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SOLIDARITY

FORMERLY AGITATOR

FOR WORKERS' POWER

Volume 1 Number 6

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A THORN , BY ANY OTHER NAME ...

We've changed the name of our paper. Like most socialists launching a new venture, we at first had some difficulty in finding a title. Copyright - or unfortunate associations - debarred many suggestions. Words had either become meaningless... or as distorted and 'bureaucratized' as any of the institutions of contemporary society.

After much argument, and many irreverent propositions, we decided on AGITATOR. We did this reluctantly. Agitation seemed an appropriate antidote to apathy... and no one else had a paper with that name! But the disadvantages were many - as new comrades joining our ranks soon pointed out. The name smattered of blind militancy, of a 'good ruck' for the sake of it - whereas our task was, through struggle, to assist in the development of a new kind of socialist consciousness. To the unconvinced bomb-thrower - surprisingly enough, a majority of the population - the name AGITATOR was hardly a stimulus to sales or an inducement to study our ideas seriously.

Our new title SOLIDARITY reflects our aims more accurately. Solidarity is not only a good old-fashioned principle. It is an essential part of every day working class experience and at the same time the premise of the socialist reorganization of society. It is an increasing need in a society whose very survival depends on successfully dividing people and compelling them to seek private solutions to social problems.

Besides a new name, we also have a new price. We change the name with enthusiasm, the price with great reluctance. But it was pointless urging people to face reality... if we couldn't face it ourselves. Two choices confronted us: increase the price or cut the size. We only appear once a month so we decided on the former. We hope you will agree with our decision. And you'll get more pages for your tanner, anyway.

PROGRESSIVE TOUR :

CHEAP DAY RETURN TO SCARBOROUGH

The decisions of the Shopworkers' and Engineering unions have 'settled' the unilateralist vote at this year's Labour Party Conference.

To us, this comes as no surprise. In the bureaucratic organizations which 'represent' labour, the officials hold the real power. These officials are convinced defenders of the status quo, even with H-bombs. They are in fact part of it!

Last year they were caught unawares. Since then the machine has moved. Their control over propaganda and information is complete. Jobs and positions depend on their patronage. Their 'opponents' are scarcely noted for their audacity. All in all, it has not been a very hard battle for the right-wing.

What should the unilateralists do next? Patiently plod the weary road back to Scarborough? Painstakingly work for another majority... in a few years' time? Bleat plaintively when it is disregarded? Remain a loyal and obedient opposition until Carron and Padley discover that socialist principles are more important than church and job?

Our 'left' leaders will no doubt be full of such advice. New resolutions will be drafted. Old compromises will be garbed in new formulas. Like the road to hell, the road to nuclear destruction will be paved with good resolutions... and determined marchers.

There is no compromise or alternative confronting mankind. The choices are socialism or barbarism - struggle or extinction.

People are disturbed by the threat of nuclear war. Most of them do not know what they can do about it. Others are confused by the press or their doubts are relieved by the 'socialist' blessing that Gaitskell has given to the Bomb. These console themselves by hoping that maybe it won't happen.

Two important jobs have to be done. Those who do not realize that nuclear war means virtual extinction must be aroused. And people must be encouraged to struggle against war.

Such a struggle will never be successful if it is restricted to the narrow confines of the Labour Party. Directing the fight against war into the ballroom of some sleazy sea-side resort is not only useless, it is downright reactionary.

Fortunately there are heartening signs that a considerable section of people wish to do something more. Three thousand people were prepared to challenge the State and its Law on the April 29 sit-down.

'Traditional' marxists sneer at this movement. As they vote their way to socialism or canvass support for Labour's unilateralists, they will mock the pacifists. But 'sit-downs' in Whitehall are not just symbolic protests. They encourage people to disregard the law on a mass scale. They remind people that laws, and the state that makes them, are not omnipotent, that they can be challenged.

People are thus made aware that the fight against war means challenging all laws and institutions which

Revolutionary Organization

3. HOW?

What type of organization is needed in the struggle for socialism? How can the fragmented struggles of isolated groups of workers, of tenants, of people opposed to nuclear war be coordinated? How can a mass socialist consciousness be developed?

In our previous two issues we were quite emphatic about what we didn't want. We looked at all the traditional organizations and found both in their doctrine and their structure mirror images of the very society they were allegedly fighting to overthrow. In this issue we would like to develop some of our own conceptions of what is needed.

Our suggestions are not blueprints. Nor are they intended as the ultimate and final word on the matter. The methods of struggle decided by the working class will to a large extent mould the revolutionary organization - that is provided the organization sees itself as the instrument of these struggles and not as a self-appointed 'leadership'. 'Elitist' conceptions lead to a self-imposed isolation. Future events may show us the need to modify or even radically to alter many of our present conceptions. This does not worry us in the least. There is nothing more revolutionary than reality,

nothing more reactionary than an erstwhile revolutionary idea promoted to the rank of absolute and permanent truth.

Exploiting society constantly seeks to coerce people into obeying its will. It denies them the right to manage their own lives, to decide their own destinies. It seeks to create obedient conformists. The real challenge of socialism is that it will give to men the right to be masters of their fate.

It seems quite obvious to us that the socialist organization must be managed by its members. Unless it can ensure that they work together in a spirit of free association and that their activity is genuinely collective it will be useless. It will appear to people as no different from any other organization or institution of capitalism, with its rigid division into order-givers and order-takers.

Without democracy the revolutionary organization will be unable to develop the required originality of thought and the vital initiative and determination to fight upon which its very existence depends. The Bolshevik method of self-appointed and self-perpetuating leaders, selected

because of their ability to 'interpret' the teachers' writings and 'relate them to today's events' ensures that no one ever intrudes with an original idea. History becomes a series of interesting analogies. Thought becomes superfluous. All the revolutionaries need is a good memory and a well stocked library. No wonder the 'revolutionary' left is today so sterile.

Struggle demands more than a knowledge of history. It demands of its participants an understanding of today's reality. During strikes, workers have to discuss in a free and uninhibited way how best to win. Unless this is made possible the ability and talent of the strikers are wasted. The loyalty and determination that strikers display - often referred to by the press as stubbornness or ignorance - derives from the knowledge that they have participated in the decisions. They have a feeling of identification with their strike and with its organization. This is in marked contrast to their general position in society where what they think and do is considered quite unimportant.

During strikes, representatives of the various political groups gain control of the Committee. Demands entirely unrelated to the dispute then make their appearance. The outcome is inevitable. A lack of interest, a diminution of activity, sometimes even a vote to return to work. The feeling of identification disappears and is replaced by a feeling of being used.

When the direct management of an organization by its members is replaced by an alien control from above, vitality is lost, the will to struggle lessens. Many will ask what do we mean by 'direct management'? We mean that the organization should be based upon branches or groups, each of which has the fullest autonomy, to decide its own activities, that is in keeping with the

general purpose of the organization. Wherever possible decisions should be collective ones. Branches should elect delegates to any committees considered necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the organization. Such delegates are not elected for 3 years, for 12 months... or even 12 days. They are revocable, at any time their fellow members consider it necessary. This is the only way that the membership can effectively ensure that their representatives carry out their jobs properly. We lay no claims to originality in proposing this. In every revolution, during most strikes and daily at the level of workshop organization the working class resorts to this type of direct democracy.

It is rather amusing to hear bolsheviks argue that this may be all right for everybody else - but not for themselves. Apparently the same workers who are expected to have determination and consciousness sufficient to overthrow capitalism and to build a new society do not possess sufficient know-how to put the right man in the right place in their own organization.

The same arguments against direct democracy repeatedly raise their bald heads! We are reminded that you cannot have a mass meeting to discuss every single issue - true, but not very profound. Of course certain committees are needed. They must however be directly responsible to the membership, and their duties must be clearly defined. They must be charged with placing all the facts of any matter under discussion before all the members. The withholding of essential information from members is a powerful factor reinforcing the division between leaders and led. It lays the basis for bureaucracy within the organization. Genuine democracy

(cont'd p. 28)

DANISH DOCK STRIKE

THE FACTS

In Denmark's biggest over labour dispute, one hundred and thirty five thousand dockers, seamen, lorry drivers and engineering workers have been on strike for over four weeks.

The strike began on April 11. Called by the Danish Transport and General Workers' Union and the Metal Workers' Union it followed the breakdown of negotiations between the bosses and unions about the renewal of labour contracts.

The Danish 'State Mediator' intervened in the negotiations. He drew up a draft statement which was submitted for ballot amongst the unions and the employers. The transport and iron and steel workers tossed the suggestions out.

Under the terms of the 'striko agreement' ships were to be unloaded for a few days. The idea was that the dockers would only stop work completely after a few days. The union leaders had also agreed that dockers would continue to unload foreign ships. An agreement was also made with the employers to load perishables.

The seamen reacted strongly against these halfhearted measures. They soon demanded a complete stoppage and the dockers joined in.

WORKERS DECIDE.

The gentlemen's agreements were soon shattered. On April 14 striking seamen put pickets round Copenhagen harbour to prevent dockers from loading a British ship, the SS Aaro owned by the Ellerman,

Wilson line. Dockers going to work were greeted by the cry: 'Skarebrækker - scab!'. On April 15, striking seamen sat on packing cases and prevented the loading of a German ship. Two days later, seamen again stopped a British and a Dutch ship - the SS Borodino and the SS Manto - from being loaded at Aarhus. Both ships left without their cargo.

EFFECTS ON PARTIES.

For many years the Danish employers settled disputes by using the Government. Parliament would simply ratify the draft settlements which had been drawn up by the 'State Mediator'. This gave them the force of law.

But things were different this time. The Times bemoaned even at the beginning of the strike that such a solution 'now seemed distant'. Two cabinet meetings and the personal mediation of Premier Viggo Kampmann brought no settlement.

On April 12 Opposition leaders in Parliament (farmers and conservatives) proposed that the strike should be brought to an end, either by compulsory arbitration or by giving to the State Mediator's settlement the force of law. The coalition government (social-democrats and liberals) rejected these proposals. They claimed that a direct

PROGRESSIVE TOUR. (cont'd from p.2)

threaten human existence. Such activity has profoundly revolutionary implications.

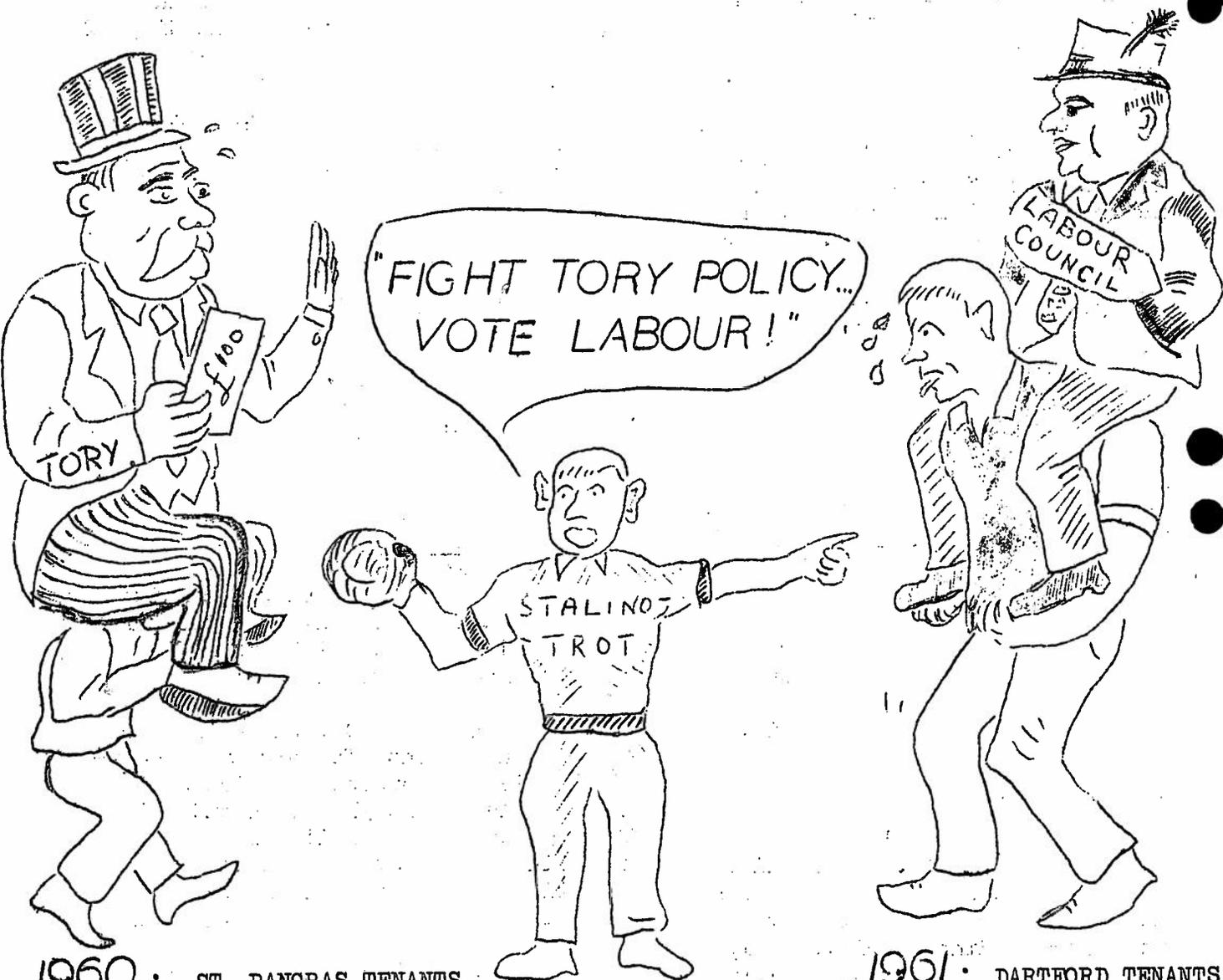
Of course silent 'sit-downs' will not be sufficient. But they are a step towards independent mass action. Such a movement has an excellent opportunity of discovering for itself more radical

and more telling ways of opposing war.

This is a campaign which is entitled to the support of all socialists. We attach little importance to how Labour votes at this year's Conference. Even the most 'left' MPs are not going to quarrel with those nice policemen who work at the House of Commons - otherwise where would they park their cars?

Bob Pennington.

'TAKING THEM THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE'



1960 : ST. PANCRAS TENANTS FIGHT TORY RENT INCREASES.

1961 : DARTFORD TENANTS FIGHT LABOUR RENT INCREASES.

Redundancy

BY JIM PETTER, AEU.

A CONTRIBUTION TO DISCUSSION

However much we may talk about the apathy of workers today, one issue on which they are always ready to fight is that of redundancy. Whatever else dull employment may have done, it has not made for security. In fact it is in the higher paid jobs, as in the motor industry, that insecurity is felt most.

'Last in, first out'?

The simplest means of dealing with the problem is 'last in, first out'. This 'solution' is favoured by the Communist Party. Like so much of that party's policy it is entirely irresponsible and often against the interests of the working class. If rigidly applied it would split the workers into opposing camps. There would be those qualified for security and an army of casual workers. Once a worker was fired, he would be in the army of casuals with practically no prospect of being anything else for the rest of his working life. Fortunately, not even the bosses are in favour of a rigid 'last in, first out' policy; all that can be said for it is that in the absence of any alternative, as a last resort it is slightly better than leaving sackings to uncontrolled boss selection. It certainly is not a policy for redundancy.

Compensation?

There has been much talk in the last few years of compensation for loss of employment. This is supposed to be a counterpart of the directors' golden handshake - but in the workers' case it will be very much a copper one. This again is no policy. At best it can only give a worker a few pounds to tide him over a period of unemployment, and this at the expense of any National Assistance he might be able to claim if he had had no compensation. To a worker of fifty, declared redundant after, say, twenty years service, compensation might amount to £200 on the most favourable terms suggested (one week's wages for every year of service). But as the worker would now be past the age when he was a good employment risk, the rest of his working days would be a long struggle to keep a job with the prospect of the minimum retirement pension at 65, and his compensation long since spent.

Short time working.

The most usual reaction of workers to redundancy is a call for short time working and spreading of the work. This usually has to be fought for, precisely because there is no policy for redundancy. With a strong shop

organization, short-time working can be transformed from a mere palliative into meaningful and properly organized rank and file action.

The first essential step when redundancy is declared will be to place an absolute ban on all overtime throughout the entire factory. If this is not done, little progress can be made. The policy of the Shop Stewards' committee must be to AVOID redundancy and not merely to mitigate it. This means that every worker must be made to feel that he is consciously doing something to avoid anybody being laid off; he must not be left to feel that his retention on short time is an indulgence of a benevolent management.

The next step will be to seek the co-operation of the workers in limiting piecework. When practicable, there should be reversion to timeworking - and the shop tear-arse will have to be firmly dealt with. The Shop Stewards' committee will seek to maintain a five-day week on reduced output and time rates rather than a three-day week on the normal speed-up conditions. When this policy is carefully explained to shop meetings, and shown to be in the interests of the workers AGAINST the boss, it is bound to receive the overwhelming support of the shop, tear-arses notwithstanding. Only when all means of maintaining a five-day week have failed, can a shorter working week be agreed to.

The fly in the ointment.

It must not be forgotten that short-time working is very often in the interests of the boss. Although the management always likes to appear as a benefactor sacrificing profit for the sake of the workers, we can take this talk as seriously as other pious boss class cant. After a bout of short-time working, the boss invariably comes up

with heartrending stories of the losses he has suffered by keeping 'his' workers on short time, and generously offers to revert to full time if only the Unions will agree to forgo some of their hard-won concessions. Sometimes it is the tea break, sometimes, as at Fords, the introduction of a shift system which the workers had strenuously opposed; or it may be the withdrawal of special rates for workers transferred from one department to another.

Because short time has been conceived of as a concession of the management, it is usually impossible to resist these demands. In fact when the bosses find it impossible to introduce new speed-up methods by ordinary negotiation, they often welcome and even deliberately manipulate short time in order to reduce worker resistance.

A socialist policy.

Short time is not a POLICY for dealing with redundancy. It can be a tactic for meeting the situation in particular factories, at particular times. A policy for redundancy must be applicable in principle to all factories, and will seek to establish a sense of class unity throughout an entire industry, or in all industries. It will make no concessions to what the bosses conceive as their interests: it will not seek to alleviate the problems of capitalist production. A socialist policy will not only be one in the interests of the workers but will also seek to prepare worker organization for socialism.

Since the end of the war, we have had more or less full employment in Britain. Full employment has become the avowed aim of Labour policy. Even the Tories pay lip-service to it. But neither Labour nor Tory claim that

A POLICY FOR REDUNDANCY

they can avoid what is euphemistically called 'pockets of redundancy', or 'transitional unemployment'. Socialists know that many unemployed workers are miserable and frightened men and possible recruits for fascist demagogy.

We must seek therefore to show that real full employment can only be maintained by pursuing a socialist policy, and is not a benefit of a more enlightened capitalism. In spite of capitalist full employment, the worker has generally no more security of employment than he had before the war; in fact in the industries where wages are highest he is in constant fear of redundancy. Our policy must be to fight for a declaration of 'no redundancy without the offer of alternative employment'.

Can it be realised?

This is by no means a demand impossible to achieve, even under capitalism. The industries where insecurity of employment is greatest are usually entirely dependent on the consumer market, and when demand falls off the factories stop. But they need not stop overnight as they invariably do now. In the modern speed-up factory there is an enormous labour turn over, averaging about 10 percent. per month. This alone leaves plenty of slack for avoiding redundancy. The cut back in production is not made at a day's or even a week's notice. Before production can begin in the modern factory, orders have to be placed for vast quantities of raw materials and accessories; production only begins when several months of work is assured. The decision to curtail production is taken when there is still several months' flow of material to be used; that is why we see car manufacturers taking over several acres of waste land to store their new cars, even after demand has slacked off.

Modern capitalist production demands that factories be kept going full blast or not at all; therefore management will take on new labour within a week or two of curtailing production, even when they have known for weeks and probably months that workers are to be declared redundant. By utilising the normal labour wastage, nearly all post-war redundancy could have been avoided if proper foresight had been used.

We must also insist that no worker is declared redundant until he is offered alternative employment suitable to his skill and at equivalent rate of pay. In his new employment he must enjoy transferable rights for pension, gratuity, sick pay, long service holiday additions and other benefits. Most labour transfer is confined within quite small industrial areas. If a worker is offered a suitable job away from his home and he elects to take it, he must receive a grant to cover all his removal expenses. But there must be no direction of labour, and no obstacles must be placed in the way of the complete freedom for every worker to leave and seek any employment he may desire.

Imposed by struggle.

Working class struggle could impose a real employment policy upon a Labour or even a Tory government. For its success such a service would need trade union representation. If the means of dealing with particular cases of redundancy are to gain the confidence of the workers affected, it is essential that all recommendations of this new employment service be fully discussed on the factory floor and subject to final workshop approval or veto.

All this may take time to realise in full, but it can be imposed even under capitalism. It will also be a forerunner of the conditions which

bricks ...

September 9, 1960.

I'm not keen on 'Socialism Reaffirmed' or 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'. Of course I'm interested in the new series, but I think that on the whole the approach is antiquarian. It is more primitive than that of the Trots whose errors are that they haven't advanced in their experience of the late thirties, while S. ou B. have retreated from territory already won. But I'd like to talk with you about it some time.

K.C., lecturer, Nottingham.

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October 17, 1960.

Here's the article on the Seamen's strike. I'm not at all proud of it. I'd like to have had time to try to write a companion article to the one by Bob Pennington on the Docks.* All my family being dockers or ex-dockers, I'm familiar enough with the industry to say that Pennington's article on the Docks is by far the best I've ever read.

G.F., seaman, London E.3.

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November 18, 1960.

I was interested to see the first issue of AGITATOR and would like to reprint the miner's poem ** in our December issue.

A.K., Editor Reading Labour Voice.

* International Socialism, Autumn 1960.

** 'Fifty years a miner', by Neil Sweeney, AGITATOR No.1, p.13.

November 24, 1960.

Please let comrade G. know that we find your paper good politically and technically and will put it before our meeting on Sunday evening.

H. McS., Glasgow.

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November 25, 1960.

...No, I don't belong to any group or sect, although I try to maintain contact with any lefts for the purpose of finding common ground to work on. I am sick and tired of fractions, vanguards and the how-many-angels-can-balance-on-the-point-of-a-needle talk that goes with all sectarian nonsense.

All my life I have been an activist, working among my class, trying to give them what little help I could in their struggles. I am still active in my Labour Party, in my Trade Union and on the building site, also in CND. We have a big branch here and are trying to make inroads into industry.

Keep in touch, please, comrades. I like to know how goes the fight in other places. We might be able to help each other in the problems the class struggle gives us.

R.G., building worker, Wolverhampton

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December 12, 1960.

...Send us ten copies of your next issue of AGITATOR. We would regard it as a compliment that you wish to reprint one of our articles. Please feel quite free to print anything out of PROGRESS...

B.B., engineering apprentice, Rochdale, Lancs.

and bouquets

December 13, 1960.

The title AGITATOR is not right. I cannot put forward at present a suitable one, but G. and I feel that the title should convey a 'socialist philosophy', 'socialist principles', etc. The bare title AGITATOR smacks of the unthinking militant, striking on every and any occasion. However we are not unduly concerned because it is the political content which is the deciding factor - and that we find good.

H.F., draughtsman, Exeter.

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December 23, 1960.

...Will you let me have half a dozen of the Renault pamphlet? I think I shall sell them without much difficulty. I think it is very good stuff. If ever you want a quid or so to help in the publication of material like that, let me know. Having been expelled from every damn thing I pay my subs to Socialism for particular purposes, as they crop up!

P.C., school teacher, Cambridge

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January 1, 1961.

...Sorry about the delay in sending my sub for AGITATOR. To make up I'm sending five subs: one for me and for each of the following.

Some of us who have read 'Socialism Reaffirmed' feel that your ideas and ours have a lot in common and would like to discuss things further.

R.D., solicitor, Leeds.

January 4, 1961.

Thank you for your recent note enclosing a copy of your pamphlet 'Renault workers Fight Sackings'.

Please forward 150 copies to the above address together with your account of same.

R.A. Burke, Convenor Main Plant, Fords Shop Stewards Committee.

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January 18, 1961.

Enclosed please find subscription for 1 year to AGITATOR, which I enjoyed reading today. Being a simple man who has devoted little time to reading I would welcome articles on workers who have striven for workers' unity and power, unimpeded by nationalistic or religious motives.

Best of luck to you with this paper. Keep it coming.

M.T., building worker, London SW4

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January 23, 1961.

At a meeting on Saturday last a Gravesend Young Left Group was formed. We decided not to affiliate to the NLR or any other organization but to be open to all young people with left-wing views - in the broadest sense of the phrase.

For our first meeting I hope it will be possible for you to get M.G. to talk on the recent Belgian strike.

A.H., student, Gravesend.

January 26, 1961.

We have read about your group in World Labour News and in Progress. It seems to us you are socialists without any of the rather complex 'ifs' and 'buts' of other 'socialist' groups.

We understand you publish a paper. Please send us four copies.

D.P., clerical worker, Dublin.

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January 30, 1961.

After reading the AGITATOR I feel you go too far in exposing our fair Queen and her Husband to ridicule. I feel that Norma Meacock and T.Hillier could learn a lot from this royal couple. Please leave royalty alone.

Re M.G.'s cartoon (Agitator 3) is it a cat or a rat? (Madam, it was a tiger!)

M.W., housewife, London NW10.

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February 6, 1961.

My main comment on it is the levity. Although much of the stuff is very good the tendency towards flippancy makes the new reader think that it is all a bit of a lark... One of my constant readers thinks it's very good but he hasn't yet accepted any of the ideas in it... My own ideas are crystallising against nationalisation and for workers control - and against reforming the Labour Party. We want more of what we stand for... Hope to increase the circulation surely to 6 or more...

M.B., optician, Derby.

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March 9, 1961.

We discussed the question of levity again. S. felt that the articles were not flippant and were written in language that was understandable, unlike the SLL jargon. A move in your direction!

M.B., Derby.

February 28, 1961.

I trust AGITATOR will become Britain's answer to News and Letters and Correspondence. What we need is far more agitating and less complacency. How can you get people to see where the trouble really is and agitate for the right things?

Far too many suffering people just add to their troubles by drowning their sorrows in drink or seeking escapes in television, etc...

V.T., Southport.

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March 3, 1961.

...the pamphlets on the Belgian and French struggles were excellent. I duly passed them on...

P.C., miner, Deal, Kent.

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March 9, 1961.

I have been hearing lots of criticisms of AGITATOR - all from the 'dissident' left. It only confirms my opinion that you are producing something worthwhile...

J. P. , engineer, Woodford Green

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March 11, 1961.

I find the politics of AGITATOR - when unearthed from beneath the sarcasm - quite good... I'm unclear of whether AGITATOR are Marxist or not. Frankly they strike me as a middle-class, neo-anarchist group... I'm afraid AGITATOR does not (yet?) match Workers News Bulletin as a serious political journal...

G. S., miner, Belper, Derbyshire.

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(cont'd p. 27)

THE COMMUNE

I. THE COMMUNE... FROM MARX TO TROTSKY.

'Each time we study the history of the Commune we see something new in it, thanks to the experiences gained in later revolutionary struggles...' Thus wrote Trotsky in 1921, in his preface to a book by Talès (1) which was to become basic reading for a whole generation of French revolutionaries.

The 'tricks of History', as Marx delighted to call them, have amply confirmed the correctness of Trotsky's statement. We can now examine the Paris Commune in a new light - in the light precisely of the rich experience of Bolshevism and of Trotskyism. We mean, more specifically, in the light of their failure. Stated more concretely, the proletarian revolution of 1871 must now be re-evaluated in the light of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and of the positive lessons of the revolutionary struggle of the Hungarian Workers' Councils in 1956 against a bureaucratic society in which the means of production were completely 'nationalised'.

Trotsky could hardly have foreseen these developments when he wrote his prophetic words in the heroic days of 1921. This however in no way detracts from their absolute correctness.

For both Trotsky and Talès the great defect of the Commune was the absence of a revolutionary leadership. 'The Commune', Trotsky emphasised, shows us 'the incapacity of the masses to choose their own path, their indecision in the leadership of the movement, their fatal inclination to stop after the first successes...' How can this be overcome? Trotsky is quite explicit: 'It is only through the help of the Party, basing itself on the whole history of the past, theoretically foreseeing the paths of development and all its stages, and extracting from them the necessary formulas for action, that the proletariat frees itself from the need constantly to restart its own history...'. He summarises his views with his usual logic: 'We can look, page by page, through the history of the Commune. We will find in it only a single lesson: there must be a strong Party leadership' (our emphasis).

The present generation of revolutionaries have lived through or studied the history of the last 40 years, and have experienced all the ills that have flown from the hypertrophy and subsequent degeneration of such a 'leadership' - even when it has proved victorious in its struggle against

(1) 'La Commune de 1871' by C. Talès, Librairie du Travail, Paris 1924.

the bourgeoisie. They have witnessed its gradual separation from the masses and its steady conversion into a new ruling group, as fundamentally opposed to the basic wishes of the masses themselves to administer society as any previous ruling group in history. For revolutionaries in 1961 the Paris Commune of 1871 should be seen as an historical precursor of the essentially anti-bureaucratic mass movement that swept through Hungary in 1956. The measures taken by the Communards to prevent the emergence of a bureaucracy from within their own ranks were to be taken up again by the Budapest workers in 1956. Both revolutions posed the question of who was in reality to manage both production and society in no uncertain terms.

It is interesting to contrast the Bolshevick appreciation of the Commune with that of the Commune's great contemporaries, Marx and Engels. In his 'Civil War in France', written as the last Communards were being slaughtered by the forces of the victorious Versailles, Marx does not once attribute the defeat to the absence of a 'strong Party leadership'. He is vastly impressed by its great positive achievements. He describes the Commune as 'essentially a working class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form, at last discovered, under which to work out the economic emancipation of Labour'. He does not say that it was the Party who discovered this particular form, a form which neither he nor any other member of the First International had either foreseen or prepared for. The masses in struggle themselves created this form of organization, just as in 1905 they were themselves to create the Soviets, at first denounced by the Bolsheviks as 'sectarian organizations'. There is no question of the Party, or anyone else for that matter, 'theoretically foreseeing the paths of development and all its stages...'. Twenty years later, in 1891, Engels was to write 'what is still more wonderful is the correctness of much that was done by the Commune, composed as it was of Blanquists and Proudhonists'. (2) In other words the everyday experience of the masses impelled them to take measures of a class character. They generated their own socialist consciousness, assisted but not dictated to by conscious revolutionaries of various kinds.

The Commune was militarily crushed, having held power for just over 2 months. Its defeat was an extremely bloody one. It is scarcely surprising that Trotsky, president in October 1917 of the Revolutionary War Committee in Petrograd, brilliant military strategist and creator of the Red Army, should have been exasperated by the Commune's lack of military success, by its vacillations, by the 'inefficiency' of a number of its leaders and by its total lack of a clearly thought out military policy, when confronted by a cynical bourgeoisie prepared ruthlessly to destroy it and 'to restore order for a generation'.

What is less permissible however is that the same Trotsky should have lent his military authority to Talès' effort systematically to denigrate the most creative and positive aspects of the Paris Commune. But the real culprit here is not even Talès. It is Bolshevism and Trotskyism themselves. If, as they tell us, 'the crisis of society is the crisis of the revolutionary

(2) Introduction to K. Marx's Civil War in France. Marx-Engels Selected Works, vol. I, p. 481. (Moscow, 1958).

leadership', it is easy to equate the history of the Commune with the history of its leadership. From this postulate everything flows quite logically... and in particular the defeat of the Commune! Or so they would have us believe!

History, on this basis, becomes an easy subject. The social composition and the prevailing ideologies of the Central Committee of the National Guard (3) and of the Commune itself were extremely diverse. The predominating influence was that of the radical, patriotic, anticlerical petty-bourgeoisie. The members of the First International lacked ideological clarity. The Blanquists, the most determined revolutionaries and the ones most prepared to struggle, lacked any positive social conceptions. To these facts should be added the backward structure of the Parisian proletariat of the time. Industrial concentration, which had been achieved many years previously in the textile mills of Manchester and which was to be achieved some decades later by the Russian proletariat in the great Putilov works in Petrograd, was only just beginning in Paris. (4)

But such an emphasis on the leadership of the Commune immediately leads to an insoluble contradiction. If history is an account of the achievements or shortcomings of revolutionary leaderships, how can we explain that the Commune, with its petty-bourgeois leadership was capable of introducing to the modern world the most advanced conceptions of proletarian democracy? Why did Marx refer to it as 'the glorious harbinger of a new society'? Why did Engels state that the measures taken by the Communards would, in the last resort, have led 'to the abolition of class antagonism between capitalists and workers'? Why did he taunt the Social-Democratic philistines with his famous 'Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!'

(3) A soldiers' council of elected and revocable representatives which took over the defence of Paris, first against the armies of Bismarck, then against those of Thiers, the most class conscious leader the French bourgeoisie has produced for generations.

(4) See F. Jellinek, The Paris Commune of 1871 (Gollancz, 1937). 'In 1866, at the apogee of Parisian expansion in this period, the total population was 1,825,274. There were 570,280 workshops (as against 64,816 in 1847 and 101,171 in 1860), owned by 65,987 masters, employing only 442,310 workers (besides 34,846 clerks and 23,251 servants). This meant that the average number of workers per shop was only 7.7, sinking from 13 in the building and metal trades to 1.4 in the food industry. By far the largest numbers were employed in the garment industry: 306,567 (208,675 women); building, owing to Baron Haussmann's reconstruction of the capital, employed most men, 125,371 (63,675 women); and the various luxury industries, upon which the repute and prosperity of Paris mainly depended, employed 63,617 workers. In all, workers (468,337) and their dependants (286,670) made up about 40 per cent of the population of Paris.'

The Commune introduced the eligibility and revocability of all officials and the payment to them of working men's salaries. These are profoundly revolutionary measures. Their application will inevitably undermine and destroy any bourgeois (or bureaucratic) state machine. These demands introduce complete popular domination of the civil administration, of the army and of the judiciary. They lead to the creation, from below, of a completely new kind of social organization. The October Revolution, in its early days, sought to implement these demands. The developing Stalinist bureaucracy sought ruthlessly to destroy them. Nearly a century after they were first put forward by the Communards, they still form the basis of all genuinely revolutionary struggles.

Marx stated that the Communards had 'stormed heaven'. Talès explains that the story of the Commune is the story of the failure of a radical-anarchist-petty bourgeois leadership! His 'explanation' is also peddled today by the crudest of Stalinists. This is no accident. In March 1961, during the 90th anniversary celebrations in Paris, Garaudy, Stalinist senator for the Seine department and university pen-pusher in the cause of Stalinism (completely unknown in England... and rightly so) declared: 'The great lesson of the Commune is that the working class can only overcome its enemies under the leadership of a revolutionary party. It is essential to grasp this fundamental precondition of revolutionary victories at a time when some people, under the pretext of a creative development of marxism-leninism are leading us back to the worst illusions of pre-marxist socialism, to petty bourgeois anarchism, to proudhonism, or to Blanquist adventurism...' Sundry Trotskyists and non-Trotskyist Leninists would agree with every word of this. (5) In so doing they reveal themselves worthy successors of those Marx castigated as 'mere bawlers, who by dint of repeating year after year the same set of stereotyped declamations... have sneaked into the reputation of revolutionists of the first water'.

How did it come about, we would ask these gentlemen (or at least those of them who refuse to accept that Russia is in any sense a socialist society) that in the 20th Century all revolutionary movements, despite their repeated victories over and expropriations of the bourgeoisie, and despite the drastic changes they have introduced in the property relations, have failed to bring about socialism, that is a fundamental change in the relations of production, in the relation of man to man in his labour and in his social life?

To answer this question one needs a very different conception of history than that of Talès or of the Bolsheviks. A serious study of the Commune, which we cannot here undertake in full, will suggest some of the answers. The real history of the Commune is the history of the masses themselves, struggling for fundamentally different conditions of existence, and not primarily the history of its leadership. Seen in this light the history of the Commune has still to be written.

(5) See, for instance, any article, in any issue of the Workers News Bulletin, any week, in the last 10 years.

II. THE COMMUNE: A CREATION OF THE PEOPLE.

The workers, artisans and ordinary people of the period did not conceive of social life, least of all of their own, in terms of universal concepts, but in terms of action. Nine workers out of ten still do so today. Action is their language. It is in fact the only language of which they have acquired complete mastery. For intellectuals words are often a substitute for action. For workers, actions are a form of speech. To add to revolutionary theory in the course of revolutionary action is the essential task of the revolutionary proletariat. (6) This was the immortal contribution to revolutionary theory of the Parisian workers in 1871 and of their successors, the Hungarian workers of 1956. Such was the language of the Commune, which socialists must now attempt to decipher.

The decisive date in the history of the Commune is March 18, 1871. Thiers sees the armed workers of Paris as his main obstacle to the conclusion of a peace treaty with Bismarck, and as a potential danger for the whole of bourgeois France. He decides to send 'loyal' battalions to remove the cannons held by the National Guard at Montmartre, Buttes Chaumont and Belleville, cannons bought by public subscription during the siege. The operation starts successfully in the early hours of the morning. After a little firing the guns at Montmartre are captured. But time passes. The operation has been bureaucratically and inefficiently planned. The necessary gun-carriages don't arrive to remove the captured guns. The crowd begins to grow. Women, children, old people mingle with the troops. The National Guard, hastily summoned, arrives. An extraordinary confusion reigns. Some soldiers of the 88th Regiment start talking to the Guard. When General Lecomte, losing his head, orders his troops to open fire, it is already too late. The soldiers refuse to fire, turn their rifle butts up, join with the people. The language of acts has been heard. Soldiers and civilians have fraternised.

But acts have a logic of their own. The soldiers have compromised themselves. They take General Lecomte as a hostage. A little later General Thomas, 'the butcher of 1848' is spotted in the crowd. Tempers mount. Both generals are shot by their own soldiers. (7)

(6) The idea that revolutionary theory is something static, enshrined once and for all in the writings of the four great teachers, something to be derived from the study of books, and the idea that socialist consciousness has to be brought to the proletariat 'from outside' (Lonin) by the bourgeois intelligentsia, which is 'the vehicle of science' (Kautsky), are both profoundly reactionary and profoundly anti-dialectical, in the deepest sense of the term. We have touched on these subjects in issues No.4 and No.5 of AGITATOR and will develop them more fully in future issues.

(7) As Marx so clearly put it: 'the inveterate habits acquired by the soldiery, under the training of the enemies of the working class, are not of course likely to change, the very moment these soldiers change sides'.

Thiers orders the withdrawal from the town of the standing Army. There is a precipitous retreat, in complete confusion, to Versailles. The major part of the civilian administration, government officials, senior officials in charge of food supplies, of the post, of lighting, of sewerage, of public assistance, of public health and of the thousand and one other aspects of life in a big city, leave Paris precipitously in the course of the next few days. An enormous social vacuum is created. Everything has to be created anew, from next to nothing, from below. And a war has to be fought at the same time.

We must dispose of the myth, which has gained much credence in Bolshevik circles, that alone a revolutionary Party would have had the 'correct answers' at such a moment. 'If there had been in Paris a Party leadership' Trotsky wrote 'it would have incorporated in the retreating armies... a few hundred or a few dozen devoted workers giving them the following directives: work up the discontent of the soldiers against their officers and take advantage of the first psychologically favourable moment to break the soldiers from their officers and bring them back to Paris to unite with the people'.

Trotsky speaks here with the wisdom of hindsight and somewhat distorts the real facts. Talès himself tells us that 'March 18... started by the collective and anonymous action of the masses and ended in acts of individual initiative, isolated militants rallying the support of (local) committees of the National Guard'. On March 19 leading Blanquists such as Eudes and Duval 'proposed an immediate march on Versailles' but their proposals 'encountered no echo on the Central Committee'. A far sighted minority had a fairly clear idea of what was required. That the majority were not at that stage prepared to follow their advice was a regrettable fact, but was also an objective element in the real situation. To argue that 'if there had been a revolutionary Party, this or that would have followed' is like arguing that 'if my aunt had..... she would be my uncle'.

What of the creative activity of the Commune? What were its prevailing moods and the level of consciousness of its participants? These are clearly enumerated in Engels' 1891 introduction to Marx's Civil War in France. We don't apologise for reproducing the relevant passage, in full. 'On March 30 the Commune abolished conscription and the standing army, and declared the sole armed force to be the National Guard, in which all citizens capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled. It remitted all payments of rent for dwelling houses from October 1870 until April, the amounts already paid to be booked as future rent payments, and stopped all sales of articles pledged in the municipal loan office. On the same day the foreigners elected to the Commune were confirmed in office, because "the flag of the Commune is the flag of the World Republic". On April 1 it was decided that the highest salary to be received by any employee of the Commune, and therefore also by its members themselves, was not to exceed 6,000 francs (4,800 marks). On the following day the Commune decreed the separation of the church from the state, and the abolition of all state payments for religious purposes as well as the transformation of all church property into national property; as a result of which, on April 8, the exclusion from the schools of all religious symbols, pictures, dogmas, prayers - in a word, "of all that belongs

to the sphere of the individual's conscience" - was ordered and gradually put into effect. On the 5th, in reply to the shooting, day after day, of captured Commune fighters by the Versailles troops, a decree was issued for the imprisonment of hostages, but it was never carried into execution. On the 6th, the guillotine was brought out by the 137th battalion of the National Guard, and publicly burnt, amid great popular rejoicing. On the 12th, the Commune decided that the Victory Column on the Place Vendôme, which had been cast from captured guns by Napoleon after the war of 1809, should be demolished as a symbol of chauvinism and incitement to national hatred. This was carried out on May 16. On April 16 it ordered a statistical tabulation of factories which had been closed down by the manufacturers, and the working out of plans for the operation of these factories by the workers formerly employed in them, who were to be organized in co-operative societies, and also plans for the organization of these co-operatives in one great union. On the 20th it abolished night work for bakers, and also the employment offices, which since the Second Empire had been run as a monopoly by creatures appointed by the police - labour exploiters of the first rank; these offices were transferred to the mayoralities of the twenty arrondissements of Paris. On April 30 it ordered the closing of the pawnshops, on the ground that they were a private exploitation of the workers, and were in contradiction with the right of the workers to their instruments of labour and to credit. On May 5 it ordered the razing of the Chapel of Atonement, which had been built in expiation of the execution of Louis XVI.

'Thus from March 18 onwards the class character of the Paris movement, which had previously been pushed into the background by the fight against the foreign invaders, emerged sharply and clearly. As almost only workers, or recognized representatives of the workers, sat in the Commune, its decisions bore a decidedly proletarian character'.

The Commune was born of the exasperation provoked by the prolonged siege of Paris and of the disgust engendered by its capitulation without a fight. Nationalist or even chauvinist feeling might have been strong in the Paris of 1871. Yet the Commune 'admitted all foreigners to the honour of dying for an immortal cause' and made a German working man, Leo Frankel, its Minister of Labour. It 'honoured the heroic sons of Poland (8) by placing them at the head of the defenders of Paris'. (Marx).

Much has been made by the advocates of the 'hegemony of the Party' of the fact that few, if any, of the social measures taken by the Commune were consciously socialist ones. To accept that they were would of course deny the exclusive function of the Party, that of bringing 'socialist consciousness' to the working class. What did the Communards think of their own activities? The very first proclamation of the Central Committee of the National Guard, on March 18, said: 'The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation, by taking into their own hands the direction of

(8)

Dombrowski and Wroblewski.

public affairs... They have understood that it is their imperious duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power'. We would suggest that this reveals an extremely high degree of political consciousness, a degree which was to be achieved again by the Hungarian workers in 1956. One of the essential reasons of the degeneration of the Russian revolution was that the Russian masses were unable to sustain this degree of revolutionary consciousness for more than a few months. Under the mistaken idea that they could 'leave it to the Party' which they themselves had created out of their flesh and blood, they retreated from the historical arena. The bureaucratic degeneration set in, with the Party as its nucleus.

Marx himself was aware of the importance of self conscious activity. He refers to 'the new era of history' which the Commune 'was conscious of initiating'. The great positive achievements of the Commune were no isolated or artificial gestures, but were measures reflecting the popular will and determined by it. Talès, our 'bolshevik' historian, makes fun of the love of the masses, at the time, for what he calls 'symbolic acts'. To illustrate his point he quotes the destruction of the monuments. This is because he has never understood this language of acts, through which ordinary people express themselves. When it pulled down the Vendôme column, which Marx referred to as a 'colossal symbol of martial glory', the crowd was expressing in actions the very notion which completes internationalism, namely anti-militarism.

III. THE MEANING OF THE COMMUNE.

Almost every measure taken by the Commune can be explained through an understanding of the deepest daily experiences of the masses. Such was the decree limiting to 6,000 francs a year the top salary paid to any member of the revolutionary government (incidentally, such a salary was in practice never received by anyone). Such also was the decree stipulating that workshops abandoned by the employers should be taken over by working class organizations and run by them, for the workers themselves.

These two measures were among the most characteristic taken by the Commune. Bolsheviks have argued interminably on the compensation clause. Today we realise how academic such a discussion really is. What the workers felt at the time was the importance of themselves managing production and distribution. As long as they managed what mattered indemnity to the previous owners, an indemnity whose effects would be restricted in time anyway? Ninety years later the Chinese bureaucracy was to discover all this anew... and in its own interests. Having bureaucratically ensured to itself the effective management of industry, it allowed itself the luxury of compensating - and even at times even of employing - the previous owners as salaried executives!

Marx was quite conscious of these deep-going aspects of the Commune. 'When the Paris Commune took the management of the revolution in its own hands', he wrote, 'when plain working men for the first time dared to infringe upon the governmental privilege of their "natural superiors" and under circumstances of unexampled difficulty performed their work modestly, conscientiously and efficiently... the old world writhed in convulsions of rage at the sight of the Red Flag, the symbol of the Republic of Labour, floating over the Hotel de Ville.' The distance separating this evaluation of the role of the Commune and that of Trotsky who saw the "only lesson" of the Commune to be the need for "a strong Party leadership" could hardly be greater!

As for the strivings of the Commune towards an equalisation of wages, and its demands for the eligibility and revocability of all representatives, they reflect a fundamental preoccupation with the question of destroying at its very roots the hierarchical organization of society.

Since then much has been written and said about 'soviets' and about 'workers councils'. But it would seem that the real nature of these new forms of social life has been forgotten by those who stand in admiration before their bureaucratic caricatures. Discussing the Commune, Marx wrote: 'Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business. And it is well known that companies, like individuals, in matters of real business generally know how to put the right man in the right place, and, if they for once make a mistake, to redress it promptly...Nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture.'

'Hierarchic investiture'! Here is the hub of the whole problem. How is the hierarchical structure of society to be destroyed and superseded? The Commune showed in its acts how this was to be done. At all levels, all officials and functionaries were to be elected. And all were to be revocable by those who had elected them!

Direct election and permanent revocability are clearly not panaceas for the solution of all problems. But in themselves they carry the seed of the most profound transformation of society. An officer or a magistrate whom one elects and whom one controls at all times is already no longer fully an officer or a magistrate. This is the yardstick by which one can begin to measure the 'withering away of the state'. The real content of this withering away is precisely the progressive elimination of hierarchical investiture and of hierarchical institutions.

Engels was quite emphatic on this question. Again referring to the Commune he stated 'the working class must... safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception (our emphasis) subject to recall at any moment'.

There has been much misunderstanding about the significance of the 'communal' regime, some of it patently dishonest. Thus Trotsky, correctly criticising some of the leaders of the Commune, could give vent to his sarcasm: 'Paris, you see, is but one commune among many others. Paris does not wish to impose anything upon anyone. Paris does not struggle for a dictatorship other than "the dictatorship of example".' But he continues quite wrongly: 'The Commune was but an attempt to replace the developing proletarian revolution by a petty-bourgeois reform: communal autonomy. This idealist chatter, of the type indulged in by parlour anarchists, was in reality a cover for cowardice when confronted with revolutionary action, which needed to be carried out ceaselessly and to the end...' (9) Marx had seen deeper than this. He pointed out that the Commune had (already in May 1871!) been subjected to a 'multiplicity of interpretations' but that its essential features were that it was 'a working class government' and 'a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive!'

The most significant aspect, however, of the Paris Commune is that it created social forms which in a sense define socialism itself, social forms which serve as yardsticks for proletarian revolutions passed, present and to come. These forms provide criteria for analysing the social nature of any particular regime. Nearly a century later societies can still be looked at according to the categories established by the Paris Commune. And it is most revealing how clearly things fall into proper perspective when one confronts the Russian or Chinese realities of today with the first, short, hesitant experience in 1871 of a genuinely proletarian revolution and of genuine working class power.

IV. PARIS 1871 - HUNGARY 1956.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 is seen in a completely new light when looked at with the proletarian experience of 1871 in mind.

There are both superficial and deep analogies. The central facts of the Hungarian revolution were firstly the active participation of the masses and secondly the anti-bureaucratic and anti-hierarchical character of the most spontaneous and deepest-going demands of the working class, demands which emerged more and more clearly as the Workers Councils became the sole revolutionary force, in the later stages of the struggle.

In the first stages of both revolutions one sees the civilian crowds, women, children, old people, massively erupt onto the scene. Their total participation paralyses for a while the intervention of the enemy. In both revolutions temporary conditions exist for genuine fraternisation.

(9) Introduction to Talès' La Commune de 1871.

The Hungarian workers in 1956 immediately put forward demands for workers' management of the factory, for a drastic reduction in the wage differential and for the abolition of piece-rate. Like the Parisians they get straight down to essentials. Managers are elected and submitted to continuous, direct control. It matters less, in this respect, that a number of the previous managers were re-elected. What is essential is the radical transformation of all existing relations between men.

On a more tragic plane, the fate of both revolutions resemble one another. In both cases it is a desperate, bitter struggle, fought out street by street, to the last drop of blood, without compromise, without submission, as only men can fight who know what they are fighting for and who have themselves determined the objectives of their struggle. Despite military defeat, which the revolutionaries in both circumstances came to see as more or less inevitable, it was a timeless ideal they fought for, an ideal to be defended unconditionally, in a fight in which inevitable death was almost welcomed as a release.

In both revolutions the threatened classes resorted to bloody repression. This was done with the calculated ferocity which ruling classes only resort to when their most fundamental prerogative is threatened, namely their right to rule. The iron fist then emerges from the velvet glove. Class society reveal itself in its true colours - as the perpetual, systematised, organization of violence by the minority against the immense majority. That Thiers was 'more liberal' than Napoleon III is about as relevant in this respect as the fact that Khrushchev was 'more liberal' than Stalin.

During both civil wars moreover, bystanders stood cynically on the side lines (Bismarck and Eisenhower) protesting at the use of so much violence, and forgetting that this class violence was but an image of their own.

The tragic defeat of the Hungarian revolution, like the tragic defeat of the Commune, both call for reflection. Their lessons are innumerable. The need for an efficient coordination and for an organization capable of ensuring it should be obvious to all. But what kind of organization? How is it to be evolved? What are its relationships to the masses? This is the whole question. When we speak of organization we mean an organization evolved through struggle by the communes, by the soviets, by the workers councils themselves.

In his preface to the book by Talès, mentioned in the beginning of this article, Trotsky wrote: 'Before the broad masses of the soldiers can acquire the experience of well choosing and selecting commanders, the revolution will be beaten by the enemy, who is guided in the choice of his commanders by the experience of centuries. The methods of amorphous democracy (simple eligibility) must be supplemented and to a certain degree replaced by measures of selection from above. The revolution must create an organ composed of experienced, reliable organizers in which one (10) can have absolute confidence, and give it full powers to choose, designate and educate the command!

(10) Who is this anonymous and mysterious 'one'? Who is to bestow 'absolute confidence' in the revolutionary organ and the revolutionary organizers? Is it the masses? Is it the Party 'acting in the interests of the masses? Is it the Party leaders 'acting in the interests of the Party as a whole? Is Trotsky's ambiguity on this point entirely accidental?

In this last quotation from Trotsky two little words epitomise, in a way, the whole subsequent degeneration of the great proletarian revolution of 1917: the words 'from above'. No one denies the need for selection, particularly in so crucial a field as the field of armed struggle, to which the whole fate of the revolution is tied. Obviously the command must be selected. Training, aptitudes, experience vary enormously. The proletarian heritage is heterogenous in the extreme. But it is a question of selection from below.

Selection from above has a remarkable tendency to transform itself from the exception to the rule. It is carried over, by its own momentum, from wartime into peace time. It spreads from the regiment into the factory. From the barracks it invades the factories involved in war work and the workers councils themselves. From the military 'High Command' it takes a brisk step into the 'High Command' of the Party. It becomes systematised. It becomes the 'hierarchic investiture' of which Marx spoke and which is one of the essential features of all class society. And as the principle proceeds on its way the masses soon retreat from the historical arena, leaving it to others who 'are more efficient', who 'know better' to act 'on their behalf'. The degeneration has begun. The seeds of the Stalinist regime are sown: the cooption of bureaucracy by the bureaucracy itself. Engels was almost prophetic in his foresight when he insisted that 'all officials, without exception, must be subject to recall at any moment'.

A new generation of young revolutionaries must now seriously turn to the lessons of the Paris Commune and to the lessons of its great contemporary analogue, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Scattered, misinterpreted, deliberately misused for ends that are not the ends of the Revolution, the basic documents of both are to be found (11) by those wishing to find them. They should be studied. Both revolutions are of fundamental importance to the socialist movement, and to an understanding of the class struggle in our epoch.

THE END

P. Guillaume
& M. Grainger.

(11) See Revolution from 1789 to 1906, R.W. Postgate. (Grant Richards, 1920).
and Socialisme ou Barbarie, vol. IV, No.20 and No.21.

LETTER FROM IRELAND

...Here the Roman Catholic Church controls the vast majority of the people and consequently they are held in the spell of that church's social policy. They dominate every sphere of life here and unfortunately this includes the trade union movement. This is quite a recent acquisition to their control. It followed the unification of the two Congresses. Whereas prior to unity the Irish TUC was centred on the North and was based on the British affiliated unions which were not under the priests' control - the other Congress was.

Today they manage to control the lot. One might justifiably ask if this does not produce a reaction similar to Latin America, Spain and Italy. Unfortunately it does not. The rebellious do not fight, they emigrate to Liverpool and Birmingham while the rest - dispirited and demoralised - pray. They are educated from the cradle to accept all the injustice and humiliation of this world and to wait for the paradise beyond.

Today the church is all powerful. Recently they have wielded their power in several distinct incidents. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Cork presided at a meeting between representatives of Cork Trades Council, the Cork Gas Company and seven fitters of that company involved in a dispute regarding the operating of a new oil-gas plant. He 'settled' the strike, but the published statement did not state in whose favour he decided. One doubts if it was the workers.

Fifty five fitters of the ETU (I) have a dispute with Aer Lingus (a semi state-owned company) over the introduction of a new shift for the Boeing jet aircraft which the company recently bought. Here again, after much shadow boxing by both sides (especially the ETU bureaucracy) the Rev. Fr. Moloney S.J. has been invited by both sides to act as a mediator. This priest is a lecturer in the Catholic Workers College. This organization believes that strike is class war and that is immoral, so one may easily guess in whose favour he will decide. We are told he is a well-educated man and has studied labour in the U.S. Unfortunately this kind of bull goes down with the gullible workers and the farce goes on.

The Jesuits run a hostel in Dublin for students at U.C.D. Recently the students Debating Society of that Hall asked Dr. Owen Sheehy Skeffington to speak at their meeting. However before the meeting was held, Dr. Skeffington received a letter from the Society cancelling the arrangement on instructions received from the Jesuit authorities. In a letter to Rev. Fr. Burke Savage S.J., principal, Dr. Skeffington said that rather than feel insulted he felt flattered to be considered so dangerous by our local upholders of anti-liberalism.

...The African students have also been very active here. They organized a march to protest against the murder of Lumumba. They had intended to march to the Belgian Embassy and present a resolution on the murder, but the police halted the parade before they reached the Embassy. The students refused to disperse, claiming their free right to protest. The

LETTER FROM IRELAND (cont'd from p.25)

police then forcibly dispersed them and driving small groups down side alleys, proceeded systematically to beat them up. This is the kind of thing you get in this den of self-righteous hypocrites.

...These incidents only touch the surface. They give some conception however of what the struggle in a Popish dominated society like this is really like. May be this seems depressing. Well, to us here, it is not. It is reality and we would be building visions, figments of our own imagination if I were to write otherwise. The struggle continues, the validity of Socialism is not subjected to any alteration by the depressing picture in this country.

D. P., Dublin.
April 1961.

A POLICY FOR REDUNDANCY.

(cont'd from p. 9)

will apply in a socialist society. Workers are beginning to demand not just full employment, but security of employment as well. By fighting for the maximum security now, and by fighting for it by our own efforts, we shall be gaining experience in the art of managing our own affairs instead of being at the mercy of both exploitation and of decisions taken elsewhere and over which we have no control whatsoever.

Jim Petter.

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STATEMENT

The following statement was made on behalf of SOLIDARITY, in Bow Street Police Court, by A.Anderson, following arrest during the Whitchall 'sit-down'.

'Eichmann is at this moment standing in the dock of an Israeli court. This reminds one of the silence and inaction of many German people during the Nazi period. These have often been cited as evidence of their guilt in the abomination of mankind carried out by the German state.

'The use of nuclear weapons is inexcusable on any grounds. Those prepared to use them are planning an abomination far ghastlier than that of the Nazis. They are planning the total destruction of Humanity. In an historical context, the event is imminent. No one will be alive to protest after it has happened. We feel bound to protest now in the only way open to us!':

WHAT NEXT
FOR ENGINEERS?

By KEN WELLER, AEU.

A survey of the present situation in the Engineering industry and some suggestions for militants.

8d (post free) from E.Morse
3, Lancaster Grove, NW3.

My pal... you was.

April 6, 1961.

November 11, 1960.

...Speaking personally, our orientation could hardly be closer to the views expressed in your statement. AGITATOR is a very good first effort. The editorial matter is especially sound... The items of humour are well done and very welcome...

+ + +

March 29, 1961.

While I and many others would agree with your motives (which we were putting forward at a time when you comrades and those in Paris were Trotskyists and neo-Trotskyists) in opposing bureaucracy, etc., you must do more than retail by rote what you have learnt over the last year or so and try to advance it a stage. Just now you are jettisoning a heritage but are not big enough to say what should transcend it. This has all been done before and will be done again no doubt, after your group has melted away into the abyss of New Left/Syndicalism (sic!) towards which you have no choice but wend your way... I'd not give you comrades more than another six months. Want to make a small bet on it?

F.W., representative, News and Letters.

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April 5, 1961.

...I would be very interested to know whether you have any co-thinkers in the USA. In a number of industries there, not only steel, the question of 'control over management' has been at the bottom of struggles taking place over the last two years, giving to developments there a potential hopefulness which has not been present since the great sit-in strikes of '36-37.

D. H., Carshalton, Surrey.

I think the paper is improving. At first there was so much private joking against Trots (which I personally enjoyed and I don't know that any Socialist Review members resented) that it puzzled and irritated most of the Young Socialist members. So it wasn't very popular. And on the whole for good reasons, I think.

T. Y., Ramsgate.

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April 11, 1961.

...I enjoy reading it. A little different from the usual lines that are flogged. Can't say I understand and accept it all, but it seems to highlight 'workers power'. Ain't it a big laugh the talk of the power of the workers. When you closely look at it we seem to be in the process of losing what little we had.

Liked your article 'Constitution Way'. Nicely written and an eye-opener for us thinking and accepting that the printing unions are strong, united and militant.

The shaggy dog joke went down well. I showed them the joke which fetches the next reaction, that of curiosity to read the pamphlet. Bloody right, they say, we ought to do something about it. (Yes, but these same Herberts won't take interest outside working hours - probably believe that in LCC elections the Tories should have a go).

L.R. B., shop steward, Fords (Woolwich).

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April 7, 1961.

I like this paper. It shits on everybody.

A. R., unemployed, Reading.

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION.

(cont'd from p.4)

does not only imply an equality of rights... it implies the fullest possible dissemination of information, allowing the rational use of those rights.

We reject the idea that matters of great importance require split second decisions by a central committee, with 'years of experience' to its credit, meeting in secret conclave. If the social conflict is so intense as to require drastic action, the need for such action will certainly have become apparent to many workers. The organization will at best be the expression of that collective will. A million correct decisions are quite useless unless they are understood and accepted by those involved. People cannot fight blindly in such situations their unthinking actions projected by a group of revolutionary theoreticians - if they do the results are liable to be disastrous.

When important decisions have to be taken they must be placed before the members for approval or otherwise. Without this there can be no understanding of what is involved. And without understanding there can be no conviction, and no genuinely effective action. There will only be the usual frantic appeals to 'discipline'. And as Zinoviev once put it: 'discipline begins where conviction ends'.

Our critics will ask us about differences of opinion within the organization. Should not the majority decisions be binding on all? The alternative, we are informed, is ineffectiveness. Again there are precedents to which we may refer: the real experiences of workers in struggle. During strikes and even more so during revolutions, big issues are at stake. Fundamental decisions have to be taken.

In these circumstances the members will automatically expect of each other full and active participation. Those who do not give it will cut themselves off from the movement, will have no desire to remain members. It is quite another matter, however, to insist on the absolute acceptance of a party line on matters not calling for immediate decision and action. Those who wish an organization to be run on these lines have clearly assigned to themselves a divine right of interpretation. Only they know what is 'correct', what is 'in the best interests of the movement'.

This attitude is very widespread and is an important factor in the utter fragmentation of the revolutionary left today. Various sects, each claiming to be the elite, the one-and-only 'genuine' marxist group, fight furiously with one another, each quite certain that the fate of the working class, and of humanity at large, is tied up with 'finding the correct solution' to each and every doctrinal squabble. Faction fights and the 'elite' conception of the Party (the 'brain' of the working class) are but different sides of the same coin. This conception profoundly underestimates the creative abilities of the working class. No wonder the workers stand aloof from these self-interested Saviours. No wonder they reject this type of organization... and this type of politics.

What should the activity of the revolutionary organization be? Whilst rejecting the substitutionism of both reformism and bolshevism, we also reject the essentially propagandist approach of organizations such as the Socialist Party of Great Britain. We consider it important to bring to workers information and reports of the struggles of other workers - both past and present - reports which emphasise the fact that workers are capable of struggling collectively and of rising

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION.

to the greatest heights of revolutionary consciousness. The revolutionary press must help break down the conspiracy of silence about such struggles. It must bring to the working class the story of its own past and the details of its present struggles. But it must do more than merely disseminate information. When strikes occur, when tenants oppose rent increases, when thousands protest against the threat of nuclear war, we feel it our responsibility to provide the maximum support and assistance. The revolutionary organization or its members should actively participate in these movements, not with the idea of 'gaining control' or 'winning them over' to a particular line - but with the more honest objective of helping people in struggle to win.

This does not absolve conscious revolutionaries from arguing for their own ideas or from the need to try and convince people of the wider implications of their struggles. We do not 'bow to spontaneity'.* We believe we have something positive to say but also that we must earn our right to say it. The revolutionary organization must see its job as serving the working class, not leading it, helping coordinate its struggles, not imposing methods of struggle upon it, learning from the struggles that are taking place, not ramming its learning down the throat of others. It must realise that correct as its ideas may be, they are dependant on workers agreeing with them.

* Most discussions on this theme are quite meaningless. All mass struggles have both immediate and remote causes and all are influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the experiences of previous struggles.

DANISH DOCK STRIKE. (cont'd from p.5)

settlement was still possible. Next day Parliament passed a resolution calling on employers and trade unions to resume negotiations. Like everywhere else the social-democrats were on the side of labour!

As Parliament debated these proposals, thousands of workers were noisily demonstrating outside Christianborg Castle, protesting against State interference with their right to strike. No one saw the King on his bike that day!

STRIKE BREAKING.

The employers had prepared well for the strike, in contrast to the union leaders who had constantly encouraged the belief that 'a fair settlement' was possible.

For several weeks the Agricultural Export Organizations had been increasing their shipments to England. As 90 per cent of agricultural exports to this country are carried on Danish ships they knew that alternative routes would have to be found if the strike was to be broken.

A report from South Shields dated April 12 described how the butter and bacon shipments to the Tyne had suddenly ceased. The 'butter boat' service of the United Steamship Company of Copenhagen was paralysed. One of its ships, the SS Alexandra was 'tied up in Denmark, unable to load'. The SS Blenda was 'awaiting orders'... empty, at Newcastle.

On the same day, a spokesman for the Danish Agricultural Council said 'Butter exporters are looking for other routes to keep the British market supplied'.

DANISH DOCK STRIKE (cont'd from p.29)

On April 13 the Agricultural Export Organization sent Danish bacon by rail to Hamburg intending to ship it from there to Britain.

On April 14 the Danish dockers called on West German dockers to boycott loadings in German ports.

On April 15 a special train was sent from Denmark to Zeebrugge (in Belgium) from where its load of agricultural products was transferred to Harwich. This bit of strike breaking was carried out by the State-owned Belgian-British Ferry. A Danish employers' spokesman said 'a similar procedure was envisaged via the Hook of Holland and Ostend'.

On April 20 dockers in Hamburg refused to load the Danish ship Primula. This action followed an appeal by the West German Transport and General Workers Union to dockers in Hamburg to refuse to load Danish ships, diverted from their normal London to Esbjerg run.

That day Mr. Svend From-Andersen of the Danish Seamen's Union said he had telegraphed several days before Frank Cousins. He had appealed for 'boycott action' by British trade unionists against Danish ships calling at British ports. He had so far received no reply from Mr. Cousins. Andersen stated that New York dockers had agreed to declare all Danish ships 'black' from noon that day.

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Almost no report of this strike has appeared in the British press. Apparently even the 'socialist' press has not considered the Danish strike newsworthy.

The British union leaders do not want to get involved. They are also making sure their members know nothing about it.

We are publishing this report because we consider that it is important and that it is of interest to workers and socialist militants. Recently we produced a leaflet giving the facts. This was distributed to dockers and market men in London.

ISN'T THIS WHERE
WE CAME IN ?

'Elections' were recently held in Poland.

It is reported that on the eve of the poll there was consternation in the rooms of the Central Committee. A caretaker had discovered that a thief had broken in and absconded with the results!

We understand that Mr Gomulka nevertheless scraped in...with a majority just over 99 per cent.

QUESTION: The Russians fire a rocket from Krushchevgrad in the direction of Cape Canaveral (distance 5,722 miles). The Americans simultaneously fire a rocket from Cape Canaveral in the direction of Krushchevgrad. The American rocket travels at one third the speed of the Russian rocket. Where do the missiles meet? (Answer on next page).

FILM REVIEW

THE SINS OF RACHEL CADE.

(or Down in the Jungle, something Stirred...)

The Congo, 1939. Rachel Cade, a Protestant nurse-cum-cold-gospeller arrives and meets the District Commissioner (Peter Finch). He packs her off to the settlement where she is to work, curing the sicknesses and restoring the souls of the local tribes.

Ten minutes after her arrival the doctor, whom she has gone to assist, dies. This came after discovering she had no nitro-glycerin with her. Whether he wanted this for curing local pregnancies or for some obscure anarchist reasons wasn't made clear.

Alas! Rachel finds neither patients nor christianity. The 'ignorant' natives are apparently quite happy without it. A child recovers from her 'inspired' surgery for appendicitis. One of the boys sees God - probably the beer is stronger than here - and everything is fine. But they still need a doctor.

Heaven answers in the shape of a young surgeon who is rescued from an RAF plane which crashes conveniently in the jungle. Naturally he falls in love with Rachel. Between lapses into Lutheran frigidity, she responds.

After operating on the Chief's third wife to remove her barren state, and helping Rachel to prove her fertility, the young doctor departs. Finding herself pregnant, Rachel takes to a bout of self-mortification, presumably interspersed with gin and hot baths.

'What will the natives think' she wonders (we are not offering prizes to readers who send postcards with suggestions). Not being cluttered with

Rachel's religious bigotry they couldn't care less... and celebrate the arrival of her child.

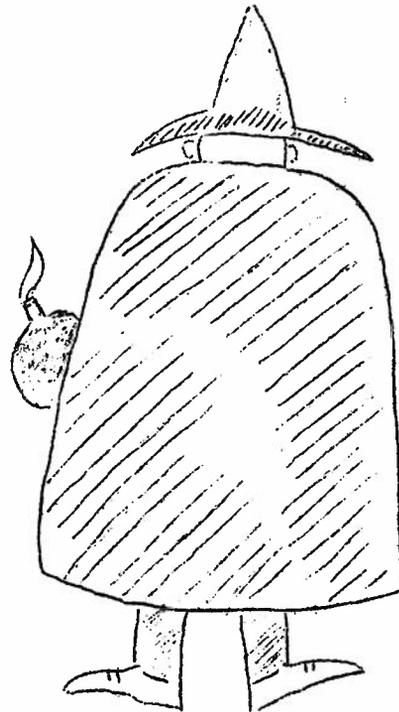
The District Commissioner who either loves Rachel or wishes to avoid a paternity suit, sends for the doctor. The gallant man dashes back 'to give his sin a name'. Then Rachel decides to stay and comfort her people. The doctor clears out during the sermon - and so did I. No wonder the Congo is in such a state!

TOM LEJEUNE.

ANSWER: Cape Canaveral, of course!

OLD FASHIONED ANARCHISTS SAY:

"KEEP THE BOMB!"



T.H.