

solidarity

FOR WORKERS' POWER

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WASHING

FOR WORKERS' LUNcheon

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THE TRADE UNIONS: THE ROYAL COMMISSION REPORTS...

This is the story of a nightmare. Readers outraged at some of the quotes and wishing to protest personally to their authors will find them listed on p.19

At 3 pm yesterday afternoon, at the Savoy Hotel, the prolonged and arduous labours of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions came to a fitting climax. Their eagerly awaited report was at long last introduced to the public.

The meeting was well attended. There were representatives of Her Majesty's Government and Shadow Ministers from the Opposition Front Bench, deputations from the Federation of British Industries and from the TUC, observers from the Press and Television and two student delegates from the Royal Academy of Industrial Sociology. Also present were representatives of the legal profession and of the Prisons Department and a large number of full-time trade union officials. Within living memory we cannot recall such a representative gathering. 'I'm backing Britain' badges were well in evidence.

In view of the nature of the Commission's recommendations (and of their anticipated effect on the working population) it was perhaps surprising that no shop stewards were present - let alone any rank and file workers. We are not sure whether this was due to apathy, 'depolitisation', the fear of being dubbed 'irresponsible absentees', or the energetic endeavours of the liveried flunkies at the gate, no doubt instructed to keep out anyone wearing hob-nail boots.

The social composition of the Commission was such as to leave no doubt as to the impartiality of its verdict. Its members were all well informed and public-minded citizens, most of whom had spent many years studying or organizing the work of others - or living off it!

A fresh, dynamic spirit permeated the Commission's report. The recommendations were presented in a vivid, down-to-earth prose, devoid of double-talk and pruned of all the usual platitudes.

The situation on Britain's industrial front was extremely critical (and had been so for many a year). Too many of us were still living in the past. We were living well beyond our means. This had led to a crisis of confidence. We were now reaping where we had sown. We had to pay our way or go under. Nobody owed us a living. The

spirit of Dunkirk was no longer enough. Britain's problems had to be tackled at the root. Outmoded management was selling the country short. Restrictive practices were a festering sore. These practices had been inherited from the bad old days. They were out of place in the context of a thrusting economy in which production was surging forward (at the rate of 1% per annum) and in which there were only half a million unemployed.

There were two fundamental difficulties confronting British industry today. One related to the functions of management (this would not be discussed further as this was a Report on the trade unions - and anyway several of the more affluent members of the Commission had threatened to resign if it delved into matters beyond its terms of reference). The other difficulty had to do with the unions. New attitudes had to be fostered among the working population. A shake-out and redirection of surplus labour were urgently required by industry. If mobility of labour was to be more than a pipe-dream there would have to be more efficiency, more rationalization and a general tightening up of labour discipline. The country just could not afford such disruptive occurrences as unofficial strikes, overtime bans and working to rule.

'The absence of all industrial discipline' was one of the main causes of the 'constant decline in the productivity of labour'. No one knew how much could really be extracted from each worker. What was needed was 'the introduction of a card system for registering the productivity of each worker, the introduction of factory regulations in every enterprise and the establishment of rate of output bureaux for the purpose of fixing the output of each worker'. (1)

We could not have workers constantly questioning and challenging management's right to manage. It was intolerable that they should discuss among themselves how the job should be done. This was the road to anarchy. As was well known the technological revolution demanded 'that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leader of the labour process... Large scale machine industry ... called for absolute and strict unity of will'. This could only be achieved by 'thousands subordinating their will to the will of one'. (2)

The Commission then went on to make a number of practical but controversial proposals:

A. LEGISLATION.

A new Trades Disputes Act would have to be passed and its provisions rigidly enforced. The labour contract should be considered inviolable. All future agreements should contain a clause signifying the acceptance by the unions of their legal responsibilities concerning the discipline of their members within factories and other places of work.

Anyone slowing down production for any reason whatsoever should be hauled before the Courts. First offenders would be punitively fined. Recidivists would be expelled from the unions (this would be a serious punishment as new legislation was envisaged according to which only union members would qualify for unemployment and other benefits). For a third offence the penalty would be imprisonment under the clauses of the Civil Sabotage Bill (1968), shortly to be introduced in Parliament by Ray Gunter and the Trade Union group of MPs. Incitement to strike would be a Felony, punishable by transportation to the Persian Gulf or such other territories as might still be available.

B. UNION AMALGAMATIONS.

The multiplicity of small unions was an anachronism in the modern era. (Moreover it meant that the employers had to spend a lot more on stamps.) 'The workers must organize. They must replace the hundreds of craft and general trade unions by syndicalist industrial unions.' (3) Unions should be merged with one another wherever possible. The objective was the creation of an industrial union in each industry, exercising complete and firm control over all its members. It was intolerable that working men in dispute should be able to play off the officials of one union against those of another.

Union officials need not fear redundancies within their own ranks as a result of these amalgamations. The Royal Commission would recommend the setting up of a special fund out of which they would be maintained. The provision of at least one union official per working member was the long-term objective. This would ensure that no dispute ever got out of hand.

C. AUTHORITY IN THE TRADES UNIONS.

The authority of the unions badly needed reinforcing. It was too often being usurped or challenged by unofficial and subversive elements. The idea that the unions should be controlled by the rank and file had most sinister implications. Trouble-makers had 'come out with dangerous slogans. They had made a fetish of democratic principles. They had placed the workers' right to elect representatives' (4) above the rights of the State.

Union officials should not have to submit themselves to frequent re-election. This was a waste of their time and of union funds. They needed secure, well-paid jobs, in modern offices, which gave them a sense of status. Permanent posts (as in many continental countries) were useful and contributed to an atmosphere of continuity and stability. It might not be possible immediately to introduce this on a wide scale, but as a preliminary measure 15-year tenures of office were recommended. The salaries of trade union officials should be made commensurate with the qualities of leadership and self-discipline now expected of the incumbents of such positions.

Wherever possible District Officials and even Branch Secretaries should be nominated from above. 'Only the conscious representatives of petty-bourgeois laxity ... could see in the granting of dictatorial powers to individual persons a departure from the collective principle, a departure from democracy.' (5)

D. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE TRADES UNIONS.

The Commission broke new grounds in its attempts to define the tasks of the trade unions in a modern society. The old ideas of 'conflict' and 'struggle' were outmoded. They seriously curtailed production and resulted in a vast waste of effort.

Wherever possible the unions should work hand in hand with management and with various State organizations. Their real task 'was to organize the working class for the ends of production ... Hand in hand with the State (the unions) should exercise their authority in order to lead the workers into the framework of a single economic plan.' (6) To achieve this the workers would have to be reorganized 'on new foundations'. The unions would have to see 'to their labour re-education, with the one unchanging end of the increase in the productivity of labour.' (7) The unions would become the 'organisers of labour discipline.' (8)

The Commission recognized that this would be no easy task. A proper system of incentives would be needed. Divergencies had appeared, among the Commission's ranks, as to whether these incentives should be of a negative or positive character. Some members claimed that under the new system of production 'piecework and bonuses had as their purpose to increase the volume of the social product and consequently to raise the general well-being. Those workers who did more for the general interest were entitled to a greater quantity of the social product than the lazy, the careless and the disorganizers.' (9) 'Piecework was a revolutionary system that eliminated inertia and made the labourer hustle.' (10)

Other members of the Commission felt that more forceful measures might be required. One member in particular, who had not forgotten what he had learnt at Sandhurst and in the Indian Army, stated that 'deserters from labour ought to be formed into punitive battallions or put into concentration camps.' (11)

E. THE UNIONS AND THE PROBLEMS OF MANAGEMENT.

The Commission had received representations from many employers' organizations to the effect that there was a dangerous and irresponsible mood among many British workers today. 'Militants' were beginning to talk about managing production themselves. Unofficial bodies had been formed to propagate these and other subversive doctrines. The Commission pointed out that 'workers' committees could best serve the workers' cause by becoming subordinate units in a state-wide network of trade unions.' (12) All talk of 'workers control' was a dangerous utopia. The industrial reconstruction of Britain could 'only be achieved by a transition to the

maximum curtailment of collective administration and by the gradual introduction of individual management in units directly engaged in production.' (13) 'No trade union group should directly intervene in industrial management.' (14)

In a minority report the delegates from the Federation of British Industries went even further. They wished to stress that 'it was absolutely essential that all authority in the factories should be concentrated in the hands of management ... Any direct intervention by the trade unions in the management of enterprises must be regarded as positively harmful and impermissible.' (15)

F. COPING WITH TROUBLEMAKERS.

The Commission deplored the recent resurgence of trouble-making activity among various left-wing groups, whose attempts to discuss their ideas with other workers verged on criminal conspiracy. In order to avoid the infiltration of Communists, Trotskyists, Syndicalists, Maoists and other subversive elements into the shop stewards movement - or even into the lower echelons of the unions themselves - the Commission proposed: (1) that all candidates for such positions should appear twice a year before a vetting committee (composed of union officials and management representatives). These vetting committees would be empowered to question candidates and assess their conditioned reflexes to such standard test phrases as 'East-West trade', 'Building the leadership', 'One big union' and certain carefully selected thoughts of Chairman Mao.

(2) Candidates would have to satisfy these committees that neither they nor any of their relatives had ever been tempted to fight for the retention of Clause 4, to join the Young Socialists, or to call on the Left MPs to fight.

(3) Candidates would also have to indicate willingness to attend such courses as the management might from time to time consider appropriate. Such training prepared future officials for their task of negotiating between management and men. It ensured they were thoroughly conversant with managerial requirements

G. THE SHOP STEWARDS.

The Commission finally got to grips with the thorny problem of the shop stewards. Shop stewards did a useful job but were subjected to intolerable pressures from below.

Some of them were actually elected. The procedure whereby shop stewards could be chosen by all members of a given shop, irrespective of union affiliation, and the fact that they were liable to instant recall, made a farce of democracy. It verged on mob rule. It opened the gates to demagogues of all kinds. Shop stewards should clearly be appointed from above, not elected from below. If workers themselves had to choose their stewards the choice should clearly be restricted (as in the political parties) to candidates endorsed by union headquarters.

The main functions of shop stewards should be restricted to the collection of dues. (Better still would be a system whereby union dues were deducted by the employers from the weekly wage packet. Apart from simplifying accountancy this symbolic gesture would stress the community of interest between employers and unions.) These proposals would have to be introduced gradually and the transition period might prove stormy.

Of particular concern to the Commission was the tendency of some shop stewards directly to intervene in matters which were strictly the prerogative of management. They assumed a right to a say on such matters as hiring and firing, the speed of the assembly line, the introduction of new machinery and problems of manning. It was ridiculous however to assume that ordinary workers could ever be capable of understanding these matters or of running economic affairs. 'All practical men knew that this was a fairy tale.' (16)

Shop stewards should finally be encouraged to report to both unions and management any signs of discontent among rank and file workers so that they (the rank and file workers) could promptly be attended to and eliminated where possible from the industry. Industrial relations had deteriorated in the last few years. Rebellious mutterings (such as 'a bad day's work for a bad day's pay') had recently been heard in a number of places.

CONCLUSIONS

The sound economy which Britain so badly needed would never be achieved as long as workpeople thought in this sort of way, indulged in absenteeism, poor time-keeping and restrictive practices, and generally exhibited a resistance to production. Such activities interfered with the main function of industry which was to produce a profit (which could then be reinvested to produce further profits). The long-term solution to this resistance obviously lay in the elimination of the working class altogether. But who then would buy back the product of our fully automated industries? This however was another problem and would be the subject of a further Report, by another Royal Commission.

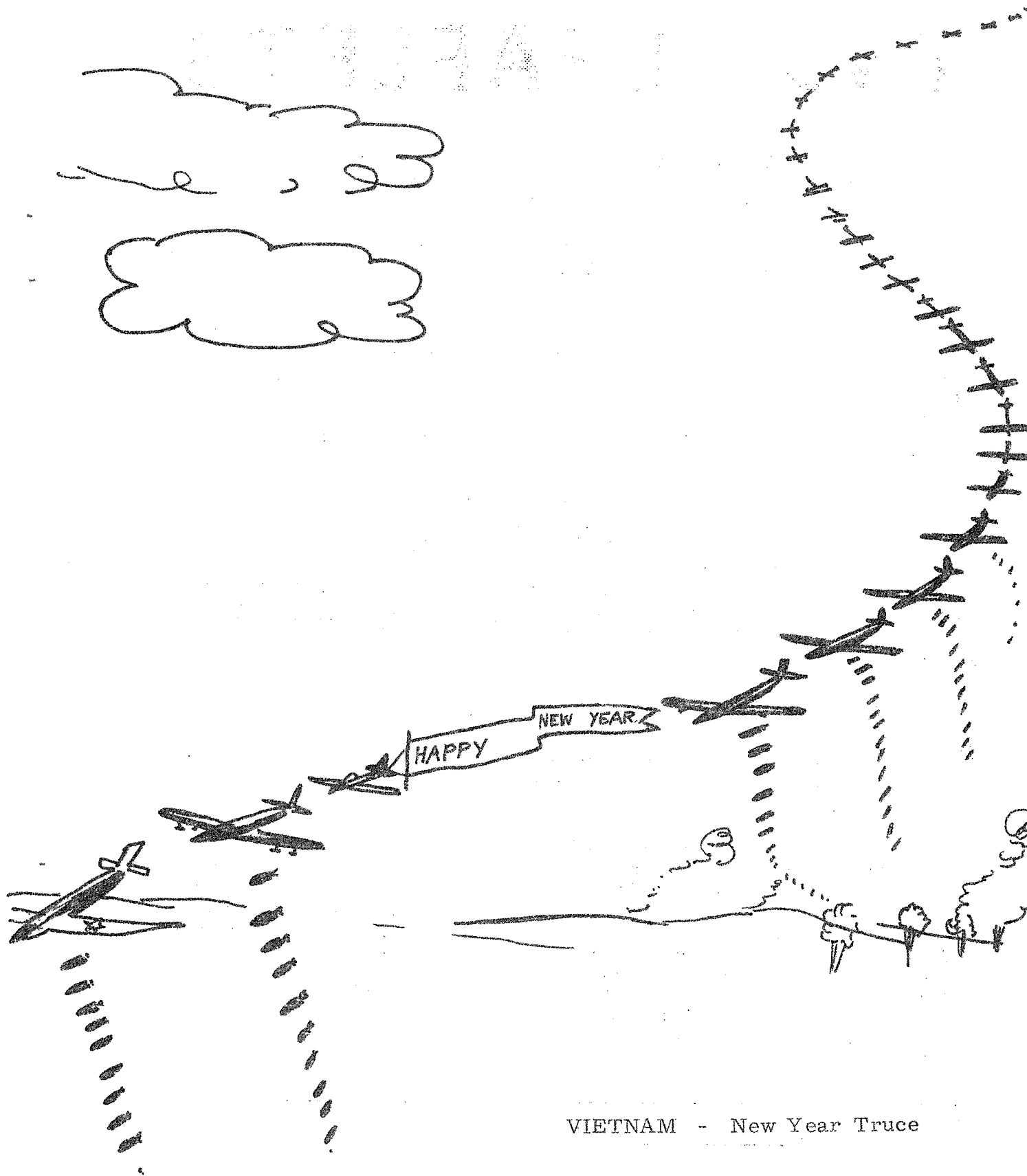
To casual readers

YOU ARE AT A PARTY. SOMEBODY TAKES A SWIPE AT SOLIDARITY

'They're a bunch of disruptives' he says. 'Always knocking everything. No respect for diplomacy or "channels". Always criticizing the responsible leadership, always making trouble. They're a bunch of no-good shit-stirers. Even worse, they're sometimes obscene!!

What do you say? Not a thing, because in all probability you've never heard of the paper. But why miss out on such great arguments? For only 10/- you too can receive the next 12 issues. Next time you'll be able to answer back. And confirm that...

IT'S ALL TRUE!



VIETNAM - New Year Truce

TWO LEAFLETS

We are taking the unusual step of including two industrial leaflets as part of this issue. The leaflets have not been chosen at random. Both describe struggles dealing with fundamental issues.

1. VAUXHALL. The leaflet is the second to be produced by VAUXFAM - 'a rank-and-file organization pledged to improve wages and fight speed-up at Luton, Dunstable and Ellesmere Port'.

The first VAUXFAM leaflet appeared last September. (It was the men's reply to a barrage of managerial propaganda, seeking to 'sell' their proposals for a wage increase tied to all sorts of 'strings'.) The VAUXFAM leaflet effectively dealt with the management's proposals. Even the Evening News (September 15, 1967) spoke of the 'Notice Board War' at Vauxhall. The leaflet undoubtedly helped mobilise Vauxhall workers for the big struggle last September.

Some of the material recently produced by the Luton men has been translated into German and was later distributed outside General Motor's OPEL works at Frankfurt, in West Germany, by supporters of the Provo paper 'Peng'. Correspondence has since been exchanged between the OPEL men and the Works Committee at Luton. We believe this is the first time for many years that contacts at rank and file level have been established between British and German car workers. We are pleased to have been able to help in bringing this about.

2. THE C.B.R. DISPUTE. The dispute (briefly referred to in Solidarity vol.IV, No.8) started in April 1967, when a 19th century type management sacked two workers for being members of the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (NUHKW). A prolonged 'official' dispute followed but the men have recently been stabbed in the back by their own union officials.

The NUHKW is a medium sized union with nearly 40,000 members. Its structure illustrates graphically the problems faced in trying to change the unions by constitutional means. Like most of the major unions its officials are elected for life, and even the candidates for official positions have to be vetted by the Executive Committee. This 18-man National Executive consists of 8 full-time officials and 10 members of District Committees. The latter are elected by the National Conference. The National Conference itself consists entirely either of District Committee nominees or of full-time officials.* Small wonder that this union has acted in the way described in the men's leaflet!

* See 'Power in the Trade Unions' by V.L.Allen. (1954) Longmans, Green and Co.

THE NEW VAUXHALL AGREEMENT

WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU

The new Pay and Productivity Agreement signed last month by the management and the officials of the NUVB, AEU and ETU is full of dangers for the ordinary Vauxhall worker.

In exchange for a closely regulated wage increase, a rope has been put around our necks. The powers of management to increase exploitation have been both reaffirmed and strengthened. It is no surprise that the officials have signed this agreement, just as they have signed every other agreement at Vauxhall's. These people have consistently shown absolute indifference to our working conditions. Any improvements won have been the result of our own actions in the factory.

The new Agreement closely resembles that proposed in July 1967, which led to the struggle last September. The only difference is that the management have withdrawn one or two minor items. The daily clocking allowance will remain. And relief time will still be allowed at the beginning of each shift.

The new Agreement remains a SLAVE CHARTER. Among its worst features are:

a) It re-emphasizes the Group Bonus Consolidation Agreement of March 1956. The 'employee cooperation' clause of the new Agreement is linked with this wretched document which gives management the arbitrary right to transfer employees from one job, department or factory to another. The new Agreement reasserts their absolute right in relation to time study and to the imposition of 'discipline' within the plant. Productivity is to be increased still further at our expense. Many conditions at Vauxhall would never be accepted in other areas in the car industry. And now these conditions are to be worsened.

b) It accepts time and motion study in any department of the plant. Not only production operations will be affected but others too. This offers us the opportunity for building up united resistance by skilled and semi-skilled workers alike.

c) The unions have agreed to cooperate with management to smash any action taken by the men in the shop. Yet it is only these actions which have ever won us anything. It was an agreement of this kind which led to the debacle at Fords in 1962-63, and resulted in the complete destruction of job organization there by the combined efforts of the management and union officials. This agreement turned Fords into the most exploited and lowest paid car factory in the country.

d) Despite the double-talk, the increased employment of women is clearly included in the new Agreement. We are not against women being employed, but we are against them (or any others) doing the same work as men for less money. We are not green. We know that the 'emergencies' and 'special circumstances' dictated by 'flexibility' allowed for in the Agreement will mean that management will be able to do as it likes.

e) The door has been left wide open for the imposition of a 3-shift or other work system. The union leaders will only have to signify their assent - and we know how readily they'll do that - for Vauxhall workers to be compelled to work any shift system that suits the management. Moreover the new Agreement contains a definite threat of making overtime semi-compulsory.

f) All previous local agreements, whether purely verbal or in writing, are in the melting pot. Valuable and hard-won conditions on such matters as the speed of the line, manning, and transfers will be whittled away if we are not careful.

The new SLAVE CHARTER has been signed, sealed and delivered in our name, but without our consent. We have been delivered, bound and trussed like a Christmas turkey, to the Company. Management and union bureaucrats have arranged a slow death for us, the slow death of our fundamental right to organize ourselves with a view to improving our conditions at work. The few bob gained will soon be absorbed and we'll then be immeasurably worse off inside the factory. We will still have to work massive overtime (if it is available) in order to live.

If we accept the new Agreement in exchange for a few bob now, we'll pay for it for the rest of our lives. The management will use every device to squeeze the utmost out of us. What is worse, our future ability to achieve improvements on wages and conditions will be destroyed. It is a case of 'wage increase now - pay the price later'.

Our case for a substantial wage increase is based on simple justice. We already do the same work as other car workers for massively lower wages. In order to get a fair deal, why should we also have to pay all the other prices demanded by management in the Agreement?

It's time we woke up. Only our own determination to resist speed-up and other methods of increasing profits (which over the last four years have averaged £819 per man per year) can help us now. The struggle last September showed that it can be done. We are not machines, we are men. It is up to all of us. No one else can help us.

THAT WAS A REBEL ... THAT WAS!

TROUBLE OVER VAUXHALL DEAL

'New trouble flared over the £5,500,000 package deal for Vauxhall workers at Luton today. Just as the signing was due to take place, Mr Arthur Leary reinstated a week ago as East Midlands area organiser of the vehicle builders' union, said he would refuse to sign the agreement. Mr Leary said he was dissatisfied with the terms of reference suggested by the Vauxhall management for a Joint Productivity Committee which is to be set up as part of the deal.

He called it a "slave charter" and said: "I am not standing for it. I won't sign. I have seen the lads taken for a ride before and I won't be a party to it. If the company tries to get some other official to sign on behalf of the National

Union of Vehicle Builders my lads will not be bound by it. What has happened in this factory over the last few months will be kids' play compared with what will happen then."

Evening Standard, 17/11/67

VAUXHALL PAY DEAL SIGNED

'The £5½ million Vauxhall Motors pay and productivity deal was signed yesterday after a day of emergency meetings. Until the last moment Mr Arthur Leary, who was reinstated only a week ago as East Midlands Area Organiser of the National Union of Vehicle Builders, refused to sign.

Daily Telegraph, 18/11/67

THE CEMENT WORKER

This article - and others to follow - describe jobs about which city dwellers usually hear little and know nothing. Yet such jobs are as much part and parcel of the total experience of exploitation and domination in a modern industrial country as work on an assembly line, or in the docks, or down a mine. When socialists argue that labour power is the source of all wealth they seldom visualise what exactly is involved...

There is dust on many fields and mountains in Wales. It belches up from the cement factory's chimneys like a gigantic white cloud of steam. In fact the company - in answer to many complaints - perpetuates the myth that it is steam. But unlike steam this filth doesn't vaporise, it clings to the trees, choking them, and settles thick and white on the grass of neighbouring fields. Its assault on nature has driven most of the wild life away from what was once a picturesque area.

In nearby towns the women can be seen daily scrubbing the cement and limestone droppings, as they settle thick on windows and paintwork. Formerly the air in this part of North Wales was good to breathe. A sanatorium was built here for lung complaints, where many coal miners from surrounding pits were treated. It was an ideal spot, both near the mountains and near the mining towns. Relations didn't have to travel far to visit. The sanatorium is closed now. The authorities on their Hospital Committees will no doubt trot out their yarns - 'reorganisation', 'rationalisation', etc., etc. - but we know why it was closed. The sanatorium was slap in the middle of the dust 'fall-out'. You don't cure tuberculosis when the prevailing wind blows limestone about. Company profits are more sacred than human lungs.

Yet this muck needn't be inflicted on the community. Efficient filter systems are possible. One such filter system has just been incorporated into some new plant and can totally eliminate dust. But it doesn't increase production! It doesn't make profits! A dust filter system may mean protection for a man's lungs but it also means that a proportion of surplus value for dividends must be sacrificed. And that's one sacred cow that isn't sacrificed. There's money for expansion (the Labour Government helps here) but none for eliminating filth inflicted on the community.

For as long as we carry the capitalists and their bureaucratic apparatus on our backs we cannot expect the community to have any real say over the siting of factories. And unless we have real control over the means of production by workers responsible to the community we cannot hope for the elimination of social hazards such as the muck from such factories.

methods of production

Cement production is a continuous process. The basic materials are limestone, sand and shale. These are first blended, then crushed in gigantic mills. Water is added and is then pumped in liquid form to storage silos. The greyish mud-like substance is a form of slurry.

From the storage silos the slurry is drawn off and fed into long revolving kilns. These are sloped so that as they turn the slurry will move forward, thus ensuring a continuous baking process. After baking at a high temperature it is reconverted to a rock-like substance known as clinker. This is subsequently milled with certain additives, and becomes cement powder. This completes the process. The powder is then stored in other silos, either for bagging or for bulk delivery by lorry.

As you see the process is continuous. It never stops day or night - or even on holidays. Barring major breakdowns it has continued non-stop for 20 years, since the plant where I work was built. The thought of production stopping is inconceivable. The foremost thought throughout the industry is "the kilns must not stop". They are the key section.

Now these kilns are brick lined. Occasionally through normal wear and tear (and sometimes through careless operating) the bricks burn out. The kiln has to stand. This isn't too bad if only one kiln stands idle, the process can continue with the other two. But it means a big loss in production. And there's always the danger of the others joining it, and stopping the whole place. So the result is panic. The whips are out. Men are called to work alternate 12 hour shifts until repairs are finished. This can last several weeks. You can be sent home as late as 5.30 pm after a normal 9 hour day - and told to report back at 8 pm the same day (for an 8 pm to 8 am twelve-hour night shift!).

The heat and dust in those kilns can be unbearable. If you are very lucky the foreman will provide you with a dust suit. This helps a little, but dust still gets through, especially the suits with large rips in them, which are generally issued. There is also difficulty in obtaining gloves. Yet the chemicals in these bricks can cause blood-poisoning on contact with a cut hand or finger. The bricks are sharp and needless to say there are plenty of worn and cut fingers.

After working in the kilns you are lifeless. An overpowering tiredness sweeps over you. Your body smells of the dust even after a bath. The heat there is so intense that I have sometimes seen a rubber barrow wheel melt as it was being wheeled in,

the process worker

The men who work the process are called operators. They work a three-shift system (6 am to 2 pm; 2 pm to 10 pm; 10 pm to 6 am). But in order to allow themselves one week-end off in three a system of alternative twelve-hour shifts is worked at week-ends to allow some to have a week-end's rest. To get this week-end off the operator must work his week of nights. He starts Saturday 6 pm to 6 am. The same on Sunday. Then 10 pm to 6 am night shifts from Monday to Thursday. Thursday night he works 10 pm to 6 am. He then returns the same day (Friday) at 2 pm to work an extra eight-hour shift. His week-end starts at 10 pm on Friday and ends on the Sunday morning at 6 am. The next two weekends he works the twelve-hour shifts. It is hardly surprising to learn that most of his free week-end is spent in bed.

These quick changeovers account for a very high percentage of stomach complaints in the industry and the social hardship involved is incalculable. Married life is completely disrupted.

As this is Wales many workers have to travel between ten and fifteen miles each way. Not possessing cars many have to wait around for hours for buses. Bus services don't run to small villages just to co-ordinate with factory shift systems. You just wait till one comes, or thumb it, or walk. As for trains - Beeching saved a lot of money in Wales. In winter it's hell.

Whilst at work the operator must not leave his plant until his relief arrives. I have just described the difficulty in getting to and from work. So imagine the anxiety on each shift when a man doesn't know whether he will be relieved or not. Plenty of double shifts are worked as a result of this. What is worse is that the system causes antagonism between the workers on each shift and those of the relieving shift. Furthermore in cases of illness or if there is a lack of trained operators, the twelve-hour alternative system is worked. A man may spend up to an hour each way travelling to and from work (a twelve-hour shift) which leaves him with less than 10 hours out of 24 to himself. If his relief is late he may get even less. What good is a man on these hours to his family? My father works this system. I hardly know him.

I have said that the operator must not leave his plant. This prevents a great deal of communication between workers. If you are a miller (responsible for the process of grinding the basic materials) the only person you can have contact with is the other miller and a greaser (when he is not on his greasing rounds). The only exception is during a breakdown,

when maintenance workers are present. You grow to hate those few men you are in contact with. Imagine standing twelve hours each day or night, year after year, sharing the same monotonous repetitive work of checking routines or observing control panels in an inferno of dust and heat with the same person. Conversation is strained because of the noise. Anyway, you know what he is going to say. It doesn't take much more to get on each others nerves.

some problems

All of us here are irritable with one another mainly because of the filthy conditions, low pay, long hours and of course the problems imposed on us by the management. This suits the management. Where conflict exists between workers it lessens the degree of conflict between management and men. The old strategy of divide and rule is the corner-stone of management policy. Unite the men on a single issue and the management will tremble. Up till now the effectiveness of the management's policy has made it impossible for any improvements to be made.

The lengthy hours are a set-back to trade union (official or unofficial) militancy. The absence of any specified meal breaks makes communication on the site even more difficult. The operator takes his meals when he can. He has no set time. It is not uncommon for him to miss them. After a shift they are not interested in trade union matters. They are too tired, dry, and shrivelled up to care. Even at home it is several hours before the sounds of grinding leave their ears. The result is negligible participation and virtually complete apathy with regard to collective bargaining.

Under these circumstances it is easy for the management to destroy any attempt at militancy. Recently we managed to persuade the men to refuse having one particular extra job imposed on them. When the first operator was asked to do it he refused. But he was then told that the other operators had agreed to do it. It was a week before we realised we had been tricked. It was too late then - the job had been done.

Recently there has been a stronger movement towards a shorter working week. Proposals for a shorter shift rota have come from younger workers. This is another difficulty. There is a conflict between the young and some of the older workers, who have a tradition of loyalty to the boss originating from the rule of the squire which still continues in parts of rural Wales. Some of the older men have become socially adjusted to the system. It is difficult to explain its evilness to them.

For more than two years the company has stalled. It has stretched out negotiating procedure and has lied to the men and to their stewards

over the shorter week issue. To obtain shorter hours the men have, at the company's wish, subjected themselves to method study, and many increases in duties and responsibilities have resulted. The company has been very clever in putting off the men's demands for so long. But now, with the added indignity of the wage freeze, the workers are becoming more coherent and militant. (We have the Labour Governments freeze to thank for hardening opinions). It is possible that the management has played too long at fobbing men off with empty promises. The demands now are exceeding the original requests, and so is the determination to achieve them. There exists an unconcealed hatred of the management and their arse-licking supervisors. The men are also beginning to see through the stool-pigeons who for so long have kept up a "we're-on-your-side-really-but-Head-Office-in-London-won't-agree" type of cant.

It has become increasingly evident that the bungling bureaucratic structure of 80 staff to 280 workers is totally unnecessary. We can manage without them. This is not as absurd as it may sound and the nature of our production makes it possible. Very often the supervisors, foremen and various production wallahs create extra work. Or they create breakdowns through their own mis-management. A good example may be cited:

The operator is held entirely responsible for his part of the plant. He sets his own controls and speeds within defined limits. And he alone is responsible for cleaning up any spillage that may occur. (At the best of times there is a great deal of spillage). Either from stupidity or bloody-mindedness company production managers, foremen etc. will alter and speed-up the plant, causing blockages and spillage without even informing the operators. Sometimes this is done during the middle of the night. These bastards never seem to sleep. I have seen men weeping with frustration after such incidents.

Industrial relations are as low as they can be. Yet here is a contradiction. It is essential to the production process that a certain amount of co-operation exist between management and worker. A morality of responsibility must be perpetuated, otherwise severe damage to plant will occur during a slipshod moment. To obtain this participation paternalistic methods have recently been tried. But we told them where to stuff their Christmas party and, later in the summer, what to do with their sports day. Company attempts at creating a 'social atmosphere' within the firms gates and under the managers' paternal eye have failed.

the works committee

The Company relies on Joint Works Consultative Committees, ('joint frauds', we call them) to maintain the image of good industrial relations. This however is a bastardised usurpation of legitimate shop steward representation. The apathy surrounding the Works Committee is to be expected

when all decision-making rests arbitrarily with the management. The management have the right to veto all requests at Works Committee meetings. All complaints must be handed in, well in advance, to allow the management side time to cook a good story up. Even if they agree to an improvement it is months before it is installed or more likely forgotten.

Whenever power is autonomous, those who are divorced from any influence in decision-making will feel alienated. No amount of persuasion and coercion will create any active participation. The arbitrary power of the management is manifested on the factory floor and is to a large extent personified by the shop foremen and supervisors. Their spheres of power overlap and as they have no real decision-making authority they tend to create artificial avenues in which to exercise their petty power. Thus we have to tolerate many petty rules and regulations which they make to justify their own existence.

other workers in the industry

The maintenance workers are organised by two unions: the craftsmen are in the AEU, and the mates in the TGWU. In accordance with company divide and rule policy skilled workers are given certain privileges. This helps to perpetuate feelings of superiority. The craftsmen have been allowed to become a kind of semi-staff worker: they can even call their foremen by their first names. Tale carrying is encouraged. With religious zeal quite a number of skilled men inform on their less skilled brothers' petty misdemeanors.

Recently the bonus has been slashed and reductions in take-home pay have helped to identify the management as the source of dissatisfaction. The present tendency is for skilled and unskilled workers to see eye to eye on an increasing number of issues. As antagonism has increased between management and the men in general, so have antagonisms been relatively reduced between the different grades of worker. Strike talk is quite common in this department. The method study cowboys have retreated away from a tide of growing militancy.

The lowest paid workers work in "the yard". They are the most exploited. They have the most degrading jobs to perform, the dirtiest, little protective clothing and no locker or changing room facilities. They can at a minutes notice be ordered to work shifts to replace operators. Their main function is to keep the works generally clean. This means cleaning excessive spillage and working in the extreme conditions of heat and dust, alternating with spells of work in wet slurry which seems to penetrate through to the bone. All this for a take-home pay of £11 a week.

Finally it is worth drawing attention to the high percentage of accidents in cement factories. In Wales in general accident figures are high.

Our factory is a record holder. We have the highest accident rate in Great Britain's cement industry. We come third in the figures for accidents causing loss of time.

The growing problem of factory accidents can only be solved by maximum workers control over the means of production. The present system of Factory Inspectors is totally inadequate. In Wales there are only 14 factory inspectors. This means that every factory in Wales can only be visited once in four years.

conclusion

The situation in the Cement Industry is complex. Militancy is weak. Long hours and a rather rural attitude towards property ownership make it difficult effectively to organise workers.

Another problem is that there is virtually no contact between workers in other parts of the Cement Industry. The setting up of a form of communication between shop stewards should be our number one priority. Only then can we become an effective challenge to the arbitrary power of management.

D. L.

THE TRADE UNIONS: THE ROYAL COMMISSION REPORTS...

- (1) Lenin. Selected Works, vol.VII, p.504; (2) ibid., p.342.
(3) Syndicalist Workers Federation (British Section of the International Working Men's Association), Aims and Principles; (4) Trotsky., Speech to 10th Party Congress (1921) denouncing the Workers Opposition; (5) Lenin. ibid., p.341; (6) Trotsky. Terrorism and Communism, Ann Arbor Paperback edition, p. 143; (7) ibid., p.146; (8) ibid., p.111; (9) ibid., p.149; (10) Scanteia (Rumanian Communist Daily), January 13, 1949; (11) Trotsky. Sochinenya, XV, 126; (12) M. Skobelev, Menshevik Minister of Labour at Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees (May 30-June 3, 1917); (13) Lenin. Speech to the 9th Party Congress (March 29-April 4, 1920); (14) ibid.; (15) Lenin. Speech to 11th Party Congress (1922) on 'The Role of the Trade Unions under the N.E.P.; (16) Lenin. Sochinenya, XXI, 399 and XXVI, 103 .

REVIEWS

THE RUSSIAN ANARCHISTS by Paul Avrich.
Princeton University Press (1967), 60/-, pp.303.

This book was to be expected. What was not expected is that it should turn out quite readable. It is a serious attempt to rescue the Russian anarchists from the realms of demonology and myth to which they have been relegated for several decades by the combined malevolence of bourgeois and bolshevik historians - and by the uninformed panegyrics of their own supporters.

Traditional historians - whether of the 'right' or 'left' - tend to view all history through the eyes of the victors. They worship the established fact. For them only the real is rational. Defeated dissidents, dynamiters, dreamers and demagogues are wrong, almost by definition.

The trouble starts when one looks at the fruits of the 'rationality' that triumphed. Bolshevism emerged victorious from the great battlefield of conflicting interests, from the great cauldron of hopes and aspirations that was the Russia of 1917. But today, 50 years later, what do we see? 'Marxism' being used to justify some of the worst tyrannies in history. 'Socialist' states which resemble their bourgeois counterparts not only in their deepest essence (the hierarchical relationship of rulers to ruled, the authoritarian pattern of industrial management, etc.) but also in many of their superficial trappings. It is hardly surprising that there should be a resurgence of interest in other, more libertarian, strands of revolutionary thought and action.

A factual framework is needed for this alternative vision of ends and means. It is here that Avrich's book proves useful. The author does not attempt a serious sociological analysis of the various strands of Russian anarchism. What he does is to survey the field as a whole, without digging too deep in any particular area. The author is not a revolutionary. He patronizingly dismisses the deepest of working class aspirations - that for freedom in production - as a quest for an obviously unattainable Golden Age. He does however provide enough factual material to justify a reappraisal of many current views as to what happened in 1917 and immediately after.

For far too long most revolutionaries have had an extremely one-sided view of the history of the Russian Revolution. Events have all been perceived and assessed through the deforming prism of Bolshevism. Those educated in this school really know very little about

some of the cardinal issues. All they know for instance about Russian 'economism' and about 'its lack of a programme and perspective' is through Lenin's scathing strictures in What Is to be Done. Avrich will broaden their outlook. If they have ever heard of Machajski and of his forebodings that marxism would turn out to be the ideology of a new aristocracy based on nationalised property (an aristocracy of managers, administrators, technical experts and professional politicians which would rule while manual workers remained enslaved by those whose 'capital' was the specialised knowledge needed to operate a complex industrial economy) it would only have been through references in Trotsky's autobiography or through Trotsky's polemical writings of 1939 and 1940, claiming that Russia was still a 'workers' state'. Again, Avrich will tell them more.

Traditional marxists will doubtless have heard of the polemics waged by both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks against the terrorist anarchists of Chernoe Znamia and Beznachalie. They may have heard of the retorts that Marx's disciples included hordes of intellectuals 'bent on drowning the will to act in a mighty torrent of words' or 'spending their time in libraries, studying and writing about predetermined revolutions'. But few will know that some of the most telling arguments against the flamboyantly heroic but incorrigibly romantic terrorists (to whom Avrich devotes excessive attention) came from such early Russian anarcho-syndicalists as Daniel Novomirsky and the group around him in Odessa.

The average Communist or Trotskyist is understandably allergic to Kropotkin and to his notions that 'cooperation rather than conflict is at the root of the historical process...' (a cooperation that clearly transcended the barriers of class). But is he aware of the hostility engendered, within anarchist ranks, against this 'genteel anarchism' whose 'nostalgic yearning for a simpler but fuller life' led Kropotkin to idealise the autonomous social units of a bygone age? Maximoff, the most sane and serious of the anarcho-syndicalists, might have had Kropotkin in view when in 1918 he scorned the Manilovs* in the Anarchist-Communist camp as 'romantic visionaries who pined for pastoral utopias, oblivious of the complex forces at work in the modern world'.

Avrich provides interesting information on the role of the anarchists in the Russian Revolution itself, but in rather a haphazard and anecdotal manner, as the author does not himself seem to appreciate the cardinal significance of some of the things he is talking about. He discusses - almost in passing - the phenomenal growth of the factory committees during 1917 and early 1918 and the sustained and concerted drive of the Bolsheviks to incorporate them in the structure of the unions, the better eventually to emasculate them altogether. He tells of Lenin's creation, as early as December 1917,

* Manilov was a day-dreaming landowner in Gogol's Dead Souls.

of the Vesenkha (Supreme Economic Council), one of whose main functions was to absorb the All-Russian Council for Workers' Control, thereby seeking to stem the syndicalist tide. Few traditional marxists will have heard of the great debates that took place, in January 1918, at the first All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions, on the question of the control of industry (workers' control versus State control) or of the even more fundamental debate on workers' control versus workers' management.* Many will be surprised to learn that at this Congress the Bolsheviks were supported by the S.R.s and by Martov and the Menshevik delegates, one of whom deplored that 'an anarchist wave in the shape of factory committees and workers' control was sweeping over our Russian labour movement'. At this Congress the marxist scholar Riazanov (a recent convert to Bolshevism if not to the realities of industrial labour) advised the factory committees to 'commit suicide' by becoming an 'integral element' of the official trade union structure.

Most Communists or Trotskyists will be amazed to learn (as was the present reviewer) that by the beginning of 1921 Lenin had become so alarmed at the revival of syndicalist tendencies among the factory workers and intellectuals of his own party that he placed on the Index the works of Fernand Pelloutier, an important figure of the French syndicalist movement. On all these matters Avrich's book brings a mass of well-documented, if only half-digested, material of exceptional interest and relevance, most of it culled from original Russian sources.

Finally the book does not degenerate into an uncritical apologia of 'anarchism' of the kind that does such harm to the libertarian cause. It is not in the tradition of so much anarchist writing which is more concerned in commemorating than in understanding. Throughout, the Russian anarchists are discussed in a ruthlessly demystified manner.

We are told of the muddleheaded Bakunin, correctly denouncing the idea that a tiny band of conspirators could carry out a coup d'etat in the interests of the people as 'a heresy against common sense and historical experience', yet determined to create his own 'secret society' of conspirators, whose members would be subject to the 'strictest discipline' and subordinated to a 'small revolutionary directorate' - a directorate which was to remain intact even after the revolution, in order to forestall the establishment of an 'official dictatorship'. We are reminded of the 'anarcho-patriots' - who as late as 1916 - were still supporting the first imperialist war in the name of anarchist 'principles' (the infamous 'Manifesto of the 16' was signed by 'some of the most eminent anarchists in Europe', men like Kropotkin, Varlaam Cherkasov, Jean Gave, Charles Malato, Christian Cornelissen, James Guillaume and others).

* Unfortunately few modern syndicalists seem to have heard of it either.

Avrich also tells us how many prominent anarchists became supporters of the Bolshevik regime. Some (like Alexander Ge) became high officials in the Cheka (anarcho-coppers?). Others (like Iuda Roschin, formerly prominent in the Chernoe Znamia terrorist movement) decided that theory was important after all... and evolved 'an anarchist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Yet others, like the Gordin brothers, erstwhile contributors to the virulently anti-bolshevik paper Burevestnik (The Stormy Petrel) came to support the Bolsheviks, seeing in them apostates from the marxist creed because of their voluntarism and constant emphasis on the role of revolutionary will, which was taken to imply a break with the categories and theories of economic determinism. (One of the Gordin brothers eventually became a protestant missionary, the other the founder of the Jewish Ethical Society.)

Throughout, Avrich emphasizes the 'congenital inability' of the anarchists to subordinate personal differences to the good of the movement. He stresses their tendency to personalize their ideological quarrels, many of which were centred on essentially abstract matters. Then, as now, they produced few ideas but many words. Then, as now, the words meant all things to all men. Then, as now, 'anarchism' could accommodate people on both sides of the barricades. Only some of the syndicalists emerge as capable of discussing ideas coherently and of intervening meaningfully in real areas of struggle. They, of course, were not paralyzed by the organization phobia that afflicted all other libertarian tendencies.

The price of the book (£3) is exorbitant, and will unfortunately prevent a mass circulation. Until it is produced, one day, as a paperback, we urge readers to insist that their public library purchase a copy.

M. B.

BEN BELLA by Robert Merle.
Michael Joseph Ltd. (1967), 30/-, pp.160.

Shortly before the Boumedienne putsch of June 1965, the author interviewed Ben Bella: the result was a 40-hour tape recording. In this book, Merle has cut out his own contributions, thus giving the impression of a long monologue by Algeria's ex-Head of State. Maybe this is why Ben Bella's story appears so anecdotal and superficial.

Can one really grasp the significance of a man's life by a study of his curriculum vitae, sprinkled with a few 'selected thoughts'? Ben Bella reduces himself to a chronology, against a background of some well-known historical events. We see him as child, schoolboy, footballer, army sergeant-major, politician. But how did he get involved in all this? And why did he react in a certain way which made him... Ben Bella? The questions remain unanswered. The man seeks refuge behind well-established formulae.

The dominant theme seems to be the achievement of Independence. The story of Ben Bella becomes the history of the Algerian State. In showing that his life coincides with the historical fulfilment of this concept, Ben Bella claims to have explained himself adequately.

We are familiar with this assimilation of an individual with an idea, or with a moral, religious or political aim. But this method seldom shows us the real human being, with his contradictions, for instance a Ben Bella not only struggling against a particular form of conditioning, but, like all men, against all forms of domination. The real Ben Bella hides behind Ben Bella the politician. But not to mention that behind 'politics' there lies hidden a very precise reality, the reality of an exploitative, alienated, competitive class society is half-way to building another society of the same kind.

Instead of talking about himself, Ben Bella only discusses 'political realities'. When he says he is going to talk about Algeria, he speaks only of his political persona. So he tells the tale of how efficiently HE settled the problems of the shoe-shine boys, of the market middlemen, of the aged, of agriculture, of the PCA, of the FLN, of workers' control, etc...

In this book, Algeria IS Ben Bella. Through certain anecdotes, he seeks to show us how well he knows his people ('I could feel the pulse...') and how much they need him, of course! ('The people expected affection and care from the first Algerian Government of Algeria, like a child who wakes up after a nightmare and needs consoling and caressing.') Having become the Arbiter, the Father, Ben Bella never needs to interpret a situation in any kind of wider context. He has no need to talk about social classes, nor to wonder why it was he who came to power, nor indeed to explain his concept of the power he achieved. All he gives us, instead, are one or two insights on specific points of history and a few images of life under the French colonialist regime. A few paragraphs would have sufficed...

C. D.

THE THOUGHTS OF CHAIRMAN ANTHONY

Dr. E. Anthony, 59, is a Romford Magistrate. In a recent article in 'Justice of the Peace and Local Government Review', he urged that young 'thugs' should, on conviction, get 'twelve strokes of the cane laid on by a burly police sergeant'. He also said: 'Young people have taken leave of their senses and are in open rebellion against society. Courts have become too soft in dealing with criminals, and prison is no longer a deterrent. The group that disturbs me most are the under 21s. There they stand in court, products of the lower classes in most cases, unintelligent, undisciplined, irreligious, defiant, surly, aggressive, lazy, untidy, often brutal and with a low IQ.'

As they say, the law is 'impartial' and 'magistrates are drawn from all classes in society'...

STOP RENT RISES

RENT RISES

G.L.C. rents go up

5/- in the £ in October 1968

5/- in the £ in October 1969

4/- in the £ in October 1970

In other words a £4 rent goes up to £6 16s. 0d.

LESS REPAIRS

Money spent on repairs is to be cut by one quarter. Tenants will have to pay for their own decorating.

MEANS TEST REBATE

A few tenants will be offered a rent rebate, but only if they pass a means test.

WAGE RESTRAINT

While rents go up:

Prices increase

Short-time work means smaller pay packets

Unemployment is highest for years

Wage restraint goes on.

WHY G.L.C. RENTS RISE

Most of your rent goes on interest charges. Moneylenders took

13/8 in the £ in 1965/6

14/5 in the £ in 1966/7

15/5 in the £ in 1967/8 (estimate)

Each year the moneylenders take more.

This is what you are paying for.

YOU CAN STOP THE RISES

Join your Tenants' Association.

If there is none, form one.

Get your neighbours and friends to join.

Bring your trade union into the fight.

Don't rely on other people to fight your battle.

TENANTS ORGANIZE NOW FIGHT THESE INCREASES

A campaign is being organized to fight these rent increases. Help is needed with leafleting, etc..
If you are keen to help, please contact GLC Tenants Action Committee, 66 Longland Court, Avondale Square, London SE1 (Tel. 237-6869) or 22 Arkwright Mansions, Finchley Rd, NW3 (Tel. 794-6716).

NEW SOLIDARITY PUBLICATIONS

Pamphlet No.26. WHAT HAPPENED AT FORDS by Ken Weller AEU,
and Ernie Stanton NUVB. (1/6, post free)

A well documented exposure of the joint role of Management and Trade Union officials in smashing job organization at Dagenham in 1962-63. The struggle described 'from the inside', as seen by one of the victimized stewards. The role of the Communist Party, discussed in detail. Contains valuable lessons for all car workers.

Pamphlet No.27. THE KRONSTADT COMMUNE by Ida Mett. (3/-,
post free)

This 70-page pamphlet is the first English translation of an important work, first published in Paris 30 years ago. Should destroy once and for all Stalinist and Trotskyist myths to the effect that the Russian events of March 1921 were 'a counter-revolutionary mutiny'. Also nails the more 'sophisticated' rationalizations to the effect that the Kronstadt sailors were 'only peasants', and that they demanded 'soviets without Bolsheviks' or 'unrestricted freedom for the kulaks'. Stalin's technique of the 'amalgam' - as practiced by Lenin and Trotsky. An essential document for a real understanding of how the bureaucracy arose and a tribute to those who struggled against it, before 1923.