

WAR

For Anarchism

COMMENTARY

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TWOPENCE.

SCAVENGERS of MISERY

Our View of the Beveridge Report

THE BEVERIDGE PLAN bears a strong resemblance to the celebrated 'land fit for heroes to live in' speeches of Lloyd George during the last war. The use of it by the press, and still more, the churning of it on the B.B.C. foreign programmes supports this view. Further examination of the report reveals so much uncertainty, so many involved statements and so many loopholes as to justify its likeness to the Atlantic Charter. It seems to be forgotten that the report is but a recommendation and may meet the fate of so many reports of Royal Commissions and Committees—a place in the dusty shelves of the House of Commons library. Yet the press speaks of it as though it were already law, instead of a promise of pie in the sky.

Nevertheless, much of the report will, undoubtedly, be operated, for the recommendations are in line with the general political and social development of modern times. We must, then, examine carefully the report. Much easier said than done. The report covers 300 pages of about 200,000 words, but the greatest obstacle to reading it is the involved style, so beloved of the Civil Service, and the confused schematic arrangement of it. About as thrilling as Marx's "Capital".

OUT OF WORK.

The most important item is unemployment benefit. 24/- per week is proposed for each single adult male. Compare this with the 25/- offered to single adult males at the close of the last war, and recall how, owing to the threatening attitude of demobilised soldiers and discharged munition workers, the 25/- was almost immediately raised to 29/-.

Compare the 29/- and the cost of living in 1919 with the proposed 24/- and the possible cost of living at the close of the present war, or even now. A high degree of working-class militancy will produce a higher rate of benefit than the good intentions of Sir William Beveridge.

Judged by any standard, 24/- per week is too low for the rapidly rising cost of living. It may be said that the benefit will be raised to meet the rising prices of commodities, indeed the giddy rise in prices will make this inevitable, but the plan is on a strictly actuarial basis, and the already high weekly contribution of 4/3 per week would need to be substantially increased to pay for this.

The whole plan for unemployment benefit is based on an estimated unemployment rate of 8½ per cent. An almost unbelievable optimism. In the years before the rearmament boom the rate was almost double this and consideration of every factor indicates a much greater percentage in the post-war years. In such circumstances to carry out the scheme of the Beveridge committee and the Government actuary would mean reducing benefit.

But it is to be childishly optimistic to expect the State to grant the unemployed sufficient benefit to live decently. Employers desire low wages, and who would work like a galley-slave for low wages if a decent dole were paid for idleness? That, at any rate, is how the employer thinks, and it is he who makes the laws. It is his experience that the only efficient way for him to control labour is by the threat of the sack. For the sack to have terror, out-of-work pay is kept deliberately low. It is foolish to expect other from the employing class.

ONLY TWENTY YEARS MORE.

When old-age pensioners agitated for an increase of their miserable pensions they were told "Wait for the Beveridge Report." The eagerly awaited report promised them the magnificent sum of 14/- per week for a single pension. This will be raised to 21/- per week at two-year intervals. If the scheme is started in July 1944, says the report, the pensioner should have his full pension of 24/-, or £2 for a couple, by mid-1964! That should cheer up the old folk and give them something to look forward to. Of course, they will have another war for us before then.

PATCHING THEM UP.

The proposed state provision of medical, dental and ophthalmic treatment with hospitals, nursing and convalescent homes, seems good until one recalls that the medical treatment provided by the first National Health Insurance Act also looked good—on paper. In practice the panel doctor and the miserly issue of medicines had little effect on the health of the people. But patching-up the sick scoffs the problem while poverty, the main cause of illness, remains, as has been so well demonstrated by John Hewetson in previous issues of *WAR COMMENTARY* and the Beveridge Plan will not end poverty.

LOVELY FLOWERS—BUT YOU WON'T SMELL THEM.

The death benefit of £20 is sure to be a prime favourite in a society where life is scorned and death is worshipped. However, its chief effect will be to raise and standardise the price of funerals and undertakers will be the chief beneficiaries.

Funeral benefit (a queer term) has always been a bait used to entice recruits into the unions. The State's proposed generosity to its dead will not help the trade unions' recruiting drives. A few decades ago the trade unions had two functions, one to raise wages, the other to provide death, sickness and unemployment funds. The passing of the unemployment, health and old age pensions bills destroyed much of their influence in the latter field; the Beveridge Plan threatens to attack it still further. The state is doing most of the work of the unions. As they have abandoned the task of defending wages, there does not seem to be much they can do, except to collaborate with the state, and ask for a share in the administration of state insurance.

THE MIDDLE-CLASS CHARTER.

Middle-class persons and workers who have not suffered unemployment may look with pleasure on the plan, but those who have suffered long unemployment will find little joy in it. The unemployed hate

the Labour Exchange and the whole system of public relief. The dirty, dingy, airless buildings; the form-filling, the endless questions, the ancestral inquisitions—they hate them all. To them there can be little fun in the prospect of the nation turned into a vast poor house in return for their lost work and wages.

The report is one which will appeal to the petty middle-class more than the worker. With the growing insecurity of the Kleinburger he has looked with envy on the state insurance of the proletarian. Now he is to get the same benefit, and after all, is not insurance the basis of his life?

Further the Beveridge Plan would provide work for tens, or hundreds of thousands of civil servants, accountants, inspectors and doctors. Is not democracy the government of the people by the Civil Service for the Civil Service? As the small businesses are swallowed by big business and "intelligentsia" swell the ranks of the unemployed, the middle-class will seek its salvation in state jobs and state insurance, in Britain as it did in Germany.

THE CAUSE OF POVERTY WILL REMAIN.

The Beveridge Plan proposes only the salving of the sores of capitalism, not the removal of their cause. The problems it "tackles" arise only because of the poverty of the workers inherent in the wages system. So long as capitalism exists the workers will be poor, Beveridge or no! Remove the cause of insecurity and poverty—capitalism, and such plans are unneeded.

But even under capitalism, if a worker has a regular job at a (comparatively) decent wage, such plans as this are useless to him. The making of such a report indicates the contemplation of the standardisation and codification of permanent poverty. It is well to recall once again the oft-quoted saying of Leo Tolstoy, "The rich man will do anything for the poor man, except get off his back."

LECTURES

EVERY FRIDAY EVENING

7.0 p.m.

KROPOTKIN CENTENARY

DEC. 18th. *Kropotkin and Mutual Aid*

JOHN HEWETSON

QUESTIONS DISCUSSION

No Lectures will be held on the
25th of December and 1st of January

FREEDOM PRESS ROOMS

27, BELSIZE ROAD, LONDON, N.W.6.
(Swiss Cottage tube: 31 'bus route)

Smallholders & Market Gardeners

By George Woodcock

IN ENGLAND THERE is little left of the peasantry who played an active part in the country's economic and social life until the middle years of the 18th century. The enclosures of Elizabethan days, the seizure of land and formation of great sheep walks where they had gained their living began the decline of the yeomanry. From that time, through the less known but equally severe enclosures of Cromwellian days, the English yeomen were subjected to a series of attacks from the large landowners on one side and the new commercial classes on the other, which resulted in the destruction of the mediæval communal life of the country and the abasement of the peasants into a class of wage labourers who worked for large tenant farmers and the big landowners, and whose unemployed surplus provided the reserves of labour which made possible the industrial revolution in its exploiting capitalist form. By the middle of the eighteenth century the yeomanry were finished as a power in England. Goldsmith, one of the more sensitive observers of the time, lamented their end in his poem "The Deserted Village."

"But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroy'd, can never be supplied."

This prophesy was correct. The agricultural revolution ended the yeoman peasantry as a great class in England. The industrial revolution turned their sons into the urban wage slaves of capitalism.

In place of the yeomen, *i.e.* the peasant farmers who worked the land with their own and their family's labour, and who were for the most part neither exploiters nor exploited in the direct sense, there arose the two classes of the large farmers (who usually held their land under tenancy) and the wage labourers who worked for them. Only in limited parts of the country did the small yeoman farmer survive in any numbers. A few outlying parts of Wales and Scotland, for instance, still contain predominantly peasant villages, like Llanylin in Carmarthenshire where almost everybody (except the school-teacher and the vicar) works his own piece of land and where, consequently, there survives a social cohesion and equality which has vanished in most parts of the country. Such districts as this are, however, exceptional. In most of the country districts the farming population is divided quite sharply into the two distinct classes of farmer and labourer, and the communal reality of mediæval village life has been lost with the peasantry who created it.

REVIVAL OF SMALLHOLDING

In the country some attempts have been made to resurrect the peasantry in the form of smallholders. After the last war, for instance, there was a great increase in small poultry farms, which for a while proved profitable, until the overcrowding of the industry, the competition of eggs from Denmark and the Dominions and the decreased working-class purchasing power of the industrial depressions, created a crisis among poultry farmers, and thousands of the smaller men were forced to give up their holdings and return to the already saturated labour market.

There were attempts by county councils to encourage the spread of smallholdings. These were let mostly to people with some agricultural experience—farmers, agricultural labourers, etc., but a number were let to unemployed urban workers. In addition, smallholdings were acquired independently by people with part-time occupa-

tions who wished to supplement their pensions from farming. The majority of these smallholders, however, relied on their land for a livelihood.

In the crisis years, smallholders felt the gale more keenly than the larger farmers who had some capital to keep them going. There was a high proportion of failures, particularly among the ex-urban workers (a few of whom, however, proved outstandingly successful) and, in general, the tendency towards high mechanisation in farming and high capitalisation has proved inimical to smallholders. The number of small farms has fallen considerably and the demand for smallholdings has fallen to a very low level.

With the growth of the great industrial towns there came the rise of the market gardening industry, in which something like a peasant structure evolved. There are, of course, the capitalist market gardeners and nurserymen whose large areas of hothouses make them among the most prosperous exploiters in the landworking community. There is also the middle stratum of market gardeners, corresponding to the medium tenant farmers, who make a comfortable living from a few glasshouses and a small area of land on which they employ a small number of hands.

But there is also a numerous lower stratum of market gardeners who correspond more exactly to the peasant status, men who work with their own labour tiny holdings of from one to five acres in areas close to the larger towns, and scratch in normal times, a precarious living from land work whose only virtue is its independence from the supervision of an employer.

The small market gardeners to whom I shall refer particularly are those of Middlesex among whom I work, but the general impression of the hard and unprofitable life has been gained by observers in other parts of the country. Rowntree and Astor in *British Agriculture* say:

"Our enquiries . . . revealed a uniformly unfavourable tale of results. In Hampshire the standard of living was little better than that of a hired labourer. In the Evesham and Pershore district the conditions of the small grower was pitiable. Among seventy-one visited, hardly one was in any sense prosperous, and many had to take jobs on neighbouring farms to make ends meet. In Yorkshire, of the various types of smallholding visited, the market gardeners were the least successful."

The condition of the small market gardeners of Middlesex during peace time was little better than that of their fellows in other parts of the country, and while the war has slightly improved their position, it has also brought new difficulties which affect the advantages of slightly better markets.

CAPITALIST GROWER'S ADVANTAGES

These small market gardeners are mostly devoted to the cultivation of crops in open ground. There are usually a few frames, perhaps a small glasshouse, sometimes an area of portable cloches for forcing crops in the open. But lack of capital necessarily limits the quantity of glass as, indeed, it does of every other kind of convenience necessary to make these gardens really profitable.

Often the really successful nurseries with large areas of glass and comfortably large profits are of no more than two or three acres. Yet a man without capital on the same area finds it hard to scrape a mean living or even enough to supplement a pension. Every operation has to be done the most tedious way because of lack of machinery. The ground must be spade dug, because the grower cannot afford a mechanical cultivator. Plants must be dibbed in at the rate of 3,000 per man per day, when a modern machine could plant 80,000 in a day. And so on through every operation of the horticultural year.

The small grower is always at a disadvantage as compared with the capitalist growers. His primitive methods render his expenditure of labour disproportionate to that of the mechanical holding. Because he only needs them in small quantities, seeds and fertilisers are more expensive to him. He often has to take pot luck in finding a holding and may have poor land he cannot afford to fertilise sufficiently, dry land he cannot water effectively, wet land which needs the drainage he has little time to do. And, most important of all, he finds it difficult to market his produce. If he is close to a centre of population he can sell direct to shops and can thus get a fair price for at least some of his produce. If he has to send to market, he often gets a price which hardly covers carriage, or, if there is a glut, cannot sell his goods at all. The prices are in any case usually small, out of all proportion to those charged in the shops. In marketing he is at a disadvantage with the large grower for his output is too small for satisfactory grading, and because of this he usually gets the lowest price.

CHANGES BROUGHT BY WAR

Before the war the small grower usually grew a number of items in comparatively small quantities. Small plots of a dozen kinds of vegetable, cabbage plants, bedding out plants, cut flowers, fruit and tomatoes would grow together on the same holding. Bits and pieces made both cultivation and marketing more difficult, but the grower did not dare to take the risk of a single crop. Also to an extent he usually made up on some items what he lost on the others. Vegetables were never particularly profitable in small quantities, but cabbage plants, bedding plants and cut flowers would sometimes give a comfortable return to make up for the lettuces dug in for lack of a market.

Taken all round, the return from these smallholdings was very poor in pre-war years and the number of failures was high. As in the case of smallholders, those who held on were often the people with pensions or part-time jobs to tide them over difficult times.

The war has made changes in the situation of the small grower. On the whole, like all growers, he makes more money. He stands more chance of marketing his produce (though even last season saw its gluts with low prices and wasted produce). He gets more for what he sells, particularly for plants and cut flowers.

On the other hand, his expenses have risen. Tools cost nearly double pre-war prices and are becoming scarce. Fertilisers are expensive and scarce, and manure becomes more and more difficult to obtain. But probably the most unreasonable rise in prices is that of seeds. This week I received a wholesale seedsman's list for the coming season. Cauliflower seeds which had been £1/10. per lb. before the war and were £3 last season, are £8/10 per lb. for the coming season. Last season the cheapest tomato seeds were 10/- an oz., this season they are £1.

And so on through the whole list, with increases varying from 30% on cabbage seed to 100% on cucumber seed. I shudder to think of the price of cauliflower seed if profiteering ever starts!

Thus all the merchants from whom the grower gets his material take their cut out of the increased profit. Even so, on the last two seasons the small growers have done better than they ever did before the war.

TROUBLES AHEAD

But there are troubles ahead. A new order, issued the other day, took away one of the mainstays of the small grower's income by forbidding the growth of annuals for cut flowers next season. Nor is the trouble with the authorities limited to orders of prohibition.

The War Agricultural Committee's representatives are easily the most annoying pests the grower has to combat. It is true "assistance" can be obtained from the W.A.E.C.'s but any small benefit gained is offset by their interference in the cropping of the holdings which often results in considerable losses, both to the grower and to the community, through instructions being given to replace crops that will grow in a certain place by crops that won't. The W.A.E.C.'s conduct their antics on a class basis and their officials habitually spend their time pestering the small men while the large and influential growers are left to do what they like. Many small growers whose holdings are hidden from the main roads deliberately defy the law and refuse to advertise their presence to the W.A.E.C.'s or to send in the statutory cropping order.

The slight improvement in the returns from small market gardens, insofar as it is not illusory because of the cost of living, is of course quite temporary. None of the growers expect it to continue after the war, and the best they hope is to be able to save a little money to enable them to improve their holdings and to have some little protection against hard times.

All the small grower ever had was independence. Now that has been filched from him, and he works virtually as a low paid employee of the State. Freedom under a governmental system is always limited and temporary. It is only in a voluntary society of common ownership and common work that the worker can be free. So that, while we sympathise with the independence that makes these people prefer insecurity to a wage slavery, it is impossible not to see the futility of their efforts in a society where all but the few must wear a chain.

ANARCHIST LAND POLICY NEW LIFE TO THE LAND By GEORGE WOODCOCK

32 pp.

6d.

This is not just another pamphlet. Its information and arguments are of importance to all concerned with agriculture. This is a sincere job of work, approached scientifically; it will repay a careful study and then it should not be put too far away.

Douglas Rogers in the "Tribunal"

The First British General Strike—Part III

“WE ARE BETRAYED!”

By TOM BROWN

AS THE STRIKE developed more workers joined the strikers, the picket lines increased, the tourniquet on the high roads tightened. There was never any slackening of the strike. According to Professor W. H. Crook (*The General Strike* pp.390-6) quoting reports of the Ministry of Transport, 99 per cent. of London Underground workers struck. On the G.W.R. by May 11th only 8.4 per cent. of goods trains ran; on the L.M.S. less than 3 per cent. and on the L.N.E.R. much less than 1 per cent. Railwaymen claim that these figures were exaggerated by running the trains over much shorter distances and so increasing the number of trains, but not the goods carried.

The reply of the Government was to increase the terror. The limits of their own laws were too narrow for them. Thrusting aside the constitution and laws, the Cabinet, no doubt with memories of their Black and Tans, promised immunity to the Armed Forces for any violence they might wish to commit. On May 7th they broadcast this announcement.

“All ranks of the Armed Forces of the Crown are hereby notified that any action which they may find it necessary to take in an honest endeavour to aid the Civil Power will receive, both now and afterwards, the full support of His Majesty’s Government.”

Nevertheless, the Armed Forces were little used other than as a threatening parade. The chief forces of the Government were the regular police, the Special Constabulary and an extra special body of mounted “specials” recruited from the well-to-do to form Cossack troops. Their chief weapons were wholesale arrests, where the strikers were not too strong, and wild baton charges, often on crowds coming out of theatres and cinemas. But the strikers stood firm. The two classes confronted one another as over a barricade.

As the strike developed some members of the ruling-class, particularly those running municipalities, showed signs of worry. The Newcastle City Council, with a heavy Conservative majority, called upon the Government to seek an armistice. The Archbishop of Canterbury, after consulting the leaders of the churches, appealed for the calling off of the strike, the withdrawal of the miners’ lock-out notices and the renewal of the coal subsidy until a settlement was found. The anxiety was not limited to City Councillors and parsons:

“J. H. Thomas, representing the railwaymen, found, early in the Strike, that his duties took him to Buckingham Palace. King George asked him a number of questions, and expressed his sympathy for the miners. At the end of the talk, His Majesty, who was gravely disturbed, remarked, it is said: ‘Well, Thomas, if the worst happens, I suppose all this—’ (with a gesture indicating his surroundings) ‘—will vanish?’

Fortunately for Britain and the world, it did not come to the worst. The Trades Unions saw to that.”

J. R. Clynes; *Memoirs*.

THIRTY PIECES

But the Government was undisturbed; it knew its agents in the Trades Union movement. All during the Strike the General Council was seeking anything which looked like a way out. In the course of their seeking they met Sir Abe Bailey and Sir Herbert Samuel at the former’s house. Samuel proposed terms of settlement which included wage cuts and some vague re-organisation of the mining industry. That was sufficient for the General Council who pretended that the proposals were, somehow, coming from the Government. Sir Herbert Samuel was quite clear about this, saying, “I have been acting entirely on my own initiative, have received no authority from the Government, and can give no assurances on their behalf.”

The Government, through the Minister of Labour, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, declared that no terms would be considered or negotiations opened, the strikers must surrender unconditionally.

Returning to the miner’s leaders the General Council presented these unofficial and private conversations as terms of settlement, speaking airily of guarantees.

“Mr. Pugh was continually pressed and questioned by Mr. Herbert Smith (the M.F.G.B. president), myself, and my colleagues as to what the guarantees mentioned were, and who had given them. We got no answer.”

A. J. Cook: *The Nine Days*.

The miners’ leaders contemptuously rejected the shufflings of the General Council and expressed their determination to carry on the fight. The Council deputation then went to 10 Downing Street and Pugh, addressing Baldwin, said:

“We are here to-day, sir, to say that this General Strike is to be terminated forthwith in order that negotiations may proceed.”

Wednesday, May 12th, 1926.

Once again workers looked at one another with bitter eyes and said “We are betrayed!”

Immediately the police terror was renewed. The number of arrests increased after the strikes, and baton charges continued. On the night of Wednesday, May 12th a meeting of dockers was being held outside Poplar Town Hall when a lorry full of police drove through the crowd scattering injured people to each side. Father Groser, the Vicar, held up a crucifix and told the police the meeting was peaceful. He too was batoned. The same night a vanload of police was driven to the headquarters of the Poplar branch of the National Union of Railwaymen. Without warning the police charged into the building and batoned all within reach.

When the strikers returned to their places of work the following day hundreds of thousands of them were met by victimisation, demands for non-unionism, wage reductions or dismissals. The railwaymen were the chief victims and spontaneously renewed the strike. The threat of a new General Strike without the leaders curbed the viciousness of the employers' attack, yet even then thousands of men were victimised. In sullen anger the workers returned and the miners were left to fight alone until November when, driven by hunger, they accepted defeat. Wages were cut, the working day was increased from seven to eight hours and district agreements replaced the national agreement.

POST MORTEM

It is now our task to examine the various social bodies and forces at work in the Strike and from a study of their relationship find lessons valuable to the workers in their struggle against the employing class. *The Government and the Employers*—The old revolutionary statement that "the State is but the executive committee of the ruling class" was well justified by the events of 1926. From the beginning to the end of the struggle the "Constitution" was on the side of the mine-owners. All the old social-democratic nonsense of the State being above classes was cruelly pushed aside by the employers and their government. Although the *Conservative Party* was in power, the *Liberal Party* was whole-heartedly behind the coalowners. In times of strike the Popular Front sham of "progressive" Liberalism is flung away and the Liberal coalowner is at one with his Tory brother coalowner. The Popular Front can wait until the next General Election.

A fairly large *Fascist* movement existed in 1926 in the form of the British Fascisti. Forgotten were the "social message" and "workers' charter" of Fascism. The Fascists joined the O.M.S. and drove lorries or unloaded ships as did the other blacklegs.

The role of the leaders of the *T.U.C.* and the *Labour Party* was particularly despicable for they had always been opposed to the General Strike and never at any time had they withdrawn their oppo-

sition to it. By leading a struggle to which they were opposed they played the part of agents-provocateur. It seems that the labour leaders believed that a struggle in defence of the miners was inevitable and that it was better to initiate the fight in order to control and hamstring it. In any case, what treachery lacked cowardice made up.

"It must not be forgotten that apart from the rights and wrongs of the calling of a General Strike, there would in any case, with the miners' lockout, have been widespread unofficial fighting in all parts of the country, which would have produced anarchy in the movement."

Ernest Bevin in *The Record*.

"What I dreaded about this strike more than anything else was this: if by any chance it should have got out of the hands of those who would be able to exercise some control, every sane man knows what would have happened. I thank God it never did."

J. H. Thomas in the House of Commons,
May 13th, 1926.

"Every day that the strike proceeded the control and the authority of that dispute was passing out of the hands of responsible Executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control, and was wrecking the movement."

Charles Dukes (N.U.G. & M.W.): Report
1927 Conference of Executives.

"I have never disguised that in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us unless the Constitution won."

J. H. Thomas, House of Commons,
May 3rd, 1926.

"I have never favoured the principle of a General Strike."

J. H. Thomas at Hammersmith,
May 9th, 1926.

"No General Strike was ever planned or seriously contemplated as an act of Trade Union policy. I told my own union in April, that such a stroke would be a national disaster."

"We were against the stoppage not in favour of it."

J. R. Clynes; *Memoirs*.

The Independent Labour Party at that time was anything rather than independent and was still affiliated to the Labour Party, a majority of Labour M.P.s and ex-cabinet ministers being members of the I.L.P. The attitude of the I.L.P. was essentially that of the Labour Party; its leaders Snowden and McDonald had years before opposed the General Strike in their long disputes with the Syndicalists. In 1926 McDonald was still the leader of the I.L.P. as well as the Labour Party and was still repeating his old opposition to the General Strike.

"I don't like General Strikes . . . I am terribly cold-blooded about the matter."

"With the discussion of General Strikes and Bolshevism and all that kind of thing I have nothing to do at all."

Ramsay McDonald, House of Commons,
May 3rd, 1926.

WE SHALL RISE AGAIN

The *Communist Party* had never yet aspired to being anything more than the vague left-wing of the

Labour Party and trade unions. The crises of 1925 and 1926 found them without any alternative policy to that of the labour leaders. On the second day of the Strike the Communist Party issued a manifesto repeating the M.F.G.B. slogan "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day," and adding a self-contradictory call to "Nationalise the Mines without Compensation, under Worker's Control," and the formation of a Labour Government. That is a Government of MacDonald, Snowden, Clynes and Thomas! The miners must wait until the next General Election for that! To all of these slogans the C.P. added the slogan it had used from the beginning of the crisis—"All power to the General Council." A stupid parody of the slogan of the October Revolution "All power to the Soviets". "All power" to Thomas, Clynes and Bevin. They already had too much power—the power to betray the miners.

There existed at this time a trade union opposition known as the *Minority Movement* a thinly disguised Communist body. Shortly before the strike it, in the usual Communist fashion, claimed to have an affiliated membership of 1,000,000. Being a Communist organisation it was forced to trail behind the C.P. and during the Strike, in which it played no part, it even ceased to hold meetings. A few years later it perished miserably.

No *Syndicalist* movement existed in Britain in 1926 although until the end of the Great War a small propagandist movement had lived vigorously. Unfortunately this movement had been eclipsed by the Russian Revolution or engulfed by trade union work. Nevertheless the General Strike propaganda of the old Syndicalist groups had had a much greater effect than was ever expected of it. The idea of the General Strike appealed to the imagination and conscience of the British worker.

The present *Anarchist* movement in England was as yet unborn in 1926. The betrayals of a decade, the failure of two Labour Governments, the Labour desertion of the Spanish Revolution and the Socialist-Communist support of the second world war were to later make inevitable the creation of our present Revolutionary Movement.

Without a Syndicalist minority among the miners, factory workers and transport men, on the picket lines and local strike headquarters, the strikers were easy prey to the Judas Iscariots. Without an Anarchist Federation, a strong, compact and resolute body of conscious revolutionaries such as the Spanish F.A.I., no alternative to the treacherous leadership could be found.

Of the workers nothing but the highest praise is sufficient. They responded to the strike call magnificently. When the Government wished to publish the *British Gazette* not one linotype operator could

be found to set up its paper. In thousands of cases trade unionists walked out to certain dismissal. In many cases, especially on the railways, men in supervisory jobs sacrificed jobs and pensions to join the fight. The ninth day of the strike found the workers more determined than ever to carry on the fight. There was never any drift back. What the workers lacked was revolutionary understanding and organisation. It is our task to create these. The General Strike is not dead. Weighing carefully the treachery and cowardice of labour leaders and drawing inspiration from the courage and sacrifice of the workers, we prepare our hearts and minds for the Second British General Strike.

The first two articles in this series are available from Freedom Press, price 5d. (post free).

THE UPPER CRUST



"He's a regular slave at the factory—look how he bites his finger nails"
(from the American "CALL")

VIEWS ON THE BEVERIDGE REPORT

YAFFLE IN REYNOLDS NEWS 17-11-42.

"Sir William has broadly envisaged a system of private enterprise controlled by "a new type of official." What shall we call this piebald bureaucracy which is half-way between Right and Left?

As to that, it has been denied that Sir William told a newspaper that his new system will "take us half-way to Moscow." But we can see how the rumour arose. For half-way to Moscow would land somewhere about Berlin.

The Democracies have a name for it."

FORWARD 5/12/42

"The Beveridge Report is not only a proposal for insuring us all, but also an attempt to insure British Capitalism against the coming British Revolution.

Not that it does not contain some excellent instalments of long overdue social reform such as family allowances and the nationalisation of insurance, and the merging of all kinds of overlapping administrations into one big scheme, which goes some way towards keeping the wolf from the working class door.

But there is not the slightest reason why the British working class should greet it with tears of joy and go down on their knees in humble gratitude."

THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN FINANCIAL

EDITOR 3/12/42

"The report is based on the conviction that social expenditure of the kind proposed is an investment in the health and contentment of the nation which is bound to yield a profit in increased productivity. Many practical business men will agree with that proposition, though others will not. The knowledge that there is a fixed lower limit to living standards may stimulate interest in the work and make labour more ready to move from one industry to another when shifts in production are needed. That is one view. The other is that the margin between the safe minimum received when out of work and the wage offered for work may be too small to act as an incentive.

This may well be so unless the lowest level of wages is at least like £3 a week, for even that rate is less than 10s. a week higher than unemployment benefit for a married man, if the suspension of contributions is taken into account. Here arises the serious question asked by many people to-day: What effect would the raising of our prices by the direct and indirect cost of the Beveridge Plan, have on our export trade? It might be suggested that wages are only a part of our competitive positions and higher wages have in the past been offset by greater productivity and greater inventiveness. More will undoubtedly be heard of this aspect of the cost, which is more difficult to deal with than any form of internal redistribution of wealth."

NEW LEADER (I.L.P.). 5/12/42

"The Beveridge Report will undoubtedly precipitate one of the keenest political controversies since the unemployment issues of 1934-5.

The Report does not attack Capitalism, but it challenges the interests of the powerful Insurance Companies and its "plan for social security," irrespective of unemployment or illness, will assist workers in their wage struggle against employers.

DIRTY WORK IN NORTH AFRICA

"These are great and glorious victories we have won in the North African Desert, but I regret to note there has been dirty work as well.

I refer to the outbreak of theft.

Murder is, of course, not a thing we can disapprove of in war-time, but thieving is a more serious matter.

It is disgusting to read that the native inhabitants of North Africa, the Moors, are taking advantage of the situation and have been stealing rifles, revolvers, grenades, tommy guns, ammunition, even uniforms, from the battlefield. After the fighting around Oran it was necessary for American troops to accompany French soldiers to a native village to recover the arms which the inhabitants had made off with, under the impression that the French had been defeated.

Through

Not understanding international politics, the natives were under the impression that the Americans had won and would be glad to have them as allies against the French. They were prepared to act as snipers and guerillas for the Americans, thinking that the Americans had come to establish the Atlantic Charter in North Africa and to give them their independence.

They did not realise that the Americans and the French would make it up so quickly and were completely taken by surprise when American soldiers arrived with French soldiers, surrounded the village, and made them give the stolen property back.

They are now wondering what the war is about and where they come in. In fact, they feel very much like the Free French." *Ikonoblast in 'Forward' 5/12/42.*

BUSINESS MAN ON WAR AIMS

"Mr. W. P. Witherow, president of the U.S. National Association of Manufacturers, told the Association's Convention at Washington yesterday:—

"I am not fighting for a quart of milk for every Hottentot or for Government hand-outs of a free Utopia.

"We are fighting for America and American ideals.

"I am not making guns or tanks to win a people's revolution. I am making armaments to help our own boys save America." *Daily Mirror 3/12/42*

8 YEARS FOR IRISH YOUTH.

"A boy who was on crutches, Gerard Adams, 16½, of Abercorn Street North, Belfast, was sentenced at Belfast yesterday to eight years' penal servitude for the possession of a revolver and ammunition.

On hearing the sentence Adams, who had been in hospital with a gunshot wound, raised himself on his crutches and shouted. "Up the Republic".

Daily Mirror, 7/11/42

WORKERS ARE ALWAYS WRONG.

"When organised labour accepted the Essential Work Order as a war-time necessity it renounced the workers' right to leave his job on the understanding that the employer should give up the right to dismiss him, except for "serious misconduct". It was expected that the order would be so drafted and administered as to operate impartially against offenders on either side. That it works in practice to the serious disadvantage of the worker has recently been shown by a case to which the National Council for Civil Liberties draws attention in the current issue of its journal. A workman successfully appealed against his dismissal from an aircraft factory. The National Service officer ordered his reinstatement. He attended for work, as directed, but the firm ignored the order. Prosecuted by the Ministry of Labour, it pleaded guilty and paid its fine. But the worker, having perforce lost several months'

the Press

wages, is still not reinstated. The court has no power to order his reinstatement. If, on the other hand, it had been the worker who had failed to comply with a direction from the National Service Officer, he could not only have been imprisoned for his disobedience but fined £5 a day until he did comply. This fault in the law is not a recent discovery. An exactly similar case, involving another aircraft firm, occurred ten months ago. Is Mr. Bevin really satisfied with this sort of justice? *It is plainly his responsibility.*" *The Manchester Guardian Weekly* 20/11/42

"THINGS RICH MEN CAN'T AFFORD"

"Expensive-looking chauffeur-driven cars are now depositing their passengers—usually women—outside London's big stores for Christmas shopping.

But no infringement of petrol rationing is being committed. The cars are "hackney carriages," hired for the afternoon.

A private hire firm said last night: "Our cost for a car and chauffeur for three hours' shopping, is £1 3s. 6."

Daily Express 10/12/42

The workers, of course, can be jammed tight in Lord Ashfield's "cattle trucks".

BOY'S FUTURE

"With your guts, you could be of real service to your country. If you were older and had the training, you would make a fine Commando." said Mr. Basil Henriques, chairman at East London Juvenile Court to-day, to a 15-year-old boy.

Six weeks ago the boy was found guilty of breaking and entering. He was said to be the ringleader of a gang of boys who "took extraordinary risks in breaking into shops and houses". *Evening Standard* 30/11/42

THE CASE OF JAN VALTIN

Jan Valtin, the author of "*Out of the Night*", the successful American best-seller (also published in this country, but with a considerable amount of matter relating to the Communist Party of Great Britain omitted), has been interned on Ellis Island by the American authorities, and is being held for deportation to Germany as an undesirable alien at the end of the war.

War Commentary described last year the attempts of the Communist Party in the U.S.A. to get Valtin deported to Germany, where certain execution awaited him, or to South America, where he might have "committed suicide" like Walter Krivitsky and Trotsky (or did Trotsky commit suicide?). At that time Russia was not yet in the war, and the American papers were trying to discredit the strikes in many factories by describing them as 'communist-inspired' and were working up public opinion against the U.S.S.R. with reference to the violation of Finland etc. Valtin, until his recent arrest, had been at liberty on a \$5,000 surety under a previous deportation order issued in March 1941. It is just too bad for him that the political set-up has changed since then; now that F.D.R. and Joe Stalin have become comrades-in-arms the Board of Immigration Appeals have reviewed his case, and have ruled that his career is "so marked with violence and treachery, that it would be difficult, if not wholly unwarranted, to conclude that his present reliability of good conduct had been established. We find respondent's proof insufficient to show that he has completely divested himself of his past of destruction, lawlessness and wavering loyalties". It seems that a man's character goes up and down with the foreign policy of the country he takes refuge in!

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JAN. 10th REV. STICKLER.

KINGSTON TRADES AND LABOUR CLUB

GRANGE ROAD (Back of G.P.O.)

Capitalist 'Reconstruction'

THIS REPORT, made at the request of the President of the Board of Trade, serves as a grim warning of what we should expect from the big industrialists during the post-war years. The Report was accepted by the 182 Trade Associations which are constituent bodies of the F.B.I., and passed unanimously by the Grand Council on 15th May, 1942.

The following are some of the more blatant examples of the reactionary attitude of the F.B.I. towards economic problems:—

1. After acknowledging that economic relationships have a large bearing on world peace (discovery!), the report states that—“... the Democracies and other peace-loving nations . . . should maintain a sufficient force to curb aggression . . . otherwise any post-war economic structure will be founded on a quicksand.” What this really means is that any economic structure envisaged by the F.B.I. would not be likely to remove international friction.

2. Aspects of “reconstruction” mentioned are immediate relief, prevention of “economic collapse” and “helping them (other countries) to restore . . . the public finances, and the confidence of their peoples in their monetary systems” (our italics).

3. Preservation of “economic stability” by regulation of imports and exports—*quotas, preferential treatment and exchange control* (our italics).

4. In a section entitled “World Purchasing Power” we come across the statement—“Over-production of raw materials and foodstuffs easily occurs and is difficult to check.”

5. The report refers to the possibilities of increasing the individual standard of life in the Colonial possessions of the British Empire and other countries and China, where a small, “a very small” (careful now!) rise would have a profound effect on world economy. However, it goes on to say that “Substantial finance would be needed and, after the war, that may be no easy matter.”

After referring to the possibilities of “lease-lend” as a post-war policy, the report says—“Such a policy, if feasible, might be considered harmful to certain established interests. The question of where the balance of advantage lay would need careful consideration”. (Very smooth!) Also, a delightful reference is made to giving ‘undeveloped areas’ of the world the “urge to improve their standard of life” (!)

The Finance of Industry.

After stating that even the best plans for reconstruction will be useless if financial resources are not available, the proposal is made that the Government should adopt a policy that would enable “adequate reserves” to be built up for post-war development. This passage includes an attack on the E.P.T.

Too great a degree of Government control would be dangerous and might “stifle the incentive for individual effort and of private enterprise—which are the keystones of business efficiency.”

Agriculture.

Whilst acknowledging the desirability of a prosperous agriculture—representing an important volume of purchasing power for industrial products, the report goes on to say “By no possibility could we ever hope to make this country self-supporting in foodstuffs, so long as it

has a population approximating its present number.” The usual conclusion was reached that we must import food so that countries supplying us with the food could import our industrial products. (See “New Life to the Land” by Geo. Woodcock. F.P. 6d.)

Demobilisation.

Early demobilisation of “personnel on the selling side” is recommended, this being “necessary for the re-creation of the commercial machine, which has been put out of gear by the war.”

Organisation of Industry.

The F.B.I. was built on the Trade Association movement, the main object of which was to eliminate “uneconomic competition” (i.e. to keep up prices).

A naive plea is made that the Government must regard industry as a partner in the national life and not “as an interest which must be regarded with mistrust and suspicion.” As though anyone would think of mistrusting the altruistic motives of big business!

Financial policy must be based primarily upon the interests of industry and commerce, and industry should be fully consulted before the Government commits itself to any future tariff policy.

There we have the picture of the post-war world if the Federation of British Industries has anything to do with it—the same old competitive system with private profit as the mainspring—faith to be preserved in financial undertakings—quotas, tariffs, preferential treatment—checking of “over-production of foodstuffs” to preserve “balance of trade”—agriculture to fit in with the interests of industry, irrespective of the real needs of the community—the commercial machine to be re-started, ensuring a continuance of economic slavery.

On all sides people are saying that we shall not return to the conditions existing in pre-war years, of economic insecurity and so on, but, unless we are prepared to challenge the power of the real rulers of the country—the big industrialists and financiers—we shall find that something very similar will be introduced—under the guise of a “New Order”.

Watch the F.B.I.

L. A. H.

ANARCHIST INDUSTRIAL POLICY

TRADE UNIONISM OR
SYNDICALISM 24 pp. 3d.

By

TOM BROWN

War Commentary readers are already familiar with Tom Brown's clear, straightforward articles. This pamphlet deals with the present union organisation, and contrasts with it the syndicalist methods of workers' organisation.

Nationalism and India

THE STRUGGLE OF the Indian people for national independence is being fought out with tremendous heroism and sacrifice and suffering under the batons and bayonets of British Imperialism. But will national independence bring emancipation and freedom to the workers and peasants of India? Is the struggle for Nationalism enough? These are the questions discussed in the following article.

THERE CAN BE no real solution of the Indian problem, as far as the day-to-day life of the Indian masses is concerned, so long as the struggle against imperialism remains a struggle for national independence. Many are dying in the smouldering strife now gripping India, dying bravely, attacked by the lathis and bayonets of British troops. Our sympathies are with them. But when the tear gas smoke clears, should the Hindu struggle continue along its present lines, no worth while goal will be in sight. The hard and brutal fight of the Indian people for human dignity and a decent life will still have to be fought.

The British imperialists will never get out of India unless driven out. The sight of their empire tottering has made them imbecile. They indulge in rosy visions of Indian progress during the era of British domination. (If you have the time, see the last few speeches of Lord Halifax). They cite statistics showing how the national wealth has increased 1 per cent. every year—overlooking the fact, however, that during this time life expectancy has been decreasing. The normal Indian baby has the prospect of living to the ripe age of 26. Maybe that is how the Imperialists hope to solve the Indian problem. . . . when the Indian hasn't any life expectancy there will no Indian problem. This isn't too far from the truth as to how far London shareholders will go toward a solution. Ex corporation lawyer Sir Stafford Cripps. His Majesty's Revolutionary Ambassador, is bundled off to New Delhi, a plan for domination status in his satchel—to be looked into after the war. It is needless to enlarge on the Tory conception of Freedom and Justice. In India their high-sounding words boil down to bleak servitude for the masses of workers and peasants.

IS NATIONHOOD ENOUGH?

But does this mean all is right with the Nationalists? Some radicals and most liberals can't think straight when confronted with a colonial people in conflict with an imperialist power. Their sentiments are proper but they are usually unable to draw proper conclusions. 'Historical destiny' and 'self-determination' are just phrases that confuse the issue. Mere struggle against a recognized evil is not enough. Too frequently has victory helped create a worse evil. Struggle for what? Is the fight for nationhood a fight that will advance the well-being of India, of the rest of the world? There are the important questions demanding solution.

Clearly the victories of fascism lay bare the sinister role played by the idea of nationalism. The writings of Mussolini and Hitler reveal that an essential of fascism is a strong national movement based upon a reflowering of national values. Nationalism, to no less a degree than capitalism, is a nourishing root of fascism. Nationalism strikes against the pressing tasks of the present: individual freedom unhindered by unjustified values outside the individual himself and the economic federation of mankind.

SCRAP NATIONALISM!

Nationalism in the field of human culture is utterly antagonistic to the normal development of culture which is universal in scope, knowing no national barriers. Science, the passion for justice, individual freedom, the growth of arts—whatever is best in humanity—finds origin and development in complete disregard of national differences. Nationalism smothers the creative aspirations of the individual. It is a machine that forces upon him an allegiance to an outlived tradition of ideas and values.

Were Indian nationhood a reality it would be an evil. But as presently constituted in the world to-day, India as an independent nation is an impossibility. The major nations would still have India under their thumbs just as much as the so-called independent nations of Latin America. And there is a greater bulwark. India is a patchwork of clashing national elements. The Hindu struggle for nationhood is opposed by an equally fervent Moslem struggle for Pakistan (a separate Moslem State). Mohamed Ali Jinnah, president of the All India Moslem League, recently stated that his 80,000,000 followers would fight to the death should Britain accede to Hindu demands. And these are just two of the national elements! From such a patchwork, the struggle for nationalism is likely to end in a bloody, anti-social civil war with British or more likely Japanese imperialism finally winning out.

The national idea in economics inevitably leads to injustice, war and imperialism. The great difference existing in various parts of the world in regard to natural resources, technical skill, abundance of capital demands the complete scrapping of the national principle. Otherwise, as the past decade has fully shown, the economic life of a country, hemmed in by national barriers, must press forward ravenously in search of more sparsely populated sections possessing all those things that are necessary for its economic development.

CONGRESS AND VESTED INTERESTS.

The vested interest section of the Nationalist Congress Party is its controlling section. Among Gandhi's main supporters are numerous Indian millionaires. For one Ganshymdas Birla, the powerful Calcutta industrialist, at whose palatial estate Gandhi resided when taken into custody by the British. In regard to Gandhi's financial supporters, a recent well-documented study of the Indian nationalist cause has this to say:

“ Of course, many Indian industrialists within the Congress have no use for Gandhi's economic theories and his rejection of all forms of modern industrialization and his advocacy of a return to the primitive life of the spinning wheel and village industries. But for the time being, until freedom from British control can be achieved, Gandhi fulfills a unique role in leading the Indian peasant and workers while simultaneously protecting the interests of the industrial and land-owning groups. Thus the characteristic feature of modern Indian politics—the in

dispensability of Gandhi—is in reality the expression of the conflicting interests represented in the Indian nationalist movement. And it is this conflict of interest, particularly the fear of the right-wing nationalists of the consequences of a militant popular movement, that explains why at so many critical moments in the history of the nationalist movement, the Congress under Gandhi followed a seemingly inconsistent, vacillating, and defeatist policy.”

(*India Without Fable: Mitchell*)

Gandhi himself stems from a middle-class background. Before becoming Messiah of Indian freedom, he had a high-priced law practice. His capitalist friends have had to watch too long the British plundering India of her richest fruit. How envious they must now be of the imperialist successes of Japan, a nation infinitesimal compared to India. National independence would be the first step toward the realization of their dreams. As far as the Congress intellectuals are concerned, Nehru for one, British withdrawal would mean for them quite a few plums of bureaucracy, of administrative power. As for the workers and peasants of India, their lot will remain the same miserable one—Imperialism or Nationalism victorious—unless the present struggle goes beyond the national aims of the Congress leadership and becomes a war against landlords, money-lenders, industrialists, and all other vested interests, Indian as well as British. And, indeed, should the present rioting develop unexpectedly into a social revolution, the peasants and workers taking their fates in their own hands and seizing the factories and lands, we can be sure that their Nationalist leaders will sell them down the river without hesitation. Like the British in Burma, Malay and now India, the non-violent middle-class Nationalist Congress is afraid to put effective weapons in the hands of the masses. They fear that what they have will forever be washed away. And we need go no further back than 1938 to find that Gandhi, in the event of social revolution, is not so great an idealist as not to make a satisfactory deal with imperialist authority.

CONGRESS AND THE IMPERIALISTS.

At that time there was the case of Dhenkanal, a small Indian state, where the people revolted after 100 days of terroristic forced labour building palaces and roads. Despite brutal repressions the masses were able by their economic strength to wrest important concessions from the Rajah. They knew that the Rajah would try to break his word at the first opportunity so they organized for more radical changes in the social structure of Dhenkanal. This revolutionary upsurge began to spread but the Rajah did not have to break his word. Gandhi sent instructions to stop the movement. After all the bloodshed, the Nationalist leader stabbed the Dhenkanal uprising in the back.

It will be worth while in summation to dwell for a moment on these pregnant words of Rabindranath Tagore, the great Hindu philosopher and poet who died in 1939:

“India has never had any real sense of nationalism But in as much as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly political in its attitude, we have tried to develop in ourselves despite our inheritance from the past, a belief in our eventual political destiny It is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity”

There is no easy solution to the Indian problem, and no glib political scheme can create harmony out of the

present strife. As far as Britain is concerned the problem is clear: the problem of India is not her concern, she has no right whatsoever to say what the Indians must or must not do. But there begins the problem, the vital issue at stake—the ending of the servitude of the Indian peasants and workers. This cannot come about except through the efforts of the peasants and workers themselves. If the Nationalist leaders remain in control come hell or high water the result can be far worse, far more reactionary than British Imperialism ever was. But first, and this is the pre-requisite for any social advancement in India, there must be a revolution in the attitudes of the Indian masses. They must banish from their minds the cobwebs of a fatalistic religion that resigns them to their meager lot in the hope of golden slippers in the promised land. They must not put their trust in any Messiah no matter how long said Messiah can sit cross-legged without partaking of food.

With a decent standard of living for all, bread controlled by the people, begins a region's opportunity to make of individual differences a valuable stimulant to its neighbour's provincialism, not a menace to its neighbour's life. On the issue of bread the millions of undernourished Indians, Hindu and Moslem, casteman, aborigine and harijan can find a unity far more fruitful than nationalist unity, mask of reaction in India as elsewhere. Imperialist and nationalist greed be in the path of the conquest of bread. Let none dare overlook one while fighting the other.

W.O.C.

(We reprint the above article from the New York Anarchist paper “WHY”, and we are in agreement with the main conclusions reached. We think however that the author accepts too readily the figure of 80,000,000 given by Mr. Jinnah for his following; this is usually taken to be a considerable exaggeration. British propagandists, of course, overstress the size of the Moslem League in order to give point to their contention that the so-called “Communal problem” is the fundamental issue in India to-day, and so divert attention from the underlying class struggle. In our opinion the author of the article seems by implication to give too much weight to the Pakistan issue. One other small point of dissent; while agreeing entirely with the analysis of Gandhi's role in the “struggle for National Independence”, we do not consider his middle class background as having anything necessarily to do with his attitude. The lives and work of Bakunin and Kropotkin—to mention only two obvious examples—support our view. On the other hand, we think it no accident that Gandhi should have chosen the profession of lawyer. The law has ever been the breeding ground for politicians, from the earliest times up to Lenin.—Editors).

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DURRUTI

IT HAS OFTEN been said that the Spanish Revolution of 1936 threw up into prominence no 'world figures' comparable with Lenin and Trotsky in the Russian Revolution. But an exception must be made in the case of the Anarchist Durruti, the hero of the Aragon Front and later of the defence of Madrid—Durruti, who became almost a legend in his lifetime and symbolized in his person the struggle of the revolutionary workers and peasants of Spain.

Not that Durruti himself would have welcomed the prominence which history has given to him. He did not believe in leadership, but in equality instead, and he knew that it was to the common action of the Spanish workers and peasants themselves that the successes of the Revolution were due. Yet it was the devotion and heroism of Anarchists like Durruti and Ascaso that inspired the tremendous energy and self-sacrifice of the revolutionary fighters in July 1936, and will continue to be an inspiration to militants all over the world.

Buenaventura Durruti was born on July 14th, 1896, at Leon, the son of a libertarian socialist railway worker. There were nine children in the family. One of Durruti's brothers was killed during the great Asturian rising of October, 1934, another fought on the Madrid front during the revolution; all his other brothers were executed by the Fascists. Franco, being unable to strike at Durruti himself, had his mother murdered also.

At the age of 14, he began to work as a mechanic on the railways, and in 1917 took a prominent part in the great railway strike of that year, which was finally crushed by the government by measures of the most ruthless severity. As a consequence of the militant role he had played Durruti had to leave Spain and go to France where he worked for three years as a mechanic.

In 1920 he returned to Spain to take part in the underground revolutionary struggle. The Anarchist movement was brutally persecuted, their militants being tortured and murdered by Martinez Anido, the Governor of Catalonia, and Arlegui, his Chief of Police. The President of the National Committee of the C.N.T., Buenacasa, persuaded Durruti to leave San Sebastian and help in the struggle in Barcelona. At that time all the revolutionary unions had been suppressed by the Government, and yellow unions were formed for the purpose of breaking strikes and destroying the anarchist syndicates. These yellow unions were mainly financed by Soldevila, Cardinal of Saragossa, who derived his enormous income from the fact that he was one of the chief shareholders in numerous gambling establishments attached to fashionable hotels and Casinos all over Spain. As in the time of Canovas, tyranny produced its inevitable result. In the teeth of this formidable oppression Durruti and Ascaso planned the execution of the arch-reactionary Cardinal, and successfully carried it into effect.

They were compelled once more to flee the country, and went to Argentine, where they were received by the workers with tremendous enthusiasm. Not so however the South American governments. The two militants were hounded by the police through Argentine, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile and Mexico. In Argentine they were condemned to death. In the end they had to return to Europe, living for a short time in Paris.

There they met and became friends with the Russian Anarchist Nestor Makhno, who had so brilliantly organized the Ukrainian peasant militias which drove out in succession the German armies under Skoropadsky and later Petlura, and the reactionary White Army of Denikin. The interventionist wars over, the Bolsheviks turned on Makhno, branded him a 'counter-revolutionary', and condemned him to death. He succeeded in escaping from Russia and went to live in poverty in Paris, where he died of tuberculosis in 1934. Their careers were so similar in many respects that it seems certain that Durruti's

by

JOHN HEWETSON

friendship with Makhno exerted a great influence on him. Both were brilliantly successful military organizers, and both demonstrated the Anarchist conception of voluntary discipline and order which was so marked a feature of Makhno's Peasant Army of 1918—1921 and the Durruti Column of 1936, forming a strong contrast to the bourgeois type of Army discipline and organization retained by the Red Army, and imported into the Spanish 'People's Army' after Stalinist influence had dissolved the revolutionary militias.

Since his death, the Stalinists have frequently claimed that Durruti was 'very near to the Communist position' in Spain, seeking to reflect some of the Anarchist militant's brilliance on to themselves. Durruti's actions, his methods of organization, his works all give the lie to these Communist pretensions. Yet even if we did not have this evidence, his knowledge of the behaviour of Lenin and Trotsky towards his friend Makhno from whom he learned so much, would have made him indignantly deny the suggestion, had he been alive to hear it.

While they were in Paris at this time, Durruti and Ascaso made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Alfonso XIII, Spain's last king. They were arrested and imprisoned for a year. On their release, the Argentine Government demanded their extradition so that the sentence of death that awaited them there, could be carried into effect. But the French Anarchist movement organized a tremendous libertarian campaign on behalf of the Spanish comrades and succeeded in frustrating this attempt. Nevertheless, on their release they had to leave France within two weeks. Belgium and Luxembourg refused them asylum, so they went to Berlin, only to be expelled soon after by the Social Democratic Police.

Durruti and Ascaso returned to Paris where they lived illegally for a short time. But they refused to remain dependant on the solidarity of their comrades, and secured a job at Lyons. Six months later they were discovered by the police and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. They then lived illegally for some time in Belgium and Germany (where they made the acquaintance of the German Anarchist Syndicalist, Augustin Souchy), until at last the Belgian police granted them permits to stay.

During all these years of almost continuous persecution, wandering and imprisonment, Durruti and Ascaso took an active part in the European revolutionary movements and kept in touch with their comrades in the struggle in Spain.

UNDER THE SPANISH REPUBLIC.

With the fall of the Spanish monarchy in April 1931, Durruti and Ascaso returned to Spain. Here Durruti fought against the view of the "moderate" syndicalist, Angel Pestana that the Syndicalist movement should support the Republic. The huge majority of the Spanish Anarchist Syndicalists shared Durruti's view, only a tiny minority following Pestana's parliamentary party.

Durruti was arrested again in January 1932. With several other Anarchists he was deported to North Africa for many months by the Left Republican Government, just two months after the birth of his daughter.

During the "Two Black Years" of 1933 to 36, the reactionary Lerroux-Gil Robles Government made Durruti the object of continuous persecution by the Republican police. He worked in a factory, and was a member of the Textile Workers Syndicate in Barcelona. He spoke at meetings and engaged in organizational work, being again and again arrested, and spending most of his time in prison. For months on end the Catalan-Left Government held him in custody without making any charge against him at all.

On July 19th 1936, Durruti was in hospital recovering from an operation for hernia. Although the wound was still open, he insisted on getting up, and on July 20th took part in the assault on the Ataranzaras Barracks, where his life-long friend and comrade Ascaso was killed fighting at his side. Durruti was among the first to enter the Hotel Colon when it was stormed after a siege of thirty-six hours during which every one of its windows concealed a rifle or machine gun raining a hail of bullets on the almost unarmed workers.

In a few days he had already organized a column of Anarchist volunteers—the famous Durruti column, soon to number 9,000 men. On July 24th, he led the militiamen out into Aragon, clearing the Fascists out before the revolutionary fervour with which his column and the Aragon peasants were inspired. "Wherever his column advanced, they socialized, they collectivized, they prepared everything for free socialism" (Souchy). He laid the foundations of the great advance into Aragon which established the Front and safeguarded the revolutionary peasant collectives on which the food supply of Catalonia depended. The ground gained by this great advance was maintained until, in the face of the Fascist interventionists on Franco's side without, and the counter revolution engineered by the Communists within, Catalonia collapsed two and a half years later.

At the beginning of November, Franco's four armies were converging on Madrid. Franco had been recognized by Hitler and Mussolini in expectation of the fall of the city, and the Spanish Fascists had already announced over the radio the date of their impending entry into the capital. Meanwhile the newly set up government of Caballero had moved to Valencia. In this moment of desperate crisis Durruti, with 4,000 of his column, moved from Aragon to the Madrid Front. His arrival had a tremendous effect on the bomb-battered defenders, and much of the credit for the successful defence lies with his column.

On November 20th, just as he was getting out of a car at the front line, Durruti was shot in the back from a small hotel in Moncloa, and died instantly. His death was a terrible blow to the Spanish Revolution, though his example continued to inspire the terrible three year struggle

of the Spanish workers. His body was taken to Barcelona, and half a million people stood in the rain at his funeral, and followed his coffin to the grave.

The legendary halo with which Durruti's name has been surrounded has obscured the recognition of the clear libertarian ideas which were the foundation of his actions. We have seen that his opposition to the Second Republic was justified in the event; and the success which attended his military operations also testifies to the efficiency of the principles of working class revolutionary action which he understood so well.

He believed that social justice and absolute freedom were fundamental to a successful anti-fascist movement. For him there could be no separating the war from the revolution, no "win the war first, and attend to the revolution afterwards"; and he was right. For with the triumph of the Counter-revolution, came also the collapse of the anti-fascist struggle, and Franco's gruesome victory.

In the military conduct of the struggle he urged the most complete and efficient co-ordination of the popular militias. His timely intervention on the Madrid front in November showed that he fully grasped the needs of the military situation as a whole. But he absolutely opposed the re-introduction of bourgeois methods of military organization. "I have been an Anarchist all my life" he said to Emma Goldman, "I hope I have remained one. I should consider it very sad indeed, had I to turn into a general and rule the men with a military rod. They have come to me voluntarily, they are ready to stake their lives in our anti-fascist fight. I believe, as I always have, in freedom. The freedom which rests on the sense of responsibility. I consider discipline indispensable, but it must be inner discipline, motivated by a common purpose and a strong feeling of comradeship". The Durruti column was the best disciplined force in anti-fascist Spain. As one of its militiamen said: "The comrades know that this time they are fighting for the working class and not for a capitalist minority or for the enemy. Knowing this, they all exercise strictest self-discipline. The militia man does not obey—he pursues, together with his comrades, the realization of his ideal as a social necessity".

Durruti understood the value of anonymous work; he had nothing in common with the limelight vanity of Left politicians. He ate and slept with his comrades in the militia. When there was a shortage of shoes, he went barefoot; when there were insufficient mattresses to go round, he gave his to the youngest or the oldest or the feeblest to lie on. One of their number wrote: "The column is neither militarily or bureaucratically organized, it has grown organically from the syndicalist movement. It is a social revolutionary union and not a military troop. We represent a union of oppressed proletarians, fighting for the freedom of all. The column is the work of Durruti who determined its spirit and defended its libertarian principles until his last breath. The foundations of the column are comradeship and voluntary self-discipline. And the end of its activity is nothing else than libertarian communism. . . . We will remain armed proletarians, voluntarily exercising the necessary discipline".

Emma Goldman describes how Durruti maintained the spirit of the militiamen at a time when every man was needed to stem the fascist tide. He listened sympathetically to a comrade who wanted to go home to see his mother who was ill with malnutrition and overwork. "Don't you see, comrade," said Durruti, "the war you and I are waging is to safeguard our Revolution and the Revolution is to do away with misery and suffering of the poor. We must conquer our fascist enemy. We must win the war. You are an essential part of it. Don't you see, comrade?" Durruti's comrades did see, they usually remained.

Documents of Working Class History

SYNDICALIST METHODS OUTLINED IN 1869

AN INTERESTING foreshadowing of the future syndicalist theories was given in the early days of the International Working Men's Association. The Bakuninist section's absolute opposition to the State and to political action, which brought them into immediate conflict with the Marxist groups in the International, is clearly stated in the following speech which the Belgian delegate, Professor Hins, delivered at the Fourth Congress at Basle in 1869:

"Hins said he could not agree with those who looked upon trade societies as mere strike and wages' societies, nor was he in favour of having central committees made up of all trades. The present trade unions would some day overthrow the present political organization altogether; they represented the social and political organization of the future. The whole labouring population would range itself, according to occupation, into different groups, and this would lead to a new political organization of society. He wanted no intermeddling of the State; they had enough of that in Belgium already. He did not consider it a disadvantage that trade unions kept aloof more or less from politics, at least in his country. By trying to reform the State, or to take part in its councils, they would virtually acknowledge its right of existence. Whatever the English, the Swiss, the Germans and the Americans might hope to accomplish by means of the present political State, the Belgians repudiated theirs." (*English report of the discussion, pp. 31—32*)

(continued from p. 14)

Such methods may fetch superior smiles from the intellectuals of the political parties. And Durruti's habit of eating with his men, queuing up for soup with the others, was criticised by the communists and socialists at the time as involving a needless waste of energy. Durruti they said, was needed for more important work, and should not have to undergo the inconveniences of the ordinary militiamen. But Durruti himself thought otherwise; all his life he had lived and fought by the side of his working comrades. He did not believe in superior intellectuals; "The factory and the workshop are the workers' university", he had said at a meeting in 1933. And the discipline and efficiency and heroism of his column, and its tremendous achievements, show that he was right. The "great figures" of the Spanish Revolution were the workers and peasants themselves. Their achievements were built with their own hands and from their own ideals. They did not need politicians to show them how to do it. The Anarchist Durruti simply crystallized in himself their history and background of oppression, their ideals and struggle for freedom.

He went on to say that "Trade unions will subsist after the suppression of wages, not in name, but in deed. They will then be the organization of labour,operating a vast distribution of labour from one end of the world to the other. They will replace the ancient political systems; in place of a confused and heterogeneous representation, there will be the representation of labour.

"They will be at the same time agents of decentralization for the centres will differ according to the industries which will form, in some manner, each one a separate State, and will prevent for ever the return to the ancient form of centralized State, which will not, however, prevent another form of government for local purposes. As is evident, if we are reproached for being indifferent to every form of government, it isbecause we detest them all in the same way, and because we believe that it is only on their ruins that a society conforming to the principles of justice can be established," (*Compte-Rendu of the Fourth International Congress of the International Working Men's Association, pp. 85-86*)

It will be seen that, allowing for a use of terms which might to-day seem ambiguous ('Government' and 'State' used to designate organization, for example), many of the root ideas of modern Syndicalism were already being put forward by the Bakuninist section of the International 73 years ago.

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