

Postbag

THE COMMITTEE OF 100

LAURENS OTTER is not quite fair to the Committee of 100. The point is not that it is imperfect, which is obvious, but that it is less imperfect than either the Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War which it absorbed last July, or the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which it seems to be replacing now.

DAC was determined to "go to the workers", but how many workers left their jobs or even went on strike against armament production? DAC was committed to "direct action", but how direct were the brave demonstrations at North Pickenham, Harrington, Foulness, Finningley, in the Sahara and in the Holy Loch? All honour to the devoted pioneers like Michael Randle and Pat Arrow-smith, and to the *francs-tireurs* like Terry Chandler and Laurens Otter himself, but we must admit that their propaganda by deed was more symbolic than it was effective.

On the other hand, of course, CND was determined to win over the Labour Party, but failed after the Scarborough fiasco and instead became infected with Miliband's Disease—the "sickness of Labourism". CND was presented with mass support, but failed to provide proper leadership and retreated into respectability. But the annual Aldermaston marches, like the DAC sit-downs, were only the top of the unilateralist iceberg. They concealed the vast programme of meetings, leaflets, canvasses, pickets, arguments and general education in the facts of nuclear warfare and nuclear disarmament—a programme which has included plays by J. B. Priestley, Marghanita Laski and Robert Bolt, and the work of anarchists, syndicalists and the New Left.

The Committee of 100 should be seen in this light, as the best radical mass movement against the Bomb—and, by implication, the State—that we have. To be such a movement, it has to make regrettable compromises. The conspiratorial title, the big names, demonstrations in central London at weekends—all these things are determined by the necessity for mass civil disobedience, to get people used to the idea of breaking the law. Remember that it takes time to build up anything like a revolutionary movement, just as it takes eternal vigilance to keep it revolutionary.

Laurens Otter wants to go straight into what amounts to syndicalist activity; but thousands of people have only just got round to any activity at all. The first unilateralist sit-down in central London, which took place in January 1952, involved twelve people; there were only forty odd arrests at North Pickenham in December 1958, only eighty odd at Harrington in January 1960. Now the Committee of 100 counts its arrests in hundreds, even thousands. This is a big step forward—not big enough, of course, but better than anywhere else in the world at the moment.

The Committee of 100 began its demonstrations in central London at weekends because few people want to leave work or travel very far. This may be reprehensible, but it is part of the situation we are in. I don't want to leave work or travel very far, but during 1961 I have taken part in civil disobedience half-a-dozen times and been arrested four times; a few days after I write this I shall be taking part in direct action against a military base for the first time in my life. If I go on like this I may lose my job and find it impossible to pay my rent, and that means a lot to me.

I admire Laurens Otter for having more courage and determination than me, but I would admire him more if he would be more tolerant of people like me. The good thing about the Committee of 100 is that he and I can both support it in our own way, that it is a genuinely libertarian organisation, that it is a model—however imperfect—for a society in which everyone can make up his own mind and follow his own conscience. It would be disastrous if its members and supporters destroyed it by calling each other names. By all means let us say what is wrong, but let us be fair.

A sit-down outside Parliament would not merely perpetuate the myth of Parliamentary Democracy—it would flatly contradict it. The sit-down on September 17 was a failure—but the Committee of 100 has learnt from it. The Committee's policy for behaviour after arrest is unsatisfactory—but it is not compulsory. The adulation of Committee leaders is distasteful—but it is rare. The behaviour of Committee marshals is fatuous—but we don't have to obey them. We are free men. The Committee of 100 is what we make it.

NICOLAS WALTER.

London, N.W.6

IN AN INTERVIEW made by Michel Gordey and published in *France-Soir* on Monday, November 7, the second paragraph states: "She (i.e. myself) hopes, before dying, to see the rehabilitation by world communism of the man (Trotsky) who was, after Lenin, the greatest revolutionary of modern times and the spiritual father of Mao Tse-tung, the Chinese communist leader."

These words are not mine; they were introduced by the editor of the interview. I am therefore obliged to make clear:

1. A great revolutionary like Leon Trotsky can in no way be the

father of Mao Tse-tung, who obtained his position in China in direct conflict with the Left Opposition (Trotskyist) and consolidated it by the murder and persecution of revolutionaries, just as Chiang Kai-shek had done. The spiritual fathers of Mao Tse-tung and his party are clearly Stalin (whom he claims, moreover, as such) and his collaborators, Mr. Krushchev included.

2. I consider the present Chinese regime, equally with the Russian regime, or any other built on its model, to be as far removed from Marxism and the proletarian revolution as that of Franco in Spain.

3. The police terror and calumnies of Stalin were only a political aspect of a struggle to death against the revolution, carried out by the bureaucracy as a whole. One can, therefore, expect truth to be re-established only by the destruction of this bureaucracy by the working class that it has subjected to slavery. I expect nothing from the Russian party, or from its fundamentally anti-communist imitators. And de-Stalinisation is mere illusion, unless it involves the seizure of power by the proletariat and the dissolution of police, political, military and economic institutions, the bases of the counter-revolution established by Stalinist state capitalism.

NATALIA SEDOVA TROTSKY.

Paris, 9.11.61.

We publish this letter from Trotsky's first wife for its historical interest, not from any sympathy with the man who, before his split with Stalin, was an equally ruthless and brutal butcher of revolutionary workers, particularly libertarians. The massacre of the Kronstadt sailors (1921) and the bloody repression of the revolutionary peasant militia of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine (1917-21) were both carried out by the Red Army, under the orders of Trotsky himself. Eds.

ENCLOSED three dollars for your paper. Our members are all very poor and cannot easily collect money, but they have great courage for propaganda among the workers.

Students of the "Zengakuren" Students' Federation are now, one after another, embracing Revolutionary Syndicalism. Some among them still agree that it is necessary to reply with violence to police attacks on protest marches; others believe only non-violence can bring final success and the discussion goes on. We must continue together—practical results will give positive proof which is right. I would like to know how you are settling this question of "non-violence" and "minimum use of violence for defence."

Our big recent loss, on November 16, was of comrade Jo Kubo, of Osaka. He had been an active revolutionary syndicalist for 50 years and lived in France for ten of them. Comrade M. Osawa, editor of our monthly paper, "Black Flag", is our foremost theoretician. We plan a special congress of the Japanese Anarchist Federation next April, when our organisation will be changed to make it more effective.

T. YAMAGA.

Chibaken, Japan.

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Franco finds a new friend

FRANCO'S fascist dictatorship in Spain, long protected by American dollar loans and military aid, has found a new ally in its near-neighbour, General Charles de Gaulle of France. The extent of the collusion between these two totalitarian gentlemen is shown by the following despatch in the French paper, *Le Monde*, from its Madrid correspondent, José Antonio Novais (18.11.61):

"Madrid Government circles and the Spanish Press are not hiding their satisfaction at the interview on Thursday between General de Gaulle and Sr. Castiella, the Spanish Foreign Minister. It is considered here that this was a victory of prestige for General Franco's régime."

"It is particularly noted that the interview took place on the initiative of General de Gaulle and that it can be considered as something more than a simple courtesy visit, as 'a special privilege accorded to Spain and to the Caudillo.' And it is stressed that General de Gaulle begged Sr. Castiella to express 'all his sympathy' to General Franco, together with his 'sincere wishes for him and his régime, which represents a factor of peace and social stability in Europe.'"

"This interview which, according to the Madrid Press, dealt mainly with European integration, took place in a cordial atmosphere, 'which corresponds to the sincere friendship which today marks relations between the two countries.' This tone is due, declare Spanish correspondents in Paris, to the desire of Spain and France to strengthen the understanding which recently showed itself in a series of measures taken by the French Government, 'despite the criticisms of circles hostile to the Government of General de Gaulle', such, for example, as the suspension of Spanish exile publications."

"If the Spanish Francoists were expecting 'this cordiality' from

SWF MEMBERS JAILED

AMONG those imprisoned following the Committee of 100 sit-down at the Brize Norton USAF base, Oxfordshire on December 9 were two SWF members, Laurens and Celia Otter. Both were sentenced to 21 days—Celia in Holloway prison, Laurens in Oxford jail. As we go to press, Laurens is reported to be on a hunger strike.

General de Gaulle, which, for them, is in return for measures taken against the Madrid group of the OAS, liberal opposition elements, on their side, do not disguise their bitterness on the subject of measures taken by the French Government against Spanish exile publications, which had little influence in Spain itself; they see in them an additional sign of the 'inexplicable kindnesses which the Western Democracies show towards the Spanish régime'.

"The majority of Madrid observers note that, within the framework of Spain's international policies, this Franco-Spanish reconciliation is a proof of the régime's diplomatic agility, which will not fail to be exploited for internal propaganda."

By French Government decree on November 2, four Spanish exile newspapers were suspended: "El Socialista" (Socialist Party weekly), "CNT" (CNT weekly, Toulouse), "Solidaridad Obrera" (CNT weekly, Paris), "Espana Libre" (CNT fortnightly, Toulouse). The CNT's heartening reply was to begin immediate publication of "DESPERTAR" in Toulouse and "Solidaridad" in Paris. At the same time, however, meetings of the CNT-UGT-Basque Syndicalist Alliance were banned.

Our French comrade S. Parane comments: "This frontal attack against the Spanish emigration—that no government, either of Left or Right, had dared to make since 1945—harmonises with the sale and distribution of papers published in Spanish by Franco agencies here. It comes at a time when Franco has arrested more than a hundred Anarchist and Socialist militants in Catalonia and has condemned to heavy prison sentences Basque Catholic workers and intellectuals."

In protest against this de Gaullist attack on civil liberties, together with the slaughter, torture and imprisonment of Algerian independence fighters, SWF members, with two comrades from the London Anarchist Group, demonstrated inside and outside the French Embassy in Knightsbridge, London on Saturday, November 25. While

an SWF leaflet "We Accuse de Gaulle" (reproduced in "Workers' Voice" No. 18) was distributed in the street, three SWF members, Laurens and Celia Otter and Don Pedelty, staged a sit-down in the Embassy itself, until carried out by the police. The protest was reported the following day by the "Sunday Telegraph" ("Syndicalists at French Embassy") and early editions of "The Observer".

Meanwhile, American backing for Franco continues unabated. In early November at Saragossa, a festival was staged in homage to the city's patron saint, the Virgin of Pilar, and to the Spanish Blue Division, which fought with the Nazis on the Russian Front during the last war. Taking part in the festival were USAF Skyblazer jets, specially sent from Western Germany. The fascist paper "Arriba" commented: "The presence of American jets flying above the survivors of the Blue Division shows who was right . . . twenty years ago."

Nor is the British Government dragging its feet. From December 11-19, the Royal Navy and the Spanish Navy held joint exercises in the Mediterranean—the third in a series of Anglo-Spanish operations held annually since 1959.

Six million 'die' in Canadian civil defence exercise

THE Canadian Government and its military chiefs recently staged a nationwide "civil defence" exercise, in which it was assumed that Canada was the victim of nuclear attack. According to the calculations of the military, nuclear bombs fell on half-a-dozen or so of Canada's major cities, "killing" about three million people. It was assumed that radiation was so intense that rescue workers could not get to survivors on the fringes of the explosions; with a result that nearly six million people "died" altogether, either directly or due to exposure or radiation effects.

Six million people represents one-third of Canada's total population, and they, so the military calculated, would be killed by one nuclear attack in which bombs were not even dropped on all the principal cities. (These figures were based on the use of 10-megaton bombs.) Assuming, then, that the attacker decided to use more and bigger bombs and make every major Canadian city a target, the figure of six million dead from one attack could easily be doubled. This means, in plain language, that one nuclear attack could just about destroy Canada.

The "civil defence" exercise was part of a campaign that has been steadily mounting over the past few months to make the Canadian people survival-conscious. A steady stream of lavishly-illustrated booklets on what to do in the event of a nuclear attack have been foisted on an unwilling public by the Government. Courses, both full and part time, in "civil defence" have been launched by the military and everyone is urged to build a fall-out shelter in their basement, stocking it with two weeks' emergency supplies. All these measures are having their desired effect. The Canadian people are becoming very conscious of the possibility of nuclear attack.

Unfortunately this fear is not making them look for ways of preventing such an attack, but only for ways of surviving it. It would be thought, when the military themselves announce that a few nuclear bombs can destroy one in every three Canadians, that the fact that there is little chance of survival in the event of nuclear war would be apparent to all. That this is not so is due largely to the Government's policy of stressing the survival aspect, to the exclusion of all else.

It would appear that if enough ballyhoo is created about surviving nuclear attack, people, who under normal circumstances could readily appreciate the slight chance for survival, become emotionally unstable and unable to accept that nuclear war means death to most Canadians. In this state they are prepared to believe anything the Government says, even if demonstrably untrue, if it will strengthen the illusion they will survive a nuclear attack. Similarly they close their ears to anything not in accordance with their illusion of survival.

It is, of course, the deliberate aim of the Government to create

this emotional instability among the people, as it is the only way in which the military domination of Canada by the U.S.A. can be maintained without the use of force.

If the Canadian people were allowed to think rationally, they would realise there is no defence against nuclear attack. It would logically follow that survival depended solely on prevention. Now the only sure way to prevent nuclear war is to persuade the Russian and American peoples to renounce the militaristic policies of their rulers and live together in peace.

For the Canadian people to attempt anything so radical would necessitate first the expulsion of American military personnel from Canada and the dismantling of their bases on Canadian soil. The governments of both Canada and the U.S. fear this idea might become popular in Canada. It is essential to U.S. military planning that Canada be used as an advance base for her nuclear weapons directed at Russia. There is a considerable body of opinion in Canada opposed to nuclear weapons being stationed on Canadian soil and it is for this reason that the Canadian government has been stalling U.S. demands that it equip its armed forces with nuclear weapons.

There is no easy way out for the Canadian people. Strategically situated between the two great powers, Canada is too valuable a military asset to the U.S. to ever be allowed to freely adopt a pacifist policy. If other means failed, the U.S. would not hesitate to use force to keep Canada under her power. On the other hand, to acquiesce to U.S. nuclear bases in Canada is inviting total destruction should the rulers of the U.S. and Russia ever start a nuclear war.

We can only refuse to take part in all war preparation, make known our desire to be left in peace and hope our fellow workers in the U.S. and Russia will follow our example.

BILL GREENWOOD

Mississippi racialism

The following report, sent us by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee of 1974 Auburn Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia, show to what lengths white racialists in America's Deep South are resorting as the struggle for Negro rights attains its strongest-ever expression. These examples are all from one area, McComb in Mississippi.

* * *

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee opened Voter Registration Schools on August 7, 1961, in McComb, Mississippi and surrounding counties. Since that time, SNCC representatives have been subjected to police brutality, harassment and intimidation as they struggle to help Negro Mississippians register to vote.

On Tuesday, August 15, Robert Moses—SNCC Field Representative—was arrested as he accompanied three people to the registrar's office in Liberty, Amite County seat.

On Tuesday, August 29, Moses was attacked in the street by Billy Jack Caston. Moses was accompanying two more people to the Registrar's office. Caston is the son of a Mississippi police officer.

On Tuesday, September, Travis Britt—SNCC Field Representative—suffered 18 blows from a white attacker as he accompanied four people to the Registrar's office in Liberty.

On Thursday, September 7, John Hardy—SNCC Field Representative—accompanied two people to Tylertown, Mississippi to register. He was struck on the head with a pistol by the REGISTRAR as he turned to leave the office. His case, "Hardy vs. Mississippi", is now in the Federal courts.

On September 25, Herbert Lee—a 52-year-old student at SNCC's Amite County Voter Registration School—was shot and killed by State Representative E. H. Hurst. This representative of the people was never arrested, never spent an hour in jail, and was acquitted by a coroner's jury.

On Wednesday, October 4, Bob Moses, Charles McDew—SNCC Chairman—and Bob Zellner—SNCC Field Representative—were arrested on the courthouse steps in McComb and charged with contributing to the delinquency of minors. Zellner was held by a policeman while the mob beat him.

On October 5, Charles Sherrod—SNCC Field Representative—was arrested on the street in McComb, thrown into a police car, and charged with resisting arrest. Cordelle Reagan, a SNCC Staff member, was also arrested and charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Prominent in the McComb struggle are not only the adults who have been denied the right to vote, but youngsters who have joined the surge toward freedom led in the McComb area by SNCC volunteer workers.

On October 4, 108 students left Burgland High School, protesting the refusal of school authorities to readmit Brenda Travis and Ike Lewis.

On October 10, students returned to the school requesting the

readmission of Brenda Travis after she was released from the Oakley, Mississippi Coloured Girls Industrial School. School authorities agreed to the request but asked the students to sign a petition saying they would be expelled if they ever walked out again. The students would not sign. On October 16, they returned to school and turned in their books. The students now attend classes taught by SNCC Staff members.

PARLEZ-VOUS JAPANESE?

ONE of the most intriguing publications sent to "WLN" is the "Black Flag", published by the Japanese Anarchist Federation. Its four pages are crammed with anarchist theory, reports and comment on news from the labour front, with the occasional photograph. The tight, neat columns of complex characters, each a work of art in itself and impossible to imitate, draw the curiosity of the reader used to roman script and make him feel that anarchism, after all, is not just the concoction of the unsuited western mind, but is beyond nation and class.

So far so good. But, here is the snag. How the devil can one understand it at all? An international working-class movement is a very fine idea, but with the best will in the world the average British worker (whoever he might be!) is not going to be able to learn Japanese, even after a life-time's study and, that being so, how will he ever communicate with the comrades two continents away. If anyone at this point is saying to himself, "Why can't the blighters learn English?", ignoring the arrogance, let him realize that the difficulty of learning cuts both ways.

The solution of the JAF is to print a summarised version of the paper every few months in Esperanto. That might not seem very helpful immediately, but it would if you had devoted, say, one hour's intensive study to the subject each day for one month. Then, armed with a dictionary just in case, you should be able to read anything in the language and that means anything which can be expressed in English.

Esperanto arouses the same mental cat-calls as does the term anarcho-syndicalism among socialists who have only a vague idea what it means, but anyone who is at all interested in communication between peoples cannot afford to dismiss the matter so easily. It is at least worth closer examination. Esperanto is an auxiliary language created by Dr. Zamenhof, a Pole, towards the end of the last century. Most Europeans would understand many words in its vocabulary as it stems largely from Latin, Greek and German roots. Its use is still confined mainly to enthusiasts who have tended to over-estimate its implications and to regard it as an end in itself, rather than a means, but there has been a notable increase in interest recently, especially in Eastern Europe, Japan, China and South America.

International organisations use it for conferences and literature, also commercial firms and air-lines, UNESCO has endorsed it, it is taught in schools and universities throughout the world and many radio stations carry Esperanto broadcasts. There are all manner of specialised Esperanto groups, Buddhist, Christian, Catholic, Quaker, medical, railway, veterans, students, journalists, etc. The Workers Esperanto Movement is the British section of the Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda. It is virtually the only means, without a working knowledge of Russian or a Slav language, by which one can communicate with Eastern Europeans without cold war interference.

All those who have been through the hell of an international conference conducted in three or four languages will appreciate that Esperanto, easy to learn, divorced from cultural imperialism and no less expressive than a national language, could be of inestimable value.

T.S.

IWMA world call

THE TENTH CONGRESS of the International Working Men's Association (Toulouse, September, 1958) agreed to support the formation of "Groups of Friends of the IWMA" in all countries where sections have not yet been set up, with the aim of gaining sympathy for our International and of spreading its principles and propaganda as widely as possible.

We address ourselves especially to comrades and sympathisers in Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas, Uruguay and Argentina excepted.

It is desirable that "Groups of Friends of the IWMA" should keep close contact between themselves in each country and they will receive our Press, propaganda and news of other countries through the international secretariat.

A group can be formed by five, ten or more members. It will give you the chance to maintain regular contact with the IWMA and of being in touch with the affairs of the international movement.

All interested in this proposal should write to the IWMA Secretariat (AIT-CNT), 4 rue Belfort, Toulouse (H.G.), France.

Syndicalism and workers' committees

IN case the critics of revolutionary industrial unionism—Syndicalism—wish to know what it is about, let us recapitulate the main idea. What the historians of labour call the "Syndicalist tendency" in the English-speaking world must include the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World and, in Britain, we cannot ignore the work of the old Socialist Labour Party in popularising the ideas of industrial unionism, particularly in Scotland.

At the end of the 19th Century, the socially-conscious workers were faced by a host of unions which organised disunity in the industrial struggle. Even by 1939 there were 40 unions in engineering and most of them might be in one factory. Worse, most of the time, most of the unions were craft unions, such as still exist, organised not only against the employer, but, too often, against other workers, men of rival unions, rival crafts and unskilled workers, who might encroach on the preserves of the craft organisation.

At that critical time, according to the historians, Syndicalism was able to arouse to revolt the latent discontent of the unskilled and, in an elementary, but potent way organise struggles which gained great advances and inspired the forgotten men and women of industry with self-confidence.

But Syndicalists were few and only the elementary lessons of class struggle were learned by the workers, so the unskilled became organised in mass unions, which resembled crowds rather than organisations. Most of these unions became amalgamated into the Transport and General Worker's Union and the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, embracing between them the gas workers, the tramwaymen, the dockers, engineering workers, roadmen and hosts of others.

So we saw the workers divided into more than a thousand unions, skilled against semi-skilled and unskilled, craft against craft—even men in one trade, but separate unions, in rivalry. Iron moulders on strike, while the machine shop worked; boilermakers locked out, while fitters were in; railwaymen in one union on strike, while their mates in another union worked on.

Against this disunity, Syndicalism has posed the idea of scientific organisation, revolutionary industrial unionism. Starting, where the class struggle starts, in the factory, or other place of work, all workers, of whatever craft, so-called semi-skilled or unskilled, male or female, draughtsmen, clerks or storemen are organised in a branch of one union, based on the commodity made or the service rendered.

The affairs particular to that factory would be tackled by the workers there, in mass meeting making major decisions and electing their delegates and committee, always with the right of recall. But there must arise problems which also concern other workshops in the same district and the factory branch must be federated to its kindred in the same district, so we might have federations of, say, the South Wales miners, shipyard workers of the Clyde, cotton workers of Lancashire, or newspaper workers of London.

Further, there are matters which are not peculiar only to the district of the industry, but concern all throughout the area, temporarily historically speaking, enclosed by national boundaries. Thus the Miners' Industrial Union, the Port Workers' Industrial Union and so on, thirty or so unions would cover most of the jobs.

Further, each industrial union is dependent on the others, as a man is dependent on his fellows, and each union would be federated to a National Confederation of Labour, which would deal with general labour questions and render aid to weaker unions, or those on strike.

Of course, within this framework there is room for other federations as and when necessary, such as federations of dockers and seamen and, in London, a traffic federation of railmen, busmen and underground workers. The greatest strength of this form of organisation is its flexibility; one weakness of trade unionism is its rigidity.

Let the man whose reasoning power is too weak to see the obvious superiority of such a system, read labour history, let him look about and see the advantages of this potent idea, even when limited in application.

Revolutionary syndicates are the means, once we brush the cobwebs of prejudice from our minds, to wage struggles with much less hurt to our people and with much greater chance of victory. But wage demands are not enough. The day will come when the workers must decide not to ask for an extra loaf, but to take over the bake-house; to take, hold, own and control the means of production, not by walking out, but by staying in and locking out the capitalist class. The ultimate aim of Syndicalism is common ownership of the means of production and distribution, abolition of the wages system and a true democracy, the industrial democracy of Workers' Control.

Our critics include Labourites, Trotskyites, Stalinists and other sorts of Bolsheviks and almost as many varieties of Socialists as there are permutations on the Treble Chance, as well as open supporters of capitalism. But they have so much in common that we can deal with the main objections, without breaking every butterfly on the wheel. It is well to note that most, though not quite all, the alleged

Labour and Socialist critics, are supporters of trade unionism of the present sort, craft and general unions.

"Syndicalism is old fashioned, it sounds like something out of the 19th Century." The speaker is often a person who supports a union founded about 100 years ago, or a craft union based on a mediaeval guild and an industrial process which vanished with the Industrial Revolution. Sometimes the statement is accompanied by a chunk of the "Communist Manifesto" of 1848, or some other contemporary work (contemporary with the first Duke of Wellington) hot off the press.

The point is not whether Syndicalism is old or new-fashioned, but whether it is likely to be efficacious in solving our present problems, which, after all, are as old as class society. Fashions we can leave to the House of Dior. The question of efficacy is rarely, if ever, tackled by our opponents.

We turn now to a body of criticism which is quite different, stemming from the belief that all that is necessary are "workers' or factory committees", without the continuous and thought-out organisational forms of industrial unionism. Just workers' committees, that is all.

But if we rule out Syndicalism and agree to committees only, then surely the committees must have some form and some relationship to one another. Are the councils just formed, say, in factories, or parts of factories, to live a tiny, corporative life without forming part of a natural or deliberate pattern? If, however, these primary bodies are to be cohesive parts of a great public whole, has that whole a form and pattern and aims? Or is it amorphous?

If the committees are to have social form and pattern, then it seems to us that they cannot attain these attributes unless they adopt the principles of Syndicalism. The Syndicalist pattern, here outlined briefly, and its further and more intricate forms, are splendidly suitable for adoption by a workers' council movement, and if our aims be the same, there is really no conflict of means.

Syndicalists have never said that everyone must first hold a ticket in his appropriate industrial union before anything can be done, but advocate continuous organisation for propaganda, for learning, teaching, demonstrating and handing on the torch. Techniques cannot exist without field and workshop practice and social techniques do not come from intellectual test tubes. Truly we learn in struggle.

But always we remember that the working class are greater than the union membership, who are the vanguard. The influence of the Syndicalists has always been immensely greater than their numbers. The IWW moved millions of workers in the USA, whatever its state of membership.

Many other criticisms of Syndicalism spring to mind. Space alone prevents us for answering them here and now, but we shall return to these matters, for the examination of Syndicalism is rewarding to the intellectual, as well as the worker. We'll be seeing you.

TOM BROWN

ARGENTINA—The Government announced on December 10 the settlement of a strike that had paralysed the Argentine railways for six weeks. The strikers had ignored an ultimatum to return to work by midnight on November 2 or be placed "in commission" and were supported by a three-day general strike from November 7-10 in which most of the country's industrial and transport workers, but few workers in trade and commerce, participated. At least 250 workers, described as Communists and agitators, were arrested. In Tucuman City over a thousand tear-gas grenades were thrown at demonstrating sugarcane workers. The state-owned power plant in Rosario, Argentina's second largest city, was blown up by strikers and the city was left without light or water, while Molotov cocktails and nails were used to immobilise some of the few buses running in Buenos Aires. The strikes were over pay demands, sackings at meat-packing plants, the closure of some branch lines and workshops of the state-owned railways, and the sale of some publicly-owned buses to private companies. There has been renewed persecution of Syndicalist workers, particularly those of the militant Plumbers and Sanitation Workers' Society (FORA).

FRANCE—A 24-hour nation-wide railway strike for higher pay, supported by Paris transport workers and Air France ground staffs, hit the country on November 28. Gas and electricity services were cut off from dawn to dusk, but hospitals and emergency services were supplied.

ADEN—Following three strikes by the Technical Workers' Union in October which won more pay and a shorter working week for building workers, its secretary-general, Abdullah Ali Murshid, was sentenced on November 24, under the industrial relations ordinance, to two years' rigorous imprisonment for inciting strikes and sedition.

RUSSIA—On November 8 three members of Leningrad's Jewish community were goaled for "consorting with foreign agents". Gedalia Pechersky, aged 60, was sentenced for 12 years, the others for 7 years, three of which were remitted because they were in their 70s.

Christmas behind bars—for their opposition to war

In Greece, George Didis, a Jehovah's Witness, was sentenced by court martial on June 6, 1961 to twenty years' imprisonment for refusing military service. His sentence was later commuted to seven years. On October 15, another JW, George Hagigeorgian, was given fifteen years. In Russia, reports the paper "Sowjetskaya Moldawija", Ivan Shitarjuk received six years for the same offence. Whatever one's views of this particular religious sect, one cannot but be appalled at the savagery of such persecution. In France conscientious objectors are subjected to repeated sentences totalling up to five years.

The War Resisters International published the names of more than one hundred and forty men and women behind bars over Christmas in France, Britain, Holland, Switzerland and the U.S.A., for the crime of opposing war. There are thirty C.O.'s in Belgian prisons and many more in Italy and in most countries where military service is obligatory. Over one hundred supporters of the Committee of 100 are sampling the delight of Her Majesty's pleasure.

These are the lengths to which the State will go to preserve the right to make war, to compel the obedience of the people. It is not as though these would-be peacemakers are seriously threatening the military machine. Their crime is that they choose to reclaim power to think and act with personal responsibility and such a refusal to conform with the barbaric standards of the ruling classes cannot be tolerated if the power structure of society is to be maintained. If non-conformism worries the State this much, then it is up to all Syndicalists not to conform, not to submit to any measure which flouts common human decency and which is designed to retain power over life and death in the hand of the criminal few.

They tell us that . . .

"Some are born to be dukes; some are born to be dustmen. The difficulty is that the stork is such an unintelligent bird that it delivers most at the wrong address. It is part of the duty of the education services to sort out the mistakes and to see that those who should be dukes become dukes and those who should be dustmen become dustmen."—**Chuter Ede**, Labour M.P. for South Shields.

"... let us rejoice that there is a bastion at the bottom end of that continent of sound, good government, strong enough to maintain it in all circumstances, and that law and order will at least prevail in that part of Africa . . ."—**Lord Fraser of Lonsdale** on South Africa.

THE KIND OF LETTER WE LIKE

THANKS for the last six well-presented issues. Have enclosed money order for renewal and an extra 2s. 6d. to help defray costs. Various worker-friends that I have passed copies on to agree that WLN is indeed a revolutionary (in all senses) news-sheet. Some of these—the more conservative and the Communist Party members mainly—have admitted as much with the expected eyebrow raised reaction. Keep up the good fight.

RON TOWSON.

Bondi Beach, NSW, Australia.

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"normal"—people joined us, we would get nowhere. "But whatever slighting remarks might be made about those sort of people—that they're cranks, misfits, exhibitionists, and all that crap", I said "the fact remains that they are right and all the other buggers are wrong."

I got home in time to take part in the biggest sitdown of them all, the nightly escape from the world of having-to-do into the world of merely spectating. There it all was, the excitement of the day on the screen of my own telly. Perhaps this mass addiction, I thought, is the only solidarity of which most people are capable.

DON PEDELTY.

JUST OFF THE PRESS . . .

Tom Brown's

BRITISH GENERAL STRIKE

A 'DIRECT ACTION' PAMPHLET 4d, postage 2d

WORLD LABOUR NEWS

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Several steps forward!

WITH THIS ISSUE, World Labour News enters its third year of publication, as English voice of the International Working Men's Association. We hope it will be one in which the small, but steady and measurable progress of Syndicalism during 1961 will be greatly increased, both in Britain and throughout the world.

The past year has seen the emergence of a Rank & File Movement in Britain, pledged to give active support to working-class struggles and to fight for workers' control and management of industry. This grouping will hold its first annual conference in London on February 25, when future policy and action will be decided in the light of workshop practice and experience. Delegates from the Rank & File Group on Clydeside, which now has its own meeting hall at 12, Ross Street, and from the newly-formed Northern Industrial Action in Manchester are expected to attend, together with the apprentices' group from Rochdale, which publishes the paper "Progress". The objects of the Rank & File Movement are in harmony with those of the SWF and all members and sympathisers of our organisation are urged to join the R&F and to attend the February conference.

Members of the SWF have taken an active part in Civil Disobedience activity organised by the Committee of 100 against the Bomb. As we go to press, two are in jail, one on hunger strike.

While we cannot honestly claim the great influence ascribed to the SWF and R&F by such right-wing papers as the "Sunday Telegraph" and "Daily Mail", to say nothing of the "Economic League Bulletin" and "IRIS", we can look back on 1961 with some satisfaction as a year in which Syndicalism and direct action have begun to make real impact. Talking of "Direct Action", the SWF paper, "Workers' Voice", which published 20 issues during 1961, is reverting to that title from its first January issue and will continue to appear regularly—at least fortnightly and weekly when possible. Read and distribute it!

Finally, an appeal to World Labour News subscribers. Many subs are renewed immediately they fall due; others come in at second or third time of asking, but some are even later in arriving—or do not come through at all. It would help us greatly if readers would renew their subs promptly, on receipt of the first notice.

RANK AND FILE ACTION

GLASGOW—The case for Syndicalism can be heard at the Rank and File Hall, 12 Ross Street, Glasgow S.E., as expounded by the SWF, who support the Rank and File Movement. This movement consists of a variety of militants who accept the view that it should be independent of political parties and trade union bureaucracy and that control must rest with the rank and file members—that is ALL members. Meetings are held every Sunday at 7.30 p.m. It is hoped that a national link-up will come from the industrial recall conference, which is to be held in London on Sunday, February 25.

NORTHERN ENGLAND—A new rank and file grouping, "Northern Industrial Action", has recently been formed in Glasgow. For details, write to Jim Pinkerton, 12 Alt Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs.

LONDON—The first annual conference of the National Rank and File Movement, formed in London last January, will be held on Sunday, February 25. For details, write to: The Secretary, NRFM, Room 12, 6 Endsleigh Street, London, W.C.1.

Recall conference, London, on Sunday, Feb. 25—book the date

A day in the country

IT had been a tough decision to make. Not because of my fears, which were small, but because of my wife's fears, which were big. But no one could be neutral on such an issue. Everyone had to decide for or against, and this seemed to be the only way to show, at not too great a cost, on which side of the barbed wire one stood, so to speak.

I cut my own sandwiches and said goodbye in an atmosphere of gloom. "Hope you don't have too miserable a day Dad", said my 9-year-old son. He and his younger brother had decided, without any help from me, that I was going to "a meeting".

It was raining steadily when I met Peter at King's Cross. "Looks as if it's going to go on all day," I said. He agreed.

A handful of Campaigners were hanging around at the original rendezvous and told us to make our own way to Liverpool Street and go by train. On the station we ran into Jack and Pete and we joined the growing cluster of Campaigners being shepherd into a queue for a relief train by a policeman and a fatherly railway inspector.

Someone remarked on the irony of the British Railways running special trains for sitdowners to replace the transport cancelled by a nervous coach company after they had been warned that they might be liable to prosecution. "They're so hard up," I said, "that even our money is acceptable."

As it turned out there were not enough of us for a special to be put on.

On the train we discussed where the Campaign could go next, and it was generally agreed that unless the number of militant Campaigners increased dramatically the only hope lay in demonstrations more strategically directed (and perhaps more secretly planned). Jack, tall and bearded, with his left arm in a sling, had come along because he felt it was "the end of the line." His predictions of the penalties that would be awarded for the day's work were at once the most pessimistic and most cheerfully expressed.

At Witham we had to change trains. We piled into a two-coach diesel train. At one end was a First-Class compartment. It was a real squeeze, but most of us very definitely "Second-Class passengers" law-abidingly avoided it. One seat in our coach was occupied by "the press". We knew this because one of them, a big, spreading German wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, had tied a piece of card, rather like a giant luggage label, to his lapel, and it said so. (We learnt later that this was the celebrated American humorist Art Buchwald!)

He was talking expansively to an attractive, well-dressed female sitting beside him, and paid not the slightest attention to the crowd of Campaigners in their oddly assorted garments.

At Braintree the road to the station seemed to be swarming with cameramen, some of them perched dramatically on the roofs of cars and vans. "It looks like . . ." I began. "Dolce Vita," said Peter.

A Campaign organiser was shouting instructions through a megaphone and convoys of cars were ferrying sitdowners the seven miles to Wethersfield. It had stopped raining, and to avoid waiting Peter and I (we had lost sight of Jack and Pete) decided to start walking. Passing the school which had been turned into a special magistrate's court, we suppressed the impulse to ask one of the policemen, who were very thick on the ground, if we were going in the right direction for Wethersfield. Fortunately the RAF had clearly signposted the way.

A mile or so out of town a young reporter offered us a lift in his car. He had five passengers already, but we squeezed in on top of the others. Further along the road the convoy we were in was stopped by the police. They were peering through the windows of the cars and we thought our driver would get into trouble for being overloaded, but the inspector who came up to us merely said, "We're just having a look", and with friendly courtesy thanked us for stopping.

Wethersfield turned out to be a charming village. Perhaps it has got used to strangers, but the invasion of police, press men and protesters must have been a strange sight.

We joined a motley group of individuals ranging in age from ten-year-old schoolboys and teenage schoolgirls to a sixty-year-old lady who had been on every Campaign from the beginning, and at two o'clock we shuffled off like sheep to the slaughter, escorted by numerous bobbies.

"We're safe while they're with us," I said. "When they start running, run with them." It was a joke, of course. The forces of law and order had behaved with exemplary good humour and even kindness, co-operating almost to the point of transporting us to the scene of our crime. But one couldn't help seeing the parallel with more sinister occasions.

Authority showed impressive solidarity. Down in the village hall the WVS was serving policemen cups of tea, and a mobile canteen passed us bearing the legend "Presented to the Essex Constabulary by the British South Africa Police". It was preceded by a car and a van inscribed "Church of Judas". We were uncertain whose side they were on.

A forest of TV aerials hove in sight and we turned past a marquee set up as a temporary police station, down the road to the airfield. The aerials sprang from a cluster of prefabs and makeshift homes that reminded one of the English seaside. Separating them from the road was a broad, rough strip of grass on which there was a collection of broken-down swings and another collection of broken-down cars. So this was where the American airmen lived, not in the super-modern quarters of one's imagination. "Looks like Tobacco Road," said my friend.

The front of the column halted at the gates of the airfield. We sat down on the wet road. The heavy ground mist which, one felt, must surely have immobilised the nuclear bombers more effectively than we could ever have hoped to have done, had cleared. A line of men in blue RAF uniforms could be seen on the other side of the barbed wire fence, presumably some of the "healthy, hearty, jolly, baying young warriors" of one imaginative female correspondent's report. A giant RAF helicopter hovered for a moment just overhead, the gale stirred up by its whirling rotors whipping off the hats of demonstrators, reporters, and police officers with a tactless lack of discrimination. We waved, but our friendly greeting was not returned by Mr. Amery or the crew, doubtless regretting their lost weekend. We might have been a concentration of enemy troops being marked for elimination by the artillery.

The young guitar-player in the Afrika Corps hat sprawling on the ground beside us was joined by a trilby-hatted saxophonist and they essayed a rather odd medley of well-known tunes—"Rule Britannia", "John Brown's Body", "She'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes", "Do not forsake me, oh my darling", and "When the saints go marching in". Everybody was cheerful but nobody sang. A few paces away the lady veteran was quietly knitting.

Three column leaders were dragged and carried away to a waiting police car. No one quite knew why, nor why the police showed no interest in removing the rest of us. Passive resistance was confronted by inactive coercion. Cameras clicked, flashed, and whirled, while journalist celebrities moved among us with somewhat less than passionate interest.

Peter and I got up for a pee. "It would be funny," I remarked as we crawled under some barbed wire fencing off a farmer's land, "if they thought we were trying to get into the 'drome.'" A farm worker shouted and gestured to us to get off. "We're just doing something for ourselves, friend," Peter shouted back.

We emerged from behind the ruined brick building which had once been used as a chicken-house in time to see an affluent young ginger-moustached man drive up in a smart new car. An elegant female was sitting beside him, with a pretty girl of five or six standing between them. Fixed to the front of the car was a large board urging "KEEP THE BOMB. SEND THE TRAITORS TO RUSSIA". "Poor little bastard," I said. "What chance has she with parents like that?" A police officer strolled up to the car and turned the driver back, presumably for provocation.

A couple of RAF ambulances drove up at breakneck speed and forced a way through the demonstrators, but nothing much seemed to be happening and after some soul-searching we decided to go.

We half expected to be challenged by the police at the other end of the road. It seemed all too easy just to walk off again after defying the law. But no one took any notice of us except for a bunch of nice-looking American kids perched on a railing. "How'd it go," they yelled. "Not bad," we replied. Their beefy-looking fathers said nothing.

The sun was beginning to set in a marvellous sky as we walked back to the village through the gently-rolling countryside. On the village green a special bus was filling up with policemen going off duty. They were behaving like a mob of high-spirited schoolboys, jumping up every few seconds to ring the bell and laughing loudly at their prank.

For them it had been a gala day, but for us it had been sad, a tragedy-comedy. Not a heroic exploit of course (nor would one have wished it so, for that could only have meant a "massacre of the innocents"), but still a brave gamble by a few hundred dedicated people ready at least to risk the wrath of the State to save the world.

Most of them must have been still sitting patiently on the wet road in the dark as we sat in comfort drinking cups of coffee on the train to London. Until many more—and above all perhaps more

continued on page 4, column 1

REVIEW

Voice of a rebel seaman

A WEEK or so ago, George Foulser and I were discussing jobs. "In my trade," he said, "even after 25 years I find I am continually learning new things. I don't think I shall ever know it all." George is an able seaman, who started his career, as he puts it "at the ripe old age of sixteen, as a mate in sailing-barges." The story of a quarter-century on the seas of the world has now been put on paper—SEAMAN'S VOICE by George Foulser (MacGibbon & Kee, 18s.)—and a fascinating record it is, hard-hitting, straight-from-the-shoulder reporting with the rhapsodizing left "to people like A. P. Herbert, people who have had other livings than going to sea in barges, coasters, tramps and the rest."

It was not long before he learned that seamen on British ships were handicapped by a legal bar against on-the-job organisation.

"Ships' committees mean as much to a seaman as your right to speak your mind at work. The boss might fire you, but he can't put you in prison or stop you practising your profession on the grounds that you spoke your mind . . . Well, shipowners can do that sort of thing to seamen . . ."

"The general run of merchant seamen are dominated by a rat organisation with members of the capitalist class as its so-called officials and voting-rules which make sure that no seaman will ever get official positions in the National Union of Seamen. Since I was born the NUS has never had a single instance where the union officials have taken action against the shipowners. It was for the genuine seamen, the rank and file without a voice in their own trade union, to take action in order to retain the good name of British seamen . . . Now that seamen have realised the value of their rank and file movement, I think that we shall obtain our freedom and our legal ships' committees—but no thanks to the British Government, whether Labour or Tory. And certainly no thanks but the back of me hand to the shipowners and their NUS lapdogs . . . One could say that a ship's committee is a rarely needed, but on-the-spot junior union branch; being a junior branch, the officials very seldom display great bellies with great watch-chains slung across the waist-coat."

Besides its enormous value as a chronicle of class struggle on and off the high seas, "Seaman's Voice" is packed with earthy humour of genuine Bermondsey vintage and keen observation of life in other lands: "The last time I was in New York, I didn't see much of the city. I was only passing through, as it happened; I was in a Black Maria at the time on my way to deportation back to England after a strike . . ." "How fast can New Yorkers work? Well, they work harder than Londoners because the latter have outgrown that sort of thing with pretty full employment since 1940; Londoners have found that by working very hard a man will work himself out of a job . . ."

On New Year's Eve, 1948, George found himself in Baltimore, Maryland, on strike with the crew of the "S.S. Ivor Rita", under the Canadian flag. It was the time of the big Canadian seamen's strike and the "Ivor Rita" crew, many of them West Countrymen, had walked off in sympathy, having passed a charter of demands. George was deck delegate and later chairman of the strike committee.

"We adopted the method of putting collection-tins, together with strike leaflets, in the waterfront pubs, especially those where we had been good customers . . . We had tins in six or seven pubs, and I went the rounds every evening, to empty the tins and replenish the leaflet pile if necessary . . . Our last call was always at a bar where the woman proprietor was a Wobbly, as were most of the clientele. A Wobbly is the nickname of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). There was always a pile of Industrial Workers (the IWW paper) on the counter of that pub, and our collection tin was alongside. The boss of the Wobbly pub was a Liverpool woman. Most of the customers were either from the Old Dart, or Irish. I could have got rip-roaring drunk every night in that pub, if I'd liked. Late in the evening, the customers (and the missus!) would be roaring 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game' or some such tommy-rot, my fellow-strikers would be swelling the chorus, hugely drunk and happy, and I'd be sitting there watching them while worrying about tomorrow. A picture no artist could paint."

"So far as I could judge, while most American workers hadn't much time for Communists, they had a soft spot for the Wobblies. During their heyday, the Wobblies played a big part in teaching American workers how to fight for a better living—and they were ferociously militant. Sometimes when the Wobblies had lost a strike, the factory would be burnt down! After Baltimore, I shall always have a weakness where the Wobblies are concerned; they are on the level, and people can't come any better than that."

It was a bitter strike, well fought by the sailors and firemen, but eventually the owners succeeded in getting the "Ivor Rita" away with a "ragtime crew of scabs", while Foulser landed in jail. But he had

taken the precaution of writing to Patsy McCarthy of Bermondsey, a stevedore in the Blue Union (National Amalgamated Stevedores & Dockers), who was to die three years later.

"If she comes to London, we'll look after her, said Patsy, and two months after leaving Baltimore the 'Ivor Rita' headed into Victoria Dock, London. She had been to Genoa the previous trip getting hell's delight into the bargain, and succeeding in getting her cargo discharged with the protective aid of tanks and barbed wire! (Dockers in Genoa were aware I was in jail on a phoney charge).

"The 'Ivor Rita' got comfortably moored alongside the 'Empire Mills'. Then the Old Man was informed that his ship was black and would on no account be discharged. She lay at that berth for three and a half months and was lucky to get away then; for she had no crew and the riggers ignored her—bar White's riggers, who scabbed after all other port workers had left her, those riggers taking that ill-famed 'Ivor Rita' across to the Continent and further trouble. The grain-cargo the 'Ivor Rita' should have discharged went rotten; I believe the Port Health Inspector came down about it. I just wonder how much Goulondris (the owner) lost because of the 'Ivor Rita' strike? It made him give up trying to make scabs of British seamen, whose name was upheld by the Westcountrymen who held up the 'Ivor Rita' in Baltimore in January, 1949 to demonstrate solidarity with Canadian brother-seamen."

Here, too from the inside, is the story of the British seamen's strikes of 1960, which were to see the emergence of the National Seamen's Reform Movement as a Rank & File organisation fighting for demands that the reactionary Nation Union of Seamen wouldn't touch. After the first strike, in July, 1960 with a court injunction against him, George found he was on a special blacklist and took a job stoking at Poplar Hospital. He was there "when the picket-lines of the second strike went into action and disturbed my existence."

"A week went by, with port after port coming out in a demonstration of militancy dwarfing that of the first strike; I felt ashamed to look a striking seaman in the face. It took a chance meeting with Brian Behan one evening to show me how I could do my part in the strike."

"Brian Behan, a brother of the more widely-known Brendan, was at a seamen's meeting selling a paper called *Workers' Voice* one evening, and I was delighted to hear his raucously stentorian voice hailing me as I arrived. We two are old friends in the agitating lark . . . It was very soon after that meeting that I stated to Brian that if he could help me with getting a paper printed I would bring out at least one issue of a rank and file paper for seamen. Bill Christopher of the *Workers' Voice* would print my paper, Brian told me. Being a really militant guy himself, Bill would charge me only for the stencils and duplicating paper. I was told that Bill and his missus contribute their labour free to the production of any rank and file paper."

"The strike was in its fourth week when *Seamen's Voice*, Issue No. 1 arrived on the London waterfront . . . there was now the beginnings of a national rank and file seamen's organisation, with an ever-growing ability to organise. All that was needed to speed the development of that organisation was a rank and file seamen's paper."

"Within a week . . . I received enough correspondence from my fellow seamen to fill three pages of *Seamen's Voice* No. 2. They were all good, constructive letters—and very revealing. By publishing a strike newspaper I was rendering myself liable to prosecution for contempt of court. The injunction which restrained me from open activity, during the first strike, was still good for the second strike, as the judge-in-chambers had made no order (that was the phrase he used) when my case came up between the strikes."

But *Seamen's Voice*—and the strike—continued, despite the jailing in Brixton of Paddy Neary, a leader of the NSRM, recently expelled from the NUS. The seamen in London organised a march from Tower Hill to the prison.

"For some reason the police escorting us seemed rather tense; I wondered why, until we got to Brixton Prison, and then I found out why the police were a bit dodgy—some of the lads began attempting to scale the walls, in order to get Paddy Neary out of unjust incarceration."

After seven weeks, the strike ended. "Beaten? The seamen's strike of 1960 is bearing fruit still, and it will go on bearing fruit and gain us the ultimate victory. Our immediate demands were not met, but we obtained something which any seaman will tell you is much better. We obtained the National Seamen's Reform Movement, our own seamen's organisation. The NSRM has not stopped growing and developing since the day of its founding. Through the NSRM we have established solidarity-links not only with our fellow-workers ashore in Britain, but also with organised labour on waterfronts all over the world—for future reference."

And while honest-to-goodness rebels like George Foulser continue to ship out of British ports, that movement will be sound at the core. Read his book—if you can't afford to buy it, order it from your local library. For this is a genuine seaman's voice.

K. H.

PAGES OF LABOUR HISTORY

Newcastle fights the Fascists

FASCISM, by 1934, was marching triumphantly. In Italy, Mussolini had long consolidated his power and was preparing to attack Abyssinia. Hitler, after one year of power, was tightening his hold on Germany and preparing the first of the many international adventures, which were to lead to the pyre at the Berlin bunker. In England, Mosley had returned from a long visit to Germany and reorganised and retrained his blackshirted British Union of Fascists.

At that time there seemed nothing to stop Mosley's military marching columns and aggressive propaganda. The Labour Party advised, "Be constitutional, leave it to the police and don't forget to vote Labour!" The Communist Party, as each big Fascist meeting was announced, called for a "counter-demonstration" and advertised, free of all charge, Mosley's gatherings. This ensured a big crowd at any Blackshirt meeting, just to hear the row, but of course it never stopped the meetings themselves. Indeed, after his return from Germany, Mosley appeared to welcome and seek out this kind of "counter-demonstration". This successful tactic had been applied by Goebbels in the fairly early years of the Nazi party.

In South Northumberland and Durham the BUF began a rapid growth. It was well organised, with many ex-army officers in command, plenty of full-time workers and no shortage of money. They began making recruits in the industrial and mining areas, including may from the CP. The Blackshirts grew bold as their military-style parades grew.

Then, on May 1, 1934, the ILP were holding a May Day meeting outside the Gateshead, County Durham, Labour Exchange. It was 3 o'clock when the meeting began and, most men having already signed on, the queue was small when a sound of singing, which only a few identified as the Italian Fascist song, was heard. A column of Blackshirt troops marched across the trodden turf of the Windmill Hills towards the ILP meeting, chanting "M-O-S-L-E-Y".

A pause and the dole queue broke in an angry charge against the Fascists. At the first sharp clash the column broke and scattered, some escaping, others pleading for mercy. It was all over in a few minutes and police reinforcements found only an attentive meeting, a reformed queue and some unemployed men who looked a lot pinker than usual.

The next move was a big Fascist rally in Gateshead Town Hall, with motor coaches bringing the troops from all over Durham and north of the Tyne. Mosley was to speak, but in fact was sick on the date, although the rally was held. The coaches arrived to head a short march, heavily guarded by police, past the police station into the Town Hall. By this time the column had reached the lock-up, singing Mussolini's favourite ditty. It looked like no spontaneous charge this time. The silent onlookers were hemmed on to the pavements, from kerb to kerb the road was occupied by Blackshirts and police. If only someone started, others might follow . . . that was the thought in many minds.

Suddenly the column wavered in two places, a short rumpus and Tow Brown was dragged by the neck into the very convenient police station. A few yards away two youths, 17 and 18, who—they said—had gone to help Brown were arrested. They were held until the rally had ended and the Fascists were safely on their way. Next day the youths were bound over and Brown was remanded.

The hearing, a few days later, lasted for two hours and was reported in most of the national dailies. Brown had been charged with assault and the rest by the police, and with assault by the BUF. The first police witness told the usual story—Brown had refused to make a written confession, but had made an oral (he called it verbal) confession. In fact, Brown had refused to speak in the station, except to give his name and address. But worse was to follow, a steel shaft with a big, round flange with a sharp edge was produced in court by the police. It was deadly enough to fell a steer. In the station a policeman had handed this to Brown, saying, "That's a fine thing to hit anyone with." Brown at once stuck his hands deep in his pockets.

The Blackshirt who signed the charge, standing in the witness box in full Fascist uniform and giving as his permanent address the BUF "barracks" said he had been struck, but, and this was to his credit, certainly not by the deadly weapon displayed. Indeed he said he received no injury. The police cross-examiner looked disappointed, but witness stuck to his evidence.

The police witnesses under examination contradicted one another, the prosecution was in the place of the cook who put too many eggs in the pudding and their case became hopeless. It was dismissed, "owing to conflict of evidence."

As a result of these events and the increasing threat of the Fascist para-military organisations, a meeting was held and a temporary and special purpose organisation, the Anti-Fascist League, formed. From the start the League became the most, indeed the only, successful propaganda organisation in Newcastle and district, though limited mainly to open-air meetings. About 150 men and women joined, but

the League was actively supported by large crowds. Most of the members were unemployed, for the time was the great slump, the place one of England's depressed areas, Jarrow, the "town that was murdered", was Gateshead's neighbour. Subs were threepence a week and everybody paid and collections at street meetings helped, though so many were living near the starvation line.

Premises were secured near the old city wall of Newcastle, at a spot which had endured Scottish sieges, the hall of the old Smiths' Guild, above the arched door the carved stone arms of the Guild, a shield bearing three muscular arms each wielding a hefty hammer and the motto "By hammer and hand do all things stand." The hall stood in a quadrangle and here the Leagues held physical training. The people who lived about were a close-knit little community, many of them street traders and at first were aloof and suspicious, but soon warmed and adopted the League.

As to political parties and such, however, the League stood alone. The Labour Party, apart from two organisers of the T & GWU and one woman Labour councillor, would not associate. Echoing the official advice, they said "Leave it to the police and vote Labour."

The Communist Party echoed the Daily Worker and called for "dignified demonstrations against the Fascists." "We should," said one of their speakers, "follow the advice of Hannen Swaffer in the Daily Herald and ridicule the Fascists by calling after them 'Mickey Mouse'." This was a reference to the Fascist dress, excluding the SS, which was usually a black shirt and grey flannels. This, thought Swaffer, made them look like Disney's character. One wonders how name calling would have stopped the Nazi advance. The CP also denounced the League as "gangsters".

The official Jewish Community was at first interested, then the traditional Hebrew policy of non-interference in political problems prevailed. "Mosley has now publicly stated that he is not anti-Semitic and does not intend to be so. We are satisfied, we believe he means it. Better leave well alone." Remember Eichmann? It took years of the most horrible slaughter to arouse in young Jewry, such as the militant "43 Group" of the immediate post-war years, the realisation that Fascism must be destroyed.

But the League went on. The Blackshirts, beaten in propaganda, were to be beaten in combat, too. They were quickly driven from the working-class quarters. Almost at once the BUF were forced on the defensive. In a few months their aggressiveness had vanished and they were being pushed—hard.

On one occasion, after a big Fascist rally, the Blackshirts were besieged in their headquarters in the business centre of Newcastle. For hours the police moved on a crowd that always came back. Late at night groups of Fascists slipped out, after the crowd had thinned, only to discover that the anti-Fascists were not only in front of the building.

That summer Mosley had planned a big rally on the Town Moor on "Race Sunday," the eve of Tyneside's annual holiday. It was presumed that the League would hold a not-very-dignified counter-demonstration. Mosley wrote to the Home Secretary, offering to call off the rally if the Home Office thought it wise to do so. The official reply passed the ball back, as did the Newcastle police. Then Mosley, without the official excuse he had hoped for, himself cancelled the rally. The BUF began to lose members. Information of counter-attacks reached the League, but they never reached fruition. On plan was a night raid on the Smiths' Guildhall. The locals volunteered to barricade the old narrow streets with carts and barrows, while a League guard kept watch, but the Fascists were to be allowed to enter the Guild locality first. The carts and timber were not to keep them out, but to keep them in.

When it came to "belling the cat", however, Blackshirt heroes were few and, according to the regular and corroborated information received by the League, the raid was called off because of lack of spirit.

The BUF on Tyneside dwindled rapidly. In a matter of six months most of the members had left, few, if any, public appearances were made and the small number remaining were little other than a club. And so it remained for years. The Anti-Fascist League, poor and "uninfluential" had, by its devotion and courage, proved that Fascism can be fought—and defeated.

GEORDIE

PORTUGAL—Nine prisoners awaiting trial for distributing subversive literature made a daring escape in an armoured police car from the fortress prison of Caxias on December 6.

SPAIN—On December 3 prison sentences of from 6 months to 12 years were passed on 44 people for attending Communist meetings and distributing propaganda. One of their crimes was to paint the word "Amnistia" (Amnesty) on walls in Madrid.