

KEEP LEFT



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EDITORIAL

The Government's contemptuous disregard of the majority report of the Monopolies Commission throws a revealing spotlight on the inherent defects of parliamentary democracy. Here was an issue on which the vast mass of the people were undivided; public revulsion at the racketeering methods of price rings was re-inforced by the findings and proposals of the Monopolies Commission and the foundations were solidly laid for legislative action. But the 'representatives of the people' rode rough shod over public opinion and enacted a Bill which is as harmful to monopolies as pea-shooters are to tanks.

From this, one significant factor emerges. The affairs of the country are not regulated by parliamentary representatives but by a powerful oligarchy of finance-capital which manouvres behind the facade of Parliament and which expresses its will through its puppet M.P.s. The presence of this extra-parliamentary power is not always evident in the day to day transactions of the State, but on occasions when its sovereignty is threatened, it manifests itself most blatantly for all but the blind to see. Public opinion is a minus quantity in the calculations of this oligarchy so long as it is expressed in a purely passive character (e.g. in the form of petitions); it is only when the people manifest their discontent through the channels of direct action and openly challenge the bourgeoisie that positive results accrue.

When examined against this backcloth the role of the Communist Party in contemporary politics is shown to be completely barren and riddled with inconsistencies. The "Daily Worker" can lash the Government for betraying the interests of the people to the monopolies and price rings, whilst on the same page it unblinking clamours for that same Government to negotiate an agreement, on behalf of the working class, at Geneva! Perhaps the convivial smile of Marshall Bulganin can be calculated to change Sir Anthony's class allegiance overnight; or perhaps the release of multi-coloured balloons from Hampstead Heath (a most efficacious substitute for Marxism!) really will prove to be a valid alternative to class struggle. We will see.

THE RIGHT TO STRIKE.

Workers must be on their guard against any attempt by the present employing-class Government to interfere with the right to strike in any shape or form. Suggestions are being bandied about that before a strike is called an E.C. of a Trade Union should be legally compelled to conduct a ballot of their membership to see if they really want to take this 'dreadful' action.

It is but a short step from gossip proposals of this sort to the necessary Tory legislation to make it compulsory. Altogether it is rather ironical that a vote on strike action is being urged by the capitalist press. During the war, when faced with a moribund group of T.U. officials, many militant workers anxious to test the feelings of the workers on several issues would be demanding the strike ballot and would be opposed both by T.U. leaders and capitalist-press. Why is it now suggested that a vote should take place?

At first glance it seems all nice and democratic that the leaders of the Trade Unions should be made to have a vote of their members before they plunge the country into "turmoil". One would imagine that most T.U. officials are bursting to call strikes. Actually the reverse is usually the case and it is only after considerable rank and file pressure born out of intolerable conditions that T.U. Officialdom goes into action. Why should we object to having a compulsory ballot?

If a Union decides to write into its book of rules that a strike cannot be called unless there is a vote, that is the affair of the members of that Union. When employing-class and Tory inspired circles deliver sermons to the workers' organizations, it should be greeted with the utmost suspicion. Especially if the idea is to go into legislative form.

The ruling-class inspired argument falls by the wayside when its proposers are asked if the same method is to be applied to ending strikes after the majority have voted to have one? It is a bit damp as an argument when we see that the leaders of the Dockers' Union were several times turned down on their recommendation to go back to work without victory. The workers were voting alright - not only by show of hands but by walking away from the ships. They were voting with their feet as well.

What the British employing-class would like to see is the Trade Union Movement hamstrung by the officials having reduced authority in bargaining if they have to go through all the procedure of conducting a ballot beforehand. If it was made legally compulsory to reveal the results of the voting, at times it might well show that a considerable minority of the members voted against the action, but had come out loyally with the majority. It is often the case that the minority is won over to the cause of the strike during it and not before.

Employers would still try to show that a strike taken against their interests was a minority imposing its will upon the "sheep-like" majority, no matter if ten thousand ballots were conducted.

Let the workers be very suspicious of every suggestion coming from the capitalist press and employing-class circles on this count. The British employers

expressed themselves politically through the Tory Party had no hesitation before the war in supporting the destruction of the Trade Union Movements in Italy, Germany and Spain. Our present democratic forms are kept in being by the strength of the Labour Movement and the conveniences of the British capitalists who prefer to rule this way if convenient but who will resort to the same measures as the Fascists in the countries mentioned to retain their rule.

When it becomes necessary for the British ruling-class to once more impose greater burdens on the workers and slash away at their living standards, look out for moves to strengthen the anti-working class legislation by the re-introduction, in some form, of the 1927 Trades Disputes Act, hated by the workers and repealed by the Labour Government.

When workers lose the right to refuse to sell their labour power to an employer there is no freedom left worth mentioning. This must remain an unalterable right. It is a measure taken by the workers as a last device and not as a first because it entails sacrifices and loss of earnings and no knowing when it is going to end. It is taken only when a feeling is sufficiently intense.

A battle between those who live by private profit accumulation and those who work for a living "by hand or by brain" is a fight of interest to the entire working-class. There must be no impediment to the right to stop work.

SID BIRWELL

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GENEVA : BEFORE AND AFTER.

If our knowledge of the international scene were drawn only from the comments of the popular press on the Four Power Meeting, there would be one question which would remain unanswered: why didn't they do it before? For, to judge from the official hand-outs, the danger of a third world war has practically vanished overnight, merely because four men drank some vodka together. Surely, if the problem were as simple as that

However, anyone who looks at the history of big power diplomacy in modern times knows that the real results of the international talks are never revealed in the public statements. They were certainly not to be found in the childish babblings which issued from Switzerland last month. The important decisions of the statesmen are always taken in secret, behind the backs of the people of the world.

Was the Cold War, the period of the hydrogen bomb, simply the result of a misunderstanding? We know that it was not. For fifty years the crisis of world capitalism has shown itself in a series of alternate hot and cold wars, interspersed with economic stagnation. World War number three was being prepared before slaughter number two had finished. The Cold War arose from the efforts of American capital, with its junior partners in Western Europe, to maintain its profits and to avoid clashing with the working class at home. This inevitably led to collision with the colonial revolution and to the preparation of an attempt to bring Eastern Europe, China and Russia, back into the grasp of the profiteers.

This life-and-death struggle of the capitalist class is the reality behind the talk of "defending the free world" etc. It was for this, that the people of the world were prepared for mass destruction and millions spent on armaments.

Before the Second World War could start, international labour suffered a whole series of defeats and betrayals, culminating in the tragedy of Spain. Imperialism cannot launch the next slaughter without first securing its rear by settling accounts with the masses at home. Because it has not yet been able to do this, it is forced to change its tactics.

Meanwhile, the rulers of the Kremlin try to bargain with the West. Afraid to risk their privileges and power by leading a struggle against capitalism, they fear the overthrow of the capitalist system as much as they do its victory. Their manoeuvres involve helping a mass struggle here, calling one off there, but never allowing a fight to reach complete victory. The history of the last thirty years is littered with the corpses of movements strangled in the international bartering of the Kremlin.

But the upsurge of the post-war period is too strong to be held in the channels of Moscow's horse-deals. This was shown, for example, in China where after the war, Stalin strived to reach a compromise with Chiang-kai-shek. Despite the advice of Moscow, the Chinese Communist Party was forced by mass pressure to smash the corrupt Chiang regime.

With these ideas to guide us we can penetrate the thick layers of platitude surrounding the Geneva talks and can find the rich vein of treachery which lies beneath. What united these representatives of Wall Street, the City, the Bourse and the Kremlin was a common interest in stifling the struggle of the workers and peasants of the world. It is this struggle which threatens to topple the power of Big Business, and thus menaces the parasites of the Kremlin.

Despite Eisenhower's statement to the contrary, a secret agreement was probably drawn up, at least in outline, at Geneva. Many important points have yet to be settled. For example, Bulganin will not sell Eastern Germany except at a price which Imperialism is still not prepared to pay. But the general shape of the deal has certainly been worked out, and will become clearer to us in the next few months, particularly after the meeting of the Foreign Ministers.

One thing is certain. The Communist Parties of the world are beginning a new swing to the right. In Britain we have had a foretaste in the dock-strike, but worse is still to come. However, the carrying through of this move to the right is not going to be easy just when things are livening up on the T.U. front.

Can lasting peace come from the horse-trading of the 'Statesmen'? I think not. True, the strength of the mass movement has forced the imperialist to revise their strategy and time-table, and this certainly provides a breathing space for the development of the struggle. But the problems of the world cannot be solved on the basis of the status quo. All the basic causes of the Cold War situation are still in existence and must remain so until capitalism is destroyed.

We are now entering the period of "Phoney Peace", when preparation for war will be dressed up as preparation for peace. (The military significance of the U.S. "artificial moon" has been played down. Apparently it was just an accident that the Defence Department is to spend the millions of dollars needed!)

WAGES AND THE COST OF LIVING.

Has it ever struck you that whatever wage increases are wrung from employers, their profits never seem to diminish? There is hardly a wage claim negotiated by a union to which one of the stock reasons for original rejection is "We cannot afford it." And at all stages of the negotiations down to any eventual settlement the employer says (and on occasions will produce statistics to prove his point!) he will face bankruptcy if the workers press their claim to the full.

The present times are no exception. Despite wage rises of recent years the worker is substantially less well off relatively than his employer and the shareholder in his employer's business.

Taking all industrial privately-owned companies in the United Kingdom we find that between 1949 and 1955 profits have risen by 50 per cent. The amount paid as dividends rose by 70 per cent. Both these items will rise still more because of the income tax relief in the last Budget.

The gross trading profits of United Kingdom companies was £580 million in 1938. They rose ~~three~~ **gold** by 1948. By 1954 they rose by another 43 per cent to nearly five times what they were before the war.

Holder's of ordinary shares have gained £5,000 million in fifteen months in the value of their property. As Hugh Gaitskell pointed out in the House of Commons the other day this means, when the shares are sold, giving unearned and untaxed profits to people who have done nothing whatever to increase industrial output.

I do not believe it is the job of the Trade Unions only to negotiate wage increases to try and keep pace with rises in the cost of living, vital as that is. The worker is entitled to an ever increasing share of the product of his labour. And the figures I have quoted show clearly there is no general shortage of cash in the kitty to meet such claims.

I have, too, every sympathy with the view expressed by some Trade Union leaders who want to know who is to benefit from increased productivity before they start discussing it. If the workers in the industry concerned are to benefit, or the community generally, then there will be a general welcome for increased output provided it is not fashioned in the Chaplin "Modern Times" technique. But if it is just to swell already over swollen profits and dividends few of us would be interested.

There is another reason too, why wages must rise.

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It is no use factories turning out electrical appliances and new gadgets to ease the housewives' burdens, unless the people have got the money with which to buy them, or at least be able to find the instalments to purchase on the "never-never". The making of films or the producing of television programmes would soon dry up if people couldn't afford to go to the cinema or buy television sets; and so on. In other words, standards of living must continue to rise if the natural processes of invention and development are to continue.

There is some £40,000 million worth of private property in this country. One million people own over £5,000 worth each. 66 per cent of the total property is owned by 3 per cent of the population. On the other hand, 62 per cent of the population own between them only 3 per cent of the wealth, which makes rather nonsense of the Tory slogans about a property-owning democracy. For the vast majority it is neither democratic nor property owning.

All of which can be summed up as saying there is no room for complacency either on the Socialist or Trade Union Front. We are still a very long way from the promised land. Progress is being made but, alas, very slowly.

GEORGE ELVIN.

General Secretary

Assoc. of Cinematograph and Allied Technicians.

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The Geneva meeting and the shift in the international situation which it reflected must be seen as an attempt to hold off the fight of the colonial peoples and the working class. It is thus part of the preparation for the next war. But, so great is the strength of the mass movements of the world today, these preparations may never be completed. If the international working class understands the meaning of Geneva, it can use the time it has gained to go forward to the final overthrow of Imperialism and the building of a socialist world. This, not the conspiracies of the Great Powers, is the only way to reach a lasting peace.

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