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# solidarity

FOR WORKERS' POWER

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 2

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# G.E.C.: the balance sheet

The recent abortive* attempt to occupy the three Liverpool GEC factories (as a protest against 3000 proposed redundancies) and to implement 'workers' control' and keep production running deserves serious analysis by industrial militants. It deserves analysis for two reasons - firstly because it was the first stirring of a profoundly positive movement, and secondly because even the failure of this movement raised many fundamental problems and taught many important lessons. These problems have honestly to be faced and these lessons have painfully to be learned.

Following the defeat of the takeover attempt, The Times (September 22, 1969) commented (rather optimistically in our view):

'The industrialist can sleep a little easier this week. No more need his rest be troubled by the nightmare in which he drives up to the factory gates to find them locked against him. The workers won't be at the barricades. The managing director won't be locked in his own office. For last week saw the first big British attempt at a factory takeover end in a rout'.

The powers that be clearly appreciated the horrendous potential of what might have happened. Revolutionaries must appreciate it too. We must do our best to deny the boss his kip.

On August 13, 3000 AEI-GEC workers - out on a one-day strike - had assembled in Liverpool Stadium to discuss the proposed sackings. The meeting pledged itself to an all-out fight against the sackings, and called for a ban on overtime, the 'blacking' of the movement of machine tools, a national combine-wide strike, and the nationalisation under workers' control of the whole AEI-E.E.-GEC complex. It was during this meeting that the question of a workers' occupation of the factory was raised - significantly by a full-time AEF official (Frank Johnston). This proposal was supported by the overwhelming majority of the 3000 workers present. Unfortunately these 3000 constituted under one-third of the workers who needed to be involved.

On October 17, a further mass meeting was held, this time outside the factory. In the interval there had been little real attempt to mobilise the men, particularly in the less militant areas. This second meeting ended in disaster. It was physically taken over from the Action Committee by a

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* We do not wish to imply that the struggle at GEC is over, far from it, but simply that the militants have lost the first round.

company-backed and company-financed movement, led by a Powellite shop steward, Bill Bewley. Under his chairmanship the meeting proceeded to pass three resolutions: 1. Occupation off. 2. Overtime ban lifted. 3. Vote of no confidence in the Action Committee.*

The fiasco was basically due to the failure of the Shop Stewards Committee to carry the workers with them. This in turn was due to a real lack of basic information among the rank and file as to the actual aims, objectives and methods of the planned occupation. There was widespread confusion as to whether it was to be a symbolic affair, lasting at most three days, or something more serious and permanent. There were substantial and realistic misgivings about the viability of actually running a factory in isolation within the present system - even for 3 days. And there were suspicions that the Action Committee was trying to sell them a pig in a poke. Much of the workers' opposition was due to a lack of information and to justified doubts rather than to any lack of militancy. The company and its pawns were able to capitalise on these mistakes and drive a wedge between the mass of the men and the Action Committee.

But much more than just information was needed by the rank and file at GEC. What was needed was mass involvement. The workers should not just have been presented with a plan. The whole campaign should have been preceded by shop meetings, discussing the pros and cons, especially in the weaker shops and factories. There should have been many more leaflets, many more mass meetings, which should have been regarded as part of the process of planning. But most important workers should not only have dominated the planning and decision-taking but should also have directly controlled the application of any decisions taken. This should have been made absolutely clear. If this had been done, the spectacle of a small group of company men breaking up and taking over a mass meeting could never have happened.

No Committee, however devoted, however honest and however militant (and the Action Committee may have been all of these), can substitute itself for the activity of the rank and file. And in any case, for us, even 'the errors committed by a truly revolutionary working class movement are infinitely more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee'.

It is ironic that a movement with the aim of 'workers' control' should suffer a set-back because of a failure to achieve mass working class participation. This fact reveals dangerous ambiguities in the movement for 'workers' control' which should be exposed now rather than be allowed to distort the movement. Everything was 'laid on' for the occupation and running of the plants, down to the smallest details (even printed passes had been prepared), but the workers were kept in the dark. This appalling state of affairs shows the depth of the prevailing confusion within the movement.

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* An excellent account of what happened, based on direct information, was published in issue No.1 of 'SOLIDARITY' (West London). Copies obtainable from M.Duncan, 15 Taylor's Green, London W.3. Price: 6d. (plus postage).

We have repeatedly argued against the use of the term 'workers' control' because it can mean - and has meant - all things to all men. It has meant anything from a diluted form of workers' participation to the state of affairs defined by Ken Coates, one of the leading figures of the Institute for Workers' Control: '... it seems sensible for us to speak of "workers' control" to indicate the aggressive encroachment of trade unions (sic!) on management powers within a capitalist framework.'* The thought of replacing present managements by such worthies as Cooper or Cannon - or even Jones and Scanlon - is a sobering one. The two latter, it is true, have declared themselves to be in favour of widespread 'workers' control' - everywhere, that is, except here and now and in their own organisations!

In their article on the failure of the occupation (Black Dwarf, October 26), Ken Coates and Tony Topham show clearly that they have learnt nothing from the GEC experience. For them it is still a matter of pressure on the unions and through the Labour Party for government action.** This is a dead end.

The movement for 'workers' control' contains a large number of healthy elements with whom we would basically agree. But it also comprises major tendencies which, in our view, socialists must oppose. It is this ambiguity, this multiplicity of contradictory meanings of the term 'workers' control' which had led SOLIDARITY (North London) to use the term 'workers' management' to indicate the direct running of industry by the workers.***

Several aspects of the GEC movement were confused and should have been thought about more clearly. Was the attempt to run the factory a symbolic propaganda exercise? Is it a serious and realistic proposition, in the present situation, for workers to attempt to run isolated factories? Or should the occupation rather have been conceived of as an effective method of industrial struggle? We feel that workers' management of production implies a fundamentally different relationship of forces from that existing today. The struggle for workers' management, here and now, pre-

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'Industrial Democracy in Great Britain', MacGibbon and Kee, 1968, p.363.

** 'The militants in the Labour Party, and the union movement generally, should raise the demand for the immediate accountability of the GEC Combine (and indeed all large companies) to its workers, so that the whole issue of workers' rights in relation to mergers, rationalisation, and redundancy, is placed high on the agenda of the Labour Party Conference, and in all subsequent policy-making.'

*** The difference between workers' control and workers' management will be explained in considerable detail in our forthcoming book 'The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917-1921'.

supposes the creation and development of really strong job organisation, and implies struggles directly dominated by workers conscious of what they are doing, and aware of the role of the trade union hierarchies. In this context the development of new methods of struggle and refinements of old ones are very important: job occupations are obviously a severely under-utilised technique.*

There is a new spirit abroad. Militants are discussing much more widely than before the use of new and more effective methods of fighting the boss, forms of struggle which can take place within the factory. There is also a much deeper awareness of the ludicrous irrationality of production. There is a lot of discussion about alternative methods of organisation. There is no doubt that the GEC Shop Stewards Action Committee, whatever their mistakes, have made a massive contribution towards putting these ideas on the map. They gained widespread support for their campaign and it is safe to forecast that their example - minus their mistakes - will be followed, possibly in the struggles to come at Vauxhall and Ford.

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* For a detailed illustration of what has been done in the past, see 'Solidarity' pamphlet No.31, 'The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike against General Motors, 1936-37'. 1/6, post free, from H. Russell, 53A Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent.

## Back Issues

Many new people are being attracted to SOLIDARITY ideas and there has recently been a big demand for back issues of our paper. The following are still available (although only in small numbers).

Vol.III : Nos. 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12.

Vol.IV : Nos. 2-12 (inclusive) We particularly recommend study of issues No.5 and No.7 which outline some of the real problems involved in libertarian self-organisation.

Vol. V : Nos. 4-11 (inclusive)

## SOLIDARITY

(NORTH WEST)

The newly-formed group in the Manchester area has just produced its first pamphlet 'MAIL ORDER MILLIONS', an excellent account of working conditions in the Lancashire mail order firms. Obtainable (6d + postage) from 102 Carter Street, Moss Side, Manchester 13.

# FORD: THE SECOND ROUND BEGINS

On October 19, an important meeting of 400 Ford Shop Stewards took place in Coventry. Every part of the Ford Empire in Britain was represented. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss action to be taken in pursuance of the demand for parity with Midland motor workers.*

The Conference voted, with only 4 votes against, to give officials and management a three-month deadline within which to gain Ford workers a £10 a week all-round wage increase, mutuality,** and the abolition of the penalty clauses accepted last February. In the event of this objective not being achieved, the conference pledged itself 'to take whatever action is necessary to achieve it'.

We cannot overstress the importance of this meeting, the enthusiasm shown, the determination to achieve the full demands, the universal awareness that these claims could not be achieved at the negotiating table, but only by the action of Ford workers themselves. The experience of the February 1969 strike has been put to good use. There has been a substantial strengthening of job organisation. Workers have been preparing for the struggle to come. Shop strike funds have already been started and the scab NUGMW excluded from many areas. The situation is enormously better than it was earlier this year. But a lot still remains to be done. The development is still very uneven.

It is important not to get carried away by euphoria. There were a number of things wrong with the Coventry Conference, and some of these shortcomings symbolise deep illusions which could prove very dangerous when a serious struggle develops. Less than a quarter of the time of the meeting was given over to discussion from the floor. The local Coventry MP meanwhile was provided with ample time to talk about the new Coventry Civic Centre, Lady Godiva, and his old dad. He was followed by Moss Evans, National Officer of the TGWU who spoke sweet nothings for about an hour. We then had a rousing election speech for Scanlon from Jack Mitchell, District Secretary of the AEF.

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* Ford production workers get 10/6½ an hour after 4 years. Production workers at Austin's Longbridge plant get an average of 16/- an hour. Workers at Rootes, Stoke, get 16/4d an hour and men at Rootes Ryton plant get 17/5, in most cases without any extended service qualification. Many other firms, such as Rover and Standard-Triumph, pay similar rates.

** Mutuality means joint agreement between management and workers before work standards are set - in other words shop control over the work load. This gives the shop floor a potent bargaining lever. It is the mutuality clause (and the shop floor power it implies) which has allowed the piecework and ex-piecework factories to push up earnings.

These illusions in the 'left' officials and in the 'new' NJNC (which is somehow expected to act in a profoundly different way from the old one) ignore the fact that both of the new messiahs (Jones and Scanlon) have already done more than enough to show that the mixture will be as before, plus a bit of oral icing. They both started by accepting the agreement which led to the February strike - and then changed horses in mid-stream. Scanlon has already approved the outrageous new agreement at Vauxhall, and one or two convenors on the NJNC are not going to make much difference.

A deeper criticism of the Conference was the lack of a practical tactical discussion of how parity was to be achieved. All the real decisions were virtually left to the Convenors' Conference. In the pressure for 100% unity, valuable political discussions were swept under the carpet. For example there was no discussion of the methods to be used in the struggle next time. Was an occupation on the cards? Should we gradually escalate the pressure on the company in the meantime, by the phased restriction of production?

# MUTUALITY NOW!

I got the impression from the meeting that the demand for mutuality was regarded as being the first item to be given up in the negotiations. In fact, mutuality is an absolute essential if true parity is to be achieved and retained.

Ford workers, as well as being the lowest paid motor workers, produce the most. In 1968 each Ford worker produced 11.7 vehicles worth £8000, compared with 8.9 vehicles (worth £5840) at Vauxhall, 8.9 vehicles (worth £7240) at Rootes, and 5.6 vehicles (worth £5180) at British Leyland Motor Holdings. (Labour Research, August 1969).

At Ford fewer and fewer workers have been producing more and more vehicles. In 1965, 64,000 workers produced 630,000 vehicles, whereas in 1968, 61,000 workers produced 712,000 vehicles. This process has been going on for many years.

This means that even when the full demand for an increase of £10 a week (i.e. 5/- an hour) is met, Ford production workers will still be earning up to 2/- an hour less than their brothers in the Midlands, and they will still be producing up to twice as much. Some parity!!

# HOW TO STRUGGLE

From the foregoing it is obvious that the struggle at Fords next year is going to be a tough one. But it is only the second round of a long, hard fight, a fight which needs to be synchronized more closely with that at Vauxhall, where workers are in much the same position as Ford employees. Their struggle for parity will also come to a head next year. Much deeper links must be created between us.

In the past, Ford workers in dispute have simply downed tools and walked out, leaving management in physical control. They have left the factories - the proper arena of struggle - uncontested. We believe they should now seriously consider denying this vantage point to the Company.* Such methods would enhance the unity and cohesion of the men, do away with the problem of scabbing and eliminate the sight of a few pickets shivering outside the plant.

The Coventry meeting, with all its faults, took the initiative out of the hands of the trade union officials. It must now remain in the hands of the men. This is the only way to victory.

Mark Fore.

## ABOUT OURSELVES

This is our 60th edition. As we celebrate our 9th birthday we report the appearance of two new autonomous groups. 'Solidarity' (West London) have already produced the first issue of their paper (see p.9) and can be contacted through the address given. 'Solidarity' (North West) which has members in Manchester, Salford, Bolton and Lancaster has already published its first pamphlet 'MAIL ORDER MILLIONS' (see p.4). The first issue of their paper is due out shortly. This new group includes several ex-I.S. members and has deep roots in the local working class movement. It can be contacted through the address given.

The appearance of these new, viable, autonomous groups - and the probable emergence of several more in the very near future - poses new problems to libertarian revolutionaries. The relation of autonomous groups to one another - at a time when such groups really exist - is a genuine problem for whose solution there is no clear blueprint either in revolutionary theory or in historical experience. We intend to cope with this problem both at the level of theory and through joint practice.

We have just produced a most 'disruptive' pamphlet. It is a detailed account of the 1936-37 occupation of the General Motors plants at Flint (Michigan).* The pamphlet is already circulating among workers at Rootes, Ford and Vauxhall, where it has been well received. We see this pamphlet as the first contribution of our group to the big struggles in the offing at Ford and Vauxhall, and call on supporters to help us get it into the hands of as many car workers as possible. The information provided is dynamite.

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* For details, see footnote on p. 4.

Our publishing activities have not been confined to the English language. 'Solidarity' (North London) has just brought out a Polish translation of Cardan's 'Meaning of Socialism'.* As far as we know this is the first piece of modern Western libertarian literature to have crossed the curtain in a Central or Eastern European language.** Polish comrades recently visited the West. They saw a wide range of 'trad. rev.' publications and attended some 'trad. rev.' meetings. They then decided that 'Meaning of Socialism' was the most relevant pamphlet to translate. We have heard that it has been well received in Poland. With the cooperation of revolutionaries from 'communist' countries, we hope to do more of this. The isolation of Eastern revolutionaries from their Western co-thinkers - until now virtually total - is breaking. This is profoundly encouraging. The publication of this pamphlet is a conscious attempt on our part at helping develop a genuinely internationalist consciousness.

The production of 'The Bolsheviks and Workers Control (Russia: 1917-1921)' is progressing. The typesetting has been completed and the proofs corrected. We still urgently need loans and donations to help meet the large number of bills (printing, covers, binding, etc.) still to be paid if production is not to be delayed.

Between October 31 and November 2 a meeting (attended by some 70 people) was held in Warwick. Its aim was to popularise our ideas to a fairly large audience of new people. Some of the discussions were fruitful and useful contacts were made. The endeavour certainly deserves repeating. The wide diversity of views expressed meant, however, that many old arguments (about the need for demystification concerning the Viet Cong, Black Power, and the Third World) had to be gone over again.*** Hammering all this out is unfortunately essential if the new movement is to develop on a clear, coherent, libertarian and consistently demystified basis. Such is the price of a principled campaign against both liberal and leninist ideologies.

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* Znaczenie Socjalizmu, available (10d.) from our usual address.

** Apart, of course, from the famous leaflet 'Against All Bombs', written by Solidarity members of the Industrial Sub-Committee of the Committee of 100, produced by them in Russian, and distributed in the streets of Moscow by Solidarity sympathizers attending the World Disarmament Congress of 1962. (See 'Solidarity' vol.II, No.5, and Zorza's article in The Guardian (12/7/62) entitled 'Heresy in Moscow'.)

*** The basic argument about the 'Third World' is outlined in 'Solidarity' Pamphlet No.24, 'From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy'.

AUTONOMOUS SOLIDARITY GROUPS

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|---|---|
| London (West) | c/o M.Duncan, 15 Taylor's Green, London W.3. |
| London (North) | c/o H.Russell, 53A Westmoreland Rd., Bromley, Kent. |
| London (South) | c/o A.Mann, 79 Balfour Street, London SE17. |
| Aberdeen | c/o N.Roy, 138 Walker Road, Aberdeen. |
| Clydeside | c/o D.Kane, 43 Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton. |
| North-West | c/o 102 Carter St., Moss Side, Manchester 13. |

# Some thoughts on the thoughts of CHAIRMAN MAO

Somehow the notion seems to have got about that the Thoughts of Chairman Mao are of a hostile and abrasive turn, bristling with novel and abhorrent doctrine. But this is quite to misinterpret the work of this, in the best sense, conservative thinker; in whose writings the traces can everywhere be seen of his life-long hobby of composing mottoes for fortune cookies and Christmas crackers. Thus surely many of us would agree with his assertion that "It is not hard for one to do a bit of good. What is hard is to do good all one's life and never do anything bad"; nor is he, one hopes, alone when he says "I believe we should do things honestly, for without an honest attitude it is absolutely impossible to accomplish anything in this world", a remark doubly interesting in view of the attempts of some writers to deny that Chairman Mao acknowledges the existence of another world.

A salutary breeze of Victorian morality blows, in fact, through the whole of his Little Red Book. On p. 187 we read "The principle of diligence and frugality should be observed in everything", while the praise of unselfishness and hard work, refreshing in these "sophisticated" times, chimes like a peal of bells in a passage like this: "Hard work is like a load placed before us, challenging us to shoulder it. Some loads are light, some heavy. Some people prefer the light to the heavy; they pick the light and shove the heavy on to others. That is not a good attitude. Some comrades are different; they leave ease and comfort to others, and take the heavy loads themselves; they are the first to bear hardships, the last to enjoy comforts. They are good comrades".

Cheerfulness,,too, is inculcated; "In times of difficulty we must not lose sight of our achievements, must see the bright future, and must pluck up our courage", and "Ideas of stagnation, pessimism, inertia and complacency are all wrong". So they are! we answer, from a full heart: so they are! Although

(perhaps from exigencies of space) there appears no explicit reference to whistling in times of stress, a passage on p. 87 shows where we should find Chairman Mao, were he a Briton: "In short, we must be prepared". And Baden-Powell, a life-long advocate of cold baths, would have been the first to greet the spirit behind the Chairman's swims in the Yangtse. He is like Baden-Powell in this, too, that he attaches great importance to cleanliness: "Dust will accumulate if a room is not cleaned regularly; our faces will get dirty if they are not washed regularly, our comrades' minds and our Party's work may also collect dust, and also need sweeping and washing" (p. 259).

I cannot do better, to sum up this trumpet call for a return to the best standards of the past, than to quote a passage which I am sure will give us all rich food for thought: "Selfishness, slacking, corruption, seeking the limelight, and so on, are most contemptible, while selflessness, working with all one's energy, wholehearted devotion to public duty, and quiet hard work, will command respect".

In all this, what must move us most is the high-hearted courage with which he is not deterred from uttering great truths by any pusillanimous fear of the obvious: in this, too, a most healthy example to some of our clever modern writers. He has given his attention to the question - alas! still so cruelly topical - of war: and on this subject, where it is so hard to find anything new to say, he has lessons for us: "All the guiding principles of military operations grow out of the one basic principle: to strive to the utmost to preserve one's own strength and destroy that of the enemy". How many blunders might have been avoided, if only this had been realized!

Not less courageous is his willingness, nay! his eagerness, to combine apparently contradictory assertions. Thus on page 66 we read, "First I said that the East wind is prevailing over the West wind and war will not break out, and now I have added these explanations about the situation in case war should break out. Both possibilities have thus been taken into account". Again, "Just as there is not a single thing in the world without a dual nature (this is the law of the unity of opposites), so imperialism and all reactionaries have a dual nature - they are real tigers and paper tigers at the same time". For, as he says himself, "Marxist philosophy holds that the law of the unity of opposites is the fundamental law of the Universe". One is reminded constantly of Heraclitus, sometimes of Walt Whitman, in this area of the Chairman's though, while the Red Queen (so aptly named!) in Lewis Carroll is left, by the daring leaps of the Chairman's mind, absolutely nowhere.

I cannot close without touching on a more personal note. In these difficult days, when our colleges are attacked so rudely by turbulent youth, what a pillar of strength Chairman Mao would be, in strengthening the resolve of the dons, and moderating the excesses of theyoung! No chord is more often touched; none with a surer hand. I quote from page 109, "Be a pupil before you become a teacher"; and from page 216, "Only those who are subjective, one-sided and superficial in their approach to problems will smugly issue orders or directives the moment they arrive on the scene, without considering the circumstances, without viewing things in their totality (their history and their present state as a whole) and without getting to the essence of things (their nature and the internal relations between one thing and another). Such people are bound to trip and fall".

As we expect, he has no sympathy with neglect of one's work ("Both students and intellectuals should study hard"), and sums up in a masterly feat of compression the characteristics of Jowett's Balliol: "What we need is an enthusiastic but calm state of mind and intense but orderly work". As for the sort of thing which has drawn on to the L.S.E. the great sad eyes of the world, he disposes of its ideas in a trenchant sentence: "It should be pointed out that the source of ultra-democracy consists in the petty bourgeoisie's individualistic aversion to discipline".

Men of goodwill, I think, will find here their own thought, but expressed with the controlled force of a master. One more from this storehouse of good things, this time a rebuke to those who rely on the "sit-in" and the harangue: "Our comrades must understand that ideological remoulding involves long-term, patient and painstaking work, and they must not attempt to change people's ideology, which has been shaped over decades of life, by giving a few lectures or by holding a few meetings. Persuasion, not compulsion, is the only way to convince them. Compulsion will never result in convincing them. To try to convince them by force simply won't work".

Confronted with so much real wisdom, there is of course a temptation to be irritated at the sage's unrelenting caution; and one hot-headed young Liberal responded with annoyance when I quoted to him from p. 216 "In this world things are complicated and are decided by many factors. We should look at problems from different aspects, not from just one". Yet how true it is! Such maxims, proved over the centuries, are disregarded at our peril. For the battle which Chairman Mao is waging, and to which he calls us all, is surely that which St. Paul spoke of, against "spiritual wickedness"; and our benison must go with him as he rides forth, resolved, in his own words, that "All ghosts and monsters must be subjected to criticism; in no circumstance should they be allowed to spread unchecked", and confident that "Monsters of all kinds shall be destroyed". Amen. Comrade, Amen!

J.G.

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The above is a slightly abridged version of a text first published in the Balliol College Record (1969). References are to Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. Peking, 2nd edition, 1967: pages 250, 242, 187, 240, 199, 204, 87, 259, 269, 93, 59, 66, 72, 214, 109, 216, 142, 229, 163, 151, 216, 19, 82.

THE MEANING OF SOCIALISM by Paul Cardan. What is a socialist programme? The real contradiction in capitalist production. Socialist values. A re-statement of socialist objectives. The case for workers' management of production. 10d.

SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM A redefinition of socialist objectives in the light of the events of the last 50 years. 10d.

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All these, post free, from H.Russell, 53A Westmoreland Rd, Bromley, Kent.

# THEN AND NOW

## A KAPD VETERAN TALKS TO A YOUNG GERMAN REVOLUTIONARY

In October 1919, at its Heidelberg Congress, a split took place in the ranks of the German Communist Party (K.P.D.) whose founding Congress had taken place in Berlin less than a year before. A new group emerged, the K.A.P.D. (Kommunistishe Arbeiter Partei Deutschland). The new group differed from the K.P.D. in its critical attitude to parliamentarianism, in its refusal to subordinate the interests of the German working class to those of the Russian State, in its insistence on direct workers' power, exercised through Workers' Councils rather than through the political rule of the Party. For a short while following its foundation the new Party was an 'associate member' (without voting rights) of the Communist International but relations were severed in 1921.

In the following pages we are pleased to publish excerpts of two interviews recently recorded by North London Solidarity members between Bernard Reichenbach* (a founding member and one of the few survivors of the K.A.P.D.) and an activist of the present German left extraparliamentary opposition. (We do not necessarily endorse all the opinions expressed in this interview but feel the factual information it contains will be of interest to our readers.)

The interest of the present German left extraparliamentary opposition in Germany's revolutionary past needs no explanation. Between 1918 and 1921 Workers' Councils were an established fact of German political life and as they were created by a mature proletariat, in an advanced industrial country, both their achievements and their shortcomings still have some relevance today.

* Reichenbach was a member of the E.C.C.I. (Executive Committee of the Communist International) and a delegate of the K.A.P.D. to the Third (1921) Congress of the International. He was responsible for getting Kollontai's text on the Workers' Opposition out of Russia.

The two interviews - which extend over a period of some 4 hours - have been recorded on tape and deal with many interesting aspects of the German working class movement at the end of World War I and in the immediate post-war period.

# THE GERMAN WORKERS' COUNCILS

Q. Between 1920 and 1923, the K.A.P.D. acted as an extraparliamentary opposition. Do you consider this essential?

A. Yes. It educates people to act on their own political initiative, independently of any representatives.

Q. At the time, this expressed itself not only as extraparliamentary opposition but as anti-parliamentary opposition. Did you consider it essential that the working class should struggle against parliamentary institutions?

A. Definitely. You must remember that at the end of 1918 there was a revolutionary situation in Germany. Participation in parliamentary activity was, we felt, a betrayal. Parliament, amongst other things, was held responsible for the war. During 1919 almost the whole of left politics took place within the Workers' Councils, not in the trade unions or in Parliament. The Councils were extraparliamentary and potentially anti-parliamentary institutions. The trouble was that in these Councils the Social-Democrats were in a majority. They put forward economistic rather than political, and reformist rather than revolutionary demands. The Social-Democrats, however, did not impose these views. Their majority reflected the will of the broad mass of workers inside the Councils, and that even during a revolutionary situation.

Q. A Leninist would argue that what was missing was a leadership party which would have exposed the policies of the Social-Democrats on the war, and that it was the lack of such a party that prevented the revolutionaries from bringing the revolutionary situation to a conclusion.

A. The conditions in Germany differed considerably from those in Russia. Russia was emerging from centuries of autocratic rule. The whole social atmosphere was ripe for a fundamental change. Germany had a tradition of parliamentary institutions, a tradition of government by elected representatives. In such circumstances revolution is much harder because it appears as coercion against democratically elected representatives. After all the years of a bourgeois majority in parliament, the victory of the Social-Democrats appeared as a decisive victory for the Left. It is true that the decisive arena of struggle for political power was within the Workers' Councils but, for the reasons mentioned earlier, any action against the elected government appeared out of the question, especially while that government had a majority inside the Councils.

Q. What was the real activity of the Councils, vis-à-vis the unions and Parties?

A. Independent Councils, based on factories rather than on trades, as had been common previously, appeared spontaneously all over Germany. This was to a considerable extent a result of the economic chaos. When a factory came to a standstill due to lack of fuel or raw materials, there was no one to turn to for help. Government, parties, unions, capitalists, could do nothing to solve basic problems of transport, fuel, raw materials,

etc. Resolutions, declarations, orders, even paper money were of little use. Under the circumstance, workers would form a Council and set out to solve these problems by themselves. We, of the K.A.P.D., believed that the trade unions were an obstacle to the creation of the new society and that the main thing was to encourage workers to take direct action, independently of the unions.

Q. What was your attitude to union members, as opposed to the union leadership?

A. We continuously explained to them that it was essential to organise on the basis of places of work, not trades, and to establish a National Federation of Works Committees.

Q. How many revolutionary parties then existed?

A. In 1920 there were 5 parties aiming at a socialist reconstruction of society - and all calling themselves Marxist: the S.P.D., the U.S.P.D., the Left-U.S.P.D., the K.P.D., and the K.A.P.D. Apart from these, there were various Anarchist groups. The working class was torn by their mutual strife and showed little united action vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie.

Q. What were the differences, at the level of action, between members of your party and the K.P.D. at their places of work?

A. The K.P.D., at the time, acted organisationaly and tactically in precisely the same way as the Social-Democrats; the only differences were in the slogans. We stood for workers' direct action.

Q. Did differences already emerge, at that time, within the K.P.D. between those who stood for the rule of the Party and those who stood for the rule of the Councils?

A. That differed very much from factory to factory. Generally speaking, it was the social atmosphere and widespread practice for Workers' Councils to operate as recognised, almost natural, institutions.

Q. What were the relations between members of the rival parties, at their places of work?

A. That differed from works to works, too. A single individual in a key role would create an atmosphere which could decide the case. Quite often there was excellent cooperation between members of all parties. You could, almost always, trace it to a worker, in a leading role, who was respected by everybody owing to his capacity as a leader. In other places, there would be incessant and acrimonious strife.

Q. Could you describe in detail how things were organised inside a factory?

A. Not accurately. First, I was not a professional worker but a paid Party activist. Secondly, while being a member of the management in

a Berlin factory in 1920 my experience there is of little general relevance because the factory was owned by its workers and therefore there was hardly any friction between management and the Council. It was in the privately-owned factories that the Councils would come into conflict with the management. Splits would occur within the ranks of the Councils over the question of policy towards management - say, between those who accepted the views of the Social-Democrats and those who insisted on workers' management.

# MOSCOW 1921

Q. Could you tell us something of the activity of the Third International?

A. In 1921 I participated, as an observer, in the sessions in Moscow. I stayed at the Lux Hotel. We met once a week, with Zinoviev as Chairman. The Russian delegation was strongest, both in numbers and in influence. They ruled the meetings with an iron hand. The German delegation was the second largest. The tremendous influence of Lenin resulted, very much, from his strong personality. The other Russian comrades were not his yes-men. He carried them with him, if not by the power of his argument, then by the power of his personality. To European revolutionaries Stalin was virtually unknown and I never heard his name mentioned. People used to argue a lot about what this or that person had done or said in some situation in the past. During my stay of six months I did not hear Stalin's name mentioned, even once.

I met Lenin in 1921 in his room in the Kremlin. We had a long discussion about the German situation. There was a big map of Russia on the wall and it was obvious that Lenin was very overworked. He explained to me that as a ruling party they had to manage an enormous country like Russia and he had hardly any time to become familiar with details of revolutionary activity in the West. I told him of our criticisms of the policy of the K.P.D., which was considered a sister-party of the Bolsheviks. I criticised their, and his, policy towards the March 1921 insurrection. He said that he accepted Trotsky's analysis on European matters and Radek's analysis on Germany, without going into details. That meant that once we got into a conflict with Radek we would find Lenin almost automatically lined up against us, despite the fact that quite often it was not he who formulated the Bolshevik line on that issue. Things were similar with respect to France.

Q. What about discussions with different Russian comrades?

A. There were quite a lot of these discussions, especially with members of the Workers' Opposition. A few days before the beginning of the Third Comintern Congress Alexandra Kollontai, then a prominent member of the Workers' Opposition, came to my room and told me that she was going to attack Lenin after he had made a speech about the N.E.P. She stated she might possibly be arrested later and asked me whether I could keep in safe custody the text of her speech about the Workers' Opposition. I said I would and as we were sending a courier to our Executive Committee in Berlin, I gave it to him.

The session during which she delivered her famous 'Workers Opposition' speech (which was contained in the text she had given me) was one of the most memorable experiences in my life. Lenin, Trotsky, Radek, Zinoviev, Bukharin and others sat on the platform. She stood with her back to them, facing the audience which included revolutionary militants from all over the world. She spoke first in fluent German which was the official language of the International. When she finished she repeated the whole in French for the benefit of the French comrades. She probably didn't trust the interpreter. Finally she repeated the whole speech in Russian. When she finished, silence fell. Lenin didn't say a single word, although he took notes all the time. Trotsky answered for the platform. He tried to play the whole thing down to the effect that she was a 'softy', and far too sensitive for the tough business called revolution, which demanded an iron hand. Neither of the speakers dealt directly with her arguments or facts. The line was to play the whole criticism down by reducing it to a matter of her personality.

Behind the scene, Trotsky took her in hand. She gave in, capitulating to Party discipline. A few days later she came to me and wanted her manuscript back. I was unable, of course, to return it to her. Later my comrades in Berlin translated the manuscript into German and published it under the title 'Alexandra Kollontai "Die Arbeiter Opposition in Russland".'

When I returned from Moscow to Berlin the K.A.P.D. decided that there was no point in remaining an associate member of the Third International.

Q. What was the attitude of Lenin and Trotsky to your Party?

A. It was critical - although, at first, fraternal. They wanted, very much, that we should join the K.P.D. and give up our independent organisation. But the policy of the K.P.D., directed by the Russians, made this impossible. It was obvious, as I said, that the K.P.D. had become a tool of Russian foreign policy.

Q. What can you tell us about the 1921 insurrection?

A. At the time I was in Russia. The uprising (the so-called 'March Action') had been undertaken by the local organisations of the K.P.D. and K.A.P.D., the former in response to an instruction from the Russian emissary Bela Kun (the exiled leader of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919). At first the March Action was approved by Lenin. After its failure, however, he changed his mind, mainly under the influence of Clara Zetkin, a member of the Central Committee of the K.P.D. Paul Levi, another C.C. member who resigned from the leadership of the Party, denounced the uprising as a 'putsch'. He did this in a pamphlet which was damned by Lenin and Trotsky, although they shared his criticism. Paul Levi's policies were continued.

Q. Do you believe that there was a connection between the New Economic Policy of 1921 and the policy of the Third International towards the 'March Action'?

A. One can discern some underlying common factors. The N.E.P. was considered by Lenin as a fortification of the Revolution in Russia; he considered the revolutionary process as having come to an end. The Bolsheviki had expected a victorious revolution in Western Europe. This failed to materialise, thus creating an ambiguous relationship between them, as a ruling party, and the capitalist regimes in Europe. On the one hand they wanted normal inter-state relations, which would ensure them peaceful borders. On the other hand, the revolutionary struggle inside the capitalist countries weakened their regimes. Once the Bolsheviks became disillusioned with the revolution in the West, they began to consider the revolutionary movements as auxiliary tools of Russian foreign policy. This attitude did not start with Stalin, but with Lenin and Trotsky, back in 1921. In 1921 Krassin, People's Commissar for Foreign Trade, warned in an interview with the Berlin 'Rote Fahne' (the daily paper of the K.P.D.) that a particular strike would interfere with deliveries of machinery being manufactured for the USSR.

# IN RETROSPECT

Q. Why did the K.A.P.D. disband in 1923?

A. Actually, the Party did not disband in 1923. When the 'March Action' failed (and later the 1923 insurrection also) only a few hundred activists remained. Originally we were a party of industrial militants, with only a few paid functionaries. When the industrial activity of these militants died down, our party simply ceased to exist. It was not a matter of taking a political decision. When our militants ceased to be active, all that was left to do was to acknowledge the situation and draw the appropriate conclusions. We, the younger activists, decided to enter other political parties, simply because this was the only place where we could meet politically-minded workers and try to win them over.

We failed for a number of reasons. Firstly, during our best period, in 1921, we numbered only 30,000, this being very small out of a proletariat of many millions. Secondly, we over-estimated the revolutionary potential of the workers and the role of the economic factor as an initiator of revolutionary activity. In this respect, our political adversaries Ebert and Scheidemann of the Social-Democratic Party had a more realistic understanding when they concluded that a struggle for economic improvement can be contained by means of reforms and need not lead to revolution. Perhaps we erred in our analysis of society by considering it to revolve mainly on the economic axis, although in the 20s this was certainly the main factor.

Q. Did you consider yourself a Marxist at the time?

A. Yes. I and most of my comrades considered ourselves as people who put Marx's ideas into action, according to our interpretation of them. Naturally every self-defined Marxist will be criticised by other Marxists for the non-authenticity of his interpretation. In general our tendency to over-emphasise the role of 'objective factors' stemmed from our interpretation of Marx's ideas and contributed to our failure. I think that

Marx's stress on the economic factor as the main motivation for revolutionary activity is not always and everywhere valid; whereas his sociological insights were right at the time.

Q. Assuming your analysis of society was valid at the time, as you just said, where then do you locate your failures?

A. A valid social analysis is one thing, implementing it in reality is another matter. One should distinguish between the theories of the K.A.P.D. and the practice through which it attempted to implement them (although the two are, obviously, interrelated). Up to 1923 the revolutionary activity of the working class was widespread throughout Germany in the wake of the collapse of the Kaiser regime, and of its political, social, economic and ideological institutions. But following the defeats of the insurrections of March 1921, and later of 1923, it became evident that whereas, during periods of political collapse and economic misery the working class exhibits independent revolutionary initiative and readiness to sacrifice a lot for the creation of a new social order, it does not sustain this type of activity during the prolonged periods between one political/economic crisis and the next.

Q. Do you think that the non-materialisation of any revolution in Germany was a product of objective factors or that it was due to the failure of the subjective, revolutionary, factor?

A. It is impossible to give a decisive answer to such a question. Objective factors can create conditions for a revolution, but its realisation depends on the subjective factor. Owing to our interpretation of Marx's theory, we considered the subjective factor as of minor significance when compared to the objective factors. We suffered from a tendency to base all our activity on 'economic determinism'.

Q. Did not Lukacz criticise this tendency, in 1924?

A. He did. On the other hand, Lenin also attacked us from the other side (in his famous '<u>Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder</u>'), accusing us of 'adventurism', by which he meant depending too much on the subjective factor. Gorter, one of our Dutch co-thinkers, wrote an excellent reply.

Q. Who was Anton Pannekoek?

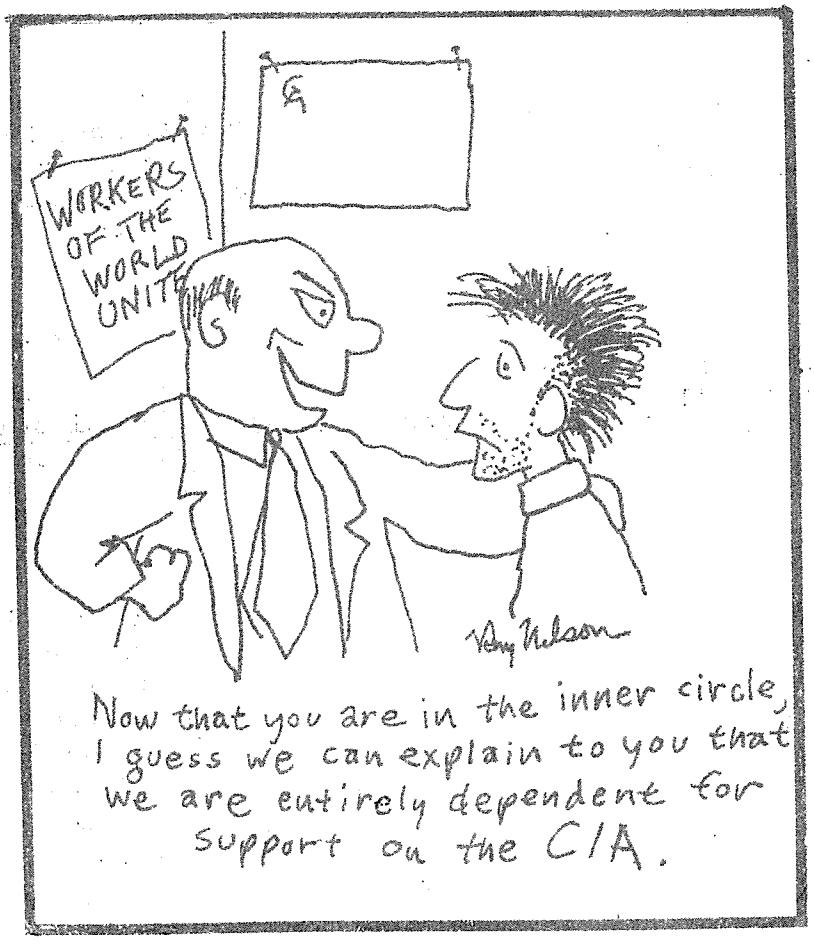
A. He was a Dutch astronomer who, before the First World War, edited a revolutionary paper in Bremen. Karl Radek, who later became Bolshevik expert on Germany, learnt his revolutionary theory from him while working on the paper. In 1917 Pannekoek and Herman Gorter defended the Russian Revolution. When the Russians instituted a 'West European Bureau' of the Comintern in 1919, Pannekoek and Gorter were among those put in charge of it

Their later criticism of the Bolsheviki concerned mainly their analysis of and policies towards the working class and revolutionary movements in Western Europe and their lack of understanding of the workers in the indus-

trialised West. They pointed out that what was suitable for Russian conditions was not necessarily applicable to the entirely different conditions in the West. They made a very detailed and fraternal critique of Lenin's policies, to which Lenin never replied in kind. Instead he declared: 'History will decide who was right!'.

Q. What is your present view concerning the possibility of revolutionary developments in Germany, France, etc.?

A. If you think of revolution in traditional marxist terms (i.e. as expressed in the words of the Communist Manifesto: 'class war of the proletariat'), I can't see any development. However, if you think of the A.P.O. (Ausserparliamentarische Opposition) developing into A.P.A. (Ausserparliamentarische Aktion) which seeks to increase the initiative and participation of the people - not only in the present institutions of political and industrial democracy but at all levels of society - then the militancy of the younger generation leaves one more optimistic than at any time since 1945. In this context I find of particular significance what has been happening recently in the modern industrial countries like the USA, Germany, France, Italy and even Britain.



# THE ISRACA DEMO

"Experience has shown that internationalism is not an automatic product of working class life. Several decades ago it was a real factor in politics, generated through the activity of workers' organisations. It has disappeared as these organisations have degenerated and lapsed into chauvinism. The revolutionary movement must struggle to help the working class reclimb the long path it has descended for a quarter of a century."
Modern Capitalism and Revolution, p. 93.

Nationalism remains today one of the most potent forms of bourgeois mystification. The idea that the 'working class has no fatherland' and that the 'main enemy is always in your own country' have never gained wide acceptance and are perhaps less widely accepted today than they have been for decades. The internationalist duties of revolutionaries remain among the most difficult ever to have confronted them.

This is particularly true in times of war when nationalist hysteria reaches its height and any revolutionary opposition to war itself - or to its aftermath of 'reparation' or 'occupation' - is equated with 'treason' or 'being an agent of the other side'. The idea of the 'third alternative' - the victory of the common people of both 'sides' against their respective rulers - is one which socialists have signally failed to get across.

The idea does not come 'naturally' to workers - out of the conditions of factory life - and propaganda for this theme is particularly difficult today, when the majority of 'revolutionary socialists' (Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists of one kind or another) are to be found giving 'critical support' to the ruling elites of one country or another - and where the ideas of genuine internationalism have reached an all-time low.

In this article we document the kind of response evoked by an attempted gesture of socialist internationalism, in London, in the middle of 1969. The kind of misrepresentation this gave rise to should give all revolutionaries serious cause for concern.

In May 1969 the Israeli Revolutionary Action Committee Abroad (ISRACA) heard that the Israeli Prime Minister, Mrs Golda Meir, was to visit London and attend a big Zionist function at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on June 15.

ISRACA, an autonomous revolutionary socialist action committee, not affiliated to or connected with any Stalinist, Trotskyist, or Maoist organisation (or with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign) decided to hold a protest demonstration outside Mrs Meir's meeting. Its posters would proclaim opposition to the annexations that followed the June War and express solidarity with all those opposing the ruling regimes of both Israel and the Arab countries. They knew from experience that such gestures would be widely misreported in the Israeli press, that its perpetrators would be personally slandered in the most vicious

manner and the worst possible motives imputed to them. But they hoped that, in however distorted a manner, the 'message' would get through to internationalist revolutionaries in Arab countries, and encourage them to struggle against their own nationalists. These Arab nationalists constantly claim that all Israelis are behind their own government.

A leaflet* was produced announcing that ISRACA members would be demonstrating 'against Zionism and Imperialism in general' and calling upon 'all socialist revolutionaries' to participate, bringing their own banners. The leaflet stressed that as many red flags as possible should be present and warned against the danger of any slogans that might be interpreted as even remotely anti-semitic. The leaflet was widely distributed.

Some time later the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) also issued a leaflet calling upon their supporters to attend a demonstration of their own (scheduled for the same time and place). This leaflet falsely stated that the PSC demonstration had been organised 'with the cooperation and participation of ISRACA'. As pointed out in ISRACA Bulletin No. 2*, 'ISRACA was not approached or consulted at any stage in planning or organising the PSC demonstration'. It would certainly not have agreed to abandon its own independent demonstration, given the PSC's known support to 'Al Fatah'.

On June 15 two clearly separate and distinct demonstrations took place outside the Theatre. One, Maoist-inspired, consisted of PSC activists together with a number of Arab nationalists. They shouted 'Long live Al Fatah!' . . and very little else. The ISRACA demonstration (constantly separated from the first by an open space and by two police cordons) carried red flags, sang 'the Internationale' and paraded posters proclaiming 'A nation suppressing another cannot be free'; 'Down with occupation'; 'Self-determination for the Palestinian people'; 'No imposed solution will halt the revolution'; 'Down with Zionism, Imperialism and Arab Reaction'. (Whatever reservations we have about the ambiguities inherent in the slogan of 'self-determination' there can be no doubt whatsoever of the difference of political tenor of the two demonstrations.)

Individual members of the North London Solidarity group and of what is now the West London Solidarity group came to offer moral support and to protect the handful of ISRACA comrades whom we expected to be attacked (and who were in fact attacked) by the infuriated Zionists. There were certainly no fascists present in the ISRACA demonstration, and any imputation that there were is quite monstrous. We saw no fascist posters and heard no fascist slogans shouted from the other demonstration either.

On August 23, a disgraceful article appeared in the anarchist journal Freedom, over the signature of Albert Meltzer, in which it was claimed that ISRACA, IS, IMG, and Solidarity had been guilty of cooperating with the National Front (a British fascist organisation) in a 'joint demonstration'. Meltzer had not been present at the events he described, but he had read the account published in the ISRACA bulletin. He therefore cannot claim ignorance of what the real slogans of the ISRACA demonstration were.

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*Copies obtainable from ISRACA, 219 Putney Bridge Road, LONDON S W 15.

Some of the cruder factual inaccuracies in Meltzer's 'report' are listed in a letter from Don Kirkley (who was present at the demonstration). This letter, published in Freedom on September 27, deals with the ridiculous allegation that the possible presence of a few reactionaries at the scene of a revolutionary demonstration brands that demonstration - whatever its slogans - and requires of the revolutionaries that they abandon their right to demonstrate at that particular time and on that particular issue. 'Accepting Meltzer's argument would mean that any demonstration against a Communist regime would be attended only by fascists, confirming popular prejudices that all left-wingers are recipient of 'red gold'!!

Early in September, a detailed factual refutation of Meltzer's charges (under the title of 'Anarcho-Zionism?') was sent to Freedom on behalf of ISRACA. It was never published - or even acknowledged. A fortnight later a further (shorter) letter was sent to Freedom by ISRACA. It is this letter, which has not been acknowledged or printed either, which we are now making public.

The whole deplorable episode does no credit to the publishers of Freedom* . When dealing with internationalism and the emotions it gives rise to, one cannot be too careful in the verification of one's facts.

Editorial Board,
Solidarity (North London).

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* The allegations have unfortunately been echoed in issue No. 1 of Blackguard 1, the otherwise excellent Libertarian Student Monthly (obtainable from 138 Pennymead, HARLOW, Essex).

September 23rd, 1969

A Heilbronn,
10A Warrington Gardens,
LONDON W 9.

FREEDOM,
The Editorial Board,
84B Whitechapel High Street,
LONDON E 1.

Comrades,

About two weeks ago our group, the Israeli Revolutionary Action Committee Abroad (ISRACA) sent you an article by A. Orr, under the heading "Anarcho-Zionism?".

This article was a reply to the one by A. Meltzer (Freedom, August 23, 1969) headed "National (Liberation?) Front" which suggested that the ISRACA group, as well as IS, IMG, Solidarity, are guilty of cooperating with the National Front in the anti-Zionist demonstration which took place outside "Theatre Royal" on June 15th this year.

We would like to point out that A. Orr's article is not a personal reply but a reply on behalf of ISRACA. Moreover, it is also a reply on behalf of

a revolutionary group struggling against Zionism inside Israel, namely the "Israeli Socialist Organization", and its paper MATZPEN.

Both ISRACA nnd MATZPEN are viciously attacked in the entire Israeli press almost every week. There is an unprecedented smear campaign going on against them in Israel. The main allegation against ISRACA and MATZPEN is that they gang up with Fascists and anti-Semites against Israel. The article which appeared in Freedom on August 23rd constitutes live ammunition in such a campaign. It 'proves' that even anarchists consider Israeli anti-Zionist revolutionaries as allies of the Fascist "National Front".

We wish to point out that we participated, and organized, our demonstration against the Israeli Premier on June 15th, not as individuals but as an organization and that Meltzer's article does not refer to individuals of ISRACA, IS, IMG, Solidarity, as your footnote in Freedom of September 20th suggests, but refers explicitly to organizations.

Under the circumstances of the vicious campaign waged against MATZPEN and ISRACA, in Israel and in this country, it is simply impossible for us to take Meltzer's article lightheartedly, gloss it over with, consider it merely as a personal viewpoint, or treat it as a case of misunderstanding. MATZPEN and ISRACA are engaged in a vicious battle and their members risk more than their freedom; it is unfortunate that Freedom, due to negligence or haste, unwittingly contributed to the slander campaign against ISRACA, but the only way to undo this is to publish ISRACA's reply to Meltzer's insinuations. We realize that this demands considerable moral courage, but we sincerely hope that you will find it in yourselves to gather it.

We would appreciate it if you would let us know if, and when, you intend to publish our reply.

Awaiting your reply,
Fraternally,
A. Helibronn,
Treasurer, (ISRACA).

# DEATH PAYS A DIVIDEND

> "An accident occurring in a place subject to the Factories Act is notifiable to the Factories Inspectorate if it causes either loss of life or disables an employed person for more than three days from earning full wages from the work on which he was employed. For statistical purposes each injury or fatality is recorded as one accident." (1)

In 1966 the statisticians boggled: there were 296,610 accidents, resulting in 701 deaths. (2) Add in those which occurred outside the scope of the Factories Act - deep-sea fishing is the most notorious - and you have at least 20 million man-days "lost" every year. (3) Lost to production that is: the Ministry of Labour find themselves unable to measure the suffering caused to workers and their families.

Some employers whose workers were stupid enough to lose fingers, limbs, eyes, etc., found themselves doubly penalised. Not only were they deprived of the services of the clumsy dolts concerned; they also found themselves in court for failing to observe the law. In 1966, two thousand, one hundred and forty-five convictions were obtained, resulting in a total of £62,277 in fines: an average of £28 10s 0d per item. It is widely believed that such crippling penalties are the main reason why employers demonstrably take so much care over the safety of their workers.

Of course some industries are more liable to employ accident-prone workers than others. In proportion to the numbers employed, building, constructional engineering, metal manufacture, and the chemical industry have more than their fair share of accidents and deaths; as can be seen from the following table relating to the last three months of 1967. (4)

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Sources:
(1) Ministry of Labour Gazette, February 1968, p. 122.
(2) Ibid., August 1967, pp. 623-5.
(3) Sunday Times, 16 July 1967: "A Gunter Clean-Up with the Factories" (!!)
(4) M.O.L. Gazette, February 1968, pp. 122-3.

| Industry | Fatal Accidents | Total Accidents |
|---|---|---|
| Textiles | 3 | 3,723 |
| Clay, Minerals, etc. | 6 | 2,763 |
| Metal Processes | 10 | 8,969 |
| General Engineering | 20 | 21,719 |
| Electrical Engineering | 1 | 3,458 |
| Wood-working | 8 | 2,717 |
| Chemicals | 16 | 3,445 |
| Paper and Printing | 5 | 2,978 |
| Food and Allied Trades | 6 | 6,980 |
| Building | 35 | 9,520 |
| Constructional Engineering | 7 | 2,228 |
| Docks, etc. | 5 | 2,650 |
| Miscellaneous | 7 | 6,425 |
| | 129 | 77,755 |

It is rumoured that Mrs Barbara Castle is to take long-overdue action against the irresponsible negligence of a small minority of workers. She will soon introduce legislation imposing steep fines on workers injured at work, these fines to be paid to their employers as a small measure of compensation for the trouble they have caused. Only then will workers have any real incentive to stop being buried alive, falling into crucibles of molten metal, blowing their arms off, etc.

John King.

# LETTER

Reading M.B.'s review of "Ultra-Leftism in Britain", by Betty Reid, reminded me of some experiences I had in the Communist Party twelve to fifteen years ago.

I had joined the C.P. in 1952 as a member of Clapham North Branch. The Secretary was a civil servant named Douglass Moncrieff. Filled with the enthusiasm of all new recruits, I was equally active in the Y.C.L., and was soon to be elected Secretary of the Wandsworth Branch.

For several years I was one of the few stalwarts who kept the organization going, planning the weekly branch meetings, distributing literature, speaking on street corners, etc., etc.

Early in 1954 Douglas Moncrieff approached me regarding some "special work" for the Party. He had been co-opted on to a secret security committee, headed by Betty Reid, and answerable only to the Party Secretariat. Its job was to investigate alleged increasing Trotskyite infiltration.

I was asked to go to the open-air meetings held each Sunday afternoon on Clapham Common, especially those addressed by one John Burns (yes, the one and only G.H.), and take a series of photographs of the audience. The exposed films would be sent to King Street for developing, and I would be re-imbursed for the cost of the films.

The object of the exercise was never detailed. I declined.

A year later I joined London Transport as a bus conductor and was posted to Battersea Garage. Within weeks an industrial branch of the C.P. had been formed, with myself as secretary. Within six months we had ten members, were producing a monthly six-page bulletin, which sold over one-hundred copies each edition, and I was running as a Communist candidate in the local elections, sponsored by the bus branch.

At that year's Area Conference (I don't think the same local organization functions today) the Area Secretary, Joe Bent, singled out Battersea Garage bus group as a shining example for all to follow.

Meanwhile, there was considerable dissension in the Party nationally on the issue of democratic centralism. Comrades at all levels were complaining of the lack of open discussions. The dissatisfaction was such that the leadership was forced to act, and a special commission was set up to enquire into "Inner-Party Democracy". All were encouraged to submit statements to the commission. "Address your comments to the Commission Chairman, Betty Reid!"

To me, the appointment of Betty Reid, Chief of the Secret Security Committee, to a responsible post on this particular body was a blatant insult to the membership. I put this point of view to the bus branch, and we passed a unanimous resolution demanding the removal of Betty Reid. Together with Fred Whelton, I was instructed to carry this resolution to the next Area Committee meeting.

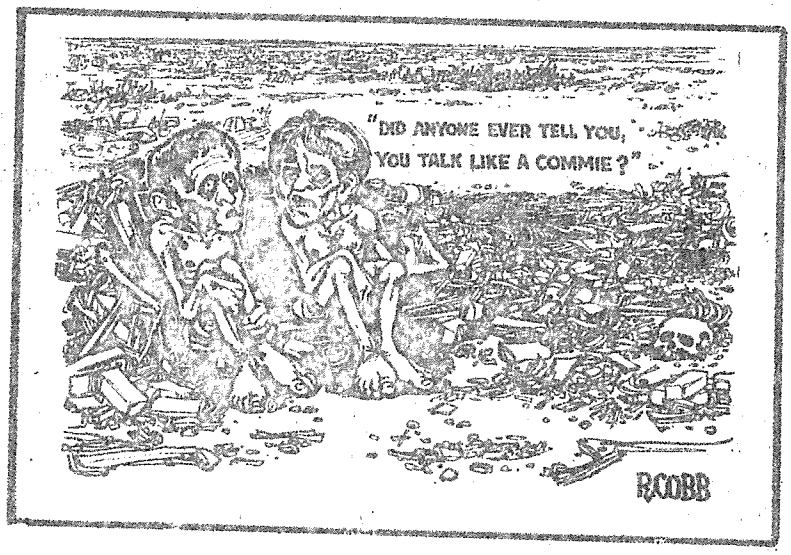
The Area Committee agreed the matter should be placed on the agenda of the next Area membership meeting.

Then, at the eleventh hour we were approached by Peter Maxwell, Area Chairman. The matter had been re-discussed by the "Area Secretariat", who had referred the matter to Party Centre (in the person of Bill Laughlan). To hold a public discussion on the Party Security Organization would do irreparable damage to the Party. Permission to discuss it before the Area membership was withdrawn, and we were warned against trying to raise it under "any other business".

Fred and I reported back to the bus branch. We all resigned from the Communist Party.

A month or two later the workers of Budapest took up arms against their Betty Reids, and all over the world millions more left the ranks. But apparently Betty Reid goes marching on with her ever decreasing little band of followers.

Bob Potter.

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