

libertarian struggle special

MAY DAY

all year round

MAY DAY IS WHAT?

A day of labour solidarity all over the world? Just another Bank Holiday in a year of useless toil? Tanks in Red Square or opera in the Chinese great Hall of The People?

May Day of course covers all these things and because of this it has become no more than an empty gesture of workers strength. Nevertheless there is an element that is still alive and relevant about May Day despite these things. This can be found in the struggles that have surrounded it in the past, for they have been periods of intense activity of workers all over the world organising for specific gains, and in some cases revolutionary gains.

They were periods of collective action and collective experience and it is only in this that working class solidarity has any meaning for now and the future.

It is precisely because of May Day's vulgarisation that the TUC has used it to hang its gutless retreat from both the capitalist offensive and the demands of the militant activists calling for real solidarity with the sections of the movement in struggle at the moment.

May Day is not the TUC calling for workers to demonstrate, phantom-like, in their tea breaks. May Day should be independent class activity for specific economic and political gains, and May Day itself should have no monopoly on this.

The attacks on our standard of life are continual and all-embracing and our reaction must be the same. Not only in the form of strikes but all forms of collective action whether it be to force down rents, ensure decent education for our children, or to liberate those sections, such as women and blacks, particularly oppressed by the capitalist system.

The real traditions of May Day derive from collective strength and the gains won by this. This strength is meaningful only when EVERY DAY IS MAY DAY. We have no need for sentimental gestures to disguise retreats. There is no substitute for independent workers' power.

This supplement contains short descriptions of previous struggles that happened to occur around May.

The twists, turns, somersaults and headstands of the Government's tactics have baffled and confused many casual observers. One thing that working people should know by now is that whatever the Tories do it is in the long term interests of the rich and powerful.

Since the last War British capitalism has lagged behind the rest of the world in expanding its production and its trade. Now that there is, firstly, a monetary crisis in which all currencies are undermining each other in a scramble for advantage; and secondly a trading crisis because the USA is trying to force the smaller capitalist powers to rearrange the rules of the game in its favour; the government is out to seek protection for British capitalism behind the walls of the Common Market's tariff system, and by tightening up at home.

The 'lame duck' policy of letting State invested firms go broke was aimed at shaking up British managers to put them in a competitive position for EEC entry, and at convincing foreign bankers that this was a no-nonsense government which puts business first. The fact that thousands of workers were thrown out of their jobs was beside the point.

The exactly opposite policy which followed, up to and including the salvaging of BSA has been a result of the governments realising that British industry has to be propped up to maintain the confidence of investors. The strings attached to the government funds are another method of meeting the 'challenge of Europe' - they include redundancies, and tread mill agreements (Measured Day Work etc.). The effect of these on working class people is also beside the point.

The main concern of the government is to maintain confidence in capitalist production. It has to increase profitability to encourage investment, so that companies can keep up with the development of their competitors. To do this companies have to pay out less and get back more. Wages must be held or cut in real value - that is, wages may rise but prices rise higher so that the purchasing power of wages is less. Prices to the consumer - the worker and his/her family - must be increased. The Tories are therefore in a fight to cut working class living standards.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT

The rising prices side of the attack is obvious to anyone. The other side involves the major problem for the government - how to make workers accept lower wages.

During the '60s real wages were pushed up primarily by the strength of local, shop floor organisation. Localised disputes waged by the rank and file were the key. Particularly important for the organisation and



Solidarity in Practice - demonstration for the hospital workers, April 5th.

mobilisation of the rank and file were the shop stewards. They play a bigger role in Britain than any other country. There are now over 200,000 stewards directly-elected from the shop floor, compared with some 3,000 full time officials..

The Industrial Relations Act, wrongly called an 'anti-union' law, is aimed at forc-

ing the union bureaucracy to discipline its own rank and file. The union is held responsible for the acts of 'their' members and so can be prosecuted. This has put the fear of God, or rather loss of their own power and privileges, into the trade union leaders. The right-wing of the TUC - ETU, GMWU and all the blatantly undemocratic unions, lost no time in advertising their willingness to obey.

MAY DAY ALL YEAR ROUND cont.

The 'lefts', who are largely based on the acceptance and support of the shopfloor, created a lot of protest. However, when made to put up or shut up, the AUEW put up the £60,000 plus that the Industrial Relations Court fined them.

It was the rank and file action over the imprisonment of 5 dockers in Pentonville last July - when hundreds of thousands came out while the union leaderships worried about calling another one-day-protest stunt. Those thousands made the Tories back down and twist their own laws so openly it was a joke for weeks after. The Tories set out to improve their weapons.

"ANTI-INFLATION"

While the Tories hammered out the dents in the I.R. Act - for instance they have set out to effectively ban picketing - they tried a new approach. This was the 'save-the-nation-from-inflation' approach. The Tory press and T.V. rammmed home how we must fight inflation for the sake of the country. Anyone fighting for a living wage must be unpatriotic or worse. Wages and prices were frozen. Wages were anyway. Prices of course are 'subject to the laws of free competition' - unfortunately they could not be controlled!!

Phase 2 of this crude con trick brought laws making strikes for decent wages and conditions illegal from April 1st. You can be nicked for arguing for a strike, giving support to a strike, 'conspiring' (thinking) about any of the above crimes.

This new legislation is being used piecemeal at the moment. Builders and Hospital workers are arrested for picketing. Stronger sections are threatened with fines on union funds. The Government are now looking either to a gradual tightening of each screw, or for one, or a number, of big battles that they can win or draw, after which workers will be so defeated or confused that the govt can bring all its armoury out into the open at once.

Under Phase 3 the State will control wages for 3 years. The rightwing of the TUC have already accepted this. Scanlon of the AUEW, spokesman of the 'left', has come up with a statesmanlike piece of self-preservation. Twice in April, in public speeches, he stated that if sections of the I.R. Act were amended, the AUEW could cooperate with the government. This means that if the Tories do away with the bits that hurt the T.U. bureaucracy, the T.U. leadership will hand over the membership, bound and gagged, to the three-year wage-cut.

In this situation its not enough to celebrate when the Tories stop hitting us for a bit. It's downright stupid to say, as do the 'lefts' and the Morning Star, that we have won 'victories'. **VICTORY IS WHEN THE WAR IS WON. WINNING A BATTLE MEANS THAT ITS TIME TO PREPARE FOR THE NEXT BATTLE.**

SHADOW BOXERS

When the TUC emergency conference on March 5th decided for a national one day protest it was under massive pressure. Hospital workers, gasworkers, civil servants and locomen were pressing ahead with action. Since then the union leaderships, far from coordinating these conflicts, and others growing in the car industry, have managed to defuse and call them off. They were merely intended to strengthen the hand of the union leaders, who now wait for the government to play its part in the old game of : pressure-conciliation-pressure-offer-settlement. But the Tories aren't playing that game now. The government told the unions to go and plead poverty to the Pay Board, which it hadn't set up yet, and which had no powers to go against government policy anyway.

The TUC is incapable of fighting the government. It just isn't in the nature of the 'honest broker between management and

labour' role that the trade unions play. The last time a head-on fight occurred was in 1926 when the government was enforcing wage cuts generally and on the miners in particular. The TUC called a General Strike. The situation occurred of Prime Minister Baldwin saying to the representatives of the General Council - "you can defeat us, but are you ready to take power yourselves?" The answer of course was no. The TUC called off the strike and left the miners in the lurch. The TUC lives and breathes compromise. It doesn't know what class war means. The Tories do - they have been fighting and winning it for well over 100 years. The TUC is stuck in its pathetic faith in 'constitutionality' and 'legality' while before its eyes the Tories show that these are just weapons in the struggle and have no halo about them at all. The TUC can't turn to the Labour Party to effect a compromise because workers know that the Labour Party pioneered most of the weapons the Tories now use - 'fair' rents, anti-strike laws, state wage control, using the media to smear militants etc. Yet workers still look to the TUC and the Labour Party for a lead. In this lies the danger.

The rank and file have lost when we've lost control of our own struggle. We don't have to go back to 1926 to see this. The miners won because of their active involvement in the running of the strike and because of the help they got from railmen, power workers, and transport drivers, who went far beyond the recommendations of their unions. The Postal Workers relied on their leaders and the airy-fairy support of the TUC. If the dockers and those who supported them had waited for the TUC to act, the stewards would still be inside.

THE SAME OLD 'NEW LEADERS'

In the 1926 defeat the Communist Party raised the slogan 'all power to the General Council'. This was because the TUC at the time was saying nice things about Russia and so the TUC was being hailed as being socialist.

Nothing loathe to repeat a mistake, the CP have come back to the same position by another road. Now the CP thinks that socialism can come to Britain without a revolution by influencing the Labour and TUC 'lefts', so that a Labour government will legislate socialism. To this end it is very concerned to gain and keep good relations with the 'lefts'. It doesn't criticise the totally undemocratic structure of the unions. It just wants 'good guys' sitting at the top. Last month it first denied Scanlon had offered to deal with the Tories, then, when he repeated it, there was an embarrassed lack of comment. It gerrymanders its puppet, the Liason Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, so that only executive motions can be discussed in its conferences - thus making sure that its 'friends' aren't criticised or opposed. Militants were expelled from the March 31st LCDTU conference for denouncing this set-up, which exactly mirrors the bureaucracy and fear of the rank and file of the most right wing unions.

The CP, having adopted the pressure and compromise tactic inside the unions, is also hooked on the myths of 'parliament' and 'law' being neutral. As workers see through these as being tools of the ruling class, the CP is as much up the spout as the TUC and the Labour Party. So it fights to prevent this understanding and divert militancy into a useless show of 'pressure', on the TUC, on the Tories. It too cannot fight the Tories.

Outside the circle of the respectable and the would-be respectable, there are a number of groups who go some of the way to shedding the illusions that prevent workers from fighting. The most important of these is the Socialist Labour League. It quite rightly says that the government must be brought down and that 'pressure' is useless. It then goes on to call for 'a Labour govt with Socialist policies'. Why is it that these people

can see through all the rubbish of compromise, and then suddenly lose their vision and logic and talk about a Labour government as the answer? It isn't that they really believe that the Labour Party is socialist, or can be. They are forced into this contortion because as a Leninist organisation, they believe that workers can do nothing to achieve socialism without the leadership of a Bolshevik-type Party. They know that the British working class is strong enough to deal with the Tories, but they also know that neither they, nor any of the other would-be Lenins, are strong enough to step in and say 'follow us'. So they encourage what illusions workers have in the Labour Party in the hope of catching them on the rebound. They hope for a Labour government knowing it will be as rotten and servile to business interests as ever, in the hope that in turning away from that, working people will fall for 'the revolutionary party' which will appear on the scene with light shining out of all available holes. We'll see.

Another group which is of some importance is the International Socialists. Still mainly based on students but putting a lot of their effort into trying to recruit working people. They too want 'the Party' (only it is to be them). They are easier to get into than the SLL because they are primarily concerned with getting members. They change their ideas - on Ireland, on the Common Market, even on what sort of revolutionary organisation is needed - in order to take advantage of changes in the current situation. In fact they haven't offered very many ideas on the current Tory attack except the perennial one that we need 'a Party' and that IS is bigger, brighter, shinier and has Paul Foot (Middle Class Journalist of the Year in case you didn't know). They support every bit of 'militancy', but for them workers don't need to understand the whole situation and organise themselves, they need to understand enough to support the Party and be organised enough to carry out the Party's decisions. They recently created a lot of bother in the London Hospital workers rank and file by pushing the 'need for a rank and file paper' - they meant a paper that IS produces while the rank and file sell it - thus putting the Party in touch with the workers! Their most successful 'rank and file' - a teachers group of that name, is as difficult for the ordinary member to influence as any trade union you care to mention. Once the Party has a way to broadcast to a captive audience it hangs on like a leech.

WHAT IS NEEDED?

The Tories know that it is rank and file organisation they have to smash. It is therefore important to strengthen and extend this. This means a number of things:-

- (1) The rank and file groups, shop stewards combines etc must be fully and obviously democratic, with full and free discussion encouraged. We have to show in our every action that we are not like the permanent officials or the 'new leaderships'. That we aren't after a ride to power or privilege on other workers' backs.
- (2) Rank and file groups etc must work on platforms that are concerned with all the problems of the working class - not just on sectional interests. It's the isolation of different sections which leaves the initiative in the hands of the Tories and the TUC. All union rules that prevent branches from communicating within the unions or outside must be repealed, broken or bypassed. The working class has to fight in every facet of its life - in school, at home, on the dole, for family allowances, for decent pensions etc. The 'parliamentary' myths would have us accept divisions that split each struggle from the others. To win we have to unite them. This means that locally and nationally all working class fighting organisations must build up contact with each other. Wherever a section of working people is fighting it must be supported. If only for the selfish

reason that if we want support when its our turn, we'll be sure to get it from those we've helped.

(3) Rank and file groups should accept any help with no strings attached. Help from political groups should mean use of their facilities. A healthy rank and file group needs a constant discussion of all sorts of ideas and should be open to them. For this reason all discussions should be open, all interests should be declared.

Nationally, militants have to fight for democratically run conferences and meetings - instead of stage managed ones. Local groups should send delegates to conferences of other groups - women, claimants, tenants. Here they can make contacts outside their own fields and also with other in their fields who are concerned to broaden ideas and link-up. Now isn't the time to set up new, paper organisations. There are too many of them. We have to build the foundations and contacts nationally and locally - using the left wing papers where we can. So that when the urgent need arises to coordinate support for struggles - there are the people, the facilities and understanding there ready to do the job.

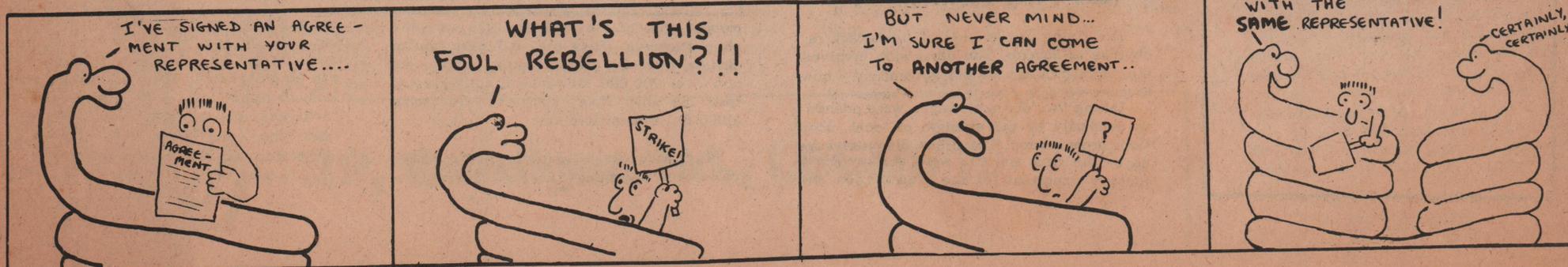
Locally, contacts must be made between local rent strikes, campaigns against the abolition of Family Allowance, local union branches etc. A network has to be built so that each group knows where it can get support, money, printing facilities. And skills such as typing, duplicating, etc must be learnt and passed on. It is important that these links don't become just the unofficial leaders of a group meeting the unofficial leaders of the others. To this end all jobs should be passed round regularly and a regular meeting place established for all groups an open forum for local activists. In some places the Trades Hall may provide this sort of meeting place, in others a local pub, institute, club or community centre may do it.

Personally, this means militants going out to learn about the problems of people in a different situation from him/herself. Like women, students, immigrants. And then using this knowledge to broaden the understanding of people near them. Like fighting racist ideas instead of letting anti-paki jokes go by because its 'normal' to tell them. Like fighting ideas that women are inferior - the backbone of the best fighting tenants groups are the women, and they need help to develop confidence in themselves as much as any other militant. It means making ourselves as well informed as we can - by reading the papers and magazines that give more of the facts than usual. Then discussing things with each other in chatting or in proper discussion groups where we can each contribute something to everybody else's knowledge.

Provided we have laid the base for this sort of mass movement, we can then talk about strategy and tactics with the hope that it will not be up in the air sloganising as at present. In general terms our aim must be to aid each separate struggle and link it to others so that our combined strength falls on isolated sections of the enemy - rather than the reverse, which is all too common. The support in the factories for the Liverpool rent strikers threatened with eviction by a Labour Council; the London public sector workers alliance backing Hospital workers; the support given strikers by claimants unions, must all be learnt from, supported, and extended.

We have to work for a situation where every member of the working class, black white, male, female, young or old can recognise their own struggle in the fight that others are putting up.

This paper and its limited resources are at the disposal of those who want to use them to build a strong, independent and democratic working class movement.



BARCELONA 1937

Over the Telephone Exchange the Anarchist flag had been hauled down and only the Catalan flag was flying. That meant that the workers were definitely beaten.
George Orwell. Homage to Catalonia

At three o'clock on the afternoon of May 3rd, 1937, Commissar Rodriguez Salas, a member of the Communist PSUC, appeared with a strong division of police at the central telephone exchange in Barcelona. He stated categorically that he had orders from Aiguade, the Catalan Separatist who was Minister of the Interior, to occupy the building. The telephone central, like most of the other public buildings in the city, was under the control of the anarchist and socialist workers of the CNT and UGT union federations. This state of affairs had long been recognised by the government. It represented the day-to-day control of large sections of society by the working class.

When, therefore, the workers protested, Salas ordered his men to disarm them by force. On the first floor luck was with him in this, because the workers were simply taken by surprise. In the second story, however, he encountered the energetic resistance of the CNT men. Shots were fired on both sides, and the police were unable to force their way further.

Meanwhile a huge crowd of people had gathered in the street, attracted by the shooting. The general excitement reached its height when armed PSUC men suddenly appeared in the adjacent streets and began erecting barricades. An outcry went up then all over the city and quickly spread to the remote suburbs: 'Treason! Treason! To arms! We've got to defend the Revolution!'

All this occurred quite spontaneously. The workers felt that a malicious assault on them had been arranged, and resolutely prepared to defend themselves without waiting for the decisions of their organisations. In the twinkling of an eye, the suburbs were turned into armed intrenchments. It was plain from the very beginning that the whole of organised labour was on the side of the anarchist workers. So strong was the popular resistance in the Barcelona suburbs that the police there, as a whole, remained neutral; likewise the Republican, and even Communist militia, as, for instance, the soldiers in the Communist barracks at Sarria. In many sections they went straight over to the people; as in Sans and San Gervasio, the Assault Guards (special police) did likewise. In Sans the workers took four hundred Civil Guards (police) prisoners and held them in the CNT headquarters. It is characteristic that these and all the other prisoners taken by the workers, were promptly released when the fighting was over, while known members of the anarchist CNT and revolutionary socialist POUM who fell into the hands of the other side were murdered.

Only in the heart of the city, the section where the old middle class resided, did the Communists and their allies remain masters of the situation; and even there only because the workers from the beginning confined themselves strictly to the defence of their own areas.

The CNT leadership acted promptly - it called for a cease fire, demanded the sacking of a few of the pawns in the plot, and urged the workers to remain on the defense. A token general strike was called - exempt were all those in industries related to the war.

The small, Trotskyist, Bolshevick-Leninist group issued a leaflet on May 4th urging - 'everyone to the barricades - general strike of all industries except war industries'. In other words, they called for what was already happening.

The revolutionary anarchists of the Friends of Durrutti group, together with the veteran Italian anti-fascists and anarchist militants who produced the paper Guerra di Classe, called - Form revolutionary councils shoot those responsible for the attacks on the workers. Disarm the armed forces. Dissolve all political parties that have turned against the workers. Don't leave the streets.

The revolutionary socialists of the POUM, who had moved to the left by breaking first with Stalinism and then with Trotskyism, were ambivalent. They called for a cease fire and in effect wanted a return to the situation before the May Days - part working class power, part bourgeois State. They did oppose the disarming of the working class. This was enough, at the time, to place them on the side of the Revolution. It was also enough to ensure that the Communist Party, later, made it its task to destroy the POUM, outlaw its paper and murder its leaders.

The weight of the influence of the CNT leadership was enough to bring about a ceasefire by the workers. On May 5th, when this had been achieved, a division of Civil Guards attacked and seized the headquarters of the Libertarian Youth. Six of the young people were killed for resisting. On the same afternoon Camillo Berneri and Barbieri, the editors of Guerra di Classe, who had escaped the hangmen of Mussolini and then sought danger in Spain to aid the revolution, were kidnapped by members of the Communist PSUC and never seen again.

In the breathing space provided by the CNT, the government moved 6,000 Assault Guards into Barcelona on the evening of the 7th. The CNT disarmed the workers politically, the Communist Party murdered the militants who sought to fight, and meanwhile the number of police and special troops grew. Within days there were enough to start to disarm the workers by force. The countryside was also scoured. In the wake of the State forces the PSUC gangs murdered unarmed militants with impunity. The peasants committees were smashed and leading militants disappeared just as finally as did anarchist workers in the City. The official estimate of dead in Barcelona was 500. The number in the whole of Catalonia was never counted. Their executioners were in power and didn't need to know.

The May Days in Barcelona 1937 were, for the Spanish Civil War, the flash point of the continuous struggle between reform and revolution. The political tendencies which caused the defeat of the Spanish workers then are still active in preparing new setbacks and betrayals.

The Civil War began on the 17th July 1936, when sections of the Spanish Army led by right-wing officers rebelled against the newly elected Government of the Popular Front. On the one side stood the Catholic Church, French and British capital, and German and Italian fascism. This side knew that against the possibility of socialism its interests were the same. On the other side stood the range of parties and unions that made up the Popular Front, the Basque and Catalan independence parties, and the CNT-FAI, the million strong anarcho-syndicalist union federation and the anarchist organisation which led it.

From the beginning the opposition to fascism was split into two forces. The first, made up of liberals, parliamentary socialists and the Communist Party, tried to win the support of foreign capitalist powers, including those who supported the fascist coup, by emphasising their respectability. The second force was the working class which had itself put down barracks risings in most areas of Spain by sheer weight of numbers. Having proved their strength to themselves, the workers weren't keen to go back to doing nothing and wait.

So the Republican side was made up of those who, on the one hand wanted to 'win the war against fascism and then have reforms', and on the other those who realised that fascism had to be defeated politically before it could be defeated militarily. That the social revolution would give the workers the will and reason to oppose and destroy fascism. That a revolutionary foreign policy - declaring independence for Morocco

and the other colonies where the rising was based and mercenaries recruited - would have more military effect than promising to be good boys to please international capital.

The line of the Communist Party was set by Russian foreign policy, which, at the time was aimed at a pact with Britain and France against Germany. Throughout Europe all talk of socialism was dropped. The Stalinists became the best of patriots in the interest of winning 'their' capitalists to an alliance with the Soviet Union. Up to 1934 they had denounced parties like the Labour Party as 'social fascists' and said they were the main enemy. In Germany they had even cooperated with the Nazis to try and overthrow the social democrat government of Prussia in what became known as the Red-Brown referendum. Now all that changed, they entered into an alliance with any 'patriotic' party however much it represented capitalist interests - the resulting monster was called the Popular Front.

To the Communist Parties a socialist revolution in Spain would have had many disagreeable results. It would have upset the new respectability and frightened the new friends. It would have been another source of inspiration to workers throughout the world but it would almost certainly have been independent of the Soviet Union. If there was one thing that throughout the last 30 years of his life Stalin was consistent about it was his running the whole show.

The Spanish CP led the battle on behalf of the landowners and bosses who had been made redundant by the workers and peasants collectivising property after the defeat of the local rebellions. The CP pushed through laws against workers control. CP gangs seized back the factories from workers and drove peasants off their won lands. Anarchist and POUM (ist) militants were murdered. The interests of Stalin were safeguarded.

Soviet influence was strengthened by the sale of arms. Every cartridge was gold from the Government reserves that ended up in the hands of the CP after the defeat. The CP handed out arms, using them to build up its influence and at the same time to keep units behind the lines. The anarchists and POUM militias had none of these weapons. The size of the CP force grew from an insignificant fraction to tens of thousands. The recruits came from the middle classes who the Party was the main protector of property.

In the Party's fight to kill the May Days in Barcelona, the light on the stealthy process of demoralisation that led to the fascist victory. The May Days because by then the CP felt it had to act openly. After their physical liquidation in full, the interests and methods of Stalin.

The CP was able to get away because of the appalling collaboration of the leaders of the CNT-FAI who collaborated with the fascists and accepted the 'postponement' of the revolution. It refused to fight the assassins and fell for the trap. It demoralised the anarchist workers by accepting the loss of property. Then, finding the main support of libertarian self-management of workers a load of political bankruptcy of importance by a Cabinet posts in the government that was a puppet for the CP.

All this happened because the leaders didn't know what the idea of what revolutionaries, April 5th.

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BUENAVENTURA DURRUTTI - centre - Commander of the CNT-FAI militias on the Aragon front. The people in arms won the revolution. The Communist People's Army lost the war.

'We are setting an example to the German and Italian working class how to deal with Fascism.... We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall - we shall know how to accommodate ourselves for a time.... We can also build. It is we who built the palaces and cities here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers, can build cities to take their place. And better ones - we are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth. The bourgeoisie may blast and ruin their world before they leave the stage of history. We carry a new world here in our hearts, that world is growing at this minute.'



france '68



The insurrection that swept France in May 1968 began with students at Nanterre University in what was later to be called the March 22nd Movement. On this day, following the arrest of several militants on an anti-Vietnam rally, the administration building was occupied. Six weeks of constant clashes between police and students followed, until the police took over the university on the orders of the Dean. The March 22nd militants moved to the Sorbonne, the central Paris university, where again there was massive street fighting between students and the C.R.S. riot police, hundreds being arrested.

An enormous demonstration was planned for May 6th calling for the release of all those arrested. The government in a belated attempt to head off militancy, released most of the arrested but also sent the police in to occupy the Latin Quarter, the student ghetto of Paris. A 30,000 strong demonstration took place on May 10th to demand the release of interned foreigners. Fouchet Minister of the Interior, ordered the police to clear the streets. In this way, the government's inept attempt to 'solve' the student discontent led not only to the 'Night of the Barricades' which took place on that day but provided the spark for the insurrection to follow.

In the Rue Gay-Hussac in the Latin Quarter, barricades were erected with the help of the local inhabitants and workers, students and people from the neighbourhood combined to beat off the brutal attacks of the CRS. Over 500 were arrested and thousands were injured.

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ment didn't want any chance of trouble with a million people on the streets of Paris, and also trusted the CGT to act as police - a role they filled admirably.

That evening the Sorbonne was occupied, on May 15th workers at Sud-Aviation in Nantes, a town with a strong tradition of anarcho-syndicalism, locked up their director and took over the factory. Occupations of factories followed everywhere, including on May 16th, Renault, the largest car factory in Europe. In every occupied factory and workplace there was a feeling that this time more than the usual strike was needed.

At the Sorbonne and Censier universities there began a ferment of discussion between students, workers and anyone who dropped in. The whole nature of the society in which people lived was discussed. Leaflets were produced by the thousand for factories, streets, schools; marches were organised by joint worker-student committees. In the



WORKERS AND STUDENTS FOUGHT - THE UNIONS NEGOTIATED

words of an observer 'The Sorbonne was transformed from the fusty precinct where French capitalism selected its hierarchs, its technocrats and its administrative bureaucracy into a revolutionary volcano.....'.

This mood was mirrored throughout the whole of France. Peasants, farmers insurance men, footballers, TV personnel, etc began to question the roles that capitalism had moulded them into. They took over their workplaces and began to seriously discuss the possibilities of running them under workers control. Until May 30th when De Gaulle passed to the counter-offensive, there was a pre-revolutionary period when anything seemed possible.

Why these possibilities were not realised is due in part to the fact that no really serious attempt was made to smash the state. Similarities exist in the situation in Turin in Italy in 1920, when workers took over factories but still allowed the bourgeois state to function. In this kind of situation, where there is an uneasy stage somewhere between working class power and state power, decisive measures have to be taken to end the power of the ruling class and smash its institutions permanently. That is when revolutions become revolutions, and the failure to do this in Turin in 1920 and Paris in 1968, meant that the bourgeoisie could regain control. They were greatly aided in this by the Stalinists of the CGT who much preferred the Gaullists in power - which enabled them to have a say in how French capitalism should be run - to the people they had been organising and controlling all their lives: the working class.

For the first three days after May 13th, the CGT refused to move. It contented itself with taking 'passing note' of the movement but did not call for its extension or adopt any of the slogans such as 'De Gaulle Resign'. It never envisaged overthrowing the power of monopolies which since 1958 it had never ceased to denounce. Seguy, General-Secretary of the CGT, constantly reiterated that the issue were purely economic. On May 21st he told a press conference that 'self management is a hollow formula; what the workers want is immediate satisfaction of their claims.' Two days later the CGT issued a communique calling for demonstrations for immediate negotiations with the government without even calling for Prime Minister Pompidou's dismissal.

At this time, according to Cohn-Bendit, 'everything was still possible, authority no longer existed except as a threat, and even part of the professional army was known to be sympathetic to the strikers. Moreover the

government no longer enjoyed the confidence of the public and finally, it could not count on enough genuine sick Fascists to carry out a counter-revolutionary coup.'

On May 24th De Gaulle delivered a speech. He threatened a civil war and then invited the population to give him a mandate to frame new laws. In reaction to this peasants struck, blocked the roads and held mass meetings. The CGT organised demonstrations in Paris, while the revolutionaries set out to 'plant the flag of revolution'. Leaflets were issued calling for the working class to directly organise production, food distribution, transport, information, housing etc. 100,000 marched on the Stock Exchange, seized it and set fire to it. But instead of continuing this and seizing the city, which was quite within the grounds of probability, and would have been a great step to destroying the illusions people still had in bourgeois authority, the march allowed itself to be turned back to the Latin Quarter. The turnabout was at the instigation of the Trotskyist Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire who believed the time was not yet right owing to 'the lack of a vanguard party to lead the working class from trade union consciousness.' The intentions to capture the radio station and the Ministries of Finance and Justice were lost and so was the chance of a revolution. Not that these ministries were of any use to anyone, but the radio station is always vital in revolutionary struggle. Furthermore the failure to take them meant that the trade union bureaucrats and the government had time to rally their forces.

Only in Nantes did any real challenge to

state power happen. The people took over the town and its day to day running was in the hands of a worker-student-farmer committee. There was no police force and no army. Peasants brought their tractors into the town to help and dockers unloaded ships for food.

Nowhere else was a successful attempt made to run production; to turn strike committees into instruments for organising production. This and the formation of armed militias would have been the death blow for French capitalism. It didn't happen. The working class still had too much faith in its leaders and were uncertain what they were aiming at. The primary responsibility lies with the Stalinists who turned a potential revolution into a purely economic struggle for better wages and social security. Following their call for immediate negotiations and the failure to take the radio station and raze the Ministries, Pompidou announced that demonstrations would be more energetically dispersed, despite the fact he had earlier been forced to condemn the brutal excesses of the police.

That day representatives of the state, the unions and the employers met to work out the infamous Grenelle Agreement. This which was signed on the 27th gave substantial wage increases to the workers but little else. These were soon lost in the inflation which followed the 'return to normality'.

Everywhere - Renault, Berliet, Citroen etc strikers rejected the agreement - but the CGT did nothing to prevent the government hitting back. It called for a 'popular government' so that the issue became Gaullism v. Stalinism. Mitterand (France's would-be Harold Wilson) offered himself as Presidential candidate and the CGT called for an end to strikes, the acceptance of the Grenelle agreement as well as elections.

This gave De Gaulle the chance he wanted. After conferring with his army chiefs on 29th he threatened in his speech on the 30th that Stalinism and Soviet concentration camps would occur and called for elections. The bourgeoisie came out of hiding to hold a mass demonstration against Communist dictatorship. Seguy did his bit by accepting the election call. 'The CGT will in no way obstruct the course of the coming referendum. It is in the interests of all workers to express their desire for a change of government'. Despite long struggle after this, it was the end for any revolutionary hopes. The Stalinists gave power back to De Gaulle on a plate.

In the words of anti-Marxist sociologist Aron 'At no moment did the Communist Party or the CGT push towards disturbance, at no moment did they want to topple the Gaullist power whose international politics fulfill their desires and which permits their progressive investment in French society. Obviously they would have taken charge of the state if it had been left open to them. However they had as their constant objective, not the 'making of the revolution' but the prevention of an ourflanking on their left engineered by students, Maoists and young workers. The government's errors are partly due to over-confidence in the support of the Communist Party. In the last analysis however the Party did not betray this confidence. In the hour which followed the President's speech, it deactivated the bomb and consented to elections it had practically no hope of winning.'

'Only knaves or fools could believe that the proletariat should first gain a majority by taking part in elections organised under the yoke of the bourgeoisie and the yoke of wage slavery, and that they should only seize power afterwards. This is the height of stupidity or of hypocrisy and it is to substitute voting under the old system for the class struggle and the revolution. The parliamentary cretins will force a vote at any cost - a vote organised at any price by the bourgeoisie - to gain the sympathy of the workers. But this is only an argument advanced by pedants, dead men or clever crooks.'

- Lenin. Message to the Italian, French & German Communists.

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