

# WAR

# *For Anarchism*

# COMMENTARY

Vol. 3 No. 10

MID-APRIL, 1942

Twopence

## For International Solidarity

**A** WEEK ago the Christian Churches celebrated Easter. If there are any adherents left of the dwindling sect of genuine Christians, they must have been appalled at the mockery of lip-service to Christian Ethics that was made by the leaders of Christendom, whether the national Churches of Britain and Germany, blessing the arms of their respective nations, or by the dexterous Pope who blesses both sides equally. Preaching the Nazarene Gospel of brotherly love and peace, and at the same time preaching the practical gospel of modern power politics, international Christianity presents a sorry spectacle.

Can anything better be said of international socialism? In a few weeks time the workers will be celebrating May Day. The class-conscious workers of a few generations ago proclaimed May 1st a day of international solidarity, a simple test to show that the workers of all lands were standing side by side with them in the common fight against the ruling class everywhere. The simple test succeeded—but a sterner test failed! The Great War of 1914 to 1918 ('great' has been its common appendage, but nothing baser than that fratricidal bloodbath was ever seen—before 1939), the Great War disproved the fact that the workers were internationally united, and showed that patriotic sentiment could triumph over international common sense. But while the war swayed the many, it did not completely conquer. Everywhere there remained the faithful band of internationalists who refused to hearken to the varying cries of nationalism.

It would be invidious to mention the names that history will single out, when we recall

the many unknown who struggled against the last war. Revolutionary socialists and anarchists raised their voices against the course into which the working-class were led, and in which they were persuaded to stay by the social-democrat and trade union politicians. They did not raise their voices in vain. While their efforts did not cause the war to finish, or world revolution to break out, their efforts accelerated and helped to direct the outbreak of revolutionary feeling that heralded the end of the war, and rose to a crescendo in the Russian revolution and elsewhere in the world.

The rise to power in Russia of the Bolshevik leadership ended the chances of world revolution. The politicians who rose to power (from Lenin to Stalin) broke down the workers' control that had arisen, and erected instead a State machinery. The result is that today a dictatorial State in Russia masks itself under the guise of a socialist republic.

There are other states that masquerade themselves. France, in her last days under the Daladier regime, still clung to the tattered gown that announced liberty, equality and fraternity. Today Vichy proclaims her inglorious co-operation to be a glorious revolution. The plutocratic United States does not trouble to repeal the Declaration of Liberty—it was good enough when coloured men were still slaves—it need not be altered to suit capitalist conditions. Just as in England we preserve the ancient titles of a bygone aristocracy, and in our legal, judicial and ministerial systems pretend that we have maintained intact the mediaeval constitution, so in Italy Signor Mussolini clings to the fiction of a new Caesarism, and Hitler has unearthed the bones of a mythical



past civilisation of Aryanism for German consumption. Russia likewise clings to the flags of the revolution that is dead.

And on May Day especially—but not only then—we find the pretences of the international solidarity that existed in the first days of the workers' movement, that was quenched but flared up during the 1914-18 war; that was damped by the Russian failure, and might have been re-lit by the Spanish revolution had it succeeded. But we assert most definitely that the claims of international solidarity uttered by the Comintern, kept mistress of the Kremlin, and the feeble utterances of the labour leaders elsewhere, are simply humbug. They are serving nationalist causes—nationalism is of course a cloak for the ruling systems—and any words of theirs on international solidarity are words of hypocrisy.

Nor do we like any better those calls to internationalism that are slightly more exclusive—that embrace the British, American, Chinese, Russian workers—so long as they obey their masters—and omit to mention the workers of all lands, irrespective of what their masters tell them to do.

A true call to internationalism is to all the workers, in all lands, to unite against the international ruling class. This has always been our appeal. We know that the circle we reach is, will always (perhaps) be small. Whether the message reaches them or not they know it is there, our comrades who, with the same faith and determination, may be in prison or in factory carrying on the struggle all over the world. The road to freedom has been long and difficult, but we have to go on.

Is international solidarity dead in May 1942? Maybe—but it is a formidable spectre to the ruling-classes everywhere. Our determination is to let it haunt the governments of the world till they relax their grip. One day the masses will give it flesh and blood again. The workers everywhere have the same interests, and that day may not be far distant.

**The method is International revolutionary solidarity—ANARCHISM IS THE GOAL.**

---

**MAKE MAY 1st A DAY OF  
INTERNATIONAL  
WORKERS' SOLIDARITY**

**Come to our Hyde Park Rally and Conway  
Hall Meeting—for details see page 16**

---

# WHO WILL

**E**VEN with the Japanese knife at their throats the Imperialist ruling-class in this country could not bring themselves to promise independence to India, or even immediate Dominion Status. All they could offer was Dominion Status *after the war*. Just like the promise of last time. The British Government obviously relied on the immediate menace of Japanese invasion to enforce approval of its plan. But the Congress leaders have shown themselves to be rather unenthusiastic about accepting the proposals even in the present situation, though they have also been indefinite about rejecting them outright.

The main point of disagreement, seems to come over the question of the control of Indian Defence, which the British Government insists on retaining in their own hands; disagreement in fact, on a war issue. But the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress declared in February 1940:

“The recent pronouncement made on behalf of the British Government regarding India demonstrates that Britain is fighting for fundamentally imperialist ends and the preservation and strengthening of the Empire which is based upon the exploitation of the Indian people and other Asiatic and African people. Hence it is clear that Congress cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, participate in such a war which means the perpetuation of exploitation.”

The Congress leaders made it quite clear at the time that they were not forgetting the Fascist menace, but that British Imperialism was just as dangerous. Thus Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, presiding over the session of the Congress in March 1940, said:

“While we were considering the dangers arising from Fascism and Naziism it was impossible for us to forget the older danger which has been proved to be infinitely more fatal to the peace and freedom of nations than these new dangers, and which has in fact supplied the basis for this reaction. I refer to British Imperialism.”

The Congress leaders are now apparently prepared—though reluctantly—to ally themselves with British Imperialism. It is difficult to justify such a change on logical grounds. If British Imperialism supplied the basis for Fascist reaction 2 years ago, it does so now also. Why then should the Indian leaders change their attitude towards British Imperialism now?

The reason, of course, is that they do not want to rely on their own people. They represent the bourgeoisie, the Indian intelligentsia, the people who aspire to rule over the Indian workers and peasants if the British were out of India. Defeating the Japanese is much more important to them than to the masses of starving Indians, of whom (according to the *Daily Express* correspondent) 75 per cent have never even heard of Hitler. While the Indian masses have nothing to lose in a quite literal sense, these others have to maintain their present positions and to defend their hopes for the future. But since these hopes are not the aspirations of the Indian workers and peasants, they cannot place their defence in the hands of the workers, but must instead turn towards



# DEFEND INDIA ?

the British for support. In an editorial article in *War Commentary* for July 1941, entitled "Indian Nationalism against the Indian Revolution," this eventuality was foreseen: "... Just because the Indian bourgeoisie are weak they will also look to the British to protect them when their struggle with the Indian workers becomes acute. Hence at every decisive phase in the "National" struggle against imperialism, the bourgeois elements, in order to save themselves, will hold back the workers who form the rank and file of the movement."

The British government have been criticised in left wing papers for not offering more to the Indian

Congress. But the British ruling-class knows what it is about—they have had centuries of experience. It seems likely therefore that in a critical moment like the present, they have offered the Congress proposals whose general outlines they know it must accept. If the Indian leaders seem reluctant, it is probably because they have to make some show to their followers on account of their declarations in the past. Certainly Cripps has shown himself entirely at ease over the whole negotiations. Nehru and Co. have really very little choice.

Gandhi also has exhibited an equivocal attitude. He has stated that he will preserve silence, in order not to hinder the Congress leaders. But if he thought his own solution was sound, it would be impossible for him to keep silent—he would put up his view *against* theirs. But he too, does not favour revolutionary action on the part of the Indian masses against the exploiting classes. It all comes to the same thing; such division of power as exists among the native Indian leaders depends for its maintenance on the continuation of British control. In the crisis the Indian politicians have to fall into their subordinate role. Only the Princes have been able to announce a definite "line." They are wholeheartedly behind the British Empire!

If the native Princes and the bourgeoisie and politicians have something to fight with Britain for, what of the Indian people? These peasants have no land, they are enslaved by debt, their standard of living is incredibly low so that their expectation of life is only 26 years. They have no liberty whatsoever, being persecuted and beaten by their Imperialist masters and their native lackeys. The revolutionaries who champion their cause are in prison. What have these people to fight for against the Japanese? It is laughable to suppose that the promises of the British government will inspire them.

A free nation of the size of India would put up such a resistance to any attacks from outside that the Japanese Imperialists would not dare to attack them. It is only because the British Government has transformed India into a slave compound, completely shackling the freedom of action of the Indians, in order to hold the country for themselves, that they are afraid that 380,000,000 people may be conquered by a small army of Japanese. Such a situation would be ridiculous otherwise. But such a situation must arise wherever a minority rules over the mass of the people. They have to render their subjects innocuous in order to be able to rule them; but they thus deprive them of the ability to defend themselves—or their rulers.

The anarchists, unlike the devotees of political parties, do not ask the Indians to put their fate in the hands of the British Government or the Indian Congress, but to overthrow their rulers, and so free their own hands to conduct the defence of the land and wealth that they themselves should control and share. Unless the Indians do throw off both their native oppressors and their political mouthpieces in the Congress, and the Imperialist aggressors who have bled them for 200 years, they will find that they have no say as to whether the Japanese meet with effective resistance or not. Let them take their fate into their own hands.

## Books on Anarchism and Russia

which we recommend to  
WAR COMMENTARY readers

### POETRY AND ANARCHISM

by Herbert Read 3s 6d.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF ANARCHISM

by Herbert Read. 3rd impression 1s.

### ANARCHO SYNDICALISM. THEORY AND PRACTICE

by R. Rocker (160 pp.) 1s 6d.

### REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

by P. Kropotkin 3d.

### ANARCHISM AND DEMOCRACY

by J. Wakeman 2d.

### THE GENERAL IDEA OF THE REVOLUTION in the 19th Century

by P. J. Proudhon 2s.

Incomplete files of SPAIN AND THE  
WORLD (prices on application)

### WAR COMMENTARY—For Anarchism

Files of Vol. 2. November 1940—October 1941  
including Supplements 3s. 6d. post free

### THE RUSSIAN MYTH (2nd printing) 3d.

### BOLSHEVISM—PROMISES AND REALITY

By P. G. Maximov 2d.

### AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

by A. Gide 2s. 6d.

### STALIN: A CRITICAL SURVEY OF

BOLSHEVISM by Boris Souvarine (690 p.) 16s.

### TROTSKY PROTESTS TOO MUCH

by E. Goldman 2d.

### THE KRONSTADT REVOLT

by A. Ciliga 2d

THE RUSSIAN ENIGMA by A. Ciliga...2s. 6d.

(Please add 2d. in the 1s. to all orders for  
postage)

Orders for books advertised in  
WAR COMMENTARY should be sent to  
Freedom Press, 27 Belsize Rd., London N.W.6.



# A Red and Black Notebook

SOME time ago this Notebook forecast the character of the proposed official production committees about to be set up in the engineering industry. The Director-Generals of Royal Ordnance Factories and the trade unions have now reached agreement on the constitution of such committees; the agreement is an exact fulfilment of our forecast. The committees are to confine themselves to "production problems," squeezing more work out of the exploited; they are not to interest themselves in wages. Article 3 declares "The function of the Committee shall be to consult and advise on matters relating to production and increased efficiency for this purpose, in order that maximum output may be obtained from the factory." Article 5 says "The Committee shall not discuss matters which are trade questions, such as wages, and like subjects."

The agreement seeks to give a mask of equality to the committees, in Article 13 it says "Apart from and in addition to the Superintendent of the establishment, who shall be ex-officio chairman of the Committee, the number on each side of the Committee shall be equal." The chairman's casting vote again! "The number on each side shall be equal," but the boss shall have one more than the workers.

It is almost impossible that any honest worker can fall for such an ill-concealed trap as the "production committee." It is none other than our old enemy rationalisation. Now that the Communist Party, as well as the trade unions, urge the formation of such committees it is well to recall their 1928 description of the process, "Two men doing the work of three men, for one man's pay."

## AFTER THE WAR

Apologists of the production committee scheme have previously claimed it was for the war period only; that condition is now being gradually abandoned. Article 26 says "This Agreement shall continue in force until twelve months after such date as His Majesty may by Order in Council declare to be the date on which the emergency that was the occasion of the passing of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 1939, has come to an end. Prior to the expiry of the said period the Ministry and the trade unions concerned shall review the Agreement and decide as to its continuance or otherwise."

## BEVIN'S LAW FOR THE BOSS

The report of the recent conference of the engineering unions and the Engineering and Allied Employers' National Federation carries this pithy item, "Dismissals from Employment. Employers could not agree to consultation with Shop Stewards. Referred to Essential Works Order procedure etc." If the law works well for the employers, as it generally does, they insist on it; if it happens to go against them they ignore it. Here are two items, taken almost at random, from the report of A.E.U. organiser E. J. Taylor: "Messrs Omes Ltd. Attended Appeal Board arising from the discharge of a member for medical reasons. The Board and the National Service Officer upheld the member's appeal, but the firm have declined to reinstate him." "J. F. Kenure Ltd. Attended Appeal Board on behalf of a shop steward who was discharged for alleged misconduct. The member's appeal was upheld. The

firm have refused to operate the decision of the Board."

If the shop steward refused to obey the decision of the Board he would be in prison now.

## JOIN THE UNION. THE BOSS LIKES IT

Wal Hannington, one time unemployed "leader," is now National Organiser of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. In his first report he states "I have interviewed several firms on the question of trade union and shop stewards recognition, and in every case have secured the goodwill of the management towards the development of shop stewards committees and union recruitment. At one firm the management agreed to allow me the use of the canteen to address the workers and recruit new members to our Union."

The boss knows his friends!

## THE HOOK

We are indebted to *News Review* for an interesting account of the activities of John Gibson Jarvie, Regional Port Director of the north west, dictator of the dockers from Silloth to Holyhead. Reporting one of his meetings the paper says, "Boos, wisecracks and cheers met the R.P.D. as he clambered on a chair, clapped by a bevy of port officers, canteen managers, secretaries and W.V.S. admirers."

"Who is Jarvie, object of furious indignation and wondering awe? What, in the rude words of many a docker 'does he bloody well know about docks anyway?'"

"John Jarvie is a barrister of the Middle Temple, chairman and managing director of the United Dominions Trust and honorary secretary of the National Council of Industry and Commerce.

"He has been around in the world, concerning himself with finance and banking in America, South Africa and the Middle East, studying the Five Year Plan in Russia."

Mr. Jarvie doesn't even claim to know anything about docks, but excuses himself by saying "he might not be a hen, but he knew a good egg when he tasted it." Hardly the point.

He publishes a paper called *The Hook*, by which he sees "fit to spur on the willing workers, strike fear into the heart and remorse into the soul of the man who was not pulling his weight. Its chief effect was to make dockers good and mad."

It seems that Jarvie took the job with the intention of making it hot for the dockers. In an interview at Liverpool he said of them "Some have reduced to a fine art the technique of hiding behind bales of cotton, crates of meat, till the sign came that no more men were wanted." In such phrases he shows how his mind is influenced against the workers, but he yet knows his pals. "They (the rebel dockers) are not Communists mind you" said Mr. Jarvie. "Some of them call themselves Communists, but I would call them Anarchists. The real Communists I don't mind. One of them was up here the other day, and now he's practically my right-hand man."

There was only one Napoleon, but we seem to have a lot of Hitlers.

SYNDICALIST

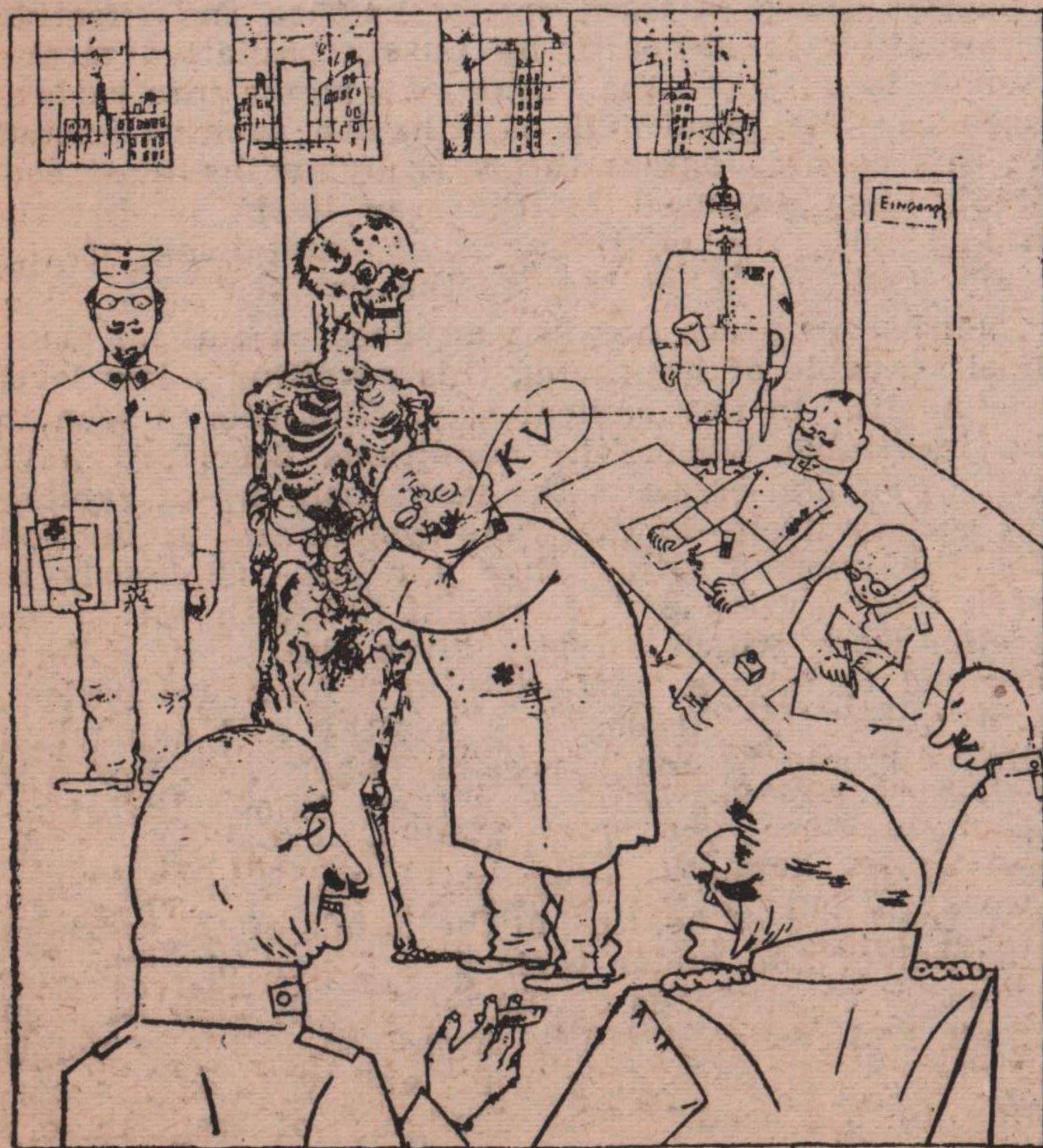


# THE WAR AND PUBLIC HEALTH

**I**N an article in the last issue of *War Commentary* evidence was presented to show the degree of ill health which was prevalent in this country in the years preceding the war. It was made clear that malnutrition played the major role in the production of ill health, and that this malnutrition was itself directly dependent on poverty—the income available for food after “fixed” payments, such as rent, insurance, etc., had been paid, was insufficient to provide enough food, more especially of the “protective” foods. In the words of Sir John Orr, “a diet completely adequate for health, according to modern standards, is reached at an income level above that of 50 per cent of the population.” It was pointed out that reformist measures, where they were not actually harmful, were inadequate to do more than touch the fringe of this formidable degree of ill health. As the P.E.P. report said: “the most effective means of improving nutrition is unquestionably a rise in the real wages of the workers, with a consequent increase in the amount the housewife can spend on food.” One may say that “a rise in real wages” forms the *only* way of improving health under an economic system based on wages and production for sale. The question arises: how does the war affect the situation?

It is only possible within the scope of one article to outline in general terms the changes brought about by the war in the main factors bearing on health. We have seen that wages are at the very heart of the problem; have wages risen? and if so, is it possible under wartime conditions for the housewife to spend any such increase on food?

The enormous increase in productive output demanded by the needs of the war has created a relative shortage of labour in industry and on the land.



Fit for Active Service 1918

(Cartoon by George Grosz)

Inevitably, therefore, wages have shown a tendency to rise. But on all sides the government has introduced measures to check this tendency. The essential Works Order, for example, by preventing a man from leaving his job, deprives him of the ability to bargain with an employer about wages by threatening to take his labour elsewhere. The determination to prevent wage increases was however officially indicated in the Government's White Paper of July 1941 on Price Stabilization and Industrial Policy. After declaring that prices must be stabilized in order to prevent the “vicious spiral” of inflation it quotes the Chancellor of the Exchequer as pointing out that “it is clear that persistence of the tendency toward rising wage-rates, which necessarily increased costs of production at every stage of the productive process,

By

John Hewetson

would compel the abandonment of the stabilization policy.” Since the government is committed to the latter, it must necessarily take steps to prevent a rise in wages.

It seems likely, therefore, that real wages will not rise. Have measures then been taken to ensure that in spite of that, adequate amounts of the protective foods, milk, eggs, meat, and vegetables are available at prices which the working class families with children can pay? According, once more, to Sir John Orr “the present system of rationing and price fixing will not do that. The protective foods are already more vigorously rationed by prices than by the present system of coupons. The coupons provided in March for 4 oz. of bacon and 8 oz. of butter. One third of the population cannot buy these amounts. Some households are so poor that they never have butter at all. These households will not purchase the rationed amounts.” (Sir John Boyd Orr: *Nutrition and War*, Fabian Tract, No. 251, April, 1940). The situation has probably not improved since this was written. One is justified in assuming that the standard of nutrition has not improved during the war years, but if anything has tended to fall.

## The Last War and Tuberculosis

In the last war, of course, the privations undergone by the civil populations, undermined resistance to disease, and rendered them particularly susceptible to the influenza epidemics which swept over the world. Influenza, according to most authorities, caused more deaths than the whole of the actual fighting. Let us, however, consider another disease—Tuberculosis—which is more directly affected by social conditions and has not an epidemic character. According to a Committee of the Socialist Medical Association (June 1941) “Food shortage was the other important social factor incriminated officially (i.e. by Chief Medical Officer to the Ministry of Health; 1920 Report) in the last war, a shortage that was accentuated by reason of the increased energy output necessary for the lengthened hours of work. In Germany and Austria, of course, this factor played an even greater part with appalling results. Indeed it has been estimated that as a result of the war and



subsequent economic depression (1914-27) Germany lost an extra 280,000 civilian lives from tuberculosis." The report states that in England "there were 25,000 more deaths from T.B. during the war of 1914-18 than would have occurred had the 1913 death-rate continued. This excess is increased if, as is reasonable, it be assumed that the pre-war decline would have continued had there been no war."

The Ministry of Health's report recently published states that "Non-respiratory tuberculosis accounted for 4,077 deaths in 1939 and 4,484 in 1940 . . . The increase in respiratory tuberculosis has been most noticeable among young women between the ages of 15 and 25." Hence, tuberculosis is on the increase in this war too. (According to the *Manchester Guardian* for 17.3.42, the same thing is happening in Germany; "the statistics show that while there were 69,000 cases of tuberculosis in the first forty-eight weeks of 1939 the figures for the first 48 weeks of 1941 was over 88,000,.)

In some instances the capitalist press has tried to gloss over these facts. The *Times* of 29th December, 1941 wrote in a leading article: "Fears have been expressed recently that the incidence of respiratory tuberculosis among young women is increasing. Such facts and figures, however, as have been cited or as are available do not appear to furnish a sufficient basis for conclusions and cannot certainly be accepted as a statistical warning." Under the headline "It's Taken a War to Make Us Healthy," the *Star* (March 17th, 1942) seeks to suggest that the increase in tuberculosis is unexpected. "For an *unknown reason*, tuberculosis deaths in 1940 were 9.7 per cent. higher than in 1939." In spite of this apparent surprise, nevertheless, a similar increase in the death rate, especially evident among young women occurred in the last war. Hart and Wright analysed the question at some length, and concluded that this increase was associated with the markedly increased employment of young women in factories during the last war ("*Tuberculosis and Social Conditions in England*" 1939) and it was pointed out by Collis and Greenwood that the rise was directly proportional to the extent that women were employed in munitions. The present increase should therefore cause no astonishment.

The question of Tuberculosis in wartime has been dwelt on in some detail because it is a disease which is closely associated with the standard of living. In other words, the control of tuberculosis is dependent on the solution of social questions. Like the question of malnutrition, it is linked directly with wage levels and with hours of work. In the April issue of *War Commentary*, Tom Brown wrote of the "struggle the British workers have waged for one hundred years; the fight to keep women out of certain jobs. . . . The workers then felt such labour to be degrading to women and most harmful to their health." The experience of this and the last war shows that the instincts of the workers were very well founded.

Under a system dependent on the control of the means of life by the few, wages are always at the lowest point compatible with subsistence for the majority who are compelled to sell their labour in order to live. With all the productive resources now available, an economic system based on production for sale instead of for need, allows those resources to remain idle while under nourishment is universal. And this situation is so much a part of the daily lives of all people, especially in industrial countries, that the incredibly low level of health is accepted as "normal". We have tried to show that it is certainly not surprising under conditions in which workers have

to work themselves to exhaustion for wages which are inadequate to maintain even the simplest nutritional needs.

The last hundred years has of course seen enormous advances in the treatment of disease. Many which formerly gave rise to high mortality have been eliminated or controlled, by better treatment or preventive methods. Improvement has undeniably taken place—though it is noteworthy that the general upward trend was interrupted by the last war, and replaced by a deterioration in health standards. The danger lies in the fact that this gradual improvement *within capitalism* is regarded by devotees of gradualism and reformism as grounds for general satisfaction. Sir George Newman, for instance, who was Chief Medical Officer to the Ministry of Health from 1919 to 1935, and of the Board of Education from 1907 to 1935, wrote as recently as January of this year: "But if we take the long and correct view of our own social history we shall find good ground for saying that, as a whole, the English people are to-day better housed, better clothed, better fed, better educated, and enjoy better health, than at any other period of our national history of which we have record." He added that "their life is *longer* and larger than ever before. They receive, as a rule, higher wages than before, though they work shorter hours. . . ." (*Britain To-Day*, January 1942). These remarks are probably quite justified. But in view of the facts regarding health and nutrition summarized in our article in the last issue, satisfaction at the present position is simply grotesque. It does not help the ills of the present to say, in effect, that the situation was much worse, forty, fifty, or a hundred years ago.

The intimate connection between Poverty, Nutrition, and Ill health which the work of the last ten years has conclusively demonstrated allows of only one conclusion: general improvement in health standards will always be limited by the factor of widespread poverty: there is therefore a limit to the effective elimination of ill-health by purely palliative means which do not take the factor of poverty into serious account. The great bulk of ill health, such as existed in this country before the war, and will almost certainly be increased by the war itself, is directly linked with the continuance of capitalism, of the wage system. What then is the prospect?

Neither in peace nor in war, does capitalism show itself capable of improving this revoltingly low level of "health" in any radical way. But this is seen to be inevitable where the conditions described have their root and cause in the very structure of capitalist society itself—in the wage system and production for the market rather than for use. Obviously to seek amelioration of the present ill-health within the frame work which directly gives rise to it is foredoomed to failure. Attempts at reform are useless, and worse than useless. A healthy and expanding life will only be made possible when men are free to secure for themselves and their fellows the abundance which is now arbitrarily withheld from them. The social revolution must place the means of life—and therefore of health—in the hands of the workers themselves and under their direct control. The immense natural riches of the world will then be open to all, and economy will be organised on the principle of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." The drudgery of wage-slavery is the root-cause of ill-health; only the abolition of the wage system and of all kinds of domination of man over man can bring freedom of access to the means of life. And freedom will bring health.



## ***Behind the Slogans***

# **'End Inefficiency'**

**E**ND inefficiency, and tighten up the war effort, demand the critics of the Government. This seems a fairly safe slogan. After all, no one can defend inefficiency (at any rate, admitting it to be such). Surely there could be nothing more estimable at the present time than demanding an end to all the inefficiency, waste and corruption. It may be said that in doing the job a bit too enthusiastically the critics give nations abroad a wrong impression of Britain today, but it cannot be denied that it would be better to correct inefficiency and give the wrong impression than remain inefficient and give a favourable impression. Not even Mr. Churchill could alter that opinion that many people hold.

Left-wing propaganda seems to concentrate more on exposing the weaknesses and inefficiencies of the war effort, which are corrected or not as the case may be, than on fighting the cause of the working-class.

We do not uphold any case for strengthening the war effort or for ending any particular governmental inefficiency as such. The ruling class will, if it sees the need, strengthen its war effort by placing additional burdens on the workers, and should the position be desperate might even make a few sacrifices itself. If it sees the need, it will equally perform the feat of Vichy. Neutrality, war, peace, strong war effort, weak war effort—this is decided by those in power. We would no more interfere in such matters of domestic policy of the ruling class than we troubled about the domestic affairs of Edward VIII.

The point at issue is the vigilance by the working class to see that its own liberties are not still further curtailed, that the sacrifices it has made are not still further demanded, that it retains some independence, thinks and acts for itself and comes round to a consciously libertarian way of action.

How does this "inefficiency" witch-hunt help us? Do the critics want more of us than the Government or less? Frankly, they want more. Are men conscripted? They raise an outcry at older men, younger men, or reserved men, being left at liberty? Is the age limit lowered and raised, are men de-reserved? They demand that women shall be conscripted. Men and women are conscripted. They demand wealth should be conscripted. Even, it is said that conscription of wealth is a means of making the money of the rich fight the same as the lives of the poor, but it is forgotten that when the wealth of the rich is used to fight it is only in order that it may be preserved after the war. It will be seen that as the government introduces conscription of wealth the magnates' power will be increased, not weakened. (But this is leading us to the case against nationalisation).

The critics sometimes complain about soldiers' pay being small. True. But do they want it to be raised? No, they want the pay of men outside the Forces to be reduced. Very acceptable to the ruling-class, and perhaps easier to achieve than the demand for the raising of soldiers' pay. Is there a shortage of coal? The miners are blamed for absenteeism, and mine-owning M.P.s cry out for attacks on the miners—not

for acceding to their small demands, or for the curtailment of coal profits, or for supplementary parties of mine-owners to work in the pits with them to make up the number. . . .

Criticism of the government goes on from all quarters now. Some critics are easily silenced, by the simple device of taking them in the government. Others tone down before public opinion, or up again as the occasion demands. Whether the criticism comes from those who profess to speak in the workers' name, or from those who speak in the name of sections of the ruling-class, we repeat: our criterion is not that of efficiency or inefficiency so far as it affects the interests that are not those of the masses. Accordingly, our criticisms are not made with the object of effecting some Cabinet changes, but in order that they may contribute to the masses' understanding for the need of independent action.

A.M.

## **CHURCHILL ON RUSSIA**

**I**N Russia we have a vast, dumb people dwelling under the discipline of a conscripted army in war-time; a people suffering in years of peace the rigours and privations of the worst campaigns; a people ruled by terror, fanaticisms, and the Secret Police. Here we have a state whose subjects are so happy, that they have to be forbidden to quit its bounds under the direst penalties; whose diplomats and agents sent on foreign missions, have often to leave their wives and children at home as hostages to ensure their eventual return. Here we have a system whose social achievements crowd five or six persons in a single room; whose wages hardly compare in purchasing power with the British dole; where life is unsafe; where liberty is unknown; where grace and culture are dying; and where armaments and preparations for war are rife. . . ."

"Here we have a state, three millions of whose citizens are languishing in foreign exile, whose intelligentsia have been methodically destroyed; a state nearly half-a-million of whose citizens, reduced to servitude for their political opinions, are rotting and freezing through the Arctic night; toiling to death in forests, mines and quarries, many for no more than indulging in that freedom of thought which has gradually raised man above the beast.

"Decent good-hearted British men and women ought not to be so airily detached from realities, that they have no word of honest indignation for such wantonly, callously-inflicted pain."

Great Contemporaries (1937).

## **● IN GLASGOW**

Get your copy of **WAR COMMENTARY** and other **FREEDOM PRESS** publications from  
**THE ANARCHIST BOOKSHOP**  
127 GEORGE STREET, GLASGOW, C.1



## Democracy in the Chinese Army

Chinese commanders, who have power of life and death over their men, are enforcing the strictest discipline.

One Chinese who stole a water melon which could be bought for a fraction of a penny in Burma was paraded before his unit and lost the tips of his ears as a punishment."

*News Chronicle, 24.3.42.*

The level of pay for the defenders of Chiang Kai-Shek's military dictatorship must be pretty low if they find it necessary to steal an article valued at less than a penny.

## Our Rulers' War Aims Again

Admiral Sir Roger Keyes (C.—Portsmouth) said he would once again put forward the scheme that he had proposed three years ago. *All work of national importance should be carried out under discipline as in the Services, and with the same rates of pay as in the Services. No one should be allowed to make a profit out of the war. The inequality of sacrifice was bitterly resented.*

*Manchester Guardian, 26.3.42.*

But managers would at least get Officers' rates of pay no doubt!

## When is a Bosses' Man not a Bosses' Man?

Here is the story of a docker who by argument and example prevented a hold-up in the unloading of a ship. A vessel which, having been damaged was repaired by the crew after hours of hard work, contained damaged cargo which dockers refused to handle having been offered only an extra 6d for the job.

Then Sammy Bywood came forward, told them what he thought of the position, reminded them that as a Communist he was known to be no "bosses' man," stressed the connection between a quick turn-round and Victory in 1942 and then, announcing that he was going to start work, walked on to the ship. First one, then two or three and finally the whole seventy followed his example. Whilst they unloaded, the cargo negotiations, which had previously broken down, resulted in a satisfactory settlement on the question of extra pay for handling the bad cargo. Communists throughout the docks, says my correspondent, are taking the lead in ensuring speedier "turn-rounds" and are not afraid of talking politics to get this.

Douglas Hyde in *World News and Views, 28.3.42.*

## Fighting Exploitation

"A Labour M.P. introduced a Money Lending Bill into the West Australian Legislative Assembly. Money lending must be a racket, as the Bill seeks to limit rates of interest to 20 per cent. and to disallow charging of compound interest. An amendment was passed limiting interest to fifteen per cent. Mr. E. Nulsen, Minister for Justice, welcoming the Bill, said: "It is high time we recognised how the people of this country are being exploited by the money lenders."

*Tribune, 13.3.42.*

## "Vansittartism" a weapon for Hitler

"Vansittart's speech shows that the Allies are fighting against the whole of the German people and not against National Socialism only," said Berlin radio yesterday, commenting on Lord Vansittart's speech in the House of Lords last week.

"This admission reveals the true intentions of the British. The Allies never thought of fighting National Socialism.

"Their true aim is to fight this war as a war of annihilation against the German people."—British United Press."

*Daily Herald, 23.3.42.*

# Through

## Common Sense from America

"How is the \$40 billion worth of consumer goods going to be distributed, granted for the sake of argument that there will be no more than that amount available because of the war? The boss class is in command and is going to dish it out—giving labour the smallest amount it will accept as its share. But organized labour, particularly if it reaches down to the bottom of the great reservoir of labour and spreads out to cover farm hands and other miserably paid workers, can influence the distribution. If capitalists are dipping up their share of the national income with steamshovels and squandering it on high living and profligate government, well organized labour can at least cut down the size of their shovels.

We do not wish to imply that if U.S. workers get a better distribution of the \$40 billion worth of goods which economists estimate will be available for consumer use, they will have won a complete victory. Labour will have won that victory only when it is in position to dispose of all the wealth it produces, including that which is used for public improvements and put back into industry for renewal of machines and expansion."

*Industrial Worker, 21.2.42.*

## Points from a Debate

During the debate on the Freedom of the Press in the House recently plain words were spoken contrarily to the usual practice.

Sir I. Albery: The liberty of the Press appears to be in danger.

Mr. MacLaren: *It has always been in the hands of the advertisers. What is the good of wasting time?*

Aneurin Bevan had some strong words to say about the record of the Labour Party "I say with all seriousness and earnestness that I am deeply ashamed that a member of the Labour Party should be the instrument of this sort of thing (the threatened suppression of the *Daily Mirror*). It has been in my experience in the House a sad thing that the two Home Secretaries whom this party has provided have been amongst the most reactionary Home Secretaries in half a century. It is a shameful record."



## Slums after the War

At a recent meeting the Manchester City Housing Director, John Hughes, gave some interesting figures about the extent of the slum area in the city "He described the slum ring as a mile deep beginning three quarters of a mile from the city centre, and said that eventually 50,000 to 60,000 houses would need to be dealt with." He went on to suggest that the clearing and redeveloping of Manchester slum area may take *twenty-five to thirty years of very hard work after the war.* . . .

This is perhaps an optimistic estimate if the present system goes on but if the workers organise production for use and not for profit and destruction slums will be abolished soon after the revolution.

# the Press

## Journalistic Accuracy

The *Evening Standard* gave the following account of the Trafalgar Square meeting mentioned elsewhere in the paper "Every recognised political party were represented on the plinth, which displayed also all the Allied flags and five huge posters with Mr. Churchill in the centre, flanked by President Roosevelt, Stalin, Chiang Kai-Shek and Nehru.

In the roadway was a bespectacled man selling little booklets which announced "Soviet Myth Exposed." A bill he carried told us he was a pamphleteer for the British Anarchist Association!"

The pamphlet referred to is in reality called *The Russian Myth* and has not been published by the imaginary "British Anarchist Association" but by *Freedom Press!* Finally our comrade did not carry a bill.

## Communists Back Grigg

While the Labour Party refused to support Sir James Grigg the War Secretary in the Cardiff by-election while observing however the election truce, the Communist Party decided to give its support to the conservative candidate, instead of to Fenner Brockway, the I.L.P. candidate.

## Big Business Leadership

"British Big Business sustains 32,000 directorships. About 4,000 of this army of directors really run Big Business; the remaining 28,000 are duds, dead-weight. They comprise the countless committees, the numberless little bottle-necks of senility and snobbery through which Government orders filter slowly and painfully to our war industries.

Ten years ago, the average age of British directors was sixty-three; twenty-seven in every hundred directors were over seventy.

Ten years ago, four in every ten British directors were peers or sons of peers or holders of knighthoods. It is certain that the war has raised the standards of senility, tightened the grip of snobbery.

I say we cannot afford the luxury of guinea-pig directors in this austere age."

Cameronian in *Reynolds News*, 22.2.42.

## People's Army

The Home Guard which was to be the British equivalent of the Spanish militia has not only become part of the regular army but has had the strictest discipline imposed on its members. This has been further proved by the recent sentence imposed on two brothers, members of the Cheshire Home Guard. They were both condemned to 56 days detention.

The charge brought against them was that they "slouched with their hands into their pockets when called before an orderly officer of the H.G. when reprimanded for not taking part in a parade. For this "crime" they were arrested by two civilians and three military policemen, handcuffed and "treated worse than criminals." The press reports however that they were both released after a few days. Were the authorities afraid of the effect of such sentences on the morale of the rest of the H.G.s?

## Who are the Controllers?

The *Economist* has recently published the list of controllers of industry showing that they all have interests in the various concerns they are supposed to supervise. It is interesting to note that this fact which is now given great prominence in the press was pointed out by *War Commentary* in March 1940. After having given a few examples we said "Except in one case, the controller is directly concerned with the industry he controls. And he is often a member of the most important firm in that industry. Which is no accident. . . We are not primarily concerned with the difficulties of Big Business. *What we are concerned with is how can such a body act in the interests of the great mass of the people? How can the numerous controllers and bureaucratic organisations set up by the Government be concerned with the lives and well-being of the people when it also has its own vested interests to look after and when it is completely out of touch with the lives of the people.*"

## Workers are always Wrong

"For what was described by prosecuting solicitor Mr. A. H. Cotton as a "wicked record of absenteeism from essential work," Reginald W. Willcox, was at Croydon to-day sent to prison for one month and fined £4, with two guineas costs.

The summonses related to staying away one whole day and losing 2½ hours on two other days, but in three months he was away 87 hours out of a possible 506. His wages were £4 10s. a week.

Willcox's complaint to the court was that on resuming work he was put into a department where, because of blast walls, there was no daylight. It "got him down," and he was refused a transfer to another department."

*Evening Standard*, 31.3.42.

## What Anarchists Stand For—

a declaration of our aims and objects has been reproduced as a leaflet. A copy will be sent free (include 1d for postage) on application.

Ask for copies for distribution—

12 for 6d post free

50 for 1/6d post free



# Capitalist International Again

THE researches of the Defence Investigating Committee have unearthed a deal of dirt about international cartel agreements which operate—and indeed seem to be designed to operate in such eventualities—in spite of national wars. Thus “Mr. Arnold, who is chief of the Anti-Trust Division of the Department of Justice, said that the Standard Oil Company agreed to do its utmost to maintain the arrangement with the German Company for the duration of the war and refused to release synthetic rubber products to the United States even after the Pearl Harbour incident.” (*Manchester Guardian* 28.3.42)

The Standard Oil Company of New Jersey has a cartel agreement with I.G. Farbenindustrie, the German chemical combine. Each aims at a world market for its wares, but Farbenindustrie does not trespass on the oil market, except for synthetic petrol made in Germany, and in return Standard Oil gives it all patents for chemical by-products of the oil industry. The arrangement works smoothly enough even in wartime. In 1939 the Standard Oil subsidiary in the Reich was helping to design plants for the manufacture of aviation spirit by an American formula. The two-way traffic is somewhat impeded by totalitarian politics. Farbenindustrie gave Standard Oil its process for making Buna, synthetic rubber, but Hitler objected to its manufacture outside Germany, and the American company deferred to his wish. It then invented its own process, by which Butyl, as it is called, costs half as much as Buna to make. It handed the patents to Farbenindustrie, and to that company's subsidiary, the Pirelli Company of Italy, while refusing them to the American army and navy, as well, of course, as to independent and British firms. In 1939 a Standard Oil representative met a German in Holland, and wrote him that I.G.F. “delivered to me assignments of some 2,000 foreign patents and we did our best to work out complete plans for a *modus vivendi* which would operate through the term of the war, whether or not the United States came in.” Later in the year Standard Oil made arrangements with Mitsui of Japan, because, as it delicately put it, “As we fear the U.S. Government, in the near future, may have grounds for action unfavourable to American and British trade, we consider it timely to organise with our Japanese partners,”—in other words, to break the blockade. (*New Statesman* 4.4.42)

Mr. W. S. Farish, president of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, admitted that following the fall of France and the invasion of Holland the Company had discussions regarding fees due from I. G. Farbenindustrie from a Dutch subsidiary owned fifty-fifty by Shell and Standard Oil. These negotiations however fell through.

Unless they are careful war makes things difficult for big business.

# Forced

THE “essential needs of the war” have once more been cited as a cloak for reactionary colonial legislation. Natives in Kenya are to be conscripted for compulsory labour in order to secure 20,000 extra workers on the private European farms. Africans are to be conscripted at 16 years old. The new order makes a mockery of the frequently repeated assertion that the British Government is strongly opposed to compulsory recruiting of native labour for private employers. It provides one more demonstration (how many more will be needed?) that such declarations are only to be regarded as a kind of liberal whitewash for the purpose of covering up the essentially brutal nature of Imperialism.

## International Labour Conventions

The apparent willingness of the British Imperialists to take part in International Conventions which have been called in the past for the purpose of “regulating” conditions of labour in colonial territories may be regarded as having the same ulterior purpose. International Conventions are called; an immense amount of preparatory labour of collecting reports and statistics is undertaken, and then discussion takes place. Reformism and Gradualism are extolled, and the air is filled with liberal sentiment. Finally, when everyone has had his say, a convention is drafted, and the delegates go home. Meanwhile the newly drafted Convention is put away on a shelf. And Imperialism? Oh, that goes on as before, but with a liberal halo. Otherwise—Business as Usual!

The International Labour Conferences of 1929-30 laid it down that forced labour *is never to exceed 60 days in the year*. Just to show how much they respect such Conference decisions, the Colonial Office has ordered the conscripts in Kenya to work for a *minimum of 84 days in the year*, and for a maximum of 12 months (*Manchester Guardian* 26.3.42). And this in spite of the fact that the Draft Convention on Forced Labour of 1930 was considered at the time extremely mild. Indeed, Vasconcelos, the delegate representing one of the most brutal and ruthless of the imperialisms—that of Portugal—“cheerfully remarked,” according to the *Manchester Guardian* for June 26th, 1930, “that if such a convention comes into force only insignificant changes will be involved even in Portuguese colonial policy”! The spirit of this remark really reflects the attitude of all Governments towards liberal reformist international conventions. The new forced labour decree for Kenya demonstrates that attitude in practice.

In September, 1941, *War Commentary* published an article by Jomo Kenyatta which described the conditions in Kenya.\* He pointed out that the Europeans had sequestered for themselves the best lands and driven the natives into reserves which included a high proportion of desert and semi-desert land. Even so the white settlers had contrived to cultivate only 12 per cent. of the land they had expropriated. Kenyatta quoted from a report on Kikuyu Land Tenure published in November, 1929: “. . . a very large number of native holdings were alienated to Europeans in the days before the Reserve boundaries were fixed, and then a great many natives who had

\*Copies of this issue are still available at 3d. post free.



# Labour in Kenya

land rights on the holdings of their clans suddenly found themselves homeless and with no land on which they could cultivate in their own right."

The European settlers under the protection of the Colonial Office thus drove the Africans off the best land, and were then only able to cultivate a mere 12 per cent. of it. It is a bitter irony that they now compel the natives to labour on the farms which they once possessed.

## Politicians and Compulsion

Before going on to discuss the question of forced labour itself in its general aspects, it may be worth while to look at some of the opinions which have been expressed on the subject. Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour leaders are all agreed, in theory, that forced labour is to be absolutely condemned. But all, curiously enough, are also agreed that "in certain circumstances" it must still be maintained, e.g. for combating fires, floods, epidemics, and famine. One is not surprised therefore to find that the spokesman of the British Labour Delegation to the 1929 International Labour Conference, Mr. W. McGregor Ross, did not stand out for the total abolition of Forced Labour; instead he declared that "his delegation would urge the limitation of forced labour to able bodied males"! As we have seen the Colonial Office disregards even this mild recommendation by conscripting boys of 16!

Government officials, politicians, and labour leaders cannot conceive of anyone working for any other reasons than for the remuneration of wages or because he is compelled by sheer force. They conceive of government as a permanent institution for forcing people to do "what is good for them"—as a kind of welfare work for people too stupid to run their own affairs, that is, the workers. This is why, although "opposed in principle to all forced labour" they still think it desirable to retain powers of compulsion in the case of fires, floods, famines, etc. It would never occur to them that before the Europeans came the Africans looked after these disasters themselves by voluntary association. But that was before the land was appropriated by the settlers and the natives driven out. If a man is set on by a brigand who seizes all his goods, he can hardly be expected to rush in and save them when he sees a natural disaster threaten to deprive the thief of his ill-gotten booty. So there is nothing for it but to apply compulsion. This is the logic of Labour's attitude to forced conscription of native workers. It is because they regard the original theft as "legal" that Labour leaders must support compulsion "in certain cases"—which means, in fact, that they support it all along the line.

Actually the idea of free exercise of labour (as in voluntary co-operative undertakings) is quite foreign to authoritarian socialists. Thus Mr. Harold Macmillan, the Under-Secretary for the Colonies, was able ironically to reply to Mr. Creech Jones, the chief critic in Parliament of the new Kenya Order, by saying that "nobody has played a more skilled part in the use of compulsion than the Minister of Labour, and no one is more committed to that principle than Mr. Creech Jones who assists him." (Creech Jones is Bevin's Parliamentary Private Secretary). And Karl Radek, the old Bolshevik, defending the

Soviet Union's use of forced prison labour for building the canals and roads and railways of the Five Year Plan, declared in *Iszvestia* on 19th February 1931, that "Socialism generally, and contemporary Communism in particular, have always demanded that labour shall be obligatory for every member of society."

Anarchists, on the other hand, have always held that the work of producing the means of life and those things which are desirable for comfort and culture is a natural and pleasurable activity of man, requiring no compulsion or special reward. The need for remuneration and/or compulsion only enters in when liberty of action is arbitrarily limited, when the majority are excluded from free access to the means of life, and so are compelled to sell their labour to those who have a monopoly of control, in order to get a bare living. No one will work willingly while he sees only a fraction of the products of his labour coming back to himself and his fellows; while instead he sees the greater part of the fruit of his toil being seized by the idle and parasitic class which wields compulsion over him, solely in virtue of their absolute control of the necessities and tools of production.

Let us now return to the question of forced labour itself.

## When is Forced Labour Necessary?

Actually it is possible to insist unduly strongly on the distinction between forced and so-called voluntary labour. A Dutch M.P. declared that the contract labour system prevailing on the east coast of Sumatra is actually a form of slavery. When a native has made his mark on a contract that contract is held in law to be a free transaction; but of course the native has not the least idea what he is signing. Nevertheless such a labourer can be prosecuted under the penal code for breach of contract. Similarly, of course, if a man sells his labour for a wage, he only does so in order to secure the means to live. He is in short a wage slave. Forced labour, it must be admitted, however, is more oppressive, as it may carry no pay, or be paid at a lower rate than "voluntary" labour, and in any case is obligatory, so that the limited choice allowed to the "voluntary" labourer is denied the conscript. Lastly it goes without saying, that if a man is compelled to do something, it is likely to be a thing he will not do voluntarily in the circumstances prevailing. Conscription always means making people do something they don't want to do.

Let us try and see what makes forced labour necessary to all imperialist rule from time to time. One always finds that compulsion is resorted to whenever there is a shortage of labour. "In 1919 the Nigerian Governor pronounced strongly against all forms of compulsion, even if the work to be done is urgent and important, such as that on railways and roads; but according to a reliable source forced labour is nevertheless to be found, as it often happens that there is not enough voluntary labour to be had" (Bulletin of the International Federation of Trade Unions, November, 1928). The legislation in French West Africa passed in October, 1925, "does not contain any clause laying down the principle of the freedom of labour: which is no doubt partly due

(continued on page 12)



(continued from page 11)

to the scarcity of the population in this part of Africa, where the density of the population is barely three per square kilometre" (Ibid. January, 1929, p.3). The organ of the League of Nations Union quoted an official publication as stating that in Guatemala the planters have no worry about the supply of labour since "if there is any difficulty in recruiting labour for picking, the Guatemalan officials force the labourers under threat of conscription in the army or even imprisonment" ("Headway," November, 1927).

Similarly in a colony like Java, which is thickly populated and has modern industries, forced labour is resorted to extremely rarely, whereas it is common in the other Dutch islands: "These latter are thinly populated . . . so that it is a difficult matter to obtain sufficient labour, especially for the tobacco, tea, coffee, and rubber plantations on the east coast of Sumatra." (IFTU Bull., December, 1928). In Malacca, where there was a surplus of labour, native forced labour was abolished altogether. It is clear enough therefore, that compulsion is unnecessary where there is an abundance of labour, and wages on the "free market" are consequently low. It only becomes essential when labour is scarce.

### Why Not Raise Wages?

It is, of course, clear that when labour is plentiful, its price, like that of any other plentiful commodity, is low. On the other hand, when it is scarce high wages would result. With several employers all competing for his labour a worker can bargain for an increase in pay. It is at this point, however, that the government steps in. Native labourers in the colonies must not be allowed to benefit when the employers experience a shortage of labour. Archdeacon Owen writing to the *Manchester Guardian* from Kenya on 6th December, 1928, stated that "there is no need for forced labour if the Administration will get down to a proper system of voluntary labour adequately paid. The whole business turns on the question of adequate payment." The same writer in another letter to the same paper a year later, speaking of work in different parts of Kenya colony said,

"There is no forced labour on the Kisumu-Yala line in Kavirondo, where wages are 16s. to 22s. a month. Raise wages sufficiently on the Kampara-Jinja line, if necessary give 30s. a month (little enough even then), and labour from Kavirondo would flock to it. To force men to work for 15s. a month on projects which will ultimately earn big profits, is in my opinion, exploitation of a defenceless "protected" people which it is impossible to justify on any grounds which are required to conform to civilized notions."

And he concludes:

"Forced labour at a low rate is the most powerful policy I know of to keep down wages in all industry in East Africa."

It must be obvious that the 20,000 extra labourers required on the European farms in Kenya for the "essential work" necessitated by war needs could be secured quite easily if wages were raised. But that would be expecting the white settlers and the Colonial Office to take the "War for Freedom" a deal too seriously. So they introduce forced labour instead. Just to show, however, that the principle of equality of sacrifice has not been forgotten we will quote the *Manchester Guardian* (26.3.42): "For employers and employed who break the provisions of the law the penalty is identical—a fine of £5 or two

## C.P.ers Attack War Commentary Sellers

OUR comrades who sold "War Commentary" in Trafalgar Square to the crowds at the Communist "For Victory This Year" Mass Rally on Sunday, March 29th, had to face insults and opposition from the Stalinists. They were, however, more than equal to their opponents and sold several hundred copies of the paper and numerous pamphlets—especially "The Russian Myth." One of the comrades furthermore held a meeting after the platform speakers had finished and spoke to a large crowd until this was dispersed by the police.

Sales at Hyde Park are also increasing and we shall welcome any help which London comrades can extend to us for outside selling there and elsewhere. Comrades in the provinces also write that street sales are also good there. We hope that more comrades will be able to get the paper on to the streets—they may be sure of good sales.

months imprisonment. The African pays a fine that represents a years income, an employer a fine that is nominal."

### The Underlying Lesson

Let us underline the essential point. Compulsory labour legislation is introduced in order to prevent the worker from benefiting from a situation on the labour market that tends to increase wages. It is at this point that the government steps in. But of course Kenya is not the only place where governments assume this function. Nor is it a function governments have fulfilled only under capitalism.

In England the wartime impetus to production has created a labour shortage. But to prevent the workers taking advantage of that situation various pieces of legislation have been passed. The Essential Works Order, for example, ties a man to his job and so prevents him playing off one employer against another. Individual reservation makes it possible for a too militant worker to be pushed into the army at 2s. 6d. a day.

When the Black Death had devastated this country in 1348 it is estimated that a third of the population perished. As a result it was followed by an acute labour shortage. The King immediately issued a proclamation ordering that no higher than customary wages should be paid. This, however, was universally disobeyed, so that when Parliament met it passed the famous Statute of Labourers. Under this no one under 60 years of age could refuse to work on farms at a wage which must be no higher than that obtaining in the King's twentieth year (i.e. 1347—before the Black Death). Men who left their employment could be imprisoned. Finally some attempt was made to fix food prices.

It is the same problem for governments whether in England in the fourteenth or the twentieth century, in the mother country or the colonies; in order to maintain government over men, it is essential that their wages shall be no more than at a subsistence level. If they are to retain their dominant position it is essential for the ruling class to be able to say to the workers "Do what we require, or starve." Let the simpler situation in Kenya help the British workers to understand the means whereby the State keeps them in slavery at home.

ANARCHIST



## George Woodcock

# The 1930's and HERBERT READ

**T**HE Thirties, and particularly their latter years, were marked by a certain increase of social consciousness among poets, although it is true that this phenomenon affected only a minority and that the majority remained individualist and unconcerned with social affairs.

The minority saw the barren nature of an isolated attitude. They realised that the poet cannot remain cut off entirely from the society into which he is born, that, even if he does not try to influence events, events will most certainly affect him.

Even the ivory towers built on economic security have no longer any lasting solidity, and the poet, like every other man, is at the mercy of violent and changing circumstances. While art in one sense is permanent and possesses a life beyond the present, the artist must interpret the world in which he lives, and must realise the effect that world will inevitably exercise upon his art. Art being concerned with universals beyond the immediate subject, the artist is not justified in forcing himself to produce works of propaganda merely, but, in so far as events can affect his ability to work according to his desire or indeed, to work at all, he should at least be conscious of what is happening about him and do what he can to establish the circumstances most favourable to the free practice of his art.

Of the poets who realised the necessity for a social attitude, some turned back upon the past in which individual security was possible, and supported the movement of reaction representing a dead world. Appreciating the social value of mediaeval Christianity, poets like T. S. Eliot reverted to the church and envisaged a Catholic society based on a theocratic hierarchy. When a direct struggle appeared between revolution and reaction, such poets found their position forced them to support the reaction, and in the Spanish struggle both Eliot and Campbell adopted a pro-Franco attitude.

Thus, in their attempt to preserve the independence of the individual, the poets of the Right countenanced a totalitarian regime which crushed out individuality and freedom both physical and intellectual. It is a tragic irony that, with few exceptions, the poets who saw the necessity for a revolutionary change in society also turned towards a totalitarian creed, that of Stalinism, and advocated a system that had driven to suicide or prison the best poets of Russia. The leaders of the most significant poetical movements of the decade, Auden and Spender, Day Lewis and Macniece, were all influenced, in varying degrees, by Marxism. But they found very uneasy their journey in company with the Communist Party. The poetry they wrote was not the debased, social-realist kitsch, required by the Party mandarins, and they were subjected to violent attacks from the Marxist critics of such papers as *New Masses*. It is interesting to see how the verse of Day Lewis, who approached nearest to the Stalin line and actually became a party member, deteriorated from the sensitive poetry of his early days to such effete silliness as the poem "Yes, why do we all, seeing a Communist, feel small?"

This deterioration can be compared with the continuous poetic development of Macniece, whose attachment to Marxism was never more than tenuous.

Of the near-Stalinist group the poet who seems to have had the clearest idea of his position was Spender, who published in 1937 "Forward from Liberalism," in which he justified his communist adherence. The early part of the book is a competent criticism of the Liberal idealist attitude which lives on from the nineteenth century among so many intellectuals. Spender points out the futility of talking of freedom without the economic security and equality which can only be obtained by a social revolutionary change, but where he goes astray is in his assumption that such a change must necessarily be conducted through the state. The latter part of the book is devoted to a plea for communism, in which Spender defends state socialism and the 'transitional' dictatorship. Out of this argument is developed a plan of immediate action which reveals the bankruptcy of Spender's attitude by its advocacy of the Popular Front, now the most dead of all the dodos of that extinct era.

Spender's conclusions were soon disproved by events, particularly the collapse of the Popular Fronts in Spain and France and the sinister role of Soviet Russia as saboteur in Spain. Since then Spender has moved steadily from the Stalinist point, following the line of doubt expressed even in this book on such issues as the Zinoviev trial and, most strongly in "The Destructive Element," on the attempt of the Communist Party to crush all art to a cretinous level of social realist propaganda.

All the poets named, whether Right or Left, adopted an attitude which, because of its failure to realise the paramount necessity of individual freedom and the essentially deadening nature of any totalitarian regime, fascist or communist, proved negative both in its general social application and in its particular application to poetry. None realised the necessity of a social change based not on a political revolution and a 'transitional' dictatorship but on a social and economic revolution by the spontaneous action of workers united in free functional organisations. Desiring freedom they supported power, the illusion of revolutionary government, the unworkable paradox of liberty via coercion.

In this environment of political confusion appeared in 1938 Herbert Read's "Poetry and Anarchism," a courageous and sane protest against the Gadarene urge which seemed to have afflicted a generation of intellectuals. Alone among the leading poets, Read protested against the dogma of the state which bemused his contemporaries, and proclaimed that freedom could not be won or social equality be established by means of coercion and bureaucracy, but only by the complete breakdown of social organisation based on pyramidal power and the formation of a society according to the principles of voluntarism and mutual aid, i.e. the anarchist society.

"Poetry and Anarchism" was an unpopular book among the Left in those cocksure days, and received hostile criticism from many of the younger poets. Now, when these poets have retired into the neutral silence of perplexity, one wonders whether their attitude has changed. Certainly, while in five years Spender's "Forward from Liberalism" has become as dated as the aspidistra, "Poetry and Anarchism"



still appears, in spite of events which have broken so many visions, a pertinent and constructive work. Indeed, the events have rather tended to confirm Read's analysis and to give more point to his arguments for an anarchist society.

In the introductory chapter Read states his belief that the intellectual should confine himself to essentials, and so distinguishes himself from the poets who limp like Baudelaire's albatross on the uncongenial ground of party politics. "There is nothing I so instinctively avoid," he says "as a static system of ideas. I realise that form, pattern, and order are essential aspects of existence, but in themselves they are the attributes of death." These words should be borne in mind, for there is a temptation even for anarchists to become dogmatic and to be led into the impasse of sectarianism.

Read develops his argument by showing the impossibility in modern society of the artist finding the circumstances necessary for his complete fulfilment. He shows the impossibility of escape from the evils of an industrial capitalism, and then demonstrates, by a review of the position of artists in Russia and the fascist countries, how a revolution which established the government of a political sect can only worsen the position of the artist because it must either use him for its own ends or destroy him. He then turns to examine the case of England, afflicted by a disease of uniformity, a national hatred of the individualist and the artist. This condition, he shows, exists because the English more than any other race have sold their souls to capitalism. "We in England have suffered the severest form of capitalist exploitation; we have paid for it, not only in physical horror and destitution, in appalling deserts of cinders and smoke, in whole cities of slums and rivers of filth—we have paid for it also in a death of the spirit. We have no taste because we have no freedom; we have no freedom because we have no faith in our common humanity."

It is only in a communal, classless society that the poet will give free expression to the individual and unpredictable urges of creation. Read argues the need for a society based on common ownership and the necessity within such a society of freedom and the abolition of classes and of the bureaucratic state machinery. He demonstrates that anarcho-syndicalist administration by functional organisations of the workers is the only practicable solution to the problem posed. This section of 'Poetry and Anarchism' and the later essay 'The Philosophy of Anarchism' represent the clearest and most stimulating modern exposition of the anarchist theory.

There are, however, some points which I feel should be criticised. For instance, it is unfortunate that Herbert Read should use the words *State* and *government* in reference to an anarchist society. "Government—that is to say, control of the individual in the interest of the community—is inevitable if two or more men combine for a common purpose; government is the embodiment of that purpose." The anarchist contention would seem to be that if men agree to work for a common purpose, their voluntary contract obviates the need for government, which is a function exercised above and beyond the scope of agreement.

Again, he says, "To a certain degree, therefore, we must accept the State as an economic structure, as an efficient machine designed to facilitate the complex business of living together in a community." But the anarchist contends that a functional orga-

nisation of the workers needs no over-riding authority, but merely a system of co-ordination between syndicates.

Further, in certain passages Read tends to identify anarchism with democracy. But we must judge systems as they exist, and democracy, whether the Greek or the Victorian system, has in practice extended its freedom and justice only to an upper stratum of the community. With its acceptance of private property it could do nothing else. Anarchism is a revolution as much against democracy in England as against autocracy in Spain.

These are quibbles of definition merely, but the very excellence of Read's essay makes them seem all the more necessary.

None of these criticisms detract from the value of "Poetry and Anarchism" as a good and clear exposition of the only sane and practicable modern social system, the only system that can rid mankind of war, poverty and injustice, the only system that can enable the poet and the artist to resume the creative freedom they enjoyed in ancient Greece, in Confucian China, in mediaeval Europe or in the England of Shakespeare, Donne and Dryden. It is the only important social essay written by a poet during the past decade.

## War Commentary Readers should not miss

# POETRY AND ANARCHISM

**Herbert  
Read**

**Freedom Press**

128 pages

3s. 6d. (post 4d.)

**Order also  
The Philosophy of Anarchism  
by the same author.**

**1s. 3d. post free.**



## Mexico.

### Persecution of Anti-Fascist Refugees by Comintern Agents.

*New York Paper Exposes Slander Campaign in Mexico*

THE Communist International continues its campaigns of slander against all revolutionists and critics of Stalinism abroad. The latest victims of this filthy campaign are refugees from France, Spain and Germany, now seeking asylum in Mexico. They include Victor Serge, Julien Gorkin, one of the leaders of the POUM (it will be remembered that another of the POUM leaders—to say nothing of many hundreds of the rank and file—was murdered in prison by the Spanish Communists during the Spanish war); Marceau Pivert, the leader of the PSOP, the French equivalent of the ILP. They are also attacking Gustav Regler, a refugee from Nazism, and a former Political Commissar of the International Brigade in Spain; and Grandiso Muniz, a Spanish journalist.

These men are described by the communists as Hitler agents, and aims at forcing the Mexican Government to deport them back to Hitler controlled France, Germany and Spain, where they would obviously be seized by the Fascists whom they have been attacking for years. The C.P. recently conducted a similar campaign in the United States to try and get Jan Valtin, the German author of the anti-Comintern book "Out of the Night" handed back to the Gestapo. As far as we know, this attempt has failed.

The New York Nation of February 7th carried an article by Richard Rovere in which he exposes the Communists and recalls a recent letter to the Nation in which Dr. Frank Kingdon urged "that the Soviet government be called upon to explain its action in spiriting away two respected leaders of the Polish Socialist Party, Heinrich Erlich and Victor Alter." Rovere goes on to point out that the instigator of the Mexican campaign—an alleged French journalist called Andre Simone, recently returned from the United States—"actually is Otto Katz an OGPU agent who once bought up European newspapers for the Communist International . . . Katz has now organized "vigilante committees" to deal with these men, whom he calls "the leaders of the Nazi Fifth Column in Latin America." It is unnecessary to quote further from the article which has been reprinted almost entirely in the New Leader for March 28th. We refer readers interested in the details of how far the Comintern is prepared to go in its calumny campaigns to the New Leader article. It is only necessary to point out that they are employing the old Bolshevik trick of imputing to others the very thing of which they themselves have been guilty. We hope the Mexicans will not have forgotten the period between August, 1939 and June, 1941 when Stalin maintained an alliance with Hitler . . .

The conclusion of Rovere's article is interesting however: "It is important," he writes, "that these men be saved from death or deportation, and the Mexican government will soon have in its hands demands from many prominent Americans that they

receive full protection. But the incident raises another important issue. Russia has built up over the years an international force of gangsters to deal with real and imagined enemies. It is still functioning, not only against Nazism but against honest men and women who have at one time or another incurred the displeasure of the Russian dictator and his petty bureaucrats. If as Ralph Bates and others have recently argued, the Soviet Union now deserves the full co-operation and trust of the liberal movement, it can go a long way toward winning respect by turning the efforts of its agents against the real foes of democracy. It will be a good deal easier to accept Russia as a genuine ally when the Russians have the good sense to call off their Otto Katzes."

Anarchists and real lovers of liberty will not be so easily satisfied, however. It is not enough to demand a calling off of the Stalinist thugs. They are a definite offshoot and reflection of the Russian regime, and a more tactful use of them by the officers of the Comintern will not affect the basic brutality of the present social order in Russia. We shall not accept any regime in Russia or anywhere else until the workers are free from governmental tyranny of any kind. Such a regime can certainly not come about before the Russian workers and peasants have overthrown their present blood soaked rulers.

Meanwhile we hope that as wide a publicity as possible be given to the danger threatening Serge, Gorkin and the other victims of Stalinist slander. We do not easily forget the assassinations of so many of our anarchist comrades in Spain by the hirelings of the Comintern. Nor the deaths of others like Muenzenberg, Sedov, Trotsky and others at the hands of Stalin's agents.



Propaganda Cartoon by Diego de Rivera



# To Our Regular READERS

**B**ESIDES our postal subscribers WAR COMMENTARY has thousands of readers who buy their copy every fortnight from our street sellers in London, Glasgow, Oxford, Liverpool, etc. It is to these comrades and friends that we are directing this appeal.

As we have pointed out on a number of occasions, WAR COMMENTARY costs a considerable amount of money to produce in spite of the fact that we have no paid propagandists, staff or contributors. First of all there are the office expenses: rent, light, heating, telephone and a gigantic postage bill to meet every week. On top of this is our printing bill which has more than doubled during the past year. By the use of smaller type WAR COMMENTARY contains about 50% more material than did the early issues. Then we have also been publishing cartoons and illustrations, all of which of course increase the cost of production. Yet we have kept the price at 2d, (though 3d would be a more economic price) and it is our intention to continue to keep the price at 2d so as to be able to reach as wide a public as possible. By so doing, however, we are incurring a loss of about £40 a month which can only be met by two sources of income: (a) any profit made on the sale of books and pamphlets (and this is very small on Freedom Press publications which are generally retailed at cost price) and (b) from contributions to the Press Fund. The latter is obviously our main source of income. But the lists we publish each month are not long enough!

Amongst the contributions to this month's list there are four entries for London from "Park Sympathisers." They are small amounts, but what we want to say about them is that they are made up by odd pennies which readers give our sellers when they buy their copies of WAR COMMENTARY. These readers feel that WAR COMMENTARY is worth more than 2d, and we who have been selling WAR COMMENTARY outside the gates at Marble Arch (and the same can be said by our regular sellers in the provinces) know from the remarks made to us by our "regulars" that there are hundreds of them who are eager to obtain their copy of WAR COMMENTARY as soon as it comes out because they find it interesting and stimulating though they may not necessarily be in complete agreement with all our views. This month we ask all those readers in London and the provinces to pay a little more for their copy of WAR COMMENTARY. Some may be able to afford only an extra penny, but others surely can manage much more. No sum is too small, or too large! So reader, the next time you see your regular WAR COMMENTARY seller outside the gates at Marble Arch, or in Brunswick Street in Glasgow, or outside the Bus Garage at Kingston or Morris' works at Oxford, give something extra for your WAR COMMENTARY, so that when we publish the next Press Fund list, "Hyde Park Sympathisers" will figure prominently not as a few shillings but many pounds.

WAR COMMENTARY depends for its existence on the solidarity of its readers. Are you doing your share in keeping the paper alive? **EDITORS**

## MAY DAY 1942

FOR ANARCHISM!

**FRIDAY, 1st MAY**

**Rally in Hyde Park**  
6 p.m.

**SUNDAY, 3rd MAY**

**Public Meeting**  
Large Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn  
7 p.m.

**Keep These Dates Free!**

## PRESS FUND MARCH 1942

MARCH 1942... ..	A.B. ....	1 2
London: Park sym-	Oxford: D.F. ....	10 0
pathisers .....	Los Angeles:	
London: F.C. ....	Man! Group, per	
Stroud: L.G.W. ...	J.S. ....	5 0 0
Bournemouth:	Bingley: D.S. ...	5 0
L.A.M. ....	Leeds: M.F. ....	10 9
London, E.9.: B.B.	London: Park	
Glasgow: J.T. ....	Sympathisers ...	1 1
Bournemouth:	London: V.R. ...	5 0 0
N.F.H. ....	Watford: J.B. ...	5 9
K.J. ....	London N: G. ...	3 0
—: Anon ....	Richmond: G.W. 1	0 0
Victoria Australia:	Somerset: M.B. ...	2 8
G.F. ....	Huddersfield:	
Leicester: E.H.H.	L.H. ....	2 2
Salford: H.R. ....	Goodmayes: A.W.	1 0
Kingston: J.B. ....	N.Devon: C.E.P.	1 2
Oxford: D.F. ....	London: J.H. ...	5 0 0
London, N: G. ....	Oxford: Group ...	5 0
Plymouth: T.E. ...	Oxford: F.E. ....	2 0
Northwood: E.H.	London: Park	
Hounslow: G.J.E.	Sympathisers ...	4 3
Darwen Lancs:		
R.H. ....	MARCH TOTAL	31 18 5
Kingston: T.W.B. 2		
Oxford: J.H. ....		
London: Park	Total to date	£104 2 0
Sympathisers ...		

## WAR COMMENTARY

incorporating  
*Spain and the World and Revolt!*

Coming out Twice a Month

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES:**

6 Months 2/6 (post free)

12 Months 5/0 (post free)

All subscriptions and enquiries

should be sent to

**FREEDOM PRESS,**  
27, Belsize Road London N.W.6.  
Phone: PRImrose 0625