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Letter to Readers

Readers will notice a difference in the cover of this week's issue. This was due to an annoying and unavoidable technical hitch at the last moment. We hope to have the trouble sorted out the next issue and start off with an improved front cover.

We have had some success in the last few weeks by sending sample copies to potential subscribers; we have received new subscribers in this way from places as far apart as Flintshire and Tunbridge Wells. If any reader can suggest a likely subscriber we will be only too glad to send them a sample to see if they are interested in taking our magazine regularly.

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THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION RESULTS: As various commentators have pointed out, these results are marked by a number of distinct features. Firstly, Labour has won more seats than in any previous year's local elections. Secondly, that although the Liberals gained some ground they are no longer gaining such a high proportion of the anti-Tory protest vote. Thirdly, that as opposed to Labour making gains because of the Liberals taking votes from the Tories, there has been a genuine swing to Labour. In some areas where the Liberals did not contest this year Labour actually did better, seatwise, than last year. Fourthly, although there was a general swing to the left this did not mean more support for the C.P., in fact in terms of seats, the C.P. actually ^{lost} ground. We shall next week when more figures are available analyse the results more closely.

However, taking all these factors together, a very clear picture emerges. This is that the mass of the working class and sections of the middle classes are, more than ever before, seeing the Labour Party as their expression of social protest. There is, of course, a complicated interconnection between this fact and the slight shift to the left since Wilson was elected party leader. That this should take place despite the betrayals of the past, despite the flabbiness of the Labour leadership in face of Tory attacks on the working class, despite such incidents as the denunciation of the proposed rail strike by Labourites Brown and Morrison, this is a profound political phenomena.

Many genuine left wingers, appalled by the right wing policies of the leadership of the Labour Party, denounce Marxists who are members of that party. They think that all one has to do is to shout from the house tops about the betrayals and the sell outs and the working class will follow them instead of the Labour Party. They have not analysed the process of the development of political consciousness. If one does analyse this process, these election results are not so surprising.

The results, furthermore, come at a time when the worst unemployment position of the winter had considerably improved, when the Tory party and its various propoganda agencies have been trying to build up a picture of the economy being on the upgrade. But this time it is clear that the workers will be very hard to fool. Their opposition to the Tories is not only that the latter have brought unemployment, etc., but that the latter have tricked them. No matter what temporary palliatives the Tories manage to achieve it will be very difficult for them to reach a position where they are trusted again. Barring really decisive changes in the political scene another Labour Government at the next general election is assured. The task of Marxists will be to channelised the discontent with Tory policies into discontent with capitalism even if under a Labour administration. However they will do this best by not only denouncing right wing policies but by also going through the experience of fighting the Tories in the Labour Party and Trade Unions with the class.

The May issue of Union Voice, as usual, carries a wide range of industrial and Labour topics. Ernie Roberts writes on Shop Stewards; Dick Teabrook on organising distribution (unionwise); there is an article on the burden on the N.C.B. by Roy Bower of the Nottingham N.U.M.; Len Youle of Sheffield writes on Housing and Clause Four; Richard Fletcher on integrating Fuel, Power and Transport; a member of the Dunlop strike committee on the strike victory at the Coventry No. 3 factory; other articles include ones on Education and Unemployment, the experiences of prisoners, London Labour, the Beeching plan etc. The centre spread this month is on the meaning of May Day.

DERBYSHIRE BOOST FOR UNION VOICE

The April issue of the Derbyshire Miner, journal of the Derbyshire National Union of Mineworkers, devotes a whole page to extracts from the centre spread of Union Voice. The item is entitled steps to full employment, and it is announced that the May issue will another page devoted to this subject. The Derbyshire Miner is distributed throughout the coalfield and to all the pits and lodges, it is also widely sold to non-miners.

SENSATIONAL VICTORY FOR LABOUR IN LONG Eaton by a special correspondent

Labour won more seats than ever before in ^{the} Urban Council elections in Long Eaton this year. The Council which was Tory only two years ago now has 20 Labour Councillors to only four Tories. Labour won all nine seats winning six from the Tories. The remaining four seats were won in previous years and must now be considered potential Labour gains. The Tories will no doubt blame the intervention of the Ratepayers candidates for much of their defeat, but this argument is invalid because the Ratepayers' vote was in the main a vote of protest. A very significant result was the election of Mr. O.G. Powe a West Indian as a Labour candidate. Mr. Powe, who is well known as the secretary of the Afro Asian West Indian Union, ousted a Tory. Those who had argued the inadvisability of putting up a West Indian because of a possible anti-colour vote were proved very wrong. Mr. Powe received only eighty votes less than his Labour stablemate. Even this eighty out of 1400 odd cannot be considered as having anything to do with colour because the other Labour candidate, H. Richards, has been active in the Labour Party for a long period.

ALFRETON URBAN COUNCIL TO CALL SAVE RAILWAYS CONFERENCE

At its May 7th meeting the Labour controlled Alfreton Urban Council decided to call a meeting of local authorities who are involved in the closure of stations on the Nottingham to Sheffield railway line. Three stations are scheduled to be closed in the Alfreton area. This decision was taken after the council received a report of the recent meeting of the "Save our Railways" campaign of the National Council on Inland Transport. The meeting also heard a letter from the Tory Skegness Council appealing for support against the closure of its station. Alfreton decided to support Skegness.

NOTTINGHAM TRADES COUNCIL CAMPAIGN AGAINST BEECHING PLAN

The Nottingham and District Trades Council has, as part of its campaign against the Beeching plan, issued a leaflet for general distribution. The leaflet explains in great detail how the plan will affect people in Nottingham, and then brings forward facts against the plan, it denounces the three Nottingham Tory M.P.s for supporting the plan and calls for widespread protests.

Which has taught the present generation an old truth - you don't judge the cigar by the picture on the box. Most of us realise that the trade mark and label or the shape of the bottle are not precise indicators of the contents. For Marxists, of course, it is no revelation that appearances can be deceptive or that the contents of a package can change in quantity and quality with no seeming or real change in the package. Even the "Good Book" makes the point that new ("working") wine should not be put in old (fully stretched-leather) bottles. To come to the particular point. We need to be precise about our political jargon. Words serve us as labels. We should use the right label naturally and furthermore we should check that the contents correspond with old labels. Fascism, democracy, totalitarian, bonapartist, dictatorship, bourgeois - such labels have avaried meanings east or west of the "Curtain," and left or right of the Labour Party - or within it!

Living in a democracy - a bourgeois democracy - we feel we ^{know} how such a regime works and how far contents and label correspond. Yet long ago a Fabian - Graham Wallas - pointed out the necessity in politics for facts, figures, research, and scientific method. Let us look at Professor Griffith's research in issue No. 20 of New Society. His first sentence is a surprising assumption: "Britons today live in a regulated and authoritarian society." This prefaces an article on local democracy and suggestions for its resuscitation. To this end he gives statistics to show the apathy of the electorate. These analyse the vote and its variations. He states:

"The most revealing statistics are those which show the vast number of uncontested seats and as a consequence, the difference in voting percentages of those who could not vote because there was no candidate, are counted as non-voters. His figures for 1958 are summarised:-

| | Councillors Unopposed | Councillors Elected | % Unopposed | % vote in contests | % vote of total |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| County Boro's | 250 | 1092 | 18.6 | 40.3 | 34.0 |
| Counties | 2444 | 1568 | 60.9 | 33.3 | 19.5 |
| Municipal Boro's } U.D.C.s "City" } | 2211 | 4666 | 32.2 | 42.9 | 26.7 |
| R.D.C.s | 8613 | 2848 | 75.2 | 46.2 | 12.9 |

Particular examples: In Cornwall, Herts., Lincs, 85% were returned unopposed. In Holland (Lincs) 3 out of 43 seats contested, but % vote in, these three 3 seats was highest in England, 51.9. Griffith states:

We rather enjoy those elections in Communist countries which result in percentage turnouts approaching 100, with unanimity of party choice. Perhaps, however, our system of local democracy has its faults when 23,692 are open to contest, only 10,174 are fought for; if less than 12.5 millions out of 52.5 million actually vote; if the average percentage vote is only 40; and if elections for 1,500 different authorities result in a change of party control in less than 4% of the councils.

However for us the important points are that we should have a clearer picture of our democracy, and that we should understand why a politically conscious working class is so "apathetic" about council elections.

Jack London long ago pinpointed the tactics of the capitalist class of either breaking the leaders of our class, or corrupting them, by money, titles, flattery or entrance to "society". Yet the left has been accused of malice, "sour grapes", and carping criticism for branding many T.U. leaders as bureaucrats divorced from the rank and file. Even today many workers don't really know the full significance of the "Establishment". On the other hand, a slap on the back, a bandying of first names, and the retention of dialect can soften the person's year's neglect, working in with the bosses, and rotten compromises at the expense of the members.

If you know an honest T.U. official uncorrupted by Establishment seduction you can learn something of the social whirl, the Embassy "do's", the slap-up dinners, the Xmas presents, the "cocktails with everything", that can be yours in any section of the movement, if that's how you like it. Capitulation to this softening up paves the way for alienation from your former workmates.

Don't think all this is the figment of a fevered imagination, a cheap version of Howard Spring's "Fame is the Spur" or Fienburgh's "No Love for Johnny". Horace Moulden, President of the National Union of Hosiery Workers, said on April 8th that there comes a time in a union leader's life when he drifts away from the people he represents. It was 30 years since he last worked in a hosiery factory and that "is a long time to be out of a factory and to be telling people what they ought to be doing in a factory. I have been very conscious that I could see a gulf gradually widening between me and the people I was supposedly representing. I don't believe I belong to their world."

Remember Moulden is president of a right wing union that has twice since the war rejected affiliation to the Labour Party, that has been a zealous Mond-Turner-negotiation-at-all-costs practitioner. That this speech was made at the N.J.I.C. when he was presented with a gold watch on his retirement. He concluded that "if he could go back he would not do what they had done in the hose section. In the last three years they had thrown away their heritage. He was looking forward to his retirement and did not intend to work again, if something meant having an employer and drawing wages. That was one shackle he was glad to be rid of."

But what of the thousands of his union's members who must go on being wage slaves under agreements and conditions forced on them by the joint efforts of the union leaders and the employers? A century ago Marx said we must have done with the slogan of "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work" and inscribe our banners: "The abolition of the wages system" and "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." In Value, Price and Profit, Marx explained the limitations of even the most successful trade union efforts and pointed out that the very success of raising wages above historical or national average levels led to the capitalist class replacing too expensive labour by machines. The hosiery union with its long-time cost of living bonus, its previously sheltered home market, and two decades of sellers' market, won wage rates that enabled above average wages to be earned by many for long periods. Persistent inflation, in a period when the home market is no longer protected and supply exceeds demand, had forced the profit-seeking bosses to replace human labourpower by machines. After many decades of peace the hosiery workers are striking hap-hazardly, piecemeal, and in increasingly unfavourable conditions. There is an urgent need for a new militant leadership who will inform the membership of the problems and seek to break out of their self-imposed political isolation. Perhaps Moulden's last words may prove to be his most useful service to his members in the long run.

The popular response in Algeria to the far-reaching measures recently undertaken by the Ben Bella government is running extremely deep. An impressive example of this was the mass turnout on the plateau of Arbattache April 20 when Ben Bella inaugurated a national reforestation campaign. In one day 130,000 trees were planted. That is a lot of trees to put in the ground between dawn and sunset. Even more astonishing was the size of the crowd that carried out the task. The estimate was 800,000. These people came ten to twelve miles, some of them starting the previous evening, to plant "their tree" Special trains, buses and trucks brought many. The roads swarmed with cars, motorbikes and bicycles. About one-third walked.

The government delegation followed detours to avoid bottle-necks and becoming stuck in the crowd. (While touring the country a few weeks ago, government cars were bent out of shape by pressing crowds and the clothing of officials was torn ragged by people wanting to touch them.) The plan proved futile and Ben Bella had to make his way on foot through the packed masses the final mile and a quarter. "The plateau and surrounding hills were black with people," writes Le Peuple; "Women, children, old people, youth. Many youth; they came from schools, colleges, universities. All the national organisations were there, all the administrations. All of the greater Algiers were present at Arbattache."

At the microphone, Col. Boumedienne recalled, says Le Peuple, that the "first objective of Our Revolution was the return of the land to the Fellah." "This objective," he added, "is being attained today. This Socialist Revolution will succeed if all the people back it." Paraphrasing the speech, Le Peuple continues: "Its enemies exist. They are those who see in "socialism" only a word which for us has a content. It is a reality as everyone can see and testify today."

"Taking up the special role of the army in this inspiring work which socialism is, Col. Boumedienne said: "Our army is not and will not be an army of the barracks, an army of members that grow fat. It is a national popular army standing on the side of the people in the work of national reconstruction. It is an army of militants who have undertaken to translate into facts the ideal for which our martyrs fell."

Le Peuple reports Ben Bella's speech as follows: "Yesterday at Oran, but especially here today, it can be said that not since independence has such an important event occurred. No one here or anywhere in the world, even among those who are against us, could deny today that our socialist revolution has been launched. If the problem of erosion and the struggle against it through reforestation is the aim of our meeting today, the spectacle of your presence here strengthens things in itself."

"This mass outpouring is a response to the government, to the Political Bureau, to all those in responsible posts, that we are on the right road. It is the reply that we did right in taking the recent socialist decrees and restoring to the workers the properties of the Bengana's and Bourgesaud's. The socialism of Ben Bella is not a mere slogan. Ben Bella and all the militants want to remain faithful to the revolutionary program of Tripoli. There is no room in this country for the bourgeoisie."

Ben Bella described the ignominious profiteers, "these four or five per cent who found means of amassing fortunes" despite the terrible repression of the Algerian people. While the poor lived in misery, in concentration camps or fell under the bombs of the oppressor, the profiteers grew fat. The time had now come to settle accounts, to put the the profiteers in a steam bath that will reduce their unhealthy weight. "The steam bath, that's socialism. Never under any circumstances whatever, will we submit to our widows and orphans sleeping in the streets, to our glorious fighters being reduced to begging. We are strong. We will break all obstacles to socialism."

1582 Ed note: The Havana newspaper Revolucion published the following statement by Premier Fidel Castro on its front page April 16, the day it announced he would visit the Soviet Union. The statement is taken from an interview Castro gave to members of The Chilean Instituto Popular on July 31, 1962.

There is but one Revolution. It is like a child who goes through his stages of development until he reaches manhood. It cannot be segmented into two different revolutions. It has only stages. The basic premises are the conquest of revolutionary power and the creation, of course, of the military strength to back up that revolution.

The conquest of power is ephemeral if it cannot create the military strength to destroy the ruling classes. That force must not be at the service of imperialism and of the oligarchy. Every revolutionary law is a step forward on the road of the Revolution. The Agrarian Reform Law brought aggressive economic measures from the imperialists; this hastened the taking of new measures against them. The law against the electric and telephone monopolies was followed by new aggressive measures and countermeasures: the suppression of the sugar quota. Imperialism, with the collaboration of the oligarchy, had recourse to military aggression, which in turn led to the nationalisation of Yankee and pro-Yankee firms. The increasingly open clash with imperialism led to the radicalisation of the revolution and to our ideological advances, and linked the Revolution to the progressive forces of the whole world.

The open aggression of the mercenaries brought on new attacks, and the declaration of the socialist nature of the Revolution was made after the bombing which preceded the invasion. And in this manner the battle which the people fought was already a battle for socialism.

The Revolution is a dynamic and developing process. But it is one revolution. If it is not a revolution, there is no revolutionary process. And if it is halted, it is not a revolution. If the proper conditions exist for a revolution, it will continue its uninterrupted march forward. And that is why it goes so far - as only a true revolution can - since it carries within itself the necessary conditions for the development of the revolution. If it is a revolution in the first stages, it will be a revolution in the last stages.

Once political power has been conquered and once the military forces on which the ruling classes base their power have been destroyed, the revolution continues its ascendant curve. All other divisions are artificial and the revolution cannot be capriciously divided into stages.

How is power attained? There are different roads, of course. Let us suppose that power was attained through peaceful elections. This would not be enough if armed forces unconditionally supporting the new power were not immediately created.

Once power has been conquered, revolutionary laws have to ^{be} promulgated. The reduction of rents is not a socialist law; neither is the law authorising the recovery of stolen properties. The nationalisation of business enterprises, the establishment of people's farms and cooperatives, the nationalisation of education, these are all socialist measures. Nevertheless, there is an interdependence between new laws and those which preceded them, between the first and the last, as there is between A and Z.

FOUR SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS ON CUBA: Two speakers on Cuba spoke to audiences of the University Socialist Society and the New Left Club in Nottingham recently. Robin Blackburn, of the New Left Review, spoke on May 3rd., and Pablo Fernandez spoke on the 10th. Although the meetings were not very large, they were very serious and attended by key people in the Labour movement. Arrangements are under way to hold larger meetings (outside the election period).

1583

A.E.U. NATIONAL COMMITTEE PLEDGES DEFENCE OF SHOP STEWARDS

At its meeting at Blackpool, the A.E.U. National Committee passed unanimously a resolution calling for resistance to the vicious attacks now ^{being} made against shop stewards, which is part of a sinister campaign of persecution and victimisation. M. Tallon, who was presiding in the absence of the president Carron, called on the committee to reject the motion. However he was immediately repudiated by two other right-wing members of the executive, P. Hanley and W. Bradley. It was clear that the right-wing faction had decided for tactical reasons not to oppose the motion. Tallon then withdrew his opposition and the proposition went through. Whilst the executive members who spoke in the debate made it clear that they did not feel obliged by the resolution to defend a shop steward who 'had broken an agreement', rank and file speakers made it obvious that they regarded the motion as pledging the union to take decisive action. Mrs Harrison of Coventry complained that the executive should act more quickly in making victimisation strikes official; and G. Bridges of Harrow regretted that union leaders remained silent in face of anti-shop steward propaganda.

On the whole the passing of the resolution was a defeat for the right wing and will give a 'legal' cover for left wing calls for the union as a whole to fight each victimisation case. The fact that the right wing did not dare to oppose it arises largely from the shock they received over the election Hugh Scanlon to the executive. In the A.E.U. every official has to stand for re-election every three or five years, many right wingers must be thinking about whether they can hang on to their comfortable jobs or not.

PLAN TO FUSE TWO PRINTING UNIONS

The Times of May 7th reported : " A proposal that the two compositors' unions should amalgamate was announced in London last night. The unions are the Typographical Association and the London Typographical Society. Both unions' executive councils have approved unanimously a draft constitution. They have recommended that it be accepted for endorsement at the unions' annual conferences. Finally it will be submitted to a ballot. The amalgamation would mean a new 80,000-member union. The announcement said that fusion would go far to 'resolve the many difficulties confronting the printing industry arising from the rapid development of new techniques.' "

STORM IN CIVIL SERVICE CLERICAL ASSOCIATION OVER UNION POSTS

Motions tabled for discussion at the annual conference of the C.S.C.A. at Blackpool foreshadow a political storm. The issue is the appeal of 4 assistant secretaries against the executive's proposed appointment of less senior officials to the posts of deputy general secretary and general treasurer. Although 98 branches endorse one or both of the names chosen by the executive, 39 are critical of the proposals. Some come out fully in support of one or more of the 4 officials who claim to have been passed over, but others merely suggest temporary or procrastinating measures pending further examination of the problem.

The executive have claimed in a circular that the 4 officials were appointed "when the association was "in the hands of the Communist Party " and that appointments were conditioned by these circumstances. Many branches are angry about this assertion. One urges the severe reprimanding of the executive because of its blackening of "the characters of officers who have many years of devoted service." Another said that this had the effect of smearing the 4 at a time when they had chance to answer.

STEEL PRODUCTION DECLINES IN APRIL

The Tories hope to reverse their disastrous electoral position by trying to stimulate the country's economy in time to reestablish the myth of Tory prosperity by the General Election. However they are going to find it very difficult to achieve the success that they had in 1959. A major economic indicator is the state of the steel industry. The following material on the state of the British steel industry is extracted from the Financial Times of May 9th:

"After rising for 4 months without pause, steel output fell back slightly last month to an average of 426,000 tons a week. The industry is estimated to have been using about 75 per cent of its available capacity. Part of the drop of nearly 7,000 tons a week from the March level was due to the Easter holidays, but there also appears to have been some marginal easing in demand.

"Although production in April was still 4 per cent up on a year earlier, today's statement from the Iron and Steel Board clearly indicates that talk of a real recovery remains premature at this stage. Consumers' and Merchants' stocks continued to fall in the first quarter of the year - a process that has been going on for about 21 months - and there is still no sign of a major overall pick-up in the actual usage of steel

"In these circumstances, the industry is at the moment disinclined to change the estimate it published towards the end of last year - that production in 1963 is likely to fall between 20.5 million and 22 million tons.... Seasonally adjusted, the actual weekly average April output of 426,400 tons comes down to 408,900 tons, which is 3,300 tons below the corrected March figure and gives some idea of the possible easing in demand.....

"A preliminary estimate for steel consumption in the first quarter is that it totalled 3.24 million tons, after seasonal allowances are made. This is the lowest quarterly figure for nearly four years, although the fall must have been due in part to the abnormal weather in January and February."

The editorial on the subject added more facts:

".....As before, the sectors of the industry supplying the motor industry were fully occupied: output of sheet steel in the first quarter of 1963 was 25 per cent up on a year ago, that of strip was 10 per cent up, and tinplate also held firm. But the heavy section of the industry remained in the doldrums. Lower demand from the railways, from shipbuilders and from engineering generally cut back heavy steel output across the board. Output of rails, plates, heavy beams and tubes was lower in every case than in a similar period of 1962."

COMMON MARKET TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST BRITISH DUMPING OF STEEL

In a statement issued on May 4th, the European Coal and Steel Community accused British steel companies and those of other countries of selling iron and steel within the "Six" at prices far below those charged in their own countries. According to the figures they issued, British Iron and Steel sales to the "Six" were 36,700 tons in December last year, and rose to 38,200 tons in January this year, 47,800 in February and 58,377 tons in March. The E.C.S.C. said it was particularly concerned because Britain and other countries are dumping at a time when the "Six" are cutting production because demand is falling. Iron and Steel production in the "Six" during the first 2 months of this year remained at the same level as last year, but dropped by 4.5 per cent in March. There was a drop of 1.6 per cent in the first quarter of this year as compared with last year. The E.C.S.C. has appointed a committee of experts to work out measures before May 15th, to prevent the Community market from being disturbed by dumping. The future of the British steel industry is beset by many clouds.