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# **AGITATOR**

**FOR WORKERS' POWER**

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**4<sub>D</sub>**



# Revolutionary Organisation

## 2. WHY?

All the ruling groups in modern society encourage the belief that decision-taking and management are functions beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. All means are used to foster this idea. Not only do formal education, the press, the radio, television and the church perpetuate this myth, but even the parties of so-called opposition accept it and in so doing, lend it strength. All the political parties of the 'left' - whether social-democratic or Bolshevik oppose the present order only by offering 'better' leaders, more 'experienced' and more capable of solving the problems of society than those who mismanage the world today.

All of them, bourgeois and 'radicals' alike, distort the history of the working class and attempt to draw a discrete veil over the immense creative initiative of the masses in struggle. For the bourgeois, the Russian Revolution was the conspiracy of organized fanaticism. To Stalinists and Trotskyites, it is the justification for their right to lead. For

the bourgeois the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 showed how capitalist rulers were better than Stalinist ones. For the Stalinists, it was a fascist conspiracy. The Trotskyites wrote pamphlets showing how badly the Hungarians needed their services. Over every revolution and struggle, the parties compete in the squalid business of seeking to justify both themselves and their dogmas. They all ignore the efforts, the struggles, the sacrifices and the positive achievements of the participants themselves. Every attempt by people to take control of their own destiny by instituting their own rule has been buried beneath a million official tracts and a welter of 'expert' interpretations.

It is now almost impossible to learn what actually happened in Italy during the early 20s when the workers occupied and managed the factories. The Asturian Commune of 1934, the May Day in Barcelona in 1937, the sit-down strikes in France and the USA during the late

thirties and the events of Budapest in 1956 have become closed books.

If the myth that people are unable to manage, organize and rule society themselves is to be debunked workers must be made aware that on several occasions other workers have in fact managed society. They have done so both more humanely and more effectively than it is managed at present. To us who publish AGITATOR there can be no thought of socialism unless the working class establishes its own rule. Socialism for us implies the complete and total management of both production and government. The essential pre-condition for this is a rise in mass consciousness and the development of a confidence within people that they are able not only to challenge the old society but to build the new one.

Making these past experiences available to people is one of the primary tasks of revolutionary socialists. All channels of information are in the hands of capitalists, bureaucrats, self-appointed saviours with special axes to grind. We disagree with those who argue that there is no need for a revolutionary organization. The production of a truthful and serious history requires the conscious and organized association of revolutionary socialists.

The revolutionary organization must also bring to workers' notice the common interests that they share with other workers.

On the one hand the concentration of capital has led to an increasing concentration of workers in giant factories often linked with one another in various kinds of monopolies. On the other hand the new productive techniques have led to greater division between the producers. The labour process has been so broken down that workers

are not only separated by national, regional and sectional boundaries but also by artificial divisions within the factories and departments. The increasing tempo of production and the introduction of piecework has fostered the idea that the interests of workers in one section are quite different from those of men in other sections.

The trade union officials help the employers to maintain these divisions. Separate and often widely differing wage and piece-rates are negotiated. Workers in one factory or shop are pitted against workers in other factories and shops. The employers and the union officials unscrupulously use the men's short term interests - or apparent short term interests - to sabotage their real needs. The very presence of different unions competing against one another for members illustrates how sectional interests are promoted above general requirements. Clerical workers are today being reduced to mere cogs in the impersonal machine of production. The increase in union membership among these workers in the post-war years shows that they are becoming aware of this fact. The union bureaucracies organize them into separate unions for white-collar workers, or into special sections of the industrial unions.

The revolutionary organization must help break down the false divisions between workers. With its paper and publications and through its militants the revolutionary organization should bring to people's notice the struggles that are taking place in society. It must truthfully report what these struggles are about and show how they affect the lives and interests of other workers.

(cont. p. 12)

# sputnik's

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# ... AND socialism

It cant be denied any longer. Outer space now belongs to the Russians. They manipulate satellites and rockets with consummate ease and skill. They are admired and envied for it the whole world over.

On the American side rockets explode at ground level. Tempers explode in Congress. The newspapers boost what they can. The grimaces of Ham, the space-travelling chimp, are front page news.

Schoolchildren draw planets and rockets in their copybooks. Everyone is familiar with stellar space. A great wind is shaking humanity. Discussions everywhere. A new vocabulary has emerged. When discussing politics today, one doesn't talk of socialism, of capitalism, of exploitation. All that's outdated. One talks of Venus, of sputniks, of orbits and of automatic interplanetary stations. One refers repeatedly to apogees and perigees, one makes oblique reference to tangential displacements. If one cant indulge in all this one is obviously displaying poverty of argument which makes one quite unfit for serious discussion.

To be a realist in contemporary politics one must have one eye fixed on the Moon, the other on Venus!

The V.I.P.s are now the dogs Laika, Strelka and Belka... and also assorted rabbits, mice and insects. These rocket passengers hit the headlines. Ham is quite a favourite in the better magazines.

As for Man, he is little spoken of. He is a small particle, blown about by astral winds.

The experts of all lands, brim-full of admiration for Russian technique, feel themselves becoming 'socialist'... by virtue of the fact that they are 'experts'. For them, 'technique' and 'socialism' are becoming synonymous.

Russia is the marvellous country where it is easier to play around with Venus and to explore the rear side of the Moon than it is to grow maize in a field or decently to house the people. Western technicians long for 'disciplined' Russian factories, for 'efficient' Russian laboratories. A country that can explore Venus must have a sensible regime! Seen through this kind of telescope 'socialism' becomes familiar to them, its image attractive. 'At last, a country where the experts are granted the dominant position they deserve!'

The only fly in the ointment is that socialism has very little to do with Venus, with the Moon, or with the conquest of outer space. Socialism concerns itself with Man. It is made by men, for men. Its echoes are not the bleeps of the first sputnik or the heartbeats of the bitch Laika.

The purpose of Socialism is not to make chimpanzees travel through space and retain their grins. Nor is it to write a modern version of the Bible, with Noah's Ark now an interplanetary rocket!

The great object of Socialism is to transform relations between men and in particular their relations in the process of labour. Its purpose is to allow men to manage society

collectively, and to decide collectively on all important questions (including interplanetary exploration). Management and decision-taking would be taken out of the hands of a minority of leaders.

Socialism does not mean the social preponderance of the technical experts. It means equality between workers, whatever their professional status.

Socialism does not mean special benefits for the most educated, the most intelligent or the most powerful. It implies on the contrary the suppression of all special distinctions and the possibility for everyone to participate in the administration of his work-place and in the general management of the matters that concern him most intimately.

The latest Russian achievements have boosted Russian prestige throughout the world. But these are in no sense 'socialist' achievements. Our technicians may cast longing eyes at Russian society. Let them not however add errors of political appreciation to their errors and shortcomings in rocket design!

This error of political appreciation is in a sense a double error. In Russia technicians are only pampered by the regime to the extent that they comply with its demands beyond all scientific rationality. They must accept as scientifically correct whatever the Bureaucracy happens to consider politically expedient.

From the military point of view the domination of outer space has become a primary objective. An immense effort is therefore made in this field. If tomorrow the Bureaucracy suddenly decides that all efforts should be geared to other objectives, all these

technical triumphs will be deemed so much wasted effort, so much unnecessary expenditure on the backs of the Russian people. The technical experts who have devoted time and talent to these great achievements will be dragged through the mud. For those who manage society in Russia are not the technical experts but the bureaucrats.

There is no more socialism in Russia than in America. One country launches big rockets, the other much smaller ones. That is all. The fate of the worker, who actually makes the rockets, is a very different story... and a sordidly down-to-earth one!

Daniel M.

## STOP PRESS: OOZLUM BIRD SIGHTED AGAIN!

Fifteen 'radical' youth swarmed and jostled their way into Denison House (capacity 320) on Monday, March 27, to 'demand the reinstatement of left MPs' and 'rally to the Scarborough decisions'.

Also present were the caretaker and his cat. Neither bought a 'Newsletter'.

ORNITHOLOGIST.

# SONGS FOR ALDERMARCH

A number of those participating in the 1961 Aldermarch will be doing so under a stolen flag.

They are 'phonies'. They are in favour of a highly 'selective' type of nuclear disarmament. They are not in favour of a revolutionary struggle against the Bomb, at all times, and in all countries.

The Stalinists only gave their support to CND two years ago. They previously denounced the movement as 'sectarian' and as 'splitting the peace movement'. In August 1945 the Daily Worker, the French Communist Party paper L'Humanité and the Italian Communist Party paper L'Unita, all welcomed the dropping of the Bomb on Hiroshima. L'Unita (10.8.45) even denounced those who protested at this monstrous crime as afflicted with 'a doctrinaire obedience to an abstract form of humanitarianism'.

The Stalinists have today changed their tune about Western bombs. They remain of course devout defenders of the Eastern variety.

When it comes down to brass tacks the Trotskyists, for all their ballyhoo about the 'Stalinist bureaucracy' also support the Russian bomb... and comrade K's right to maintain his finger on the nuclear trigger. As Mr. Healy, National Secretary of the S.L.L. so clearly put it in Tribune (25.11.60): '...until a real possibility of international socialism arises, the Soviet Union cannot give up its H-bomb'.

To the crudely bureaucratic and to the cynically 'sophisticated' defenders of Russian H-bombs, AGITATOR is pleased to dedicate the following rousing marching songs.

## THE WORKERS' BOMB. (Tune: The Red Flag)

### I

Our cause is surely won this year  
Because 'the leadership' is here:  
For Kruschov's boys and Trotsky's too  
Now guide us in the work we do.

### CHORUS

Then wave the Workers' Bomb on high:  
Beneath its cloud we'll gladly die;  
And though our critics all shout 'BALLS!'  
We'll stand beneath it when it falls.

(continued overleaf)

II

While Western arms we strive to end,  
The Russian Bomb we will defend.  
Degenerated though it be,  
It is the Peoples' Property.

III

The King Street comrades chant its praise;  
In Clapham too they love its blaze.  
Though quite deformed politically,  
We must support it... critically.

IV

It will correct our errors past,  
And clarify us with its blast;  
Deep in our shelters, holes and nooks  
We'll all have time to 'read the books'.

V

And when we leave this world of toil  
And shuffle off our mortal coil  
We'll thank the Bomb that sent us free  
To socialist eternity.

THE DEFORMED WORKERS' BOMB. (Tune: The Wearing of  
the Green)

I

Oh comrades dear, come raise a cheer;  
Our troubles are all gone,  
We'll win the revolution with  
The Soviet Workers' Bomb.  
No more lockouts, strikes or marches;  
No more struggles for the prize,  
When the Workers' ICBM falls  
Upon us from the skies.

CHORUS

Oh the Soviet Workers' Bomb,  
Oh the Soviet Workers' Bomb,  
The degenerated, bureaucratic  
Soviet Workers' Bomb.

II

Do not worry; never fear it, for  
It will not fall on you.  
It will only hit the bourgeoisie  
(And Clapham High Street too).  
If by chance some backward workers die,  
We're sure you will not mind,  
For it's in the interests of the li-  
beration of Mankind.

III

Oh the property relations of  
The Soviet we defend,  
Though the fall-out from the bomb may put  
Us all clean round the bend.  
And if it drops too near and we  
Should be annihilated,  
They'll call it a mistake and we'll  
be re-habilitated.



# RENT STRIKE

By GRACE JACOBS

All over the country local authorities, whether Tory or Labour controlled, are putting up the rents of Council tenants. Dartford's Labour Council is the latest example.

Can ordinary people fight back? Or are they condemned to be fleeced again and again by those claiming to 'represent' them?

We are pleased to bring to our readers the history of the great fight waged in 1955 by the Crawley Tenants against the Crawley Development Corporation. The account has been written by one of the most active participants in the struggle. Its lessons are important to all tenants.

## The background.

On Wednesday October 26, 1955, work stopped throughout the Crawley Industrial Site at Manor Royal, and a demonstration over 5000 strong and a mile long made its way to the Town Centre. Wives, some with prams and pushchairs, fell in beside their men-folk in a great protest march and rally against the rent increases.

These workers were the tenants of Crawley. A large number of them had followed their firms to the New Town. Some had sought employment in order to qualify for housing. Others, who had acquainted themselves with the future plans of the town, considered that it would open up a better life for their children. All of them, before uprooting themselves and moving to this

town, had carefully examined the economics of their new wages, rents and cost of living. Budgets were assessed and irrevocable decisions taken. Budgets were necessarily tight because allowances had to be made for family increases, furnishing, high fuel charges, as well as for rents. These were often higher than those to which they were accustomed. Rent increases were not expected. Some tenants claimed that their firms had even given them assurances to this effect. Tenants were advised of the increases in a crude manner, by means of a notice to quit... and a new housing agreement to sign!

Some tenants on the point of moving in found such documents waiting for them in the post, on opening their front door.

This was a blow beneath the belt to people cut off from friends and relatives, facing all the difficulties of adapting themselves to life in an unfinished town. They had taken the lack of pavements and roads in their stride. They shopped in caravans and made do with miserable huts for all social and cultural activities. Bus services were inadequate. People travelled far and wide for hospital treatment. The small cottage hospital which served the old town was the only local one available. The tenants had all that it takes to make a real live town out of a social experiment. Yet they were treated with utmost contempt.

The Development Corporation set up by the Government was not a representative body. The tenants had no voice in the affairs which directly concerned them. They were not consulted in connection with the rent increases, neither were the housing accounts made available for their inspection. There was no just cause for this increase. Interests charges more than doubled the subsidies and 'economic' rents were already being paid. Crawley New Town which had first been conceived of as an urgent social need to relieve congestion within the London area was now being treated just as any other commercial proposition. As usual business interests came before those of the people.

#### The demonstration.

The Crawley Weekly News \* referred to the march as 'Crawley's biggest ever demonstration of unrest and discontent'. Its sponsors had hoped it would be 'the biggest demonstration even seen in Sussex' but even their hopes were to be surpassed.

'At 10.00 am.' the paper reports 'Manor Royal had its normal quiet air, but as it approached 10.30 workers downed tools and streamed out of the factories with their banners and slogans. The band quickly joined up till finally the parade stretched from end to end of Manor Royal.'

Some 26 factories were represented with 14 unions taking part. As the procession moved off they were joined by building workers from the local sites.

Much ingenuity went into the banners and slogans. Some read: 'Port and pheasant are very pleasant but we cant pay our rents at present'.

As the workers marched toward the Town Centre 'they called on others still at work to join them. Many did so. Police reinforcements had to be drafted into Crawley and stood by at the Police Station.'

At the mass meeting a building workers' steward said: 'I feel that if Mr. Butler were in Crawley today it would have a sobering effect on him and the class he represents'. 'There was a feeling' he said 'that the working class had lost the spirit to fight. This magnificent demonstration confounded that idea!'

The platform asked for a show of hands on a resolution not to pay the rent increases. 'Hands shot into the air in a unanimous vote.'

The Crawley rent strike was on. It lasted many weeks but the tenants were eventually defeated. How did this come about? What lessons can be learned for future struggles? What is the source of strength of such a movement and what are the dangers threatening it?

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\* Issue of 28.10.55.

### Organization.

The Crawley rent strike started off with a big bang. Unfortunately the ideas of the Tenants Association and of the Shop Stewards movement were inclined to cut across each other. This is a difficulty which is only likely to arise in other New Towns or localities where the majority of the tenants work in the factories close by. The Tenants Association did not foresee the giant stoppage of work and the mass rally. Emotion ran high, and rightly so. But the decision for a rent strike was taken at a demonstration which was originally intended to be merely one of protest. This immediately created the need for organization way beyond the strength of the Tenants Association. It soon transpired that the factory committees could not take on the tasks created by the new developments. Although an historic stand was made for many months, the situation gradually deteriorated from the very start.

Although it is essential for tenants to be able fully to express their feelings, prolonged and organized activity must be based on the power to maintain such organization. Unless it is possible quickly to expand organization to meet requirements as they arise all spontaneous expression of high emotional content will be condemned to be but short and sharp outbursts, without lasting effect.

### Developing the movement.

The Crawley rent strike was regarded by too many of its militant tenants as a static achievement, within which they carried out their personal role by merely refusing to pay the increase. The rent strike should have been regarded as a constant challenge to develop the movement by providing education and propaganda to meet every

exigency, by issuing information on current and future plans, by maintaining contact with every tenant, etc. These aims were attempted and achieved in part, but they eventually proved to be beyond the power of the neighbourhood organization.

Some felt that these objectives could have been achieved in the factories because there the concentration of tenants made contact easy. But apart from the first great effort which resulted in the stoppage of work and in workers emerging triumphant with quite remarkable banners, the necessary organization did not materialise. The necessary factory meetings were not held. It is possible that this deficiency could be overcome, in the future, in similar circumstances, and that this might result in considerable success. But in localities without such factory connections, the need for constant contact with every tenant would have to be taken very seriously. This amounts to hard slogging work requiring dogged determination, patience, good humour and all the inspiration one can muster.

Organization must expand as much as is necessary to meet current need, in spite of any dog-in-the-manger attitude of leaderships. We experienced some of this in Crawley when some of the pre-rent strike personnel of the Tenants Association were inclined to consider that publicity and fame were their due, because of previous services rendered. In one neighbourhood this resulted in a 'possessive', 'restrictive' attitude within their Committee at a time when the Committee should have expanded rapidly.

The existing Committee should always be ready to expand its basis as new forces reveal themselves in the course of struggle.

### Keeping strikers informed.

To rely on maintaining contact through meetings is not enough. After the first excitement, attendances are inclined to drop off. The need for contact becomes greater. In Crawley we felt there was a need to put tenants in the picture almost every week before the collection of rents. We preferred to do this through pickets. It was done by leaflets when this became impracticable. This dissemination of information was reinforced by press releases and meetings.

The Joint Emergency Committee met every Sunday morning. It was composed of representatives from all neighbourhoods, and shop stewards from most factories together with representatives from the non-organized factories. Within this, some balance of the various trade unions was observed. Federation stewards represented some of the building workers. (Builders from local sites joined in the march even when they were not tenants of Crawley. Some of them came from as far as Brighton, Hastings and Lewes).

This was a good committee which was able to reach excellent decisions. But the carrying out of these decisions was defective. The workers were not adequately informed and mobilised around the truly vital decisions.

Any sense of just drifting along is bad for tenants, especially if they have the feeling that their numbers are dropping without them being informed. It gives rise to defeatism and makes them very susceptible to press and other reports calculated to break the strike. All sorts of fears set in when people feel cut off and alone, especially where possible evictions are concerned. Things might well have proved more successful in Crawley if the suggestion of a voluntary show of rent books had been

taken up, so that confidence could have been drawn, every week, from the secure knowledge that a definite number of tenants were still in the strike. But such measures would have had to be introduced tactfully, without any sort of intimidation, encouraging friendly discussion amongst dissenters, and aiming at least to maintain their moral support. If numbers actually participating in the strike were to drop, such moral and financial support by the others could be very important. Moderate support and even acceptance to pay, under protest, does render minority action possible. Such potential support should not be turned into antipathy. The door should always be kept open for tenants to rejoin. In Crawley towards the end of the strike, the comparatively small circle of tougher militants became a source of annoyance within the guilt complex of the 'renegades'.

### Telling the truth.

Changes in the level of the movement call for change in organization, especially if the movement slides backwards in any way. It may prove necessary to call a halt to back-sliding and to have some plans ready to switch the type of protest. Tenants may require such insurance to keep them going. In Crawley, the women (who after all had the homes of their children to think of) were given assurances that the Committee was a strong one, and that they had the protection of the factories. We told them that if this position should change they would be informed. When the biggest factory dropped out the committee considered it necessary to make the position clear in spite of objections to this step.

Such action may give the defeatists an easy target, but the tenants

are surely on stronger ground when their struggle is based on full knowledge of the real facts than on hot headed fanaticism. If the majority of the tenants are not prepared to continue the struggle then nothing the leadership does can ensure victory. The truth on the other hand can have an invigorating effect. Any defeatist trends it might encourage will at times be offset by the inspiration to greater solidarity, which in turn can create the greatest confidence.

The opportunity must be taken at times of high feeling to strengthen organization. In this way emotion can initiate some kind of positive chain reaction. Otherwise it may only lead to a negative and defeatist anti-climax.

#### Levels of understanding.

Every contribution, however small, must be welcomed. People do not always reach the same degree of militancy at the same time. All propaganda and education must bear this in mind. Humorous slogans and sarcastic comments on posters were more appreciated than grim reminders of dire need. Good humour proved a great tonic to successful action.

To avoid a sense of anti-climax and odious comparisons in the press or in the minds of the tenants themselves, it is better to avoid repeating a given form of action (march, demonstration, etc.) if the second performance cannot be made better than the first.

Throughout the rent strike the level of understanding of tenants concerning interest rates, etc., increased considerably. The new tenancy agreement forms, which were to have been sent back to the Corporation,

never reached their destination. Tenants quite courageously handed them in to Tenants Association officials and shop stewards, as requested to by the strike organizations. Because of the large numbers involved no intimidating action was taken by the Corporation and tenancies continued without such agreements.

#### Conclusions.

Crawley made a valiant attempt but failed. The will to fight was there but the organization proved too weak to hold it together. One thing is certain however: rent struggles will have to be faced again. There have now been three rent increases in the last few years. More will clearly follow. Future struggles will teach new lessons. These must not remain the 'property' of isolated groups of tenants, to be forgotten as the months and years go by. They must be studied and disseminated as widely as possible. Eventually, tenants may have to join up in one great national movement, fully aware of the main lessons of its own past.

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## WHAT NEXT FOR ENGINEERS?

By KEN WELLER

(AEU Shop Steward).

AGITATOR pamphlet No.3  
Price: 8d (post free).

Order now from: E. Morse,  
3, Lancaster Grove, London NW3.

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION (continued from p.2)

Most people do not at present see the need for socialism. If by socialism is meant what currently passes as such - both East and West of the Iron Curtain - we can scarcely blame them. There is no doubt however that vast numbers of people are prepared to struggle on real issues, on issues that really concern them, and against the innumerable and monstrous social injustices and social frustrations of contemporary society. At an elementary level, they are prepared to fight against rent increases, against changes in piecework rates and against changes in job organization about which they have not even been consulted. At a higher level they are prepared to campaign against the production of nuclear weapons. They are constantly challenging the various 'solutions' to these problems, imposed upon them from

above. How can this challenge be generalised? How can it be transformed into one directed against the very society which perpetuates the division of men into order-givers and order-takers?

The revolutionary organization must assist people engaged in struggle against exploiting society to understand the need to act in an organized class way and not as isolated groups with limited or sectional objectives.

\* \* \*

Is the socialist society a utopian dream? The answer depends on how one sees the development of socialist consciousness. The Bolsheviks - Stalinists and Trotskyites alike - both endorse Lenin's

(continued p.16)

COMMERCIAL

On that Friday full of gloom  
We laid him in his tomb  
And sealed it with a great big brick.

But he rose up two days later  
To sell the AGITATOR  
So they packed him off to Heaven,  
bloody quick.

# ARSENAL: NARROW LEAD ON POINTS

THE STRIKE of 28 men employed at the Woolwich Arsenal which lasted from March 3 to 27 illustrates a typical problem facing workers at the present time.

THE MANAGEMENT at the Arsenal have recently been 'reorganizing' the works. One of their objectives was that three shops should be amalgamated. These were departments E 100 and C 63 (which were both individual piecework shops) and department E 89 d (which is a gang bonus department). This meant that the 28 men in E 89 d would be forced to go onto individual piecework.

THE MEN involved felt that they would be worse off in several ways and decided that under no circumstances would they allow their group to be broken up.

THE QUESTION was taken through the negotiating procedure without any satisfactory agreement being reached. The Executive Council of the AEU - or rather its National Organizer - negotiated at the War Office without any representative of the Woolwich Arsenal Shop Stewards Committee being present...or even any of the local officials! This violated the recent decision of the Final Appeal Court of the AEU which declared such actions against rule.

THIS INTERVENTION by the E.C. is part of a tendency by the officials to keep the men involved out of negotiations. The reason is that once the men are absent cosy compromises can be reached, which the men would never accept. This tendency must be fought against with utmost vigour and any deals arrived at by these means should be repudiated by the men.

THE DISPUTE started on March 3, when 6 men in E 89d were instructed to report to work on individual piecework in department C 58. They refused and the 28 men struck work. The dispute was endorsed by the London South District Committee. This forced the E.C. and the War Office to reconsider their refusal to consult. On this condition the men returned to work.

THIS DISPUTE was in effect directed almost as much against the Executive Council of the AEU as against the War Office, since the E.C. also originally refused to reopen the negotiations.

THE STRUGGLE to maintain workshop organization and conditions is one of the really basic jobs for militants. Although I have big doubts as to the wisdom of going back 'pending further consultation', nevertheless this struggle did threaten the 'divine' right of both management and officials to do as they wished.

KEN WELLER.

## BOOK REVIEW

# ABORTION : LAW AND REALITY

'LAW FOR THE RICH' by Alice Jenkins. Gollancz (1960). 15 s.

This is a very interesting account of the fluctuating fortunes of the Abortion Law Reform Association. It is at the same time a powerful indictment of the present antiquated laws on this subject (the law relating to the termination of pregnancy dates back to 1809. In 1861 it was incorporated in the Criminal Law Amendment Act).

It is more than this however. The implications of the valiant struggle of this small group of social reformers transcend the immediate issue of their agitation. The laws they have been fighting are in many ways characteristic of the whole pattern of social organization in contemporary society.

The laws are not only monstrous and completely bureaucratic in their very conception - in that they assume that persons other than the prospective mother know best, and that in their wisdom they will decide whether this or that woman will or will not bear a child. They are also completely inefficient. The author points out that 'not one in a thousand of those who infringe them are brought into court'. As so often occurs those who make the laws know very little about what the real problems are about and are quite incapable of enforcing the rules they make. In all these aspects the abortion laws show a striking similarity to the whole 'organization' of production in a class divided society.

The present laws not only fail to prevent the widespread practice of abortion (which would take place in any case, laws or no laws). Because the laws cannot be enforced, they ensure that skilled abortion rapidly becomes the privilege of the wealthy. And this is where the class issues obtrude. The wealthy can obtain a curettage in a private clinic any day they wish. The poor have to resort to unskilled abortionists... with all that this entails in risks to life and health.

There was a time when the Socialist movement took a keen interest and campaigned on issues of this kind. What could be more in tune with the fundamental conception of Socialism (as a social system where human beings are free themselves to decide on the matters that concern them most) than the right of women to bear or not to bear children, as they think fit. It is surely a symptom of the utter degeneration of all radical thought that none of the political tendencies will today openly proclaim that it stands four square for the full legalisation of abortion.

The book brings many interesting facts to light. A Government Inter-departmental Committee reported on the incidence of 'criminal' abortion in 1939. Hospitals were then coping with between 44,000 and 60,000 'illegal' abortions every year. This amounted to between 120 and 160 abortions daily... or about one every



ten minutes, round the clock! This was a very conservative estimate of the prevalence of self-induced abortion. It only took into account abortions resulting in complications (such as infection or haemorrhage) necessitating admission to hospital. Assuming 3 or 4 non-complicated abortions for every complicated one - and the increased resort to self-induced abortion in the post-war years (an increase nearly all gynaecologists are convinced to be a definite fact) - it would be no exaggeration to say that today, in Great Britain, self-induced abortions are probably taking place at the rate of about one a minute!!

In 1930 a League of Nations publication reported that more deaths were resulting from unskilled termination of pregnancy than from childbirth at full term. The eminent American writer Dr. Taussig published the horrifying statement that 'a considerable portion of our knowledge of poisonous drugs is derived from the human experiments made upon themselves by women desirous of an abortion'. Here again it is clearly a class issue. Under the heading of 'occupational mortality' the Registrar General's report for 1958 states 'pregnancy, childbirth and abortion are an increasing cause of death among married women as one passes down the scale from social class I to V'.

But statistics don't bleed. The reader is brought face to face with individual case histories. Mrs. Jenkins tells of a young mother who lived with her husband and two very young children in a two-roomed tenement. Believing herself pregnant she sought help. A few days later she was taken to hospital, delirious. She died, the next day, of septicaemia. Her womb had been perforated by a skewer. There was no pregnancy!

But the book does more than to present a well argued case against the prevailing laws. It deals systematically with all the objections, medical and eugenic, 'scientific' and irrational, that the opponents of legalised abortion put forward from time to time.

Dr. Glanville Williams, in a scathing introduction, points out that the opposition rests its case 'not on human experience and needs but on a metaphysical idea which is incapable of demonstration'. The Catholic Church, which provides the most biggoted, reactionary and intolerant opposition to any reform on this matter, believes the human personality begins at the moment when the microscopic ovum is fertilised. 'The soul (anima) enters the body... with impregnation' (theologians call this the theory of 'immediate animation'). The logical implications of this view - for those concerned with this sort of thing - are amusing and worthy of some attention:

Embryologists have recently shown that there is a very high rate of wastage of fertilised ova. Perhaps one in two is lost by spontaneous abortion (usually in the next menstrual period). Are these human beings? And if they are what about the Catholic practice of infant baptism for the purpose of redeeming their souls? A dissident Catholic theologian\* (faction fights here too... as it is a question of dogma) once pointed out that if this view were taken seriously by those who preach it 'we would have to insist that a search be made in the menstrual flow of every woman who has had sufficient recent matrimonial intercourse to see if there were not some germ there. Or better still, we ought to pour baptismal water on

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\* Canon Henry de Dorlodot in Rev. E.C. Messenger's Theology and Evolution (London, 1949).

this blood, taking care that it should penetrate everywhere while pronouncing ... the baptismal words'. To be quite logical the Catholics should surely insist thereafter that the catamonia be 'given a Christian burial, complete with grave-diggers and priest'. Catholic practice fortunately lags behind Catholic theory. 'A foetus spontaneously aborted before the end of the seventh month can be buried in the back garden or put into a hospital incinerator.'

The author does not venture into the wider fields of the implications of this campaign. That she is vaguely aware of some of them is quite clear from the following statement: 'For a body of fallible men to assert that it is always wrong to remove a tiny organism identifiable only by the professionally trained eye seems arrogance personified, especially as the same Church recognises in principle the legalised slaughter of human beings of all ages during war, and accompanies this by acceptance of the State punishment which is inflicted on those who decline to take part in such slaughter'.

The main shortcoming of the book is that Mrs. Jenkins 'spares' the medical profession in her otherwise excellent indictment of the reactionary forces opposed to her objectives. A small minority of the profession have, it is true, rallied to her banner. But the overwhelming majority, and in particular the powerful 'pressure groups' and institutions of modern medicine will have none of her 'agitation'. Although in closer contact than most with the misery of unwanted pregnancy, most doctors conform and comply with the dictates of Established Society. And in so doing they assist in the perpetuation of a state of affairs that is an affront to everything they are alleged to stand for.

Martin Grainger.

## REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION

(continued from p.12)

statement 'The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness'.\*

This view implies that workers are only capable of struggling for reforms and that they are too backward to understand the more important need to bring about a revolutionary transformation of society. Socialist 'consciousness could only be brought to them from without'.\*

The adherents to this theory, quite logically, consider it the job of professional revolutionaries to plan the strategy, organize the taking of power and take all the decisions for the instituting of the 'socialist' society. Lenin, the firmest advocate of this reformist and reactionary idea which was borrowed from Kautsky \*\* went so far

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\* V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done, (Lawrence and Wishart, 1944, p.33).

\*\* In Neue Zeit, 1901-02, XX, No.3, p.79, Kautsky wrote: '...socialist consciousness is represented as a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. This is absolutely untrue... Socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other... Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge... the vehicles of science are not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia...'

Lenin, in What is to be Done (p.40), quotes Kautsky in full and refers to his views as 'profoundly true and important utterances'.

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION (continued).

as to applaud the Webbs' ironical and scornful comments about the attempts of the British workers to manage their own trade unions.\*\*\*

We completely reject this idea. First, because it attempts to impose upon workers a relationship to 'their' leadership which is a replica of the relations already existing under capitalism. The effect would only be to create apathy and the alienation of the masses - conditions which powerfully assist the growth of decision-taking groups, which rapidly assume increasing managerial function and which however 'well-intentioned' originally, rapidly start settling matters in their own interests, and become exploiting groups and bureaucracies.

We believe that people in struggle do draw conclusions which are fundamentally socialist in content. Industrial disputes, particularly in Britain, frequently take on the character of a challenge to managerial rights. Workers constantly dispute the bosses'

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\*\*\* Lenin wrote (ibid. p.125):  
'In Mr. and Mrs. Webb's book on trade unionism, there is an interesting chapter entitled 'Primitive Democracy'. In this chapter, the authors relate how, in the first period of existence of their unions, the British workers thought that it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions decided by the votes of all the members but all the official duties were fulfilled by all the members in turn. A long period of historical experience was required to teach these workers how absurd such a conception of democracy was and to make them understand the necessity for representative institutions on the one hand, and for full-time professional officials on the other'.

right to hire-and-fire. Strikes regularly take place over employers' attempts to reorganize and 'rationalise' production. In these the workers counterpose their own conceptions and ideas of how production should be organized to those of the employers. Such disputes not only undermine the whole authoritarian, hierarchical structure of capitalist relations. They also show quite clearly that people are repeatedly seeing the need to organize production - which is the basis of all social life - as they think best.

During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 the Workers' Councils demanded drastic reductions in wage differentials; called for the abolition of piece-work and introduced workers' management of industry. These organizations of political and industrial rule - far more important than the Nagy government - were based upon elected and immediately revocable delegates.

The Hungarian Revolution followed the tradition first established by the Commune of 1871. But the aims of the Hungarian workers went further than those of any previous revolution. In the anti-bureaucratic nature of their demands the Hungarian workers showed that they were fighting for something which will become the fundamental feature of all workers' struggles in this epoch. Such a programme is far more revolutionary and more profoundly socialist in character than anything advocated by any of today's so-called socialist parties.

The Social Democrats and Bolsheviks look to either war or economic misery as means of converting to socialism. It is primitive and insulting to believe that people are unable to oppose exploiting society unless their bellies are empty or their heads about to be blown off.

(continued p.20)

# about ourselves

This will be the first time many will have seen our paper. Some will glare ferociously at us, aggressively wag their finger and demand of us where we stand on some abstruse question. To them our retort is simple: 'on our own two feet, tired though they may be'.

Others may wish to know more. It is for them that we enclose our original statement 'Socialism Re-affirmed'. We are of the opinion that socialism is above all concerned with the abolition within society of the division between rulers and ruled. We feel in particular that any society where these divisions have not been abolished in the relations of production cannot in any sense be considered as even moving in the direction of socialism.

In some respects we are quite old-fashioned. Parliament fails to impress us. Nor do we believe a conclave of Kennedy, Krushchev and Macmillan will bring world peace one whit nearer.

We don't know whether capitalism will experience another major slump. Most of us doubt it. What we do know is that it is a rotten, lousy system. Its values are distorted and meaningless and by its very nature it dominates and degrades people, preventing them from developing their potentialities. It provides education in its own image and insufficient and ugly housing. These seem to us good reasons for getting rid of it - slump or no slump.

Since our first issue last November we have appeared monthly. We have also produced a special pamphlet recording an eye witness account of the Belgian General Strike, of which over 1000 copies have been sold. Another of our pamphlets was written by a group of French car workers. It described their experiences during the recent sackings at the nationalised Renault motor works in Paris and Le Mans.

Our most recent pamphlet 'What Next for Engineers?' is written by Ken Weller, a young engineering shop steward. It discusses the problems of engineering workers in a fresh and completely new manner.

Co-thinkers of ours in France produce the theoretical magazine 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' and the monthly agitational paper 'Pouvoir Ouvrier'. In Italy the 'Unita Proletaria' group hold ideas similar to ours. One of the editors of 'Socialisme ou Barbarie', Paul Cardan, has an article 'Capitalism and Socialism' in the current (No.4) issue of the British magazine 'International Socialism'. This is a systematic explanation of our basic ideas.

Following the Belgian strike a number of workers from Brussels, Liège, and La Louvière got together and decided to form a group to advocate our common ideas and to help workers in their future struggles. The group, which calls itself 'Pouvoir Ouvrier Belge' issued the following statement during the recent Belgian General Election. The statement was produced in many thousands in the form of stickers:

Comrades,

Strikers are still in prison. Yet the deputies are already seeking to return to THEIR Parliament. We would have no need for THEIR elections if the Strike Committees had taken power throughout the country. Many workers are now having thoughts of this kind. During a strike they think so collectively. Now, only separately. Elections will never give you power. You will have to struggle for it yourself.  
POUVOIR OUVRIER BELGE.

That our Belgian comrades were not wholly out of tune with the mood of the workers in the 'advanced' areas is corroborated by the massive abstentions in many of the traditional Walloon proletarian strongholds.

Naturally, we would like to

give you far more information. Space however prevents this. Perhaps if you are interested and would like to know more, you will write to our publisher, Eric Morse. We certainly would be pleased to hear from you.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 'WHAT WE WANT IS A PARTY !'



REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION (continued from p.17).

This is shown by the innumerable disputes which take place in the motor industry. Car workers - despite their relatively high wages - fight back against employers' attempts to establish an evermore rigid control over workshop conditions. Often employers are prepared to pay more money if workers will only give up their hard-won rights in the workshops. Workers often reject this bribery.

Capitalist and bureaucratic societies both seek to subordinate the great majority to the needs of their ruling groups. The rulers attempt to impress the stamp of obedience and conformity onto every aspect of social life. Initiative, intellectual independence, creativeness, are crushed and despised. Unless man can develop to the full - these, his most precious qualities - he lives but half a life. Men want to be something more than well-fed servants. The desire to be free is not a pious liberal phrase, but the most noble of man's desires. The pre-condition of this freedom is of course freedom in the field of production - workers' management. There can be no real freedom and no real future for humanity in an exploiting society. The path to freedom lies through the socialist revolution.

The resentment of people today against the stifling and degrading relations imposed upon them by class society provides the strongest driving force towards the socialist future.

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