

### Stealing Wages!

THE GOVERNMENT is about to end imprisonment for debt. Instead it proposes to introduce the Scottish law of attachment upon wages. In these proposals they have mixed humbug, cowardice and contempt for the interests of the public.

Contrary to general belief, most imprisonment for debt has already been abolished. (It was the so-called 'reformers' who wanted it kept on, fearing that without it 'the working-man will never get credit'—a now well-explored 19th-century myth!) Except in one or two instances where corporations have wangled it into Acts of Parliament (the most noticeable being borough councils who can imprison for non-payment of rates), imprisonment today is for those who refuse to pay, rather than those who cannot. It is necessary to prove means before a county court, and make offers to pay; provided the debtor plays the rules, and has the time to appear constantly asking for revision of his offer (and does not lose too heavily in wages by this appearance), he has fairly the whip-hand over the creditor, who is paying heavily for barristers who manage to charge him considerably more than they collect from the debtor.

To parade the abolition of imprisonment for debt as a reform is in these circumstances laughable anyway; but there are many prisoners who are defaulters on maintenance payments to wives. Here again, it is the obstinate, not the penniless, who suffer. If they conceal their earnings, they can get away with it. In most cases, courts must accept the word of the debtor as to what he earns.

In attaching wages, and making the courts privy to what the wages are, it becomes impossible to get away with anything, and obviously favours the creditor considerably. It is noticeable that whenever Scottish law is more reasonable than English law, Scottish law is 'brought into line' with English law; when Scottish law, as in this case, is more reactionary, it has something to teach us. The attachment of wages for civil debts can result in a man receiving nothing whatever at the end of the week, after tax, insurance, attachments upon wage, various contributions and fares have been met. This has happened in the States, too, where men have found it just not worth while working to get so many attachments slapped upon their pay packet. Almost all cases of theft in the Army can be traced to the practice of letting a man receive nothing at the end of a week; it is true that, in this case, he is fed and sheltered. This of course would not apply in civil life. On the whole it would be far better to apply for national assistance than to work, the moment that the attachments came in; this will be the reply of a great many workers to the new 'reforms'; the obvious thing to do is to get the sack and sit back and wait until the State sees the point. The defaulting ex-husbands will certainly do this, if they are ready to go to the extent of prison, as things stand.

#### NEW 'TOLPUDDLE'

Why has the Government suddenly

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DISCUSSES

### Derevolution -isation

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plumped for this dubious 'reform' after it has been rejected for so many years? Employers on the whole do not like it (it is after all the wage system that keeps the workers working, and to give them nothing, or far less than a normal wage, at the end of a week, is not the way to run a railway... this is PAYE on a much larger scale). Lawyers of course support anything that gives them more work, but they are well satisfied with the county court system, though judges sometimes find it inconsistent with their dignity to be acting as the collecting agents of hire purchase companies who force sales upon people not 'credit-worthy' and then get the courts to back up the payments. To them, the solution is not to give credit.

The sentimental can sometimes be worked up about the poor debtor languishing in prison; but in truth the only ones who do are those who do so on point of principle (e.g. the husband who, admitting his ability to pay, point-blank refuses to contribute to his former wife's comfort; pointing out her ability to look after herself) and have chosen prison rather than payment. The law is now going to prevent him making this choice, just as PAYE prevents the worker from choosing whether or not he will pay income tax.

The reason for this pseudo-reform is the Prices and Incomes Bill which aims to outlaw strikes. The Combination Laws are coming back; once more the working classes are going to be prevented from organising to better their conditions; there will be new 'Tolpuddle Martyrs', and this in the name of organised labour. But as organised labour in government does not want to see 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' in prison, for the sake of appearances, it is going to make it impossible for strikers to be sent to prison. It would never do for Socialism Victorious to put trade unionists in jail; but they are going to be fined heavily, and the fines placed on a PAYE basis. This will not prevent martyrdom, but it will make it seem less glorious than prison, and the apparent pettiness of the persecution will make it seem less real.

It would be slightly more honest to sell unofficial strikers into slavery. They would if they could, no doubt, but in the meantime they are making do with the amendment of the law relating to the non-payment of fines, being paraded as a 'reform', a triumph of liberalism, and one of the things Labour gets done.

A. MELTZER.

### PROVOS IN LONDON

IT IS PERHAPS a measure of the political sophistication which has come in the wake of the Committee of 100 that many of the ideas, plans, strategies and theories outlined by Bernhard de Vries and Irene van der Weetering, the two Amsterdam provos who recently visited London to put their case, seemed terrifyingly naive. There is no doubt that the English press did convey a very confusing image of the provos but, having been to Amsterdam and having heard the provos in London, I do not consider this the least bit surprising. When van de Weetering's husband described the provos as a 'heart rending, muddle-headed organisation' he seemed to be making the fairest comment so far. No vicious attack on the level of *Le Figaro's* has been made by any English paper (provos are 'nazis, communists... vicious petits bourgeois, beatniks, delinquents'). Nevertheless the provos' arrival in England to present their case was a step in the right direction: it may be an indication of the Committee of 100's failure to explain itself overseas that the provos are so muddled. It is no kindness to ignore the confusion in provo thinking. The provos have,

# Vietnam 'dialogue with Death'

It had become a tradition during the last few years that dictators acted and democracies protested, a division of labour which seemed to satisfy everybody.—Arthur Koestler: 'dialogue with death' (1937).

THIS APHORISM is basically as true today as when Koestler wrote it in a Spanish jail during the revolution (which he called civil war) when the German and Italian aeroplanes bombed the Spanish cities, while the democracies meekly protested. Perhaps the distinction between democracy and dictatorship is not so great today as it was 30 years ago. Nevertheless, after the black smoke rose to the sky near Hanoi and Haiphong the democracies duly protested. The time and motion man with his stop-watch and taperecorder stood in the Grosvenor Squares of the world and reported back to his government. 'Nothing to fear, your excellencies,' he said, 'they were in good voice, a bit fractious but I daresay they are all in their beds by now.'

The Vietnam war has been going on since the end of the Second World War. The US entered after the Korean cease-fire, but basically both the purpose and the reason for these two wars are the same. Military economics demand a theatre of war somewhere, otherwise the system which is based on war-production must collapse. Protesting against war is the only human thing to do,

but without changing the system that needs war, the condition for war remains.

Without an egalitarian system of distribution of the real wealth of the world the need for war will exist as it is the only way that you can have full employment in a capitalist economy. Should the Vietnam war cease tomorrow, a war in Thailand or some such place will start the day after.

The Chinese and Russian 'Communist' systems also need a localised war for the same reason. They have the added incentive that as long as the Vietnam war continues, they can make fiery speeches, protests and the inevitable recruitment of party members all over the world.

The 'Communist' powers are supporting North Vietnam with brave words but with hardly any weapons. Possibly the North Vietnamese cannot pay for the latest anti-aircraft batteries. It was pitiful to read the 'Agence Presse' correspondent's report from Hanoi where he observed the bombing raid on the oil dumps. The soldiers 'hunching their shoulders, came running to climb the outside staircases leading to the roof-tops where they fired off their rifles in the direction of the aircraft.' Imagine shooting down supersonic jet bombers with ordinary rifles and machine guns!

After the bombing of Hanoi the Chinese, of course, protested. A statement by them described the

raids as 'barbarous, wanton and a criminal act of aggression and war. In accordance with the interests and demands of the Vietnamese people we will at any time take such actions as we deem necessary'. Words, fighting words, dishonest words.

The war is being 'escalated' by the US Government according to the 'scientific' formulae worked out by 'Professor' Kahn. What stage have they reached now in their war of nerves? A year ago there was furore when it was revealed that the Americans were using gas warfare. Now, after the initial indignation has subsided, gas is used consistently in Vietnam. Remember the horror with which napalm bombs and lazy dogs were greeted? All this is now part of modern warfare.

For a long time the Americans have talked about the possibility of bombing Hanoi. Now they have done it and public protests have been voiced, they will do it again. It won't be news next time. They are already hinting that the next step is going to be the bombing of Red River-Delta with the consequent flooding of North Vietnam. After that they may use 'tactical' nuclear weapons. And so on.

What should anarchists do in the circumstances? We should continue to protest but never lose an opportunity with our literature or banners or private conversation to try to explain the cause of war and the need for an egalitarian society.

Of course a 'crisis' situation tends to stultify thinking. Even 'comrades' urge us, like latter-day Kropotkins, to choose sides. There are no short cuts to anarchism or to eradicating war for that matter. If we are to stand by our principles we must be prepared to lose a few friends. R.

### A Visit to Stuart Christie

I, A FRIEND of Stuart Christie, went over to Madrid on June 3 in an attempt to visit him in the Carabanchel Prison.

On my arrival in Madrid I reported to the Consulate to receive a letter of introduction to the Director at the Prison. When I went to the prison I was told that before I could see Stuart I would have to go back to the Embassy to get a letter of introduction to the Director General of Prisons at the Ministry of Justice. They in turn told me I would have to see the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Foreign Office. This meant yet another letter of introduction. The Minister for European Affairs interviewed me and then said he would get in touch with me later on to inform me whether I had been granted the permit or not.

When the word came through on June 17 that I could visit Stuart the next day I was sent to the Minister of Justice to receive the prison permit.

At the prison I was put into a small room divided by a wire mesh wall. Ten minutes later Stuart arrived on the other side of the wire mesh and then the interpreter arrived.

The news from Stuart is that he is in the middle of his A-level exams in Spanish, Maths, History, English, etc. and that he has now put his appeal through without the assistance of the Spanish lawyer who demanded the £1,000 fee from Stuart after the trial. The result is due to come out in August. At present Stuart has, at the most, six years left to complete of his sentence which, he thinks, will be reduced by a few more years. He now receives no letters except those from his mother. He is not allowed to send letters to his friends. The reason for this is that someone sent a newspaper cutting to him about a demonstration in Glasgow when the Spanish flag was set on fire. The general impression I got of Stuart was that he was well-liked in prison and that he was

still concerned about all his old friends in Britain. He is allowed to work one day per week depending on his conduct. He either works in the Dental Surgery or in the Printing Room.

I was told by the consul that the best way to send parcels to him is through the British Embassy (Consular Section), Recoletas 22, Madrid. He receives parcels from Germany, Holland, France and Britain.

Stuart asked me to convey all his thanks to all comrades who have been so concerned about his imprisonment and those who have sent books, money and food, etc.

While I was waiting to see the Minister for European Affairs a decrepit old man left the office and I was informed that the Minister would now see me. This pensioned-off old dodderer who had preceded me was none other than General Franco, the Caudillo himself!

ROSS FLETT.

P.S.: We are informed by the FIJL that two French comrades were released by the Spanish authorities possibly as a result of the kidnapping on May 1 of the Spanish diplomat-prelate Mgr. Ussia

unnecessary; the continental attitude, where police are never allowed to feel that secure, is much more to the point. Ultimately the police would become trained social workers, dressed in white, which is the provos' big symbol. This is all very well, but one can easily see a situation where, as recent trends in the USA indicate, the police become pseudo-social workers without in any way ceasing to be an arm of the state.

The appeal to the International Provovariat, reprinted in *Heatwave 1*, is the manifesto of the provos and explains both their ideas of 'class' and also their approach to the anti-authoritarian struggle. It talks of beatniks, pleiners, nozems, hooligans, mods, rockers (though having seen rockers in London de Vries decided they were not, after all, a revolutionary force), students, artists and misfits as being a new, heterogeneous, de-classed 'class', a grouping of subversive elements who will through 'pinprick actions' be able to force authority to show its true nature. Authority, having done so, will become more and more unpopular and there will be a crisis of authority. It is, perhaps, a rather devious and circuitous route to social revolt—and, I would have thought, hardly likely to change the fuzz into English bobbies—but it has its own logic and appeal.

But what happens in practice? A lot of kids, doubtless intellectually provoked and pre-justified by provo ideas and statements, provoke a major crisis of authority in Amsterdam, with police, riot police, special sub-military police and three infantry regiments either in town or standing by. The provos broadcast an appeal on the pop music station urging kids to stay at home. Asked if this was not rather inconsistent, de Vries told his London audience that the provos did not approve of violence, and that shops were being damaged which was 'unnecessary'. But surely such actions were the logic of the provos' appeal? De Vries, in common with the provos I interviewed in Amsterdam (I have written at length in *Heatwave* about this visit), said the provos did not call for violence. They did not want riots. But did they not want to provoke authority?

De Vries said they wanted to provoke authority with happenings, constructive schemes and not destruction. But, if they saw the provovariat (the heterogeneous groupings of beats, delinquents, etc.) as the last element of revolt in society, was it not their job to explain the riots, at least philosophically? Simply to denounce them was inadequate, confusing and, perhaps, a treason to their ideas. 'I can understand why these riots happened',

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