

The Week

A NEWS ANALYSIS FOR SOCIALISTS

Stand Fast: Fight the Mussolini Labour Laws !

As we go to press, two dozen members of Parliament on the Labour back benches have just abstained for the second time running in the crucial divisions on the new Prices and Incomes Bill.

The whips' office is bubbling with dark hints and imprecise leaks, to the effect that sanctions will be taken against the mutineers. True, these threats are carefully calculated to lever apart the new intake of new left wing members, and the old guard: but for all their tactical suppleness, they fit into a most menacing strategy. Mr. Wilson has no mandate whatever for his bankers' stop budget: and the whole left must rally to prevent any attack on the parliamentarians who have refused to endorse this reactionary policy. All this, we fear, fits too plainly into the pattern of events in Nottingham and Croydon, where disciplinary sanctions were fiercely imposed on the

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advocates of trade union independence and socialist structural reforms.

Today, no-one on the Left can fail to see the drift of the Wilson administration. It was no left-winger, but Reg Paget, who rightly likened the new Bill to the Statute of Labourers, which directly provoked Jack Cade's Rebellion. Even more appositely, Ian Mikardo has characterised it as a horse out of Mussolini's stable. The whole measure can only be construed as the culminating attack in a whole series of forays against the basic freedom of Labour in this country.

Of course, Frank Cousins is entirely right to insist that events in Westminster will not determine the fate of Benito Brown's new Bill. But this fact should not make socialists indifferent to events in Parliament. The factories will decide the issue, but they will decide it much more effectively if, from the beginning, there is serious political resistance. The mutineers in Parliament can act as a focal lens, through which the mounting trade union discontent can be brought to white heat at the exact point where it can be effective.

Out of Parliament, many unions are already taking preparatory steps to meet the new threat. But if the new MPs will stand firm, they can act as an inspiration to the activists who will have to bear the main brunt of the fight. For this reason, socialists must welcome the mutiny and urge its participants to stand firm, and fight on. All support must be given to those who defy the whip.

Mussolini's road is no road for British Labour to tread. Those who criticise the present unseemly wanderings of the Wilson team may be temporarily unpopular, but as the issues become clear, they will rapidly assemble substantial forces for the fight which is coming.

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At a meeting held in London on the 31st July, over 200 Labour Party Young Socialists, representing over 70 branches in the London, Eastern and Southern Regions, agreed to start a new LPYS paper. The meeting decided that the paper should be called 'Rebel', and an Editor, Business Manager, Circulation Manager and an Editorial Board of six were elected.

Organisation and aims of the paper were discussed and agreed upon, the political programme including: Opposition to the Incomes Policy and support for the Shop Stewards' Movement; Nationalisation, under workers' control, of the basic industries, land, Banks and Insurance Companies; Opposition to imperialism, the withdrawal of all British troops from overseas bases, and support for all genuine National Liberation Movements; Opposition to Racism and the withdrawal of all Immigration controls; Opposition to all nuclear weapons.

Quarterly Readers' Meetings are to be held, and these will wield ultimate control over the Editorial Board. There was very thorough discussion on all aspects of the paper and delegates expressed the hope that it would act as a forum for discussion within the LPYS and as a recruiting paper. The first issue of 'Rebel' will appear in September, and any LPYS Branch or member wishing to know more about it should contact the Editor: Ian Craig, 45 Norman Road, South Croydon.

VIETNAM MARCH TO TRANSPORT HOUSE ON EVE OF PARTY CONFERENCE by Geoff Coggan

At the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign's Hiroshima Day protest meeting, held in the Mahatma Gandhi Hall last Saturday, plans were announced for a Big Demonstration to be held in London on the eve of the Labour Party Annual Conference.

This, the first major demonstration against the British Government's complicity in Vietnam, will take the form of a March on Wednesday, September 28th, starting from Trafalgar Square at 7.00 pm. and arriving outside Labour Party Headquarters in Smith Square, at 8.00. It will be followed by a Mass Meeting at which plans will be announced for the British campaign of support for the International War Crimes Tribunal whereby the guilt and duplicity of the American aggressors and their supporters will be exposed before the bar of world opinion.

Last week's meeting, which attracted a capacity attendance of 400, and which was followed by a 300 strong Torchlight Procession to the U.S. Embassy, promises well for the September demonstration. The use of torches, which proved both popular and effective, may be repeated. Full details in subsequent issues of The Week.

BRITISH EQUIPMENT IN VIETNAM : confirmation from the Sunday Telegraph.

On Sunday, August 7th, the 'Sunday Telegraph' carried an article under the heading, "Vietnam: a War Laboratory", which managed to place America and Nazi Germany in a well-merited juxtaposition:- "When the Nationalists and Republicans met in their bloody clash of the late 1930s, major powers in Europe saw Spain as the perfect testing ground for their new weapons ... and Nazi Germany perfected the dreaded Stuka. Now, 3 decades on, another arena ... has been turned into a war laboratory. The Americans make no bones that they are testing a vast range of new equipment. ... When the terrain made navigation difficult, the army promptly purchased British Decca Navigator sets and ground stations, and more recently ordered kits for licensed assembly in the USA."

INCOMES POLICY, LEGISLATION AND SHOP STEWARDS : A Reply to Colin Barker,
by John Holland and Bernard Reaney

Colin Barker is right to say (The Week, 30th June) that no left tendency should be laying down a take-it-or-leave-it programme for the working class to follow. However, he makes the mistake of going on to say that we need a united front - apparently without a programme - against the Government's present policies. It is not sufficient to say "we are all against the Government's policy" without exploring ways of making that political opposition more coherent and effective. It is easy for Wilson to decimate any united front on the anti-union Bill, for instance, by exposing the Left's lack of agreement to oppose the Incomes Policy of which the Bill is an integral part.

On East of Suez policy, we can all get in the same boat with Mayhew and Wyatt if we want the Left to commit further harakiri. Again, on Vietnam, the different tendencies which militantly oppose Wilson's policy are not likely to stand in unity against his next phoney peace initiative.

We have to work towards a Left programme of opposition to the Government. This will require, at some stage, organisational expression. We shall need a caucus which will fight in a disciplined way inside the Labour Movement. That discipline can only spring from an agreed programme. Otherwise, the defensive task of uniting the Left - increasingly vital in the present situation when critical attacks are being made on the trade union movement and on the whole spectrum of the Labour Left - will be shirked. An aggressive Left, leading a working class on the offensive in a later period, can only be made possible by a sustained effort for defensive unity now.

No programme will be finally accepted that has not been backed by careful study and discussion. The shop stewards' movement is likely to find itself without an effective political defence unless these tasks are now undertaken: and CSE is excellently placed to provide the necessary forum.

We suggest that the programme should be one of principled opposition to the Government. Primarily, though it should not eschew objectives to be pressed on the Government, it would need to include these 10 points:-

1. Rejection of the Government's economic policy, Prices and Incomes Policy and National Plan. For nationalisation with workers' control of growth industries, e.g. computers, chemicals, building, steel, ports, etc.
2. Open the employers' books to trade unionists at all industrial levels and throughout the economy.
3. No immigration controls. Repeal the 1962 Tory Immigration Act - scrap the 1965 White Paper.
4. No bases East of Suez. Withdraw from NATO, SEATO and CENTO.
5. Support the NLF and DRV in Vietnam.
6. Freedom for all colonies. Support resistance movements in Rhodesia and South Africa.
7. Public ownership of all privately rented accommodation to strengthen the Rent Act. Nationalisation of all building land towards the realisation of a national building programme.
8. Nationalisation of banks, insurance companies and finance houses to facilitate a socialist National Plan.
9. Party Organisation Demands: No Government Minister to hold Party office.
10. Establish democratically elected disciplinary Appeals Tribunal, to deliberate in public.

"...The leaders of Lowndes County Freedom Organisation (the Black Panther Party- it is running candidates in the next general election with the object of taking over the county?ed.note) are all from Lowndes County. There is a thin layer of middle-class negroes, but they are not leaders in the organisation. The leaders are working people who have roots in the community. They have suffered the same things that the masses of black people in Lowndes have been suffering for years- inadequate housing, schools, food and clothes. They know what the problems are, and they know how to go about changing things. The median income for negro families is \$935. What this means is that the homes are unpainted, with collapsing porches and not enough room inside. It means little furniture and four or five children to a bed. It means few windows and fewer glass windows. It means getting all the water for cooking and bathing from an outside pump. The children go to broken down one-room schools with inadequate supplies and inferior instruction. Mrs. R.L. Strickland, who is running as Freedom Organisation candidate for the board of education, told me that the children have to take up school time in the winter to gather wood to heat the school buildings. Their school buses are unheated and often break down because they are in bad repair. Mrs. Strickland said that one night when her small children did not arrive home from school, she and her husband found them abandoned in the dark in a school bus which had broken down.

Eighty-six white families own 90% of the county's land. Much of this is rented out to negroes to farm. But the number of negro families supporting themselves by farming is declining because the price of cash crops is going down due to the growing mechanisation of farming. Many of the women farm while their husbands work, to supplement the income. From their farm work, they usually get several hundred dollars a year. Most of the negro farms have to use draft animals. The people in the Freedom Organisation have one belief which is key to everything they are doing. That is the idea that "if we want to make progress, we must rely on ourselves." This became apparent to me when I went with John Hulett, the chairman, to visit homes in the county, organising people to register. At that time the Mississippi March had just been completed. Mr. Hulett said "We are registering the people ourselves- then we won't need any marchers through here." I noticed... in Lowndes the overwhelming majority of the negroes worked with John Hulett to get as many people as possible registered. More important, they are motivated to register because they have their own party to vote for in the autumn- a party that provides a real alternative to the racists.

As he canvassed the community, Mr. Hulett encouraged people to come to the community meetings. He told them that they could bring up any topics that they wanted to discuss. At the community meetings, someone from the community is chairman. At a meeting in Moses Community I attended, they discussed plans for building a playground, a library, outhouses for the church and the purchase of an icebox for the school to keep the children's milk from turning sour. Many of these projects were already well-launched with committees working on them. An announcement was made at the meeting that voting machines would be brought to a future meeting so that people could learn how to use them. At this meeting a collection was taken which came to \$37. This represented big sacrifices for the people there.

Education is carried on in many different ways. Freedom Organisation leaders and activists are continually canvassing the community, talking to people about what they are trying to do. There are frequent meetings held in various communities (Lowndes Co. is divided into 21 communities) Here the candidates speak and political questions are discussed. These meetings usually attract from 175 to 200 people.

* from 'The Militant'