

THE NEWSLETTER

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BIRMINGHAM WORKERS BEAT CENSORSHIP

By **BOB PENNINGTON**

DELEGATES to the annual general meeting of Birmingham Trades Council firmly rejected an attempt by an alliance of Right-wingers and Stalinists on the Trades Council executive to impose a censorship on the Council's monthly journal.

The executive had decided, by the president's casting vote, not to publish a report of the national industrial rank-and-file Conference called by The Newsletter last November 16, but to refer the matter to the editorial board, a sub-committee of the executive.

The president, G. Varnom, justified this decision by reading out the Trades Council's aims and adding: 'I gave my casting vote against our journal being used by an organization that stands condemned by the TUC.'

This was a reference to the Militant Workers' Movement, of which Coun. Harry Finch, the author of the article, is a member.

Another opponent of publication, Harold Marsh, an assistant divisional organizer of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and a member of the Communist Party, made delegates laugh when he declared:

'It was not a controversial article, but a report about a controversial conference.

'It is quite clear that Harry Finch, who wrote the report, was not an ordinary rank-and-file delegate who went to

Come and discuss how London workers can help the miners' fight

JIMMY SWAN

**(Bradford colliery,
Manchester—editor
of the rank-and-
file paper The Miner)**

BRIAN BEHAN

**(Building trade
worker, member of
the Editorial Board
of The Newsletter)**

**speak at HOLBORN HALL, London, on
SUNDAY, January 11, at 7 p.m.**

the Conference with an open mind, but was a sponsor of the Conference.'

A delegate from the National Union of Public Employees, Bro. Darraugh, made a blistering attack on the executive

'I will quote you some articles we have had in the journal,' he said, 'not one of which you have protested about.

'Interviews with Professor Bernal, Arthur Horner and Frank Haxell. Yes, and the Duke of Bedford—hardly a rank-and-file trade unionist!

'We have even had reports of the meetings of the Birmingham peace committee, an organization actually proscribed by the TUC.'

Another delegate accused the executive of 'doing a Pasternak'.

Moving the reference back Harry Finch warned Communist Party members against joining with the capitalist Press in the witch-hunt.

He asked rank-and-file members of the Communist Party 'to vote for the reference back and defend the rights of all trends to their opinions'.

The reference back was carried by a large majority.

BLUE AND WHITE DOCKERS UNITE IN HULL: RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEE SET UP

From a Correspondent

UNITY of the dockers in the port of Hull is no longer a pipe dream—it is a reality. With the advent of the New Year solidarity between the rank-and-file men in the 'white' union has been achieved with those in the 'blue'.

A rank-and-file committee has been set up which will meet each month to investigate many of the outstanding problems on the docks.

Chief among these is a policy to get the non-unionists into a union of their choice, be it 'white' or 'blue'.

The outmoded system of settling disputes is also to be overhauled. A shop steward is to be elected for each ship, and when a dispute arises all the shop stewards will hold a ship-side meeting to discuss their case and present a united front to the employers.

The impetus for this great step forward was a dispute over the loading of scrap metal on to the S.S. Falkland ready for export.

Walked off the ship

The men were not satisfied with the rate for the job or the manning of the job and so they walked off the ship. Three hours later the rest of the port had joined them in sympathy. One out—all out.

Delegates were elected by the men to take their case to the employers, consisting of two men in the 'white' and two men in the 'blue'.

When they arrived at the place for negotiation the Transport and General Workers' Union official refused to sit with the 'blue' men. The two 'white' men immediately walked out in solidarity with their fellow-dockers.

Negotiations were then conducted between the employers and the TGWU official without any lay members present.

Another meeting next month

The outcome was an increase from 3½d. to 6d., which was certainly a victory for the dockers but which left the manning problem still unresolved.

At a mass meeting on Sunday called by the rank and file of the two unions the plans were laid for making sure that disunity would be prevented for ever in the port of Hull.

These plans are now to be circulated round the port and a further meeting will take place next month when every docker has had a good chance to study the plans.

COMMENTARY

THE MINERS' FIGHT

THE fight against sackings in the pits shows that the idea put forward at the national industrial rank-and-file Conference on the need for an alternative leadership in the trade unions is a correct one.

Imagine the state of affairs if the national executive of the National Union of Mineworkers, backed by the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, were to declare that they did not intend to let one single miner be thrown out of his job—and that they would back up this determination with industrial action. Not only could the Coal Board be defeated, but the way could be cleared for a socialist government to sack the employing class! But the Right wing in the NUM have no intention of putting up a fight. As a fig-leaf to hide their nakedness they have adopted a series of demands for shorter hours and longer holidays. These demands are excellent—but they are to be submitted after the present series of sackings has been accomplished. The intention is clear: these demands are adopted as a substitute for struggle.

What about the leaders of the Communist Party inside and outside the pits? The Daily Worker and the Communist Party officials in the NUM are calling for demonstrations and lobbies to parliament as the answer. But demonstrations and lobbies, unless they are backed up by strike action, can be as big a snare for the miners as the Right-wing demand for shorter hours and longer holidays. The only thing that will prevent sackings is the determination of the rank and file to resist. To suggest to working men that demonstrations and lobbies are enough to break the will of the Coal Board and the Tory government is a cruel deception. The workers at Belvedere power station, the Harland and Wolff workers, the Crawley engineers, are showing that the only answer to 'redundancy' is to strike. Linked to strike action, lobbies, demonstrations, demands for shorter hours, for the extension of nationalization, for socialist planning in the pits, for the ending of compensation: all these are necessary. But unless they are backed up by rank-and-file action—unless the campaign has teeth in it—such forms of action and such demands are so much pie in the sky.

Everyone knows that the attitude of the Communist Party is determined by the desire to get Paynter elected as general secretary of the NUM. It is hard to see how his election as a result of failing to struggle, as a result of avoiding conflict with the Right wing, would benefit the rank-and-file miner or the rank-and-file Communist Party member for one single day.

The Newsletter fully supports the decision of the rank-and-file South Wales miners to march in furtherance of their demand for strike action against the sackings. We welcome them to London, and call on the workers in other industries to back them to the hilt. Providing the lessons are drawn from this opening skirmish, providing the miners place their confidence in their own strength, there is no doubt that this section of the working class, with its glorious traditions of struggle, will strike telling blows against the Tory government and for socialism.

SACKINGS ON THE 'UNIVERSAL' PATTERN

From Our Industrial Correspondent

MEMBERS of the strike committee at Universal Pattern and Precision Co., Crawley (Sussex) told me this week that the eighty-two strikers there are determined to remain out until they have won their demands.

Cause of the strike is the management's decision to declare ten members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union redundant. The management refused to let the workers share the work by going on short time.

Told by the men that they were prepared to return to work if the management withdrew all reference to redundancy and discussed the problem with the shop stewards, the management replied that:

'They must reserve the right to make their own decisions on the need for redundancy, and have no option but to proceed with the implementation of those decisions.'

Though the numbers involved are not large (eighty AEU members and two members of the Electrical Trades Union) the dispute has big implications.

Up to now this management, like others in the area, has not had a bad record in negotiations. It seems clear that Universal Pattern is continuing the pattern of sackings that are going on in industry generally.

RENTS

LONDON COUNTY COUNCILLOR OPPOSES RENT INCREASES, CALLS FOR CAMPAIGN

In an interview with The Newsletter this week, London County Councillor E. S. Hillman said he did not think the LCC was justified in raising rents. 'The LCC should challenge the Tories' financial policy, not operate it for them,' he declared.

Some 150,000 tenants will have to pay average increases of 5s. 10d. per week. The main reason given is the high interest rates on loans for new building.

Pointing out that the London Labour Party fought the LCC elections on the basis that the Tories would increase rents and Labour would not, Coun. Hillman declared:

'The LCC should lay the blame where it belongs—on the Tories. They should go direct to the London Labour movement, inform them of the position and lead a campaign against these Tory measures.'

Would not solve problem

Raising the rates and not the rents would not solve the problem, he went on. It would lead to a division between Council tenants and private tenants.

Labour's aim must be to unite all workers to oppose a common enemy, not seek to pass the burden of Tory policy on to anyone.

This would not mean going into deficit. If the facts were clearly explained to the very powerful London Labour movement, then Labour could not only win new support, but also make a real contribution to the defeat of the Tory government. The ground would be prepared for a reversal of Tory rents policy by a new Labour government.

The alternative was to make tenants pay rent increases for property which in some cases was over thirty years old and lacking in proper amenities.

'Tenants should immediately start to work with local Labour Parties and trade unions, through tenants' associations, against the rent increases,' Coun. Hillman went on.

'Throw out this government'

'They should demonstrate, and they should lobby their own Councillors to make them reverse this decision.'

Asked what proposals he had for solving London's housing problem, he replied:

'Our first aim must be resistance to Tory measures now, so that we can throw out this government and make certain that Labour builds with a very low interest rate.

'The second thing open to London's Labour majority is to end private contracting in the construction of new homes for London's workers.

'As much building as possible should be done by direct labour, which can be made cheaper, knocks out the big builder's profit and is better for both building worker and tenant.

'These policies can be won if the rank and file of the trade unions and Labour Party unite to fight for them and force a real change in policy.'

LABOUR

TO THIS EC, IT'S A CRIME TO BE A KEEN SOCIALIST

By Ursula Verity

CASSELL WARD is again at war with our City Labour Party executive. Cassell is the ward I told you about once before, in which the members wanted to sack an unsatisfactory councillor and have an open selection conference.

They were defeated by the machinations of the EC, and their own soft-heartedness, but it looks as though they learnt their lesson well on that occasion, and will make a better fight of it this time.

Each year, every ward and division is invited to submit names of suitable people to go on to the panel from which municipal candidates are selected. These names are then considered by the EC for confirmation.

Naturally, the fact that someone has been nominated by his organization is an indication that he is a good worker, and the EC usually ratifies him.

If it does not, it is usually on quite reasonable grounds, such as non-membership of the nominee's trade union, lack of experience or some similar reason, and we are supposed to have enough confidence in our elected EC to accept its ruling without being given reasons.

SUPPRESSED

At least, that is how the system used to work. But now the traditional confidence between the EC and the rank and file is being misused to suppress freedom of speech and opinion by our local bureaucracy, as it is in many other places.

Cassell Ward nominated its own secretary. This sounds reasonable enough, one would think. The fact that anyone is energetic enough to be a ward secretary should be in his favour.

Further than that, John was young, and we are told that the party needs, and is the party of, youth.

Furthermore, John is enthusiastic and knows a lot about socialism, and in fact, had been on the panel the year before and had already fought an election in a hopeless ward, and increased the Labour vote.

Yet this year, against all precedent, when John's nomination was repeated, he was called before the EC again.

This in itself was surprising, but he was then told that he was unsuitable to be on the panel, and some of the EC wanted to throw him off it for good. They were persuaded against this by the argument of a woman member that 'this young man has time to mend his ways if we are not hard on him now'.

SUSPENDED

John's name was suspended from the panel for two years, after which the matter will be considered again.

What had John done to be treated like this? Had he joined the peerage, or married a Tory millionairess, or scabbed in

a strike? Nothing so meritorious! John had been seen selling The Newsletter!

This was the 'crime' for which he was judged unfit to be a Labour councillor. John was not told this officially, but was grilled for some time about his 'associates'. At one point he wondered if he was appearing before the editorial board of the News Chronicle, rather than the leadership of a Labour Party.

It was only later that he got a tip-off that his 'crime' was his support for The Newsletter.

Cassell ward is fighting back, and its constituency party fights with it. The EC have made several untrue accusations against John, which are being denied by the whole ward, and the thing will not be allowed to rest.

STANDARDS

When we think of the dispute as a whole, we can see the EC's difficulty. It has accepted the standards of Labour Councillors, and John's standards are not theirs.

If he is elected on to the Council, he will not merely be a 'progressive'.

He will want to fight against increases in Council rents, which are caused by Tory maladministration at national level.

He will want to do a 'Lansbury', and that would make everybody uncomfortable.

John would not attend banquets, or engage in horse-swapping for a turn at being Mayor.

It would never do to put John on the Watch Committee, for he is a severe critic of the police force and its place in capitalist society. So was Lenin, you say?

Sh! Now you are being naughty, like John!

ECONOMICS

IN BRITAIN AND IN FRANCE, THE BOSSES STEP UP THEIR ATTACK

By Tom Kemp

A YEAR of strains and surprises came to an end with the new currency measures and the outlining of the economic shape of Gaullism.

The sharp recession in the USA, which was beginning to spread alarm and despondency in the financial Press by the spring, was reversed in the latter part of the year. Unemployment and excess capacity remain higher than in the boom and there are few signs that another full expansion is in prospect.

Surprisingly, the effect on British trade turned out to be the reverse of that expected; insufficient allowance had been made for the involved, interacting nature of the relationships between the different parts of the world economy.

The main brunt fell on the primary producers; but even so increased borrowing or drawing down of foreign balances eased the strain—for the time being. Britain's trade balance benefited, although the contraction in world trade was reflected in lower exports for most of the year.

Between slump and recovery

The improved balance of payments position was in sharp contrast to the recession which began to engulf sections of heavy industry but spared all but a few of the consumer goods industries.

Events thus gave a decisive response to those who assumed that uninterrupted advance was the future prospect of capitalism. Instead economists were looking for some new force which would send the economy back on an upward course and prevent a severe contraction in 1959.

The government found some temporary expedients, but they were not likely to affect the worst-hit industries for some months.

THE STRANGE CASE OF FRED CROOME

By ROBERT SHAW

FRED CROOME is the delegate from Calverton pit to the Nottinghamshire area council of the National Union of Mineworkers. He attended the national industrial rank-and-file Conference called by The Newsletter last November in a personal capacity.

In giving support to the Conference he wrote a statement outlining his view that such a conference was made necessary by the threat of unemployment in the coal-fields. This statement was published in the Rank-and-File Special issued as a supplement to The Newsletter on October 25, 1958.

Some opponents of the Conference interpreted 'delegate' as meaning that Mr Croome was a delegate to the Conference. No such suggestion was ever made, by him or anybody else.

WERE NOT FOOLED. The Newsletter inserted in the Nottingham Evening Post an advertisement stating that any suggestion that his attendance at the Conference was in anything other than a personal capacity was quite untrue.

But the leading officials of the Nottinghamshire area were not fooled by this. They know all about these subversive agitators—haven't they two leading Communist Party members to advise them?

And they subjected Fred Croome to a most monstrous campaign of trial by Press statement. They were given space in every Nottinghamshire paper, large or small, to launch an attack on the one man who had dared to say that the danger of unemployment in the coal-field was very great, and who had dared to set out to discuss this with other militant workers.

Suitably juicy bits about communism were released to the news agencies, and these bodies proceeded to besiege Fred Croome's house and make his life one long nightmare—all in the best traditions of the 'free' Press.

Finally Fred Croome was solemnly censured by the Nottinghamshire area council, and threatened with loss of his livelihood if he ever again dared to speak out.

RUMBLE OF ANGER. This kind of witch-hunt has nothing to do with supposed communism, Trotskyism or any other 'ism'.

Its meaning becomes clear when you put your ear to the ground in Nottinghamshire and hear the rumble of anger at the things being done by the National Coal Board in the interest of 'productivity' and 'economy'.

A quarter of the nation's coal is produced within thirty-five miles of the Nottinghamshire miners' headquarters, and it is

likely to be here that the NCB would try to make a fight in the event of a national stoppage.

For the miners in the east Midland division the NCB policy of obtaining cheaply a strictly limited supply of coal means more sweat and toil and less in the wage packet at the end of it.

The report of this section of the NCB for 1958 shows that the production of coal in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire was held to within 1,250,000 tons of 1957 despite the loss of the Saturday shift from last April.

Area no. 6, which is mainly around Nottingham, dropped only 3,000 tons, about .05 per cent.

Two new pits are to open at Cotgrave and Bevercotes, and these are expected to be turning out soft coal and gas-making coal by 1960.

At many other pits schemes for opening new seams and for the increased use of machines are going ahead, making the east Midland division one of the most mechanized areas in the country.

At the same time manpower has been slashed by 1,850 during 1958, a reduction of 1.8 per cent. Despite this, output per man per shift has increased to 38 cwts in the division as a whole, and as high as 43 cwts at one colliery.

ATTACKS ON EARNINGS. There have been general attacks on the piece-work earnings of underground men, the net effect of which has been to wipe out the increase of 7s. 6d. gained last year.

One underground worker at Calverton told me that out of a week's work on 'packing' his gang of six men had each received an abnormality bonus of 10s. for the week. The average bonus is usually 6s. to 8s. per shift.

Another man at the same colliery said he had been told that the drawing-off rate was going to be reduced by 2s. for every hundred yards.

Asked what the men proposed to do about it, these colliers replied that their first reaction was: 'No use taking it to the bloody union.'

There has been a similar reaction at Blidworth pit, where the day-rate men are very bitter about their low earnings.

Three months ago this pit went on record with a vote of no confidence in the president and secretary of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Union.

Today the miners there are asking: 'How can any progress be made when those at the top are working against you?' Those at the top being the union leadership.

Spencerism is not dead in the Nottinghamshire coal-field,

but it has been made respectable and accepted into the fold.*

In the 1920s Spencerism went along with the miners' struggles so long as defeat was not certain, then sold out for a local settlement.

Today the local union members talk about fighting, about the seven-hour day, about stopping compensation payments, about opposition to the pit closures.

NO LABOUR SHORTAGE. But when Fred Croome sets out to do something about precisely these things he is all but thrown out of the union and out of the pits.

When the Derbyshire pits begin to close, as they are scheduled to do in the next few years, there will be no shortage of skilled labour, which the NCB will try to use to drive down the conditions in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

If the union officials now lead the field in persecuting militant workers can they be trusted to defend workers who are on strike in the future?

Such activities can only help the NCB to force the Nottinghamshire miners to accept worse conditions of employment.

No doubt the Nottinghamshire miners' leaders will hotly deny that they think along these lines. If they are sincere about this, then let them reverse the censure motion on Fred Croome. Otherwise the miners will draw the conclusion that Spencerism is due to return.

A MILITANT FIGHTER. The Newsletter salutes Fred Croome as a militant fighter for the working class.

He is not a communist, but a sincere supporter of Labour. He would deserve our respect just as much if he were a member of the Communist Party, and were being witch-hunted for that.

The attack on him is a slur on the Nottinghamshire miners which can be put right only by forcing the officials to withdraw the censure motion and the threat of expulsion.

A blow against Fred Croome is a blow aimed at the head of any militant miner who dares to get up and challenge the officials. This extension of the witch-hunt must be firmly resisted.

* After the defeat of the General Strike and the miners' strike in 1926, a breakaway 'non-political' union was formed in the Nottinghamshire coalfield under the leadership of a Right-wing official named Spencer. This union survived as an independent body until 1937. 'Spencerism' was the term used for tendencies towards 'non-political' unionism among miners generally, not only in Nottinghamshire.

Meanwhile, though business confidence was strong, the conditions existed for a worsening of the economic decline—excess capacity, underemployed labour, satiated markets, falling new investment.

It is unlikely that a severe crisis could have been averted without the U.S. recovery. Now, during the first half of 1959, the economy will be poised between further recession and incipient recovery—with the latter extremely sensitive to the state of world markets.

With the new measures to free sterling held by foreigners the internal position is tied more closely to the fluctuations of international trade and currency movements.

In the absence of new depressive factors the recession may be brought to a halt before it becomes severe. There is still considerable momentum derived from the boom, and prosperity still prevails in many sectors of the economy.

A movement towards restocking, new investment called for by the activity in the consumer goods industries, a foreign trade revival—these could do the trick.

In that event the unresolved problems of the expansion would merely have been shelved and another, more virulent, recession could be expected within two or three years.

A higher unemployment average, chronic excess capacity and increased sensitivity to crisis can probably be expected to accompany any such revival.

AFTER seven months, in which not one outstanding problem of French capitalism has been solved, de Gaulle has made his leap. And it is clear that his choice is of the purest economic orthodoxy.

It could scarcely have been different had it been designed

(as it probably was) by Baumgartner, Governor of the Bank of France, himself.

In fact he has been trying to impose such a policy, in the interests of high finance, on de Gaulle's predecessors—never with more than partial success. They were not ready to administer such strong medicine to French capitalism because they feared the effect on the Assembly and the electorate.

Now de Gaulle gets his votes first and reveals his policy afterwards. The socialists, who played a major part in putting de Gaulle in, now shed crocodile tears. 'Austerity at the expense of the workers and peasants', laments Le Populaire.

But what did they expect? The general was brought to power to solve the problems of French capitalism, and at whose expense could he be expected to solve them, if not at that of the workers and peasants?

Launched with all the arts of demagoguery—all the blame being put on past politicians, and with insinuations that it is the fault of the British—the intention of the new policy is plain.

Weak, parliamentary government could not reconcile the deeply-divided interests of different sections of French capitalism, nor could it impose a policy of austerity without the risk of strong popular opposition.

Now the strong State speaks in the interests of the strong, though through the mouth of the general and in the name of national greatness.

Hold down the consumption of the people in order to enable accumulation to go ahead. Strengthen the competitive power of French industry by driving down real wages. Balance the budget at the expense of the social services and education. But keep the Algerian war going.

The socialists' policy of collaboration, and the compromises of the Communist Party, have helped de Gaulle to put these measures across easily.

These 'workers' parties' have, in fact, bound the workers hand and foot, stultified and stupified them.

They have thus made it possible for de Gaulle to go about his task of trying to overcome the problems of French capitalism without the workers being able to intervene at once. The full fruits of the defeat of last May can now be seen.

The effect which the measures themselves will have cannot easily be foreseen; they are a gamble upon which de Gaulle has staked his reputation.

Big industry will benefit

In essence they seek to carry forward the half-complete and one-sided modernization of the French economy which has been going forward under pressure since the war.

The main beneficiaries are big industry and big finance; the less efficient, more backward sectors of the economy will have to look after themselves.

Under the influence of Plevin and Baumgartner the siren voices of the expansionists at all costs have been rejected. For one thing it would mean a haphazard development with continued inflation, and with no prospect of disentangling French finances from dependence upon outside influence.

But still the choice is a gamble. It could mean a damper on expansion and the growth of the still slight recessionist influences.

It depends upon retaining the support of middle-class people and peasants, whose interests may be adversely affected.

It takes big risks with future international trends and, if they prove adverse, could merely aggravate the balance of payments problem.

Above all it counts on the passivity of the French working class. Perhaps, as in 1955, a big movement will develop in the next year or two, apart from and even against the machines of the trade unions and 'workers' parties'. This would signal a real renaissance of socialism in France.

CEYLON

HOW RACE-HATE CAMPAIGNS SPLIT CEYLON'S WORKERS

By Michael Banda

RACIALISM has always been a favourite—if not indispensable—tool of every ruling class threatened with expropriation. In Ceylon, too, racialism has always gone hand in hand with the attacks of the capitalist class against the working-class movement.

In the years of the depression racialist propaganda was directed mainly against the Indian estate workers who form the overwhelming majority of the labour force on the tea plantations.

Immediately after the war the United National Party government tried to rekindle the communalist fires with such reactionary measures as the Citizenship Bill and the Immigrants and Emigrants Bill. These completely disfranchised the

Indian workers and virtually made serfs of them.

A more sinister aspect of these Bills was that they established an entirely new and dangerous principle into State legislation: that the State is conterminous with the nation and the nation with the race.

The campaign which the UNP began against the Indian Tamil workers was transformed, in the course of a few years, into a campaign of hate and violence against all national and religious minorities, in particular the 'indigenous' Tamil peasantry in the north and the Tamil white-collar workers and professional workers in the towns.

The landslide victory of Bandaranaike and his ragtag and bob-tail coalition in 1956 gave a new impetus to the anti-Tamil 'Sinhalese Only' campaign of the communalists.

Left was seriously isolated

This campaign for Sinhalese as the only State language found an initial response amongst the village people, who had been deprived for so long of the benefits of administration

in their native tongue. For a period the Left was seriously isolated.

Not unnaturally, communalism in the south began to evoke similar sentiments among the Jaffna Tamils in the northern peninsula, who formed the Federal Party and began to demand a Federal State for Ceylon.

The tragic riots of 1956 which resulted from the passing of the 'Sinhalese Only' Bill were a gift to the Federalists, who clamoured even more loudly than before for a Federal State.

The danger of separatism was averted at the last moment only by the signing of the infamous Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam agreement (now referred to as the B-C Pact), which gave certain rights to the Tamils in the north but excluded the Jaffna Tamils in the south.

The shameless way this pact was torn up and a new and more frenzied anti-Tamil campaign was launched is well described by Tarzie Vittachi in his 'Emergency '58' (André Deutsch, 10s. 6d.)

(To be concluded)

Economic Crisis and Class Struggle

by CLIFF SLAUGHTER

A VERY popular theory among Left-wingers is the 'kick-in-the-pants' theory of revolution. According to this theory only an economic depression, large-scale unemployment and severe poverty will make the workers realize the need for action to challenge capitalism.

For some of those who accept this theory there follows the conclusion that in times of full employment and 'prosperity' political propaganda and agitation are useless, since they fall on stony ground.

One of the replies commonly given to this argument is that if the factories are closing, working-class unity is hampered by competition for jobs, the employed are split from the unemployed, and factory organization is greatly weakened.

The thirties are quoted as an example of a period of economic depression in which it was difficult to make the slightest political gains for the working class; there was a decline in industrial militancy and a drift to the Right in the Labour Party.

In this article I want only to start a discussion of this important question. The ideas and examples presented here are only a small part of the answer, and since it is a question that socialists have been discussing for a long time, I hope that some controversy will be aroused in which our mutual experiences will enrich the rather general ideas I put forward.

Truth is more complicated

In the first place I think that both sides of the argument stated above are oversimplified. The truth is more complicated than either of these two points of view.

It is so easy to escape from political responsibility simply by saying that we have to wait for the big stick to come out. On the other hand, it is nonsense to deny that when the economic contradictions of capitalism—poverty in the midst of plenty, unemployment due to over-production and so on—stare people in the face, they ask bigger questions than they do at other times, and are more responsive to critical ideas.

It is a mistake to think of the working class as being the same thing at different stages of development, always responding in the same way to the same immediate experiences.

A simple example will show this; a young, inexperienced and small working-class movement, like that, say, of China during and after the first world war, is immensely strengthened and boosted in self-confidence by a period of industrial boom.

It grows in numbers, has a chance to build up more stable workshop and city organization, and is helped along the road from cultural backwardness.

But if we take the British working class, betrayed and defeated first in 1926 by the trade union leaders and then by MacDonald and his crew, split and depressed by mass unemployment and poverty in the thirties, we find that the effects upon it of the post-war boom were politically negative.

Knew in their hearts

The election of Labour to power in 1945 was the fruit of the experience and ideas of war-time, which clinched a determination never to return to the conditions of the slump.

But the replacement boom of the post-war years, full employment, new social services and higher wages all helped to bring a certain apathy, a refusal to consider the possibility that the bad old days could return, although most workers knew in their hearts that this was on the cards sooner or later.

Clearly then, a change from depression to industrial expansion can have opposite consequences, according to the stage of development of the working class concerned, according to the effects of its previous experience.

If we consider the opposite process, of a change from boom to slump, similar conclusions emerge.

The thirties in Britain saw demoralization and frustration; out of the same depression in the USA came the new and powerful CIO, the result of the workers' own struggles.

Everything depends on the stage reached by the working class, and on its fighting capacity at the time when conditions begin to deteriorate, and not on some general psychological effect of depression.

Preparing workers for struggle

The task of socialists is not to speculate on the possible scale of unemployment and its effects on the workers' mood, but to find methods of preparing the working class for struggle.

This is done by participating in the day-to-day experience of the working class, for the class struggle does not stop in periods of prosperity, but simply takes place at a lower level of organization and intensity.

Socialists must test the existing forms of organization and help the working class to find methods of struggle which can defend standards and lead along the road to workers' power.

Thus at the present time the formation of links among rank-and-file workers in struggle, fighting around the Charter of Demands adopted at the Newsletter rank-and-file Conference, is a necessary step to mobilizing the full fighting force of the working class.

One way of summarizing that is to say that the working

class must be seen as a process, rather than a fixed entity.

If we take this 'dialectical' view, we see the working class responding to this or that experience not passively, like a thermometer or a rock on the sea-shore, but as a dynamic force.

A complex of relationships

It is not only different at different times, but is different within itself; rather than a solid lump from top to bottom, the working class has advanced and backward layers, some close to the bosses, others not fully drawn into the industrial system.

The working class is a movement, and the response of this movement to economic conditions depends on a complex of relationships between top leaders, political and industrial, the lesser or middle officials of their machines, and the ordinary rank and file in different industries.

One other historical example will be useful. In the months following the first world war, capitalism was in grave danger of defeat. There were workers' revolutions, with varying degrees of success, in Germany, Italy, Russia and some of the Balkan countries, and a tremendous flood of confidence among workers in all countries following the Bolshevik victory in Russia.

Because the movement was dominated by Right-wing Labourism, the workers were thrown back, except in Russia. On the heels of these political defeats for the workers came a severe bout of depression and unemployment, and many socialists expected that this would revitalize the revolutionary movement.

Trotsky pointed out that the effect of the economic decline was by no means so simple, and it is worth quoting at length from his Pravda article, 'Flood Tide', of December 25, 1921:

'The commercial-industrial crisis of 1920 broke out in the spring and summer, at a time when the foregoing political and psychological reaction had already set in inside the working class. The crisis unquestionably increased the dissatisfaction among considerable working-class groups, provoking here and there stormy manifestations of dissatisfaction. But after the failure of the 1919 [working-class] offensive, and with the resulting differentiation that took place, the economic crisis could not by itself any longer restore the necessary unity to the movement, nor cause it to assume the character of a new and more resolute revolutionary assault. This circumstance reinforces our conviction that the effects of a crisis upon the course of the Labour movement are not at all so unilateral in character as some simplifiers imagine. **The political effects of a crisis (not only the extent of its influence but also its direction) are determined by the entire existing political situation and by those events which precede and accompany the crisis, especially the battles, successes or failures of the working class itself prior to the crisis.** Under one set of conditions the crisis may give a mighty impulse to the revolutionary activity of the working masses; under a different set of circumstances it may completely paralyse the offensive of the proletariat and, should the crisis endure too long and the workers suffer too many losses, it might weaken ex-

tremely not only the offensive but also the defensive potential of the working class' (my emphasis—C.S.).

The whole of the article is worth reading for a development of the argument; it is published in 'The First Five Years of the Comintern', vol. ii.

Now, if we return to our example of present-day Britain, we will find that our understanding is enriched by this dialectical, historical approach to the working class.

Incorporated into capitalist State

What has happened to the working class since the war is not just that it has become 'soft' and 'satisfied', but something a little more complicated.

The established official machinery of working-class leadership, i.e., the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Right-wing trade union leaders, have become incorporated into the capitalist system, even into its ruling executive, the State.

During a period of full employment they were able (in the absence of any clear alternative) to keep the support of the majority of the workers, because British capitalism could spare a certain degree of concessions for the sake of social peace and undisturbed production for profit during the boom.

Now Britain's international position is bringing her to the brink of crisis, and the old basis for bargaining and haggling with the bosses for a few concessions is being washed away as the resurgence of Germany and Japan, the victories of the colonial liberation movement, and the ever-growing dominance of the USA in the capitalist world, force British capitalism into open cut-throat competition on the world market.

Faced with this prospect, the ruling class possesses only one major resource to fall back on: it relies on the reactionary leaders of the working-class movement to hold back the working class while the whole of the burden of the crisis is placed upon the workers.

Resist with full force

Exploitation at home must at all costs be increased; that is the reason for the attacks on shop stewards and industrial militants, and for the financial manipulation of 1957 to create an army of unemployed.

The effect of the coming crisis will therefore depend above all upon the actions of the working class itself in combating its first manifestations.

No inroads into conditions and wages must be allowed; in such a period it is necessary to resist with all the force at the workers' disposal, and to have a central strategy.

It is in this light that dockers and transport workers should view the fight to stop the closing of the coal-mines. Solidarity is not just a question of 'helping the miners', but of winning an early battle for the whole working class.

The prime need of the moment, in preparation for the employers' attacks, is the creation of a rank-and-file movement in industry able to counter the efforts of the official machine to stand as a buffer between the boss and the worker. This is the aim of the fight for the Charter of Workers' Demands.

Constant Reader From Miners' Sweat

ALBURY PARK, in Surrey, which I visited during the Christmas break, is one of those stately homes which are open to the public at certain hours so that, for half a crown a head, we may view the pictures, furniture, porcelain and other aids to gracious living accumulated over the centuries by the present occupant's forbears.

This particular house belongs to the Dowager Duchess of Northumberland, who is Mistress of the Robes to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother; photographs of 'Helen Northumberland' in her Coronation finery appear incongruously among

the old masters.

In one room the visitor finds gazing sternly down the arrogant face of the 8th Duke, Helen's deceased husband, and a man well remembered by the older generation of miners. (He died in 1930, portrait by de Laszlo, of course.)

The Northumberland family were among the biggest owners of coal royalties in this country. Payments to them and their like, as the owners of the land under which coal was being mined, constituted a heavy burden on the miners' backs.

The 8th Duke was a bitter enemy of the organized miners, whom he saw as ignorant men stirred up by Russian-paid

agitators to disturb the Albury Park way of life.

Through the papers he controlled—the daily Morning Post (now absorbed in the Daily Telegraph) and the semi-fascist weekly the Patriot—he never ceased denouncing them for their idleness and greed.

They're doing well

An all-round reactionary, the Duke also screamed against peace with Ireland, recognition of Soviet Russia, and what he called the 'fallacies' of democracy.

The royalty owners were bought out during the second world war for £66 million—about sixteen years of their income.

The coal industry bears the responsibility of repaying the government for the money handed over to these parasites.

The Northumberland family, thus 'compensated', are doing well; the Dowager Duchess and her son, the current (10th) Duke, have, besides Albury Park, residences at Alnwick Castle and Syon House and in Eaton Square, and the Duke is a director of several companies. *

For Americans only

In World Marxist Review's formulation on the second world war, which I quoted last week, there is a coy absence of names when 'those countries which were victims of aggression by the fascist powers' are mentioned.

Would this include Poland, perhaps? During 1939-41 one of the activities of the resistance movement in Poland was sabotaging the transport of vital economic aid to Hitler which Stalin was then sending across Polish territory.

Regarding this episode the well-known fellow-traveller D. N. Pritt has written that the Soviet authorities 'owed no moral duty to the western democracies, who as yet were not fighting a truly anti-fascist war'.

Presumably the Poles were too stupid to see that. After all, when Poland had been partitioned between Hitler and Stalin, the two dictators had proposed that the world make 'peace' on the basis of accepting this crime.

And Mr Pritt wrote of this proposal that 'it would have been of great service to the world, and in particular to the task of ultimately uprooting fascism, if the war had stopped—for a time—then'.

Both of these passages are taken from a book of Pritt's, 'The State Department and the Cold War' (1948), which he has seen fit to publish in New York but not in London.

Lefts and 'Lefts'

As the tide of working-class militancy rises we see some people in the Labour movement moving further to the Left, while others, hitherto known as Lefts, begin moving in the opposite direction.

The key to the latter type of development is perhaps provided by an explanation given at the time for the collapse of the 'Left' leaders of the trade unions during the General Strike.

'These people were all Left so long as they could safely reckon upon Thomas [the dominant Right-winger of the time] to stop any action being taken. When Thomas and Co. failed to stop action, then all the Left garments dropped . . . in a flash' (The Worker, organ of the National Minority Movement, September 17, 1926).

Not true any more?

'We contend that in the majority of cases our officials are much more concerned with averting any trouble, at whatever expense or sacrifice—on the part of their members—than they are with the betterment of the conditions of those who pay them their salaries—salaries which in themselves divorce the recipients from the working class.'

—From a memorandum of the Printing Trades Minority Movement, 1928.

BRIAN PEARCE

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LETTERS

THEIR WOULD-BE WITCH-HUNT WAS A BOOMERANG

THE spirit of working-class democracy shines brightly within the rank and file of the trade union movement. That is my conclusion after seeing the response of delegates at the January meeting of Birmingham Trades Council.

Overwhelmingly, delegates defeated an attempt by the 'old school' Communist Party members, the president of the Trades Council and two others, to prevent my telling Birmingham trade unionists, through the medium of the Trades Council journal, the real truth about the national industrial rank-and-file Conference last November, and about the Militant Workers' Movement, which supported the Conference.

Many delegates had read only the gutter Press scare stories on the Conference. Here in Birmingham we have had our full share of 'bogy man' fantasies.

Communist Party members (again of the 'old school') have unashamedly combined with notorious Right-wingers against members of the Militant Workers' Movement—even to the

'THE WORKING CLASS NEEDS A PAPER LIKE THIS'

Despite the differences that I have with The Newsletter, I want to see it maintained and enlarged, when this is possible.

I think the working class needs a newspaper such as this, which links the political and industrial struggles, is not afraid of truth or criticism, and is not controlled by either bosses or bureaucrats.

I am therefore sending you the enclosed £1 to help forward your appeal for £1,000.

I would like to suggest that you appeal in your columns for 200 readers who would be prepared to raise the sum of £5 each between now and May Day.

Leeds 6

Jim Roche

extent of sending cuttings from the capitalist Press to their union's executive council in order to 'discipline' delegates to the Newsletter Conference.

Small wonder that the Communist Party lost two of their seats on the executive council in the annual Trades Council elections, which took place the same day that their own witch-hunting attack on a Trades Council member's right to write in the Trades Council's journal was so decisively repulsed.

So few hands were put up in favour of suppressing the article that one can only suppose that they could not win their own rank and file for an 'anti-Trotskyist' crusade—let alone the Trades Council members.

Their actions have now ensured a much wider audience when the article is printed in the next issue of the Birmingham Journal, and an audience that will undoubtedly study the report very carefully.

Readers will be interested to know that at this Trades Council annual meeting, attended by 123 delegates, eighteen copies of the current issue of The Newsletter, nine Newsletter Conference reports and thirteen copies of Labour Review were sold.

Our grateful thanks to Messrs. Atkins, Bulgin, Baggeley, Ingram and Varnom and Miss Large, who voted for the suppression of the written word. As would-be censors generally do, they helped the sales of the written word considerably.

Birmingham 9.

Harry Finch

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