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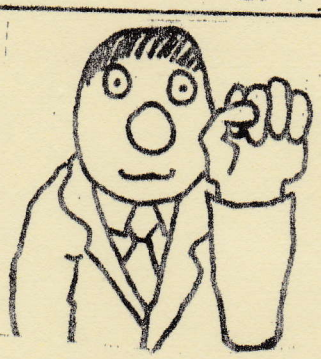
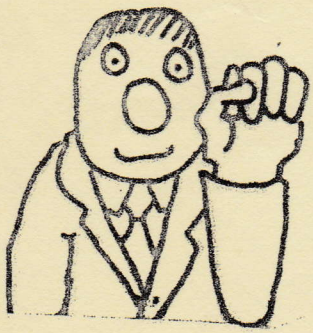
RECOGNITION CHART

I am a revolutionary



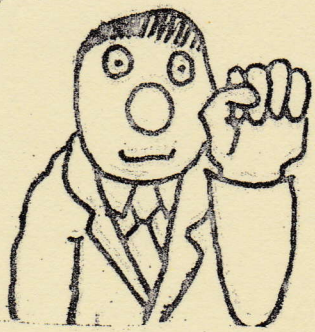
I am knocking on wood

My fist is stuck to my head



I am pulling the communication cord

I am nervously asking a bus to stop



I am showing you which hand has the sweetie

THE UNIONS KEEP US WEAK

A major theme of this issue is the role and function of the trade union hierarchies. We see the articles as part of an on-going discussion amongst socialist industrial militants. Further contributions are welcome.

There is a danger of over-simplification in this area. We do not say, for instance, that there are no differences between 'left' and 'right' officials. There are. Those on the 'right' tend to see themselves as the labour lieutenants of this rotten system. Those on the 'left' look to the future. They see themselves promoted: captains in an authoritarian, state capitalist society. But both sides share a fundamentally similar attitude to those they claim to represent. (The current collaboration by the TUC in the government's offensive against the working class is nothing new: just business as usual. It is not unique to Britain but part of a world-wide phenomenon.)

Better union leaderships are not the solution. There is a long and bitter experience of 'lefts' in office. Once upon a time the architects of the social contract - Jones and Scanlon - were both 'lefts'. Both were campaigned for by people further on the left. The problem is one of assisting the growth of genuinely autonomous organisations, not one of electing more 'left' leaders. But even here the situation is ambiguous. Recent years have seen the accelerated tendency towards the bureaucratisation of the shop stewards' movement. A new layer of petty trade union officials within the place of work has emerged. One of the consequences has been the 'unofficial' unofficial strike (i.e. not supported by the shop stewards' apparatus).

A related question is that of groups of militants often in, or influenced by, the various left sects. They want to fight the boss. But, just like the officials (whom they often see as rivals for power rather than simply as opponents) the 'lefts' do not consider ordinary workers as actively and consciously in control of their own struggle. They see them instead as strike fodder, to be tricked and manipulated into following the 'correct' demand, the 'correct' slogan or the 'correct' leadership. There have recently been a series of disputes where such radical bureaucrats have found themselves - to put it mildly - completely isolated.

The trade unions, by their very structure and function, are an essential part of the system. J. Zerzan's article in this issue raises some interesting questions about their past role in a situation of social stress. Today there is no doubt that the unions divide and limit workers' struggles and inhibit the development of a socialist consciousness.* They are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

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* Recent Solidarity (London) pamphlets on this theme are 'Trade Unionism or Socialism' by John Zerzan and 'Bureaucrats and Women Cleaners' by Lynda Finn and Gavin Williams (both 10p + postage).

UNIONISM AND THE LABOR FRONT

This text (announced in Solidarity vol.VIII, no.3) is part of an on-going discussion on the nature of the trade unions, a subject of great importance to all revolutionaries. In it, J. Zerzan challenges some widely-held beliefs concerning the degree of resistance offered by the German trade unions to the Nazis when they came to power in 1933.
The article has given rise to some discussion within Solidarity (London). It is therefore followed by the dissenting comments of a comrade who feels that the choice of facts with which Zerzan supports his thesis is too one-sided.

In "Organised Labor versus 'The Revolt Against Work'"* (TELOS # 21), I described spontaneous opposition to an increasingly bureaucratic and collusive unionism. Greater centralisation of control over workers and more institutionalised business-labor-government co-operation have made transparent trade unions' role as the last effective police force of wage labor.

In passing, I suggested a developing similarity in some ways to the situation in National Socialist Germany, where labor discipline was maintained via the Labor Front, the forced membership of all working people in one, big national organisation. This suggestion met with much predictable ridicule, though it was buried within a paragraph and mentioned but once. Some research, however, convinced me that the point is valid and that the reference deserves discussion in its own right.

The standard thesis about German labor and the Nazis - generally accepted by bourgeois and Marxist commentators alike - is that the unions were the backbone of Weimar democracy and the consistent enemies of Nazism. They were, therefore, savagely attacked by the reactionary Nazis, and destroyed on May 2, 1933 when all union offices and resources were seized and union officials imprisoned. This event is seen as the effective inauguration of the dark night of German fascism, and the Labor Front which then replaced the unions is considered to have been a kind of giant concentration camp, the very antithesis of free trade unionism. The subject in fact has been largely ignored, owing to the absence of similarity between the unions and the Labor Front, and the fact of total enmity between unions and Nazis.

* Solidarity Pamphlet No 47.

With these obvious facts and the zero degree of continuity, in other words, there has seemed little to discuss and certainly nothing of relevance to an understanding of the role of contemporary unions.

Yet there may be very much in the German experience worth our consideration today, for this overall assessment does far more to conceal the truth than to reveal it. The connection between unionism and fascism, in fact, was a very real one.

If the Workers' Council movement was curbed and rendered non-revolutionary in the years immediately following World War I,(1) employer-union collaboration was begun in earnest in the closing days of the War. The unions (principally the Free Social-Democratic Unions) formed the Co-operative Association of German Industrial and Commercial Employers and Workers with the employers' groups in November, 1918. In many ways a replica of the Nazi Labor Front, this institutionalised collusion endured until worker opposition and economic crisis in late 1923 brought an end to the effort(2). This candid class collaboration was superseded by the Temporary National Economic Council, which assumed many of the Association's duties, and by a similar example of growing state involvement, the trend toward government arbitration, also supported by the unions. Franz Neumann saw this process accurately:

> Bound so closely to the existing regime and having become so bureaucratic, the unions lost their freedom of action... The spontaneity of the working classes had been sacrificed to the bureaucratic organisations... National Socialism grew in this seedbed(3).

Hermann Rauschning saw the unions' constant betrayal of the workers' interests as resulting in their becoming used up in the service of capital and in time a political liability to the ruling classes. A leading industrialist said,

> "It was quite all right to make these trade union officials, the big and little busybodies alike, look thoroughly ridiculous. When we had flattered these gentlemen into donning dinner jackets and tail coats we had begun to make progress... The workers began to get sick of their own men... We just had to get rid of these fellows(4).

General von Brauchitsch echoed these sentiments, explaining why the unions were no longer useful to the Weimar rightists:

> The trade unions were too ponderous and lethargic; and they had not struck roots deeply enough politically in the younger generation. They were the

organisations of the old men, not of the younger generation, which was what mattered(5).

Hence, "Labor's influence upon the fate of the German Republic was rapidly declining", as Adolph Sturmthal put it(6). At the end of Weimar there had to be at least the public impression of their demise; to quote Sigmund Neumann, "The destruction of the pre-Nazi labor organisations was was an inescapable result of political defeat"(7).

In the last months of the Weimar Republic, the unions had increasingly clamored, however, to be retained in the service of the bourgeoisie. In October, 1932 the ADGB (Free Trade Union Association, which represented nearly all unionised workers) printed an article in the Nazi Schwarze Front paper pledging its faith in the "National Idea",(8) and in the November transport strike in Berlin, "the trade union leaders fought openly against the strikers"(9). Schleicher, the last Chancellor before Hitler, recognised the service the unions were giving the state and strongly considered their incorporation into the government leadership, based on his appreciation of their increasingly nationalist policy(10).

After Hitler's accession to the Chancellorship on January 30, rightists and unionists continued to work for an open labor collaboration with National Socialism. On March 4, former Chancellor Papen declared that unionism could be a very strong support of the Nazi regime(11). On March 20, the ADGB Executive Committee swore its fealty, reminding Hitler that "Unions are indispensable and inevitably integrated into the state"(12). On April 1 the Metal Workers Union, Germany's largest trade union, announced that it would solidly and loyally work with Nazism(13). On April 7, Leipart (head of the ADGB) proclaimed the Nazi government and asked for a role in loyally representing the workers(14). On April 9, a Statement to the Government by the A DGB Executive Committee declared unreserved willingness "to place at the service of the new state the labor force's own organisation which the trade unions have devoted years of activity to creating". It further pledged its full co-operation for National Socialist efforts to overcome "all tendencies toward disunity" and its support for state "efforts to unify the trade unions"(15). Other union statements and meetings with the Nazis led Erich Matthias to see the development of a "national trade unionism", in which the unions jettisoned any allegiance to democracy in order to obtain benefits from an all-powerful state(16). On April 19, the ADGB decided to send out a call to all members, inviting their participation in the Nazi celebrations planned for May 1(17).

It should now be clear that when, say, Richard Grunberger admits that the trade union leaders wanted to co-operate with the

Nazis(18), or Franz Neumann says that union officials agreed to step down if the trade union structure were retained(19), a real understatement is being conceded. And when the trade union offices and equipment were confiscated and the top officials arrested on May 2, there was no resistance for a deeper reason than merely the unions' rottenness. Active co-operation was at work in the scenario, and a vital continuity was insured. When Labor Front head Dr. Robert Ley declared that the unions had been "brutally and ruthlessly" seized, then, he spoke for public consumption. Much closer to the truth of the situation was the August 7, 1933 article in the Manchester Guardian, which spoke of ongoing conferences between union and government officials, toward the organisation of the Labor Front.

In terms of structure, personnel, and policy, basic continuities are to be found between the Weimar unions and the Nazi Labor Front. B.N.Prieth's unpublished doctoral dissertation, widely considered the most complete study of the Front in English, acknowledges that it was built on the administrative structure of the old unions(20). Similarly, Vaso Trivanovitch found that the Front was organised according to the basic industries. "There are 18 industrial organisations, corresponding to the former German trade unions"(21). Far from being the antithesis of the unions, the Labor Front "absorbed the former trade unions"(22), and consolidated them in an extension of the centralisation tendencies of Weimar unionism. As Florinsky wrote in 1935, "Within the Labor Front, the trade unions, whose number has been greatly reduced through re-organisation, continue to retain their identity"(23). Rauschning perceived this continuity when he referred to "the Labor Front formed out of the trade unions"(24). Though nearly everyone has been confused by the formal inclusion of business in the Front, and by Nazi rhetoric intended to obscure the continuity involved, the National Socialists realised the necessity of unions. As Dr. Ley confided late in 1933, "Nothing is more dangerous to a state than uprooted men deprived of their defense organisations... Such men undoubtedly become a constant source of disturbance"(25). Maxine Sweezy expressed this point well: "The National Socialist government recognised that destruction of the labor unions might strengthen radicalism among the workers"(26).

Related to the sameness of structure is the sameness of personnel and policy. "The trade unions were not simply dissolved," according to Pascal, and "Lower functionaries remained... in positions such as treasurers of branches (locals), etc. The subscriptions (dues) were still collected"(27). The discredited top leaders had to go, but the Labor Front "retained the services of minor officials of the former trade unions", to quote Helga Grebing(28). Otto Nathan found that many Labor Front officials "Considered themselves genuine successors of the earlier trade union movement, and others actually had been functionaries in the

pre-Nazi trade unions"(29), a finding that would not contradict Karl Bednarik and others who saw the co-existence of national socialist and Marxist views among Weimar unionists. Similar is Albert Speer's recollection regarding the Front's "Beauty of Labor" project: "We were able to draw former union leaders... into this campaign"(30). And C.W.Guillebaud, an expert on Weimar labor legislation, noted that often "the same individuals who had held important posts in the Labor ministry under earlier Governments were still in high offices there". He also found "a continuity of policy... which he had not altogether expected to find"(31). Indeed, an examination of Nazi Party documents illustrates the continuation of the Labor Service, created in the late Weimar period, and the Labor Courts, instituted even earlier(32). Franz Neumann's assessment underscores the essential continuum:

> The Labor Front has driven the process of bureaucratisation to its maximum. Not only the relations between the enterprise and the worker but even the relations among the workers themselves are now mediated by an autocratic bureaucracy.(33)

It is also worth noting that even leading resistance figures saw the 'benefits' of the Labor Front. Wilhelm Leuschner, a bourgeois Weimar parliamentarian, wanted its extension post-Nazism, as the "solution to the social problem". Other resistance leaders, such as Habermann and Wirmer, considered the Front a unified trade unionand called for the change of its name to "German Trade Union', to be the only change necessary. The 'German Trade Union', as Goedeler explained, was to be "an organic continuation of the equally comprehensive Arbeitsfront"(34). And the German Communist Party apparently shared this manipulative mentality; the KPD saw the Labor Front as probably the most useful vehicle for "the conquest of the trade union masses"(35). German Socialists, for their part, cynically adopted fascist ideas into their "Neo-Socialist" slogan of "Order, Authority, Nation". As the trend towards state capitalism seems generally to beget state trade unionism, the Left exhibits only its familiar opportunism.

The Nazi factory cell organisation (NSBO) engaged in many union-type activities before the establishment of the Labor Front, and in fact often displayed more militancy than did the trade unions. Thus in February and March 1933, for example, NSBO partisans attacked company unions, breaking up their meetings and the like(36). With National Socialism in power, state anti-depression measures caused real wages to rise, unemployment to decline, and the number of paid holidays was doubled. The tendency of workers to regard the Labor Front as their union, noted by Grunberger(37), begins to appear less surprising, and Guillebaud went so far as to characterise it as having a "strong pro-worker bias"(38). As Noakes and Pridham observed, Front officials "did not hesitate to apply pressure on employers"(39).

Peter Viereck saw its unionist nature perhaps more succinctly: "Ley's Labor Front is the world's largest labor union inasmuch as every single German worker is forced to join"(40).

It is significant, too, to consider the growth in relative power of this super-union, within the practical development of National Socialism. Dr. Ley, as head of the Front, gave more orders than anyone else in Germany and in effect supervised every human being according to Wallace Deuel(41). David Schoenbaum states that the Nazi Party declined and the Labor Front gained in power after 1933(42). It "has more and more excluded all other organisations (with the exception of the Hitler Youth) from the field of social activity", in the judgement of James Pollock(43).

When the Labor Front was established, it was proclaimed by the Nazis, "an achievement of working-class solidarity"(44). At the same time, the factory cells were deprived of their authority, to preclude any possibility of worker organisation at the local level. The "solidarity" was based, of course, on compulsory worker membership in the Labor Front. Under Weimar, the closed shop was not legal; it came with the Nazis. (One is reminded somewhat of the current drive for the closed shop in France, pushed by progressive employers since the factory occupation of May, 1968.) Dues to the Labor Front were thus automatically deducted from wages, along with such other practices familiar today, as the use of the work book, or union book, and the growth of compulsory arbitration. And the Nazis were more advanced than the Marxists in their appreciation of the changing work force: their conception of the working class, "workers of Faust and Stirn", included both blue-collar and white-collar employees. In fact, Nazi labor 'leftism' went as far as the Labor Front's demand, in the January 7, 1938 Party paper Volkischer Beobachter, for nationalisation of the war industries.

Regarding unionism today, we find increasing bureaucratisation and centralisation: more merging of locals and unions, more workers forced to join unions, the general absence of even formal union democracy, closer and more institutionalised collusion with business and government, more arbitration, bargaining taking place at ever higher levels. When Harvard's George Wald thought he saw a union-based fascism developing in the hard-hat violence of 1970, he missed the point. What he witnessed was only a union-engineered release of the tensions built up from a growing imprisonment of workers. The developing fascism has deep roots. Jacques Ellul's description is instructive:

> In reality, the growing integration of unions into the state mechanism makes them increasingly an element of state power, and their tendency is to re-inforce that power; at that moment a union be-

comes a mechanism for organising the laboring masses for the benefit of the state(45).

The other side of the story is obviously the worker autonomy and resistance which makes this development necessary in a given form. The militancy of German workers is well-known, and the Labor Front was far from totally successful in containing it. (The miners resorted to passive resistance in 1938 and 1939, and in November, 1939 wage cuts were rescinded, due to plummeting productivity; this was a massive defeat for the regime(46).)

The 'revolt against work' here - absenteeism, turnover, sabotage, low productivity, anti-unionism - is calling for strenuous disciplinary efforts from the unions. We will see whether the American Labor Front, apparently in the process of formation, is as successful as its German predecessor.

NOTES

(1) See, for example, Helga Grebing, The History of the German Labour Movement (London: Wolff, 1969), p. 107.

(2) Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 111-112.

(3) Franz Neumann, Behemoth: The Structures and Practice of National Socialism (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. 413

(4) Hermann Rauschning, Men of Chaos (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1942), p. 209.

(5) Ibid., p. 273.

(6) Adolph Sturmthal, The Tragedy of European Labor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 132.

(7) Sigmund Neumann, Permanent Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1965), p. 171.

(8) Roy Pascal, The Nazi Dictatorship (London: Routledge, 1934), p. 148.

(9) Ibid., p. 103.

(10) Ibid., p. 147.

(continued on p.27)

COMMENT: Zerzan seeks to show that the creation of the Nazi Labour Front required only minor modifications in the structure, personnel and functioning of the pre-existing German trade unions. The implication is that there is no reason to refute a priori the thesis advanced in his previous article (see 'Trade Unionism or Socialism', Solidarity pamphlet No.47) that existing USA union structures (including the majority of trade union personnel) could fulfil a role analogous to that of the Nazi Labour Front.

But Zerzan's supporting evidence, although interesting and too often ignored in the debates on the role of trade unions, is insufficient and too one-sided. He adduces three main types of evidence:

1) active support of the Nazi government and declarations of readiness to cooperate by trade union officials;

2) limited change of personnel;

3) limited changes in organisation and activities.

He adduces no quantitative data on how many trade union officials were removed. To say that a number, even a large number, were not removed proves little. Certain trade unionists were right-wing, and others might have been afraid of persecution, had they left their jobs. And these right-wing trade unions (or trade union members) might also have been the very ones having those meetings with government officials, referred to by the 'Manchester Guardian'. Other statements by trade unionists (in support of the Nazis) may have been initiated by fear (and not without justification), once Hitler's power came to look unshakeable. And there were significant organisational changes: abolition of elections, no authority to factory cells, a state-imposed closed shop (with the SS to enforce the decisions).

Thus, although Zerzan's general thesis finds me sympathetic, I am not convinced. Besides, it is not certain that the historical similarities between pre-war Germany and present-day USA are such as to make the analogy fruitful.

P. F.

MORE ON THE UNIONS

Reading the Editorial ('State of the Union') in the last issue I found myself in immediate disagreement with the opening paragraph: 'The main trend in politics, in Britain and other West European countries during the present economic recession, is the emergence of the trade union bureaucracy as the dominant partner in the ruling triumvirate: government-industry-unions.'

'What?' I snapped. 'The trade unions the dominant partner?'. But then what makes them, in the UK, accept the £6 policy, and the 4½% policy, and the cuts in public employment? What makes them, in Italy, give up most of their programmes of reduction of wage differentials? What makes them so unnoticeable in Germany and almost silent in the USA?

'Where has the analysis gone wrong?' I asked myself. It is true that the trade unions have become more important. It is true that their support is essential to the 'success' of any economic policy. It is true that their opposition may topple governments (although not always true, not even in recent years). But is this enough to make of them the dominant partner? It was clearly this term 'dominant' which was troubling me.

A coalition is formed to reach certain aims. But there are always several ways of doing this. The coalition ('triumvirate') we are discussing has been formed to defend an oppressive, hierarchical social structure. But such a structure can vary within wide limits and various alignments can favour the interests of one or another partner. The partner whose interests are favoured most is the dominant one. Domination refers to strength, and if this strength doesn't reveal itself in some concrete advantages, it means it's not there.

If this is accepted, then the trade unions are not the dominant partner in the 'triumvirate'. It is quite easy to conceive of a society not fundamentally different from the present one, but in which the trade unions would have much more power and many more privileges. They could, for instance, have some legislative power. Their higher officers might form a Second Legislative Chamber, besides the House of Commons. They could draw an income, guaranteed by the state. Etc. If this isn't so, it must be because the trade unions are unable to impose it. As things stand now, trade unions cannot initiate legislation nor policies. They can only oppose them. Their capacity to influence the course of events is fairly limited.

The Editorial stresses that the trade unions don't want to run society. To have power thrust upon them 'would reveal to all the full scope of their impotence'. So the TUs are both dominant and impotent?

It doesn't sound plausible. Why are they impotent? My answer is, because they have to keep the workers under control. The workers accept the mediation (and control) of the trade unions only because they see the TUs as a weapon with which to interfere with the policies decided upon by the bosses or the state. Either the unions remain a mediating institution (and they cannot be 'dominant', but at most influence the struggle between the two main opponents). Or they become the dominant institution. We would then have a society close to the syndicalists' prescription (although syndicalists would claim that they had 'different' trade unions in mind), and as different from the UK and the USSR as these two societies differ from each other.

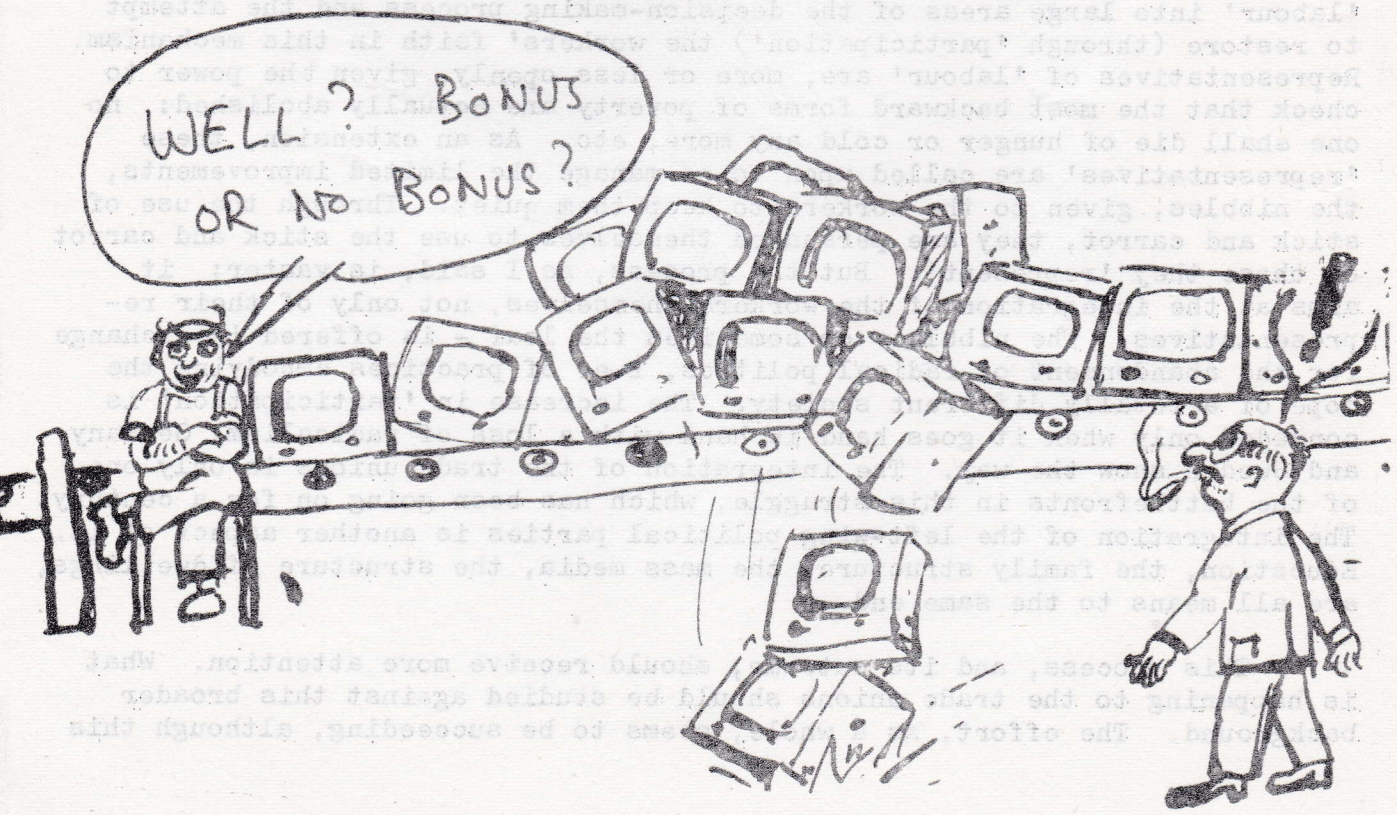
A 'syndicalist' society is, in my view, the only one where trade unions could be called dominant. Nowadays, their role remains subordinate. The direction of social evolution is not defined by them. Their strength, which derives from their capacity to affect the economy, gives them some power over the course of events, but not in any major way. They are squeezed from both sides. In a real confrontation the only weapon at the disposal of the trade unions would be a massive mobilisation of the workers. Short of that, the trade unions will be defeated. And if they are not defeated by the state, they will be destroyed by the workers. Either way, the trade union bureaucracy would lose.

All that the unions are achieving now is a somewhat greater role in policy-making. This greater role is part of a broader process, which is the really important and interesting one: the integration of the world of 'labour' into large areas of the decision-making process and the attempt to restore (through 'participation') the workers' faith in this mechanism. Representatives of 'labour' are, more or less openly, given the power to check that the most backward forms of poverty are actually abolished: no one shall die of hunger or cold any more, etc. As an extension, these 'representatives' are called upon to co-manage the limited improvements, the nibbles, given to the workers to keep them quiet. Through the use of stick and carrot, they are persuaded themselves to use the stick and carrot on those they 'represent'. But the process, as I said, is vaster: it aims at the integration of the workers themselves, not only of their representatives. The nibble - or sometimes the loaf - is offered in exchange for the abandonment of radical politics, i.e. of practices embodying the hope of a totally different society. The increase in 'participation' is conceded only when it goes hand in hand with a loss of radicalism. Germany and Sweden show the way. The integration of the trade unions is only one of the battlefronts in this struggle, which has been going on for a century. The integration of the left-wing political parties is another aspect of it. Education, the family structure, the mass media, the structure of dwellings, are all means to the same end.

This process, and its outcome, should receive more attention. What is happening to the trade unions should be studied against this broader background. The effort, as a whole, seems to be succeeding, although this

is not the place to discuss it in depth. One implication can usefully be pointed out: it is no longer clear that political propaganda and activity should mainly rely upon, or be addressed to, the traditional working class. Not only their bureaucratic representative institutions, but the workers themselves, if seen as a mass, seem to me to have been losing, over the last 100 years, their political radicalism. Recently a somewhat different radicalism has started appearing, much more randomly, and among a much wider section of the population. What, to my mind, distinguishes it from the 'old' radicalism is that, while the old one extolled the workers (and could therefore rightly be called 'workerism'), the 'new' one refuses the condition of worker, with all that it implies in terms of everyday life habits, hobbies, acceptance of 'discipline' and of the work ethic, etc. The new radicalism entails an effort to be non-conformist, rather than an effort to conform to the working class sub-culture. It is, perhaps, the human response to the attempts at creating one-dimensional persons, which go on all the time. As the world comes out of the present economic recession, the pressures of dire need (fear of unemployment, etc.) will decrease. The 'new' radicalism will flourish again, and more strongly. And it won't give a damn about trade unions.

Theleme Anarres



. . . and more

The TUC conference at Brighton and the Labour Party conference at Blackpool are an x-ray of the power structure in Britain today.

At Brighton the TUC demonstrated that it was still capable of talking the Seamen's Union Executive out of their decision to strike. At Blackpool the Prime Minister declared: 'The relationship which has grown up between the TUC and the government in the last two and a half years has developed faster than the relationship between the government and the NEC' (National Executive Committee of the Labour Party). A few days earlier he had said on TV: 'In a modern industrial democracy no government can govern without the consent of the unions'. These comments reflect a real state of affairs, namely that the Labour government carries out policies which the majority in the Labour Party opposes, and can only stay in power because of the TUC's support.

At Blackpool the Labour Party conference rejected the pleas and threats of the Prime Minister and of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and voted for including the demand for nationalisation of major banks and insurance companies in the Party's next election manifesto. At the same time the pound fell to $1.60. The connection between these events is clear: a battle between finance capitalism and the 'left' of the Labour Party, with the Labour government firmly on the side of 'realism' (i.e. of the capitalist reality of the moment).

The TUC is the government's main support, sustaining it in power. It is indeed both dominant and impotent. It is dominant in the sense that it is impossible for any party to rule Britain today without support from the TUC. And it is impotent in the sense that it refuses to use this power to change the (capitalist) status quo in this country. When the NEC voted to support a massive demonstration against Labour government policies of cuts in public services The Times (28/10/76) wrote: 'It became obvious yesterday that the government can no longer rely on the support of the Labour Party's National Executive for the Cabinet's economic-industrial strategy, and that it will be left to the TUC to sustain it through the present crisis'.

The TUC today has the power to sustain - or break - the entire social structure in Britain. It chooses to sustain it, and will do all it can to save it, because this bureaucracy is an integral part of the system. Of course, the TUC will always 'warn the government' that 'there is a limit to its support for the government's policies'. But it tactfully declines to state what that limit is. At one stage the 'limit' seemed to be the figure of a million unemployed. But the TUC did not withdraw its support from the government when the figure reached almost a million and a half. The 'limit' will always be stretched as far as the working class will allow it to be stretched.

The most powerful argument which the union bureaucracy uses to defend its support for the present Cabinet is that 'the Labour Movement must not bring down a Labour government'. This, apparently, would be a betrayal of loyalty to the Labour Movement and would bring the Tories to power. Both arguments are a form of emotional blackmail exploiting the self-image of 'loyalty to one's mates, class and party'. They cannot stand up to closer scrutiny. By its acceptance of the IMF conditions to cut back on public services the Cabinet is scabbing on the Welfare State. If the Cabinet is disloyal to the principles of the Labour Movement and starts dismantling its achievements, must that movement still remain loyal to such a Cabinet? Does one remain loyal to scabs?

The argument that 'to overthrow Labour would bring the Tories to power' may well be true. So what? Could a Tory government stand up to those forces which overthrew a Labour government? Could the Tories initiate, and sustain, policies that would win the support of those who swept Labour out of office? Certainly not. Working class forces which can overthrow a Labour government today will find it much easier to overthrow any other government tomorrow.

So why this anxiety about sweeping this lot out of office? After all, isn't the Labour Movement involved in a battle? Healy hinted as much, when he told the Labour Party conference at Blackpool: 'I do not come with the Treasury view, I come from the battle front'. He only 'forgot' to mention what the battle was about and who the enemy was. No wonder. For Healy and his like is the enemy the IMF (i.e. the forces of international capitalism) or is it the working class? Is 'the battle' about cutting down the Welfare State or is it about smashing British capitalism?

* * * *

There was once a Movement which set out to build a new Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. Instead it created a welfare state within a corrupt and decaying capitalism. Now that this welfare state is threatened by those who control the world's credit (it is rumoured that they are not socialists), what is this movement to do? Use its power to buttress the pld social order? Or use it to clear the ground and lay the foundations of a new society? Could it be that deep down this movement is afraid of sweeping away a decaying system and of implementing its own vision?

A. O.

BALLAD OF NORWICH JAIL

The following letter, which we received from an ex-guest at the prison, is interesting and amusing in its own right, in exposing the difference between the expectations and reality of the powers that be. But the situation that it describes has a much wider validity; do not workers build their own prisons too? In fact the examples of prisoners' resistance are only too familiar to anyone who has ever worked on a building site. We would welcome further contributions on this theme.

As in the past the government "at a saving of thousands" is using prisoners to build prisons. After all, with 80% of offenders usually ending up again in Nick some time in the future, you'd think those "good for nothings" would knuckle down and make as good a job as possible of their future home. A great idea, but in face of certain facts, I hope to show that our governments' faith in the criminal element is gravely misplaced. And to be fair, after all, when you think about it, it's a bit much to expect people who are forcibly made to dig their own graves to take much pride in the job in hand. In Hitler's days even the most fanatical Nazi supervisor would probably not insist on a high class piece of excavation before pushing his victim into it. Since then of course, with the tremendous democratic progress that's been made, you'd think the occupants of H.M. Prisons would take a real pride in the task of making a spanking new centre for themselves to be locked up in. However, criminals - like a lot of the working class - never accept these great new social opportunities when they are offered and I'd like to describe some of the disgraceful acts of sabotage which have bedevilled the construction programme at Norwich.

Apart from the individual acts of sabotage, a complete atmosphere of indifference, even cynicism, seems to have enveloped the site both among the prisoners and the guards. The only people who seem at all interested in getting the job done quickly and properly are the people in charge - those responsible to the Home Office. The "security" guards just wander around looking for places to go and have a chat or a cigarette and keep out of

the way of their chiefs. Of course a lot of their time has to be spent avoiding situations where building site accidents might befall them. These always seem to occur when they are near convicts, so the obvious motto for them is "all guards keep away from convicts, especially ones with bricks, trowels, electric drills, steam hammers or any other nasty little things".

This suits the convicts of course. They can carry on with their scrabble or chess or whatever, and if they're lucky, enjoy the odd joint so long as they keep a look out for the Engineer. The more politically minded criminal will no doubt be completing some complicated piece of sabotage during these working hours. Incredible ideas - worthy of Colditz - have been developed, from simple ones such as cell doors being hung so that they suddenly swing open and crush a guard against the wall at the moment he inserts a key into the lock, ranging to the more grandiose - the collapse of an entire building by ramming a car into a predetermined weakened corner.

Much of the sabotage is aimed at the guards quarters. Several toilets have been plumbed so that they flush directly into the cavity wall space. "Thus", as the designer commented, "they will gradually be building a solid wall of shit all around them". Of course one can expect the vigilant eyes of chief screws to discover many of these practices. A senior officer told me that putting things right cost several thousands of pounds each quarter. Last year an enterprising fellow, when told to lay a coat of concrete to protect metal tubing which would be threaded with electrical cables, gave them all a good bash with his hammer before covering them with concrete. Of course it was later found impossible to thread the wiring. The job was so thorough in fact that the tubes were dug up, he was charged with sabotage and was given an extra year in prison.

A brickie friend of mine - much more careful - used a system he called 3 to 1. That is, he laid three rows of bricks with a normal cement mix, then one with sand, and so on, carefully pointing the whole wall to avoid discovery. Another one, taking a dislike to the new security habit of incorporating a screen of wire mesh in the cell walls, made sure to cut the mesh into neat, easily removable 18" squares, just enough to get his body through. "You never know when you might want to get out", he said.

I remember a rather spectacular moment when tons of ready-mixed concrete had been poured into some shuttering for a roof on the gate-house. All seemed well for a few moments - the shuttering had taken a lot of time and care in the making - but then a small section mysteriously came adrift and a sea of fresh concrete poured over the floors, down the stairs, to finally fill up some drainage trenches recently dug out.

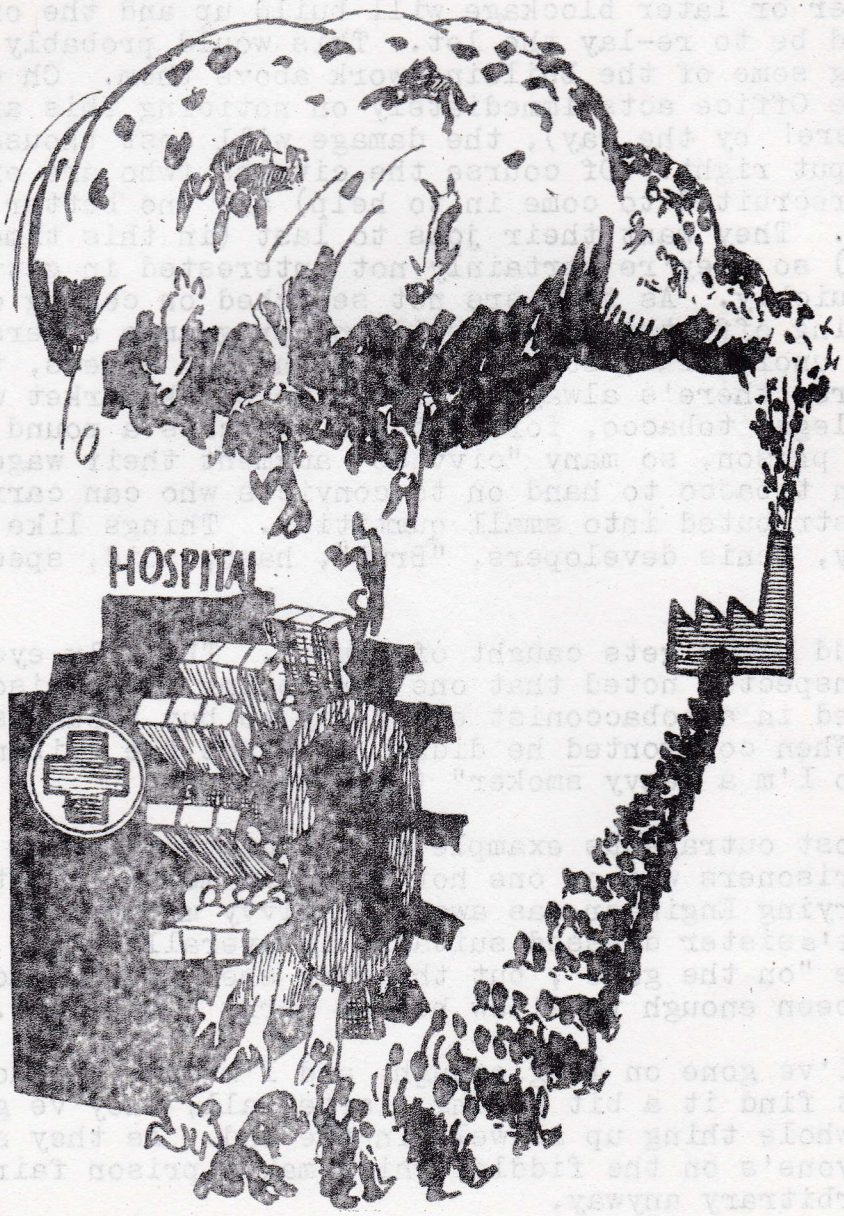
Some of the potentially most destructive pieces of sabotage were done when the main drains were laid. Dumper truck loads of concrete somehow found their way into various sections of the drains. Even if they don't completely block everything right away, sooner or later blockage will build up and the only thing to do would be to re-lay the lot. This would probably involve dismantling some of the building work above them. Oh dear! Even if the Home Office acts immediately on noticing this article (hello there! by the way), the damage will cost thousands of pounds to put right. Of course the civvies (who are ordinary tradesmen recruited to come in to help) are "no better than they should be". They want their jobs to last (in this time of economic chaos) so they're certainly not interested in getting the job done quickly. As they are not searched on coming onto the site or going off, the prison building programme offers them a useful, if unofficial, source of free nails, screws, tools etc., and of course there's always a lucrative black market with prisoners. Illegal tobacco, for instance, fetches a pound an ounce inside the prison, so many "civvies" augment their wages by bringing in tobacco to hand on to convicts who can carry it through distributed into small quantities. Things like hard-core pornography, penis developers, "Brut", hash, acid, speed, also sell well.

The odd civvy gets caught of course. The wily eyes of a security inspector noted that one man coming into prison from town stopped in a tobacconist every day to buy 5 ounces of Old Holbein. When confronted he didn't convince the tribunal by his excuse, "so I'm a heavy smoker" (cough, cough).

The most outrageous example of the civvies making a profit from the prisoners was on one hot Saturday morning last summer, when the prying Engineer was away. A civvy managed to smuggle in his mate's sister dressed suitably in overalls etc. She happened to be "on the game", but the work she got that morning must have been enough to allow her an early retirement.

Well I've gone on long enough, and I'm sure our Home Office reader must find it a bit boring - after all, they've got to cover the whole thing up as well in the end. As they say nowadays, everyone's on the fiddle, which makes prison fairly pointless and arbitrary anyway.

G. Bird


HOSPITAL

BOOK REVIEW

Marcel Liebman, Leninism under Lenin. Jonathan Cape, London, 1975.

This big, expensive book (500 pages, £12), recently awarded the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize, is essentially an attempt to defend Lenin's practice against the accusation that it contained the roots of Stalinism, without denying the historical facts which have been dug up by anti-leninists in support of that accusation. To this purpose, the author reassembles known material (no original research) in order both to dispel the Stalinist image of Lenin, and to show that, apart from some lapses, Lenin was sincerely democratic and it was not really his fault if the Russian Revolution ended as it did. What is new for a book written by a leninist, is the defensive position to which the author is compelled by his decision not to forget the facts upon which the anti-leninist case usually rests. For instance, in the last chapter Liebman says:

> "One can grant straight away to the critics of Leninism that the history of the bureaucratic and totalitarian degeneration of the Soviet regime does not begin with the death of Lenin, or even with Stalin's accession to important positions of authority in the Soviet state... The birth of the Communist bureaucracy antedated the appearance and growth of Stalin's influence, and the same is true of monolithism - Lenin's responsibility in the latter connexion, one of crucial importance, being incontestably substantial. His assertion of the fundamental role played by the vanguard organisation in preparing and consolidating the revolution, and his emphasis on the virtues of discipline, however understandable and necessary, also contained germs the growth of which produced most baneful results. It is impossible not to conclude that the origin of a phenomenon as complex as Stalinism has to be sought in a historical background containing a great variety of factors, one of which was certainly Leninism." (p. 433).

But the whole book tries nonetheless to defend Leninism by arguing a somewhat more defensive variant of the orthodox Trotskyist line which can be summarised as follows: Leninism was

only a minor factor in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, the biggest responsibility falling on the isolation of the Revolution, the backwardness of the country, and the disasters brought about by the Civil War: without these other factors, the dangerous germs contained in Leninism would not have developed into Stalinism. The point is that Lenin (and Trotsky) was fundamentally right when he argued that, without a revolution in the West, the Russian Revolution would have been defeated. As it happened, there was no successful revolution in the West, and the Russian Revolution was consequently "defeated": the weakness of the Russian working class, without the support of the victorious Western working classes, was unable to prevent the bureaucratisation of the Party. But such bureaucratisation happened against the will of Lenin and certainly contrasted with his aims: and this is demonstrated, not only by his writings of the "libertarian" period (April-October 1917) but also by his struggle, from his deathbed, against bureaucratism and against Stalin.

This position is not supported by new material (although much contained in the book may be new to readers acquainted only with traditional Leninist apologetics). Thus there is not much point in discussing the facts (I'll only note that the libertarian literature is not really adequately recognised, and, occasionally, slightly misrepresented, e.g. Avrich's "Kronstadt" is quoted out of context so that Avrich seems to give much more importance to the change in the social origin of the sailors than he actually does). Therefore I will concentrate on showing that Liebman's position is undermined by the facts themselves which he includes in his book in an effort to avoid historical distortions.

How democratic was Lenin? There is an important problem, in this respect, which is never discussed: the permanent revolution theory. The theory argued that a revolution in the West was absolutely necessary, because the inevitable conflict between proletariat and peasantry in Russia, in Liebman's words:

> "could end victoriously for the proletariat only if it were to receive 'direct state support' from the European proletariat. Trotsky added: 'there cannot be any doubt that a socialist revolution in the West will enable us directly to convert the temporary domination of the working class into a socialist dictatorship'". (p.80)

Trotsky's phrase 'direct state support' is revealing. The dictatorship envisaged by him is the dictatorship of the minority over the majority, and as such in need of a strong repressive power in case of conflict with the majority. There is no doubt that, in the end, the 'direct state support' was needed in order to make this repressive power strong enough. Thus, <u>implicit in</u>

the permanent revolution theory is the idea of a long period of strong repression - but no one ever stopped to consider the problem of how this social setup would deform and debase civil life and the love for democracy. The theory is accepted by Lenin in 1917, but he too says nothing on this problem. One must conclude that in Leninism there is the belief (conscious or not) that despotic authoritarianism is a legitimate way of running society.

I do not want to discuss here the big problem of whether a really socialist society could have been created in Russia at all, or whether the backwardness of the country prevented it anyway - I only want to stress that the justification for Lenin's abandonment of the classical Marxist theory that a socialist revolution will come first in a rich country, was implicitly authoritarian. At the root of the theories justifying the choices of October 1917 there is not, as Liebman says, a spontaneist, libertarian Lenin, but a deeply authoritarian Lenin (and Trotsky) who was seeing the spontaneity of the masses create the conditions for the implementation of his authoritarian design.*

Liebman, in effect, is only able to show that Lenin's declared aim was the final establishment of a truly democratic communist society (after a long transition period, though). No one disputes this. The problem is rather: was the practice of Leninism (and the theory justifying it) compatible with that aim? On this, rather than Liebman's attempt to depict a Lenin, deeply democratic at heart, and happily reconciling theory and practice in 1917, but compelled at other times to be undemocratic (although somewhat more than the situation required) by the disastrous historical situation - much more interesting is the thesis that there is a substantial unity in Lenin's theory and

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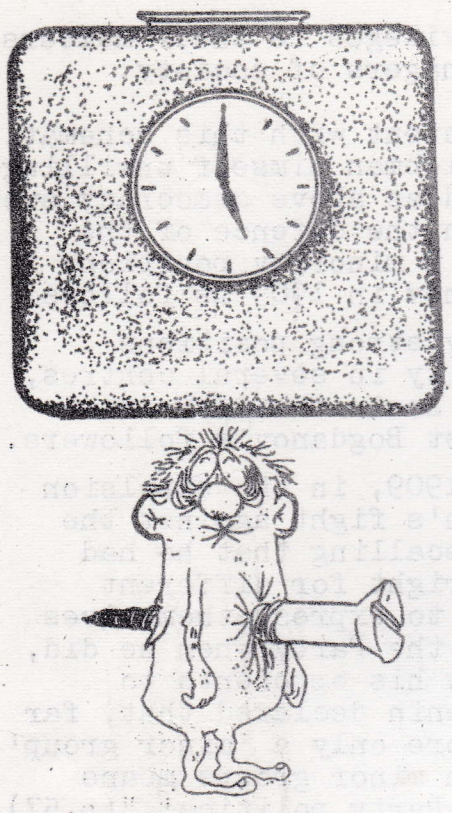
*And incidentally, it's time to give up this myth of a libertarian Lenin: even State and Revolution says; "No, we want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control and 'foremen and accountants'". (Lenin, Selected Works, p. 298). "By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organising the new system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people in organising their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie" (ibid., p. 281; Lenin's emphasis).

practice of political action, which is deeply authoritarian. In ultraschematic terms: Leninism represents the consequent application to revolutionary activity of an approach to political action shared by most bourgeois organisations: a separation between leaders and led, order givers and order takers, which is common to all hierarchical, oppressive societies, is justified as necessary for efficiency in struggle. The bourgeois concept of efficiency is taken over uncritically: it is well known that Lenin, alone in the Bolshevik Central Committee, supported Trotsky's proposal to militarise labour in 1920; not to speak of Trotsky's reactionary reorganisation of the Red Army, or of one-man management. That such organisational forms gave some people great power did not escape the Bolsheviks: but they thought it necessary.

This authoritarianism pervades the whole of Leninism. The philosophical attitude of Leninism to knowledge, for instance, is a naive theory of truth as something which is grasped by application of the 'correct' theory, the latter being something that is found only once, and then for good: final, indubitable knowledge. Typical of old as of recent Leninist writings is, for instance, the use of expressions like 'objective truth' and 'the revolutionary theory'. Thus Leninism is inherently dogmatic and sectarian. If there is only one truth, every opinion but one must be wrong. Now then, who is to trusted? He who knows how to get to the truth best, i.e. the theoretician. It is therefore logical that the best theoreticians be also the Party leaders (even Stalin had to pay homage to this ideology by writing theoretical treatises). Obviously, if the leaders are those closest to the truth, not to follow their directions means not to share their aims, i.e. to be enemies; or perhaps there are some too dumb to grasp the arguments; but then, since anyway the leadership understands their own interests better than they do, the leadership has the right to tell them what to doand boss them around and even con them into doing what is really best for them. These two possibilities - sectarian fight or manipulation - describe, in fact, the entire practice of numerous Leninist groups, internally and towards others.

The connexion with authoritarianism is clear. The centuries-old power of religious men of knowledge - from the sorcerer to the prophet - justified by their 'knowing better' coming from their privileged relationship with the divinity, reappears as the power of scientific knowledge (reached through the science of social phenomena, marxism): the bourgeois specialist's claim to authority reappears in the Leninists' pretence to leadership as the specialists in revolution. The'truth' to this claim to power is then revealed by the practice of the organisations in which it is embodied: or organisations which, whenever they get



BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

Taylorism is 'the enslavement of man by the machine'. (Lenin, Sochineniya XVII, 247-8.)

AFTER THE REVOLUTION

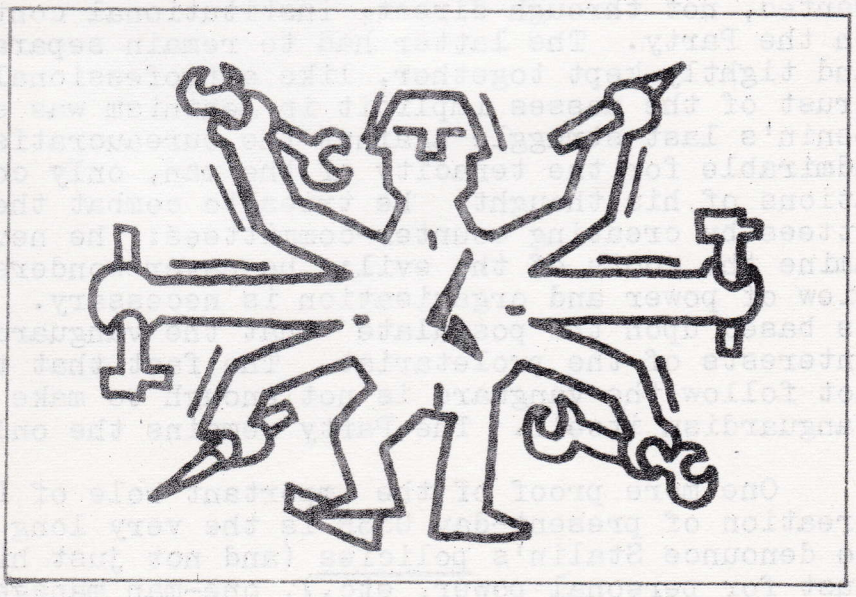
'We must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system'.

'The Revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process'.

'Large-scale machine industry - which is the material productive source and foundation of socialism - calls for absolute and strict unity of will... How can such unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one'.

'We must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system'.

All 'post-revolution' quotes from Lenin, Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, Isvestiya of the All-Russian General Executive Committee, April 28, 1918.



some power, ensure concrete material privileges to their members. Leninism is an ideology of (would-be) managers of society.

Lenin's behaviour is entirely consistent with this schematic portrait of the 'essence' of Leninism. Liebman himself unwillingly shows that Lenin always put his own ideas above democracy even within the Party, and vehemently spoke in the defence of the rights of minorities only when he was in a minority position. Liebman describes the expulsion of Bogdanov in 1909 as follows:

> "This 'leftist' tendency held very strong positions inside Russia, possessing a majority in several centres, including St. Petersburg itself. Lenin therefore resolved to wage ruthless war against Bogdanov's followers.
>
> The struggle culminated, in July 1909, in the expulsion of the 'leftist' leader, but Lenin's fight against the 'leftists' did not stop there. Recalling that he had formerly spoken in favour of the right for different trends or tendencies in the Party to express themselves (he was in a minority position in the Party when he did, P.F.), but not being keen to allow his opponents to take advantage of such a right, Lenin declared that, far from constituting a trend, they were only a 'minor group' and that, 'to confuse a trend with minor groups means condemning oneself to intrigue in Party politics'."(p.57)

Even when Lenin said, in 1917, that the masses were much to the left of the Party, he never meant to say that the masses, and not the Party, should take the fundamental decisions. The influence of the masses on the Party had to be exercised through a greater attention of the revolutionaries to what the masses wanted, not through direct, institutional controls of the masses on the Party. The latter had to remain separate, autonomous, and tightly kept together, like a professional army. The distrust of the masses implicit in Leninism was still there. And Lenin's last struggle against the bureaucratisation of the Party, admirable for the tenacity of the man, only confirms the limitations of his thought: he tries to combat the power of committees by creating counter-committees: he never tries to examine the roots of the evil: he never wonders whether a different view of power and organisation is necessary. His whole outlook is based upon the postulate that the vanguard represents the interests of the proletariat. The fact that the proletariat does not follow the vanguard is not enough to make him question vanguardism itself. The Party remains the only hope.

One more proof of the important role of Leninism in the creation of present-day USSR is the very long time it took Trotsky to denounce Stalin's policies (and not just his bureaucratism, lust for personal power, etc.), one-man management, industrial-

isation, socialism in one country, abolitionof organised tendencies, etc., all these Stalinist policies were started by Lenin. The Maoists are, ultimately, more consistent than the Trotskyists, who must try to distinguish a good Lenin from a bad Lenin.

Finally, let us consider what is implied in Liebman's thesis that the weakness of the Russian working class was unable to prevent the bureaucratisation of the Party. As Cardan puts it in "From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy", the problem with this type of argument is: why didn't this weakness bring about the restoration of capitalism? why did the revolution defeat its external enemies only to collapse internally? why did the degeneration take the specific form that led to the power of the bureaucracy? Liebman implicitly answers: because the Party naturally tended to become bureaucratic, and only a strong direct involvement of the masses could prevent it. He acknowledges, for instance, that when the Party was not monolithic, it was because the influence of the masses, their active involvement in politics, and the violence of social conflicts, prevented it from being monolithic. Which implies that the natural tendency of the Party was towards monolithism, and that only strong external influences could prevent it at times: influences coming from movements originating spontaneously, independently of, and often against (like in 1905 or in July 1917) the Party's will.

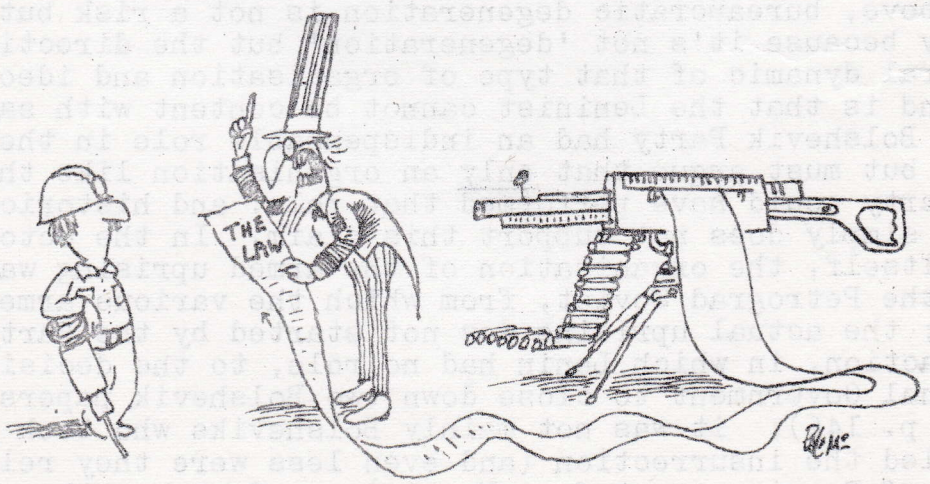
But then, how can Liebman still defend Leninism? Through, again, the Trotskyist argument that, without the Bolshevik Party, no revolution would have been possible: which is usually taken to mean that the risk of a bureaucratic degeneration is the price to be paid for the efficiency necessary for a successful revolution. "The Bolshevik organisation was an indispensable instrument for the seizure of power..."(p. 199).

Two counter-arguments can be opposed. The first is that, as argued above, bureaucratic degeneration is not a risk but a near certainty because it's not 'degeneration' but the direction of the natural dynamic of that type of organisation and ideology. The second is that the Leninist cannot be content with saying that the Bolshevik Party had an indispensable role in the revolution, but must argue that only an organisation like the Bolshevik Party could have performed that role: and historical evidence simply does not support this claim. In the October revolution itself, the organisation of the armed uprising was the task of the Petrograd Soviet, from which the various armed bodies depended; the actual uprising was not started by the Party, but was a reaction, in which Lenin had no role, to the decision of the Provisional Government to close down two Bolshevik papers (see Liebman, p. 146); it was not mainly Bolsheviks who took part in or even led the insurrection (and even less were they relevant in the rest of Russia, apart from Moscow); and anyway the repressive

power of the State was almost nonexistent, and any organisation capable of rallying mass support, or even a spontaneous mob, could have taken Petrograd. Thus the strictly military argument in defence of the Leninist Party doesn't hold either. What remains is the argument that the Party is necessary for the dictatorship of the proletariat, after the seizure of power. But, although some sort of co-ordination is necessary, history certainly does not support the claim that it must be insured by a Leninist-type organisation. What history shows is that that type of organisation soon alienated from itself even the urban proletariat. And a really worthwhile investigation would be to try to reconstruct how this alienation of the Party from the workers developed in its daily-life details, in the factories, in the Soviets, in the army (what role, for instance, did Bolshevik authoritarianism play in the insurrection of the Czech division which started the Civil War?), in the state administration, and everywhere. But no Leninist has, until now, been interested in pursuing this kind of historical research.

Summing up, then, this book is interesting mainly because it shows how hopeless the Trotskyist defence of Leninism becomes when the historical evidence is not selected in a sectarian, distorting way.

P.F.



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