

MILITANT INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

Summer 1971

Number 4

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a Marxist Quarterly

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Editorial:

British capitalism's continued decline

In order to understand the change, or the attempted change, in the policies of British capitalism it is necessary to see its declining position in relation to the world market and the sickness which has infected it since the end of the Second World War. The definitive decay of British capitalism had already begun at the beginning of this century and proceeded apace through the two world wars. However, during the last quarter of a century, the process has been speeded up. In an article in "The Socialist Student" of Spring 1971, R. McKee has compiled some valuable material from which we quote extensively in this editorial. "It is well known, even to the most casual observour that British capitalism has failed to match the performance of its major competitors on the World Market:

<u>% Annual Rate of Growth in real GNP</u>				
1949-62	U.K.	..	..	2.5%
	Italy	..	..	6.0%
	W. Germany	..	..	6.8%
	France	..	..	4.8%
(Postan - Economic History of West Europe)				

and since 1963 the situation has deteriorated further:-

<u>World Industrial Production Indices 1963-70</u>				
	<u>U.K.</u>	<u>OECD EUROPE</u>	<u>USA</u>	<u>JAPAN</u>
1963	100	100	100	100
1970	123	141	145	222
(N.I.E.R., October, 1970)"				

Not only in production but even more important in capital formation Britian has been lagging behind. McKee quotes the figures worked out by Postan:-

<u>Capital Formation as % of GNP since the War</u>				
U.K.	..	16%	Germany	.. 16%
France	.	20%	Italy	.. 22%

The capital/labour expenditure ratio as a percentage of the United States ratio is very revealing:-

92% Norway	54% French
67% Belgium	52% Germany
66% Denmark	44% U.K.
62% Holland	36% Italy.
(Fortune, January, 1970)	

This means that much of British industry's machinery is old and obsolescent What Marxists call the rate of surplus value in Britain is considerably lower than other advanced capitalist countries.

<u>Estimates of Rate of surplus-value in selected Countries 1963</u>					
U.K.	..	88.6%	U.S.	..	108.3%
		Japan	..	170.0%	
(G. Loftus - Lloyds Bank Review, April, 1970)					

(These figures are probably underestimates, on using different assumptions than Loftus the rate of surplus-value for the USA works out at 133.1%)".

Thus Britain is steadily losing out in relation to her competitors. All the measures of the Governments, both Tory and Labour, have not been able to arrest the tendency for the rate of profit to decline, ie. the surplus of unpaid labour in relation to the amount invested in capital (machinery, raw materials, buildings), and variable capital (labour power), has declined:

"Here is the evidence of three independent sources:-

<u>Rates of Return to Net Assets of Manufacturing Industry in U.K.</u>		
1949-63	18.7% to 12.7%	(Economist)
1951-66	23.3% to 12.0%	(Economic Trends)
1957-67	9.3% to 6.9%	(Financial Times)"

These figures are a stark indictment of British capitalism in the post-war period. They are an indication of the sickness eating at the vitals of British society. The measures taken by the ruling class indicate their alarm. But the attempt by Heath, Barber, Davies, and the clique controlling the Tory party, to carry out the liberal instructions of the CBI in order to restore the rate of profit, have alarmed the latter. Growing unemployment and bankruptcies, a fall in the rate of investment, even below the catastrophic figures of the last years, plus an accelerating inflation which it was supposed to cure!

Not only this, but the attempt to drive up the rate of profit, through the attempt to shackle the unions, has provoked the biggest movement of the workers since the twenties, apart from the General Strike, the biggest strike wave for fifty years. Hence the dilemma of British capitalism. The attempt to tinker and "manage" or "regulate" the economy, has failed disastrously, as is inevitable under capitalism, except temporarily the exigencies of an actual war. Thus the measures of the Wilson Government too resulted in the stagnation of production. The devaluation of the pound, far from solving the problem, has made matters worse by accelerating the already existing inflation.

The attempt by the Tories to return to the good old days of laissez-faire, of nineteenth century capitalism, were doomed in the present day world to aggravate rather than solve the problems. The ruling class feels the burden of state expenditure and taxation as a monstrous weight tied to the back of the productive system. But on the other hand, large sections of industry have looked to the state for lavish handouts. The state remains one of the biggest markets for the products of industry, especially the engineering industry. But whichever way they turn, the capitalists find a new dilemma. It is not much use restoring a few percentage points of profitability to industry, if at the same time the measures taken reduce the market and consequently cut into the profitability of industry from that side.

If the rate of profit is low, then the capitalist will not invest. On the other hand, if the market diminishes, then the capitalist will have no incentive to invest in order to increase production when the machinery he already has can supply the market adequately. It is these two sides of the problem that have undermined and negated the policies of British capitalism in the post war period. Had it not been for the enormous expansion of the world division of labour, and the increase of world trade in the last quarter of a century, even the miserable rate of growth that sclerotic British capitalism has produced, the lowest of all industrial countries in the world, would not have been maintained.

During the last six years, the increase in investment combined has only been 10%! The measures of the Tory Government, far from increasing, will result in an actual drop, even of this minuscule growth. These will further weaken British Capitalism in the decisive section of world trade. The rivals of British capitalism found resources in the reduction of the peasant sector, a survival from feudalism, long since eliminated in Britain, or in the case of America of the employment in agriculture, which also dropped substantially. However, this would not have been possible except for the enormous expansion of the world division of labour through the expansion of world trade.

Recessions or small slumps during the whole of this period since the war, have merely been incidental interruptions to the enormous economic upswing, which in its turn has intensified, not only the interdependence of all countries in world trade, but the crushing domination of the world market over all countries.

But it is here that the Achilles heel of British capitalism is fatally exposed. Her share of world trade has been steadily dropping since 1950. She has difficulty even in defending the home market from foreign competition, because of the lower investment in capital equipment. There are only two ways in which this could be solved: an increase in the exploitation of labour, resulting in an increase rate of profit (but alas, this meets with the resistance of the working class, and therefore further exacerbates the problem); or alternatively a massive programme of capital investment - but this is a mirage for British capitalism, for the reasons explained above.

Meanwhile, in all the industrialised countries, the problem of the falling rate of profit and of inflation is affecting even the most successful rivals of British capitalism. The sickness of world capitalism is showing itself first of all in the strongest capitalist power, the United States of America. The tendency towards protectionism in America poses dangers in front of world capitalism. Protectionism is always followed by protectionist reprisals. Instead of the spiral of world trade going upwards, the turn towards protectionism of any of the major powers, especially America, the strongest industrially and the biggest market, would turn the spiral downwards.

These ominous trends are the shadow of approaching events. For the moment it is most likely that America and Japan will arrive at some sort of compromise. But the steady reduction of tariff barriers, which was a result of the development of world trade, and in its turn acted as a spur to further development, under such circumstances would dry up. In recoil from the world market, the different national capitalisms would look for safety to their own home market and thus a trade war would commence. The key to the world-wide expansion of the industrially developed countries lay in the increase in world trade. But this very increase means that once world trade begins to shrink, then the mainspring for capitalist advance on which all the other factors have been dependent, will be removed. Consequently, the very process of world development in itself contained all the contradictions inherent in capitalism. This will mean deeper recessions or slumps, and over the long term a new depression like that of 1929.

The attempt by Britain to enter the Common Market, whether successful or not, cannot solve the problems of British capitalism. Entry now will be too late to achieve the results which it had for the Common Market countries. On the other hand "independence" has the results that we have seen.

The Labour Movement can no longer allow itself to be drugged by the panacea of "managing" capitalism, with which Wilson and other Labour leaders entered the Government in 1964. The hankering after "incomes policies" by the ex-ministers of the Labour Party shows that they have learned nothing from the experiences of the last Labour Government. They failed utterly in their attempt to reform capitalism, or to make it work more efficiently. New attempts on these lines would be even more disastrous. The problem of booms and slumps or small slumps, ie. "recessions", cannot be ironed out by the methods adopted by the Labour leaders. The problem of inflation is the problem of capitalism.

Neither inflation nor deflation are in the interests of the working class. Both are conditions of the economy which the capitalists utilise to try and squeeze more surplus value out of the working class. Both are a snare and a trap as far as the interests of the working class are concerned. The choice between the two for the working class are the difference between suffering from thirst or getting large supplies of salt water.

For the Labour Movement and those who claim to theorise in its interests, it is a question of breaking away from posing capitalism and its ills as eternal and showing a new path to the Labour Movement.

The attempt to square the circle of capitalism must be abandoned. This is a feat which neither Wilson nor any other magician, reformist or Tory, can accomplish for British capitalism. The Labour workers will inevitably come to see that the solution to their problems lies in what the Party leaders would term "old-fashioned Socialism". The nationalisation of the means of production, with minimum compensation on the basis of need, is not a demagogic programme, but a completely scientific one. Only thus could the resources of Britain be really computerised and planned. The monopoly of foreign trade, which will be introduced simultaneously, will be a powerful weapon in the hands of a British workers' democracy. The unleashing and harnessing of all the resources of the Trade Union and Labour organisations, of a highly educated working class, the use of all the scientific resources of technicians, scientists and engineers; plus workers' management of industry and the state, would be an economic programme of epoch-making proportions.

The decline of British capitalism threatens to engulf the working class, its organisations and its living standards. The very strength of the workers' organisations which in an ironical way gave a certain stability to British capitalism in the last half-century, now turns into its opposite. The ruling class is too weak to crush the working class at this stage. While relatively the position of British capitalism on a world scale has suffered a steep decline,

yet in absolute figures the increase in production has been sufficient to increase the power and cohesion of the workers. But woe to the workers, woe to the Labour Movement, if they do not utilise in time their enormously strengthened position. In the coming decade, British capitalism faces catastrophe. It is only by taking to the Socialist path, (even from a purely economic point of view, that the working class can solve the problems of British society.

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The Polish Rising

by **ROGER SILVERMAN**

In December 1970, the workers of the Baltic shipyards, supported by the rest of the Polish working class, made the greatest step forward in the world struggle against Stalinist repression for fourteen years. In Gdansk, Gdynia, Sopot, Slupsk, Keszaline and Elblag in the North-West, in the mines of Krakow and Katowice in Upper Silesia, in Ledz and in Warsaw, the workers displayed magnificent solidarity against overwhelming and appalling odds. Dockers struck and occupied the shipyards, telephonists occupied their exchanges, miners held sit-in strikes, transport and power workers struck, and engineering workers held "go-slows" in sympathy. Workers, housewives, students, and youths marched defiantly in the paths of tanks. In the Baltic towns, workers' councils and strike committees were set up, and in the space of a few days an embryonic workers' militia had been formed. All the eyewitnesses testify independently that the conscript soldiers refused to fire on the crowds and openly fraternised with them. On the other hand, the special riot police, a band of demoralised lumpen-proletarian thugs, fired indiscriminately and callously. Even the official statements admit that 45 people were killed and 1,165 injured.

In Gdansk, they machine-gunned into the crowds from overhead helicopters and according to unofficial estimates up to 300 died in the bloodbath. In Gdynia, workers responding to the appeal of Deputy Prime Minister Kociolok for a return to work, and walking across the bridge from the town to the shipyards, were ambushed and machine-gunned. They later estimated that over 200 had been killed on that day. Raising flags literally dyed red with the blood of their comrades, and singing socialist songs like "The Internationale" and a wartime resistance song including the words "For hunger, blood and tears, the hour of revenge has come," they marched in their thousands. From its frightened reflex of brutality and slanders, the bureaucracy was forced to make urgent concessions. Within a matter of days, the entire leadership of the Party, the Government and the trade unions was dismissed.

This historic experience, flaring up in intense concentration over a few days, has altered the whole mood of the East European workers. The evil spell cast by the capitulation of Czechoslovakia has been broken. In particular, the Polish workers have become aware of their tremendous power and feel an upsurge of morale. It is important for socialists all over the world to draw all the lessons from these events.

Stalinism from its inception has lurched from one crisis to another. Born of the isolation of the world's first workers' state crystallising in the conditions of social backwardness, it was strengthened by every blow of the world counter-revolution leading up to the Second World War. The old officials, with their monopoly of culture did what every such group in history has done: they used and abused their power to protect their sectional privileges. The Soviet bureaucracy grew into a tyranny, steeped in the blood of a generation of revolutionaries, betraying the workers of the world, but forced by history to wear the cloak of Marxism. But its perversion in theory and in practice, and by its collaborationist policies, it became the greatest obstacle to the world revolution.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition, swimming against the stream of reaction, reasserted the ideas of Bolshevism, kept its traditions alive in preparation for a new turn in the tide. They predicted that public ownership and planned production would ensure an unprecedented growth of industry and the working class, and the development of education, technology and science to unequalled peaks. The growing complexity and sophistication of the economy would undermine the roots of bureaucratism and turn the ruling caste into an absolute fetter on society. Every ruling elite fights tooth and nail to protect historically obsolete privileges. The Left Opposition predicted the programme of political revolution that was to be inscribed twenty years later on the banners of the workers of Hungary in 1956 - demands going back to the Bolsheviks' measures against bureaucratism.

The extension of the revolution to Eastern Europe had not been anticipated, but this very source of authority to Stalinism brought terrible new stresses into its realm.

Eastern Europe

The flight of the Nazi troops from the advancing Red Army completely changed the correlation of class forces in Eastern Europe. The capitalists had thrown in their lot with the Nazis, and stood or fell with them. The only effective indigenous power in these countries was the partisan resistance movement, mostly Communist. Soviets were springing up and a spontaneous movement was developing towards a revolution on the model of October. Threatened with the imminent extension of the revolution and the rebirth of internationalist ideas, the Kremlin resorted to the same tactic it had used behind the workers' barricades in pre-war Spain. The capitalists in both cases had abandoned the tools of bourgeois democracy and joined the camp of Fascism. The Stalinists picked up their abandoned puppets and formed bogus "coalition" governments with politically

redundant "liberal", "radical", "socialist" and "smallholder" parties. For their own nominees they reserved only the portfolios controlling the police and the army, the coercive apparatus of the state. This left them free to stamp out the glowing sparks of independent working-class activity. For the Red Army in Eastern Europe as for Mao's peasant armies when they reached the cities after years of guerrilla war and were greeted by general strikes, exemplary harshness was used to quell the workers. It was only then that they were forced by the relentless logic of events to mobilise a chastened working class to obliterate the residue of the old exploiting classes. Using what the Hungarian dictator Rakesi called the "salami tactic", effortlessly they sliced off one layer of the opposition after another. The revolution was completed in a devious artificial, distorted way, creating workers' states that were bureaucratically deformed from the beginning, in the image of Stalin's Moscow.

The puppet regimes that were imposed on the foundations of the planned economy were used to sanction an era of shameless plunder by the Russian bureaucracy. For a decade, it successfully moulded the economic plans of these states in the interest of the Soviet economy, operated biased trade terms (even by comparison with the built-in bias of the world market against primary producers), and even exacted colossal direct tribute under the name of "war reparations". In Hungary alone, the people paid one quarter of the national income in "compensation" for the war crimes of their overthrown exploiters! Between 1945 and 1956, about 20,000,000,000 dollars were squeezed out of Eastern Europe. Nationalisation gave a tremendous impetus to industrial production, which in Poland, for instance, has grown thirteen times since 1938. But although the leaders in general enjoyed the guarded confidence of the masses, they had come to power by skullduggery and sleight-of-hand, and were afraid of the workers. Most of them had found refuge in Moscow during the Nazi occupation, and the underground resistance had no help or recognition from them. The Polish Communist Party was actually "dissolved" by the Comintern! Their power was based on the Red Army. Only Tito in Yugoslavia and Mao in China were based independently on their own peasant armies, and were able to lever themselves out in the end from under the Kremlin's stranglehold. After Tito's break the Kremlin resolved to crush tendencies among the satellite bureaucracies towards even limited autonomy. Leading lifelong Stalinists like Rajk in Hungary, Slansky in Czechoslovakia and Gomulka in Poland were branded as Titoists, huge show trials were stage, the entire economy was disrupted in crippling purges, and there were mass executions, imprisonments and deportations. In Poland alone, there were over 100,000 political prisoners.

1956, Khrushchev made his famous "secret speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress. The repudiation of Stalin, never to this day published officially in Russia, was intended as a symbolic gesture to the thousands of bureaucrats assembled at the Congress to cultivate a sense of initiative and responsibility among a caste that that learned bitterly the risks involved in such an attitude. This action heralded a new turn in the face of economic stagnation resulting from the stifling stranglehold of the Party monolith, catastrophic waste of resources, the obsolescence in a modern society of slave labour in the camps and militarised factory production, the mass uprisings in the labour camps, the pressures of the intelligentsia, and the strains in Eastern Europe. Incalculable reverberations resulted from the exposure of Stalin. They came as a thunderbolt to a whole generation. For thirty years he had been slavishly built up as a paragon of wisdom in every sphere of human endeavour. Now all the responsibility for the blood and horror of a traumatic epoch was heaped on to his shoulders: the nightmare of the mass purges, the genocide of entire nationalities, the Nazi invasion, the "personality cult" - in all these were consequences of Stalin's "mistakes"!

Ritual sacrifices were staged in every Eastern European state as the top figureheads were pensioned off and replaced by their chief lieutenants. In Poland too, dutiful admonitions of the police for "violations of socialist legality" were mouthed, and a limited amnesty was announced, releasing 30,000 of the 100,000 political prisoners. This jolted the minds of the people and shook them out of sullen bitterness into conscious political activity. Like the heady optimism that engulfed Czechoslovakia after the shock of Novotny's downfall, the ferment in society was articulated at every level, including the official Press. Warsaw Radio, for instance, took its cue too eagerly: "For a long time we have been spooned on an insipid, messy hash of slogans." This prompted Odnab, the Party Secretary, to strike a cautionary note not unlike those murmured at times by Dubcek: "Some comrades seem to be losing their sense of balance or proportion..... We must separate the chaff from the grain, the constructive ideas from the rare examples of irresponsibility or hysteria". Bulganin from afar spoke more acidly, in terms of "opportunist and subversive elements", "hostile elements", "coming out of corners" and "sowing venomous seeds". The workers felt that the denunciations of the police terror gave them the opportunity and the right to stand up for themselves. Under the scrutiny of the whole world, at the International Fair in Poznan in June, the workers of the Zispo engineering works struck, sent a delegation to Warsaw, and marched through the streets in their thousands. The troops sent along to disperse them refused to open fire, and instead joined them in an attack on the headquarters of the hated security police. In the fighting between the two, the official figures state that 53 were killed and over 300 injured. Another 481 were arrested. Regardless of its own denunciations of the security police, the leaders slandered

the workers in similar terms to their more recent outburst, as "imperialist agents, provocateurs, and enemies of our country". However, in a sudden concession which once again will remind our readers of more recent events, it was suddenly discovered that the workers did after all have a "legitimate grievance". Apparently over $6\frac{1}{2}$ million zlotys ($\pounds\frac{1}{2}$ million) had been "unjustly collected" in taxes from the Zispo workers, and it was immediately refunded to the "enemies of the people". Feeling the groundswell of popular indignation, Ochab changed his mind about the disturbances: "It would be an error to concentrate attention on the machinations of provocateurs and agents of imperialism. The social roots of these incidents should be sought for in the first place". Blaming "bureaucracy and the soullessness of the authorities", he summed up the episode concisely as a "grave warning to us".

Taking due heed of the "warning", the ruling clique made a desperate decision in October - to make Gomulka Party Secretary. He was thus as meteorically raised to exalted office as he had earlier been hurled into the depths of disgrace. He had only been released from prison in April, and only been re-admitted into the ranks of the Party in August!

The Nationalist Trap

Gomulka's subsequent history is worth studying, because he is almost a "laboratory specimen" of a type that recurs again and again in such cases. The historical background meant that, although the masses in Eastern Europe might be the first to rise against the arbitrary excesses of Stalinism, they would have to penetrate the smokescreen of nationalism. Bourgeois nationalism and restoration were quite out of the question, but the "Titoist" wing of the bureaucracy, under the pressure of the masses for independence from the Kremlin, would inevitably seize the opportunity to divert the movement from its political tasks and use it in its own interests. The history of Eastern Europe must be seen against this background. In Poland in 1956, like in Czechoslovakia in 1968 but unlike in Hungary in 1956, the bureaucracy deflected the workers from their real target into a blind alley.

Because in Czechoslovakia there had been no major upheavals in 1956, all the frustrations of bureaucratic centralism had accumulated in the course of the 1960s. The warning signs were clear: production was stagnating; the Writers' Congress had broken up in uproar; the students had marched through the streets and successfully obtained an apology for their brutal treatment; and Slovak nationalist strains were felt. To forestall the impending explosion the Central Committee deposed Novotny and replaced him with a promising technocrat - Dubcek. What the Western press so lyrically

acclaimed as "socialism with a human face" was in reality - Stalinism with a liberal mask. The different prospects that unfolded in front of Gomulka on the one hand and Dubcek on the other are to be explained, not by political differences, but by the new correlation of forces in the whole Stalinist world.

Gomulka in fact was superficially a far more plausible candidate for the role of champion of democratic rights. He was Secretary of the underground CP when it was unrecognised by Moscow. He had languished for four years in prison. Massive demonstrations acclaimed his appointment to office in 1956. He made ringing promises and forthright assertions, declaring that "the Poznan uprising was not due to imperialist agents, but was a result of many years of deep discontent among the working classes". He condemned the old regime with phrases about "serious mistakes, juggling of statistics, perversions of the past, shame, poison of mediocrity, **black** pages of the personality cult", etc. He revealed that man-output per day in coalmining had dropped by 35% since 1938. He made clear commitments. One could scan the entire speeches of Dubcek without finding any such eloquence. Unlike Gomulka, unlike Nagy, unlike even Kadar or Husak, Dubcek had never suffered personally at the hands of the police. In reality, of course, those who had suffered had only been made more pliable tools of the bureaucracy as a result of their humiliation and degradation.

Betrayal

Gomulka played off all the desperate elements in the situation against one another - the peasants against the workers, the Catholic Church against the Communist Party, the Red Army against the opposition. For large sections of the youth he showed his treachery very early on. When in October of 1956 thousands demonstrated against the presence of Soviet troops on Polish soil, he called them "provocateurs, reactionaries and hooligans", regardless of his words of a few days earlier. In November an agreement was signed allowing the permanent stationing of Soviet troops.

The crucial test faced Gomulka immediately. The Hungarian movement refused to be diverted by Nagy, his Hungarian counterpart, but moved implacably onwards against every shade of Stalinism. The revolution began with a demonstration called by the Petofi Circle of intellectuals on 23rd October "in solidarity with our Polish brothers". As the leader Gero attacked the demonstration on the radio, more and more workers and students joined it until 100,000 had assembled. They moved to the radio station to reply to his slanders, but were shot down by the AVO (security police). Munitions workers and soldiers handed out arms to the workers, and the Hungarian C.C. like the Polish C.C. brought Nagy out of disgrace and into power. He then requested Soviet "aid" in putting down the "counter-revolution", which had

already organised itself into Soviets, democratic councils of workers, housewives, students, peasants and soldiers. They fought for the Bolshevik programme - for political and trade union liberties, for withdrawal of foreign troops, for workers' management through Soviets, for the abolition of the AVO and recognition of the workers' militia, for a maximum wage differential of 3 to 1. The insurrections in six weeks, organised solidly behind the Central Workers Council. The Russian soldiers fraternised with the workers and the Kremlin had to withdraw them and replace them with ignorant peasant troops from Siberia and Mongolia, sealed off in tanks and told that they were in Egypt fighting the Anglo-French imperialists, or in Berlin fighting the Nazis. Only by this desperate trick could the Kremlin massacre the Hungarian workers and drown the political revolution in blood. Gomulka mumbled mealy-mouthed support of the Kremlin murderers and finally expressed his confidence in the "revolutionary workers' and peasants' government" - that it, the Kadar puppet government imposed by the Russian tanks.

The Fallen Idol

At home, Gomulka made concessions to the peasantry, dissolving most of the collective farms which had been formed with lunatic haste, but replacing them not with model collectives and the force of example, but with an opportunist redivision of land. To this day, more than 85% of agriculture is in private hands, as result. But all the promises of mass participation have turned to ashes. By the early sixties, the momentum had ended. Production began to stagnate. The regime's social basis became so slender and precarious that it was politically impotent. Along with the disillusion of the workers and intellectuals, came a deep cleavage within the Party elite itself into two mutually antagonistic factions. Gomulka lurched desperately between the two of them in the hope of maintaining an uneasy balance. On the one side stood the "Technocrats", led by Kierek, Kociolek and Tejchma. These stood for Liebermanist economic reforms on the model of Brezhnev and Ulbricht, giving a greater predominance to the managerial wing as against the State and Party officialdom, without any dangerous relaxation of political control.

On the other side were the "Partisans", the "Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy", a movement 250,000-strong of Communist and non-Communist underground resistance veterans. At their head stood General Moczar, formerly a particularly vicious police chief and Minister of the Interior, responsible for clubbing down workers at demonstrations going right back to Poznan in 1956. This faction combines a demagogic crusade against bureaucracy and corruption and a rejection of all economic reforms, with a vile appeal to all the basest chauvinistic prejudices accumulated over centuries of poisonous propaganda by the Polish aristocracy. It is based on

resentment against the "Muscovites" who ignored the heroic acts of the resistance and took control of the Party after the liberation. It crudely broadens this into a reactionary campaign against Jews and "cosmopolitans". Anti-Semitism was a favourite weapon of the old ruling class, used with tragic effect: its use today is almost farcical. Since Hitler built Auschwitz and Treblinka and other death camps on Polish soil, the Jewish population has dropped from 3million to little more than 200,000. The "Partisans" have avidly seized upon the fact that 20% of the Party membership before the war were Jewish, and certain Jewish individuals were prominent among the "Muscovites". They also call for improved relations with the Church and Moczar personally is its publishing agent.

All the underlying tensions flared up in a brief spurt of rebellion in March 1968. Inspired by the flood of change then sweeping through Czechoslovakia, the youth of Poland bravely voiced their aspirations in strikes, sit-ins and marches. The response of the whole Party leadership, including even "liberals" like Gomulka and "technocrats" like Gierek, was highly instructive.

On March 8th and 9th, hundreds of police fought 4,000 students in Warsaw University. Although the demonstration was provoked by the arrest of students at a protest against the banning of a 19th-century play in which anti-Russian lines had been chauvinistically applauded, the students' demands went beyond nationalism to demands for the actual implementation of all the nominal constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and assembly, etc. Trotsky predicted that such demands would be the first shots in the struggle and similar elementary constitutional demands are being boldly voiced in Russia today. The students' slogans were: "Relax the censorship", "A free press", "No study without freedom", "Long live the writers", "Democracy". Against the official slanders, they shouted: "Down with the lying press", and against the truncheons, tear gas and water cannon of the police they cried: "Gestapo!" On March 11th, thousands of students and young workers sacked a building of the Ministry of Culture, fighting police and smashing furniture. As a protest meeting of 2,000 students met at the University to condemn the police and Press ten thousand young workers assembled in their support and there was more street fighting. A total of 1,208 young people were detained by the police. On the 21st and 22nd of March, 4,000 students sat in at the Warsaw Polytechnic. Crowds gathered outside the building, applauded and sent in food, drink and cigarettes. Further demonstrations took place in Krakow, Lublin, Poznan, Gdansk, Bialystok and Szczecin.

The "Partisans" applauded Moczar's brutal treatment of the demonstrators and also became pacemaker for a hysterical pogrom, in sinister imitation of the old order. The desperate attempt to play on peasant prejudices was dressed up in suitable political trappings: it was of course the "Zionists" who were responsible for the disorders.

Spurred on by the "Partisans", the Warsaw Party Secretary Kepa announced: "The most notorious organisers of the disturbances were Polish citizens of Jewish extraction". Gomulka started by blaming "forces hostile to Socialism" for "sowing seeds of anarchy and lawlessness" with the aim of "provoking bloodshed". He accused some "revisionist professors of "deliberately and with premeditation infusing hostile political views into the minds of the young people placed in their care". Finally he stated: "An active part in the events that have taken place was played by a section of students that are of Jewish origin or nationality, the parents of whom occupy more or less responsible and also high posts in our state". Needless to say, the latter did not occupy their positions much longer. Scores of leading intellectuals were dismissed, including the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, two Central Committee members, two nuclear physicists, and other eminent ministry officials, professors, editors of the Polish Encyclopedia, etc. Several students and writers were imprisoned, hundreds expelled from colleges and at least 8,000 people were thrown out of the Party.

Two C.C. members, Schaff and Zolkiewski (both later dismissed), defended the young people's programme and in the Sejm (Parliament) members of the Znak Catholic liberal group condemned the police's "brutal actions". Discontent in the families of the ruling circles had reached critical proportions, and this is always an omen of deeper social upheavals.

At a Warsaw Party meeting, the "Partisans" greeted every reference by Gomulka to Jews with such spirited and prolonged cheering that he had to beg to be allowed to continue his speech. The May Day parade became in effect a "Partisan" demonstration, in which the predominant slogans and banners attacked "Zionism" and "revisionism."

The New Crisis

After the hysteria of 1968, the "Partisans" receded to some extent before a "Technocratic" counter-offensive. Moczar became especially unpopular among the ruling clique when Gomulka discovered that the "Jewish section" of the Ministry of the Interior contained files on his own wife, who is Jewish, and when Gierek discovered hidden microphones in his office, placed there under Moczar's orders. In any case, the bureaucracy could put the semi-racist demagogues into cold storage for a time after the political ferment died down. Moczar and two of his supporters were compelled to resign from the Central Committee. It was not until the new crisis of 1970/71 that Moczar was readmitted to the Central Committee, and for the first time the Politburo too, to play the role of "hard man" in the double tactic of combined reform and repression. The equivocal composition of the new Party Leadership graphically symbolises the dilemma of the bureaucracy and the hopeless deadlock paralysing its freedom of action.

In the course of time the fearless "liberal" of 1956 became the most hidebound and conservative of bureaucrats, despised, vacillating, indecisive, so lacking in authority and so much the prisoner of his past promises that he dared not upset the equilibrium even to the extent of carrying through economic reforms implemented in every other East European country. The leadership became an inert vacuum, held together by the equal pull of opposing tendencies within the ruling clique. Not until July 1970 was a "pilot scheme" started, involving a mere ten enterprises in a complex bonus system based on four separate indicators. This is the sum total of effort made to correct a chronic and fundamental imbalance in the economy. Industry is held back by a shortage of key capital equipment, a shortage circumvented by foreign trade.

The importation of capital goods depends on boosting the export of foodstuffs, which is by far the biggest source of foreign exchange. But agriculture is overshadowed by the fragmentation of the land enacted by Gomulka in 1956. For all the industrial achievements, the economy is based on an unsound and primitive footing. Agriculture productivity is chronically backward. Agriculture is exposed to the merciless caprices of Nature, and vulnerable to the kind of ravages that plagued it recently, with the drought of summer of 1969, followed by an exceptionally severe winter, leading to disastrous spring flooding. In 1970, grain output was 4 million tons short of the plan target. There were 250,000 fewer cattle than the year before, and 1 million fewer pigs. Imports rose, but for the first time exports dropped. After a surplus in the balance of trade of 110 million dollars in 1969, Poland had a deficit of 90 million dollars in the first half of 1970. The output of wheat flour reached its peak in 1965 and that of meat in 1967. The record figure of these years has never been surpassed.

The acute food shortage caused riots in Katowice, Gierek's home base in August 1970 when the miners held a sit-in strike and the housewives smashed up the supermarkets. The disorders were only soothed by the emergency arrival of special consignments of extra meat from Warsaw and Moscow. Over subsequent weeks, there were countless warning signs of an impending clash. Strikes broke out in two major factories in the Warsaw Area - the Rosa Luxemburg lamp works and the Polski Fiat car plant.

Strengthened by the industrial expansion that had taken place since 1956, the workers once again were beginning to stir. The students and intellectuals, as in neighbouring states were in revolt. The bureaucracy was split down the middle and torn by inner conflicts. Any spark would have been enough to set Poland ablaze. Suddenly in Mid-December it was announced that the prices of food, fuel and rent - life's basic necessities - were to be raised by between 10% and 30%. Since as much as 52% of the average

workers' family budget is spent on food alone, the new system spelt acute hardship. The "corresponding reductions in the price of durable goods - 20% on nails, 21% on tape recorders, 39.5% on elastic long slacks, etc. - were no consolation to any but the richest sections of the population. In effect, the bureaucracy was trying to hang the burden of its own short-sighted policies around the neck of the working class: to implement a vicious piece of rationing, in the effort to meet its export quotas, in the harshest and most unjust form, by near-prohibitive prices. At the same time, the opportunity was exploited to dump unsaleable second-rate durable consumer goods. It is not surprising that the brusque and insensitive announcement provoked an explosion.

A 'Plot'?

There has been speculation in the Western press to the effect that the whole episode was "engineered" by a "conspiracy" within sections of the bureaucracy antagonistic to Gomulka. This is nonsense. Capitalist observers dare not admit even to themselves the possibility of genuine spontaneous movements of workers. However, cynically the bureaucrats may stick their knives into one another's backs, they will never deliberately incur the risk of political revolution that would menace their whole caste, without pressing need.

In any case, "Trybuna Robotnicza", the Katowice Party paper admitted that the price increases were "only the proverbial drop which made the cup of bitterness flow over". Gierek has stated that over recent years, the average annual rise in real earnings was less than 2%, and for some groups of workers earnings have even dropped. Four million workers, a quarter of the labour force, earn less than 2,000 zlotys a month (about £34). The new Prime Minister, Jaroszewicz, revealed what other medicine the Party leaders were planning to administer: a wage freeze for 1971; the dismissal of 30,000 workers; a none-year delay in bonus payments; and a freeze on pensions

The last card of the bureaucracy was played in 1956. It is left politically naked and defenceless against a renewed upsurge. First it responded with the wellworn calumnies and the police assassins. But, as Gierek put it, force did not end the crisis but "led to its aggravation and threatened outright catastrophe". So it then deposed Gomulka. It sent the "Ormo" (paramilitary police) into the Warsaw factories to intimidate the workers. It raised the minimum wage to about £17 a month and increased family allowances - but then told the striking dockers that they would lose pay for lost production. It at first refused to change the officials responsible for the massacres, and then started a full-scale purge of every Party, state and trade-union committee. It put Gierek at the top, but balanced the leadership by promoting Moczar to the ruling bodies. It bravely declared

that the vicious price system was "essential to the economy", and then in the teeth of renewed strikes revoked the whole scheme. Neither reform nor repression can break the workers' new-found spirit. Again and again in January and February there were stoppages of shipyard and transport workers in Elblag, in Gdansk, in Gdynia and in Szezecin for better pay and conditions but also for real trade unions, for the dismissal of top politicians like Cyrankiewicz, Moczar, Kociolek and the new trade union boss Kruszek and for a degree of control over the state apparatus. No sooner had these died down when an inspiring revolt began far away from the Baltic coast: thousands of textile workers in Ledz, mostly women, staged a prolonged strike and sit-in. the Bureaucracy has far less room for manoeuvre than it had in 1956. Sooner or later, the workers will carry through a political revolution to overthrow it for ever.

Political Revolution

It was inevitable that a new movement in Poland would begin at a higher level than that of Czechoslovakia in 1968. There, as in Poland in 1956, the leaders were helplessly carried along on the crest of the wave. In Poland they could sit tight until the ebb-tide, and then harness the movement according to their own designs. But by the time that Novotny was belatedly removed, even the most limited break with tradition spelt peril to Stalinism. The Kremlin could not allow the movement to run its natural course. It was already stimulating the opposition in Poland; the Ukrainian C.P. leader Shelest insisted on intervention because of the impact in his republic of events over the border; in East Germany popular sympathy was so warm that 4,000 Eisenach workers marched in protest at the intervention; and the workers and students of Yugoslavia were aroused by the new mood.

The abject capitulation of Dubcek, Cernik, Svoboda and even Smrkovsky, the trade unions's hero, taught a valuable lesson. The Kremlin knew that while they retained public confidence, it could swagger, bully, invade, insult, dictate to them and finally utterly degrade them, without running the slightest risk of political or physical resistance. While the people shook their fists in impotent rage, the leaders appealed for calm. They proclaimed their "realism" with tears rolling down their cheeks, and even endorsed the despotic new laws with their personal signatures. The only practical difference between Dubcek, Husak and arch-quislings like Strougal, Indra and Bilak, is the degree of public tearfulness.

The sight of unarmed workers crowding around the tanks had a devastating effect on the intervening troops. Instead of being welcomed as liberators, they were being branded as Gestapo troops. Dozens of suicides were reported and whole divisions were withdrawn because of their utter demoralisation. But to translate a feeling of

helpless sympathy into mass mutiny, a revolutionary alternative must be held up to the prospect of the firing-squad. If instead of appeals to "leave us alone" they had heard internationalist demands, with a programme to rid themselves of their own Novotnys and establish a fraternal alliance of workers' democracies, the way forward would have been pointed for all East European workers.

That is why the political level of the Polish workers is so important. When the revolution does break out, the Kremlin will certainly try to intervene. But Gomulka himself drew attention to the political dangers, in a frenzied allusion to one of its expressions at the 1968 Party Congress. This was the Group around Kuren and Modzelewski. The latter is a stepson of a former Foreign Minister. Both were expelled from the Party in 1964 and have twice been imprisoned for "subversive" activities. "This group," exclaimed Gomulka in horror, "prepared tracts and brochures whose content was a jumble of revisionist viewpoints taken from subversive broadcasts. These rags proclaimed that the Party's economic and social policy was heading for disaster; propounded anarcho-Trotskyist ideas on the alienation of the proletariat by the bureaucracy; called for a general strike and revolution; and demanded the liquidation of the Army and the organs of public order, and finally the breaking of the alliance with the Soviet Union." The emergence of this group was only one sign of the fact that some of the lessons of 1956 had penetrated into the consciousness of the most advanced elements in society. In addition to the numerous student groups and of much greater significance, is the opposition movement among the miners in Silesia.

Once the routine fabric of society is scratched, as it was in December, the instinctive gravitation of the workers towards spontaneous forms of workers' democracy is brought to light. That is why the Workers' Councils and the militia sprang up and what Gierek called "outright catastrophe" loomed large. The port of Szczecin was isolated by the authorities as rigidly as if bubonic plague had broken out. They considered the disease even more virulent. The general strike was solid, the workers were masters of the town. Their slogans revealed brilliant clarity. In direct contradiction to the fatuous slogan dreamed up by the "Tribune" reporter, "We want a Dubcek!" (sic), whereas a Dubcek was precisely what they had, they shouted: "NO DUBCEK FOR POLAND!" Against the Government's smears, they reasserted their socialist loyalties: "WE ARE WORKERS, NOT HOOLIGANS - LONG LIFE THE WORKERS' STATE!" Their understanding of Stalinism and their optimism were expressed in the slogans: "STALIN FOR BUREAUCRATS, LENIN FOR WORKERS!" and "LENIN IS IN MOSCOW, BUT NOT IN THE KREMLIN!" Most significant of all in its boundless internationalism and its self-confidence is the slogan seen painted on a wall in the Szczecin docks:-

"RUSSIA 1905 - HUNGARY AND POLAND 1956

RUSSIA 1917 - POLAND AND THE WORLD 1971?"

Against such slogans, and intervention in today's conditions would be fraught with danger for the whole Stalinist world. In Yugoslavia, which like Poland has had ample experience of the "national" bureaucracy, there have been heroic strikes by miners and students. At the other end of the spectrum, a movement initially along Czechoslovak lines is long overdue in East Germany. In Russia itself, everything points to a gigantic explosion with a few years which will restore Soviet power and transform the face of the whole world.

The British journal "The Economist" talks openly about "the re-entry of the workers on to the East European political stage". "The workers must now be regarded as a political factor in eastern Europe", it wrote in relation to the Polish events. It has also predicted "Russia's second revolution this century". For capitalism, the replacement of Stalinism by a workers' democracy pursuing socialist and internationalist policies would be the last death-blow.

"The Times" (9.3.71) quoted a Gdansk party official as saying: "The workers have felt their strength. They have seen what they can do." A worker is also quoted "We can wait now and give them time but have the placards ready for the next time if there are no changes".

It is obvious that the Polish uprising is only the prelude to a mightily movement of the workers of Eastern Europe. Far from intervening at this stage, the Kremlin gave massive aid to the Polish government to enable it to abandon the new price system. Even more significant is the fact that it has suddenly introduced price cuts in a number of consumer goods in the USSR, and is planning ambitious projects to expand domestic consumption during the next five years. It can see the writing on the wall.

Every day brings fresh blows to the punch-drunk members of the "Communist" Parties in the West. In the wake of the traumatic revelations of 1956 and the worldwide split of the Stalinist monolith, hard on the heels of the Czechoslovak crisis and for the second time in Poland's history, they have to account for the official revelations that the "United Workers' Party", the "vanguard of the proletariat" of Poland, had "lost a common language with the working people" (Gierek). The daily "Zycie Warszawy" said "We must admit it plainly: arbitrariness and autocracy were quite frequent Unilateral decisions were often taken in a very narrow circle."

Once again the "Morning Star" has explained that "errors were made". It is unfortunate that it has never pointed out the "mistakes" of Stalin, Beria, Rakosi, Novotny, Gomulka or any other leader until after their overthrow. Obviously their "mistakes" lay only in their failure to keep the workers passive and quiescent. The "Morning Star" has talked of "paternalistic methods of leadership", and added that "the process of extending socialist democracy has still not been carried forward with sufficient energy or vigour". It asserted

that "socialism and democracy are inseparable" and promised that "a Socialist Britain must ensure freedom of speech, the right to demonstrate and strike, a powerful and independent trade union movement, industrial democracy and free creative artistic activity". Its readers must wonder why it refers to these states as "socialist states" rather than workers' states that are distorted in the interests of the "paternalistic" "narrow circles" at the top, and why it does not actively campaign for these rights "inseparable from socialism", in Russia and Eastern Europe. Its letter pages again and again raise the most pertinent and frank questions along these lines.

The problem is that for the first time the readers have an uncanny sense that they have seen all this before. The talk of "errors", "narrow circles" and the need to "extend socialist democracy" in Poland echoes rather closely the clichés of 1956. McGahey, of the Political Committee of the CP, candidly confesses his bewilderment:- "It is difficult to understand why, after fifteen years, the same mistakes have to be exposed all over again and that the arbitrary methods of the former leadership denounced by Gomulka in 1956 became once more the practice of the Party". The reason why Gomulka "ruled like an autocrat", in McGahey's phrase, is because these tendencies are not to be ascribed to the "mistakes" of individuals, but to the problems of the ruling stratum who quite manifestly have no interest in "socialist democracy" except as a verbal camouflage for their inflated privileges. Anyone who calls himself a Communist must look again and ask himself: who continues the traditions of October? The hacks who yesterday defended Stalin's crimes and today mouth platitudes about "mistakes" or the dockers of Szczecin, the textile workers of Ledz, the miners of Katowice, fighting against terrible odds under slogans like those quoted above, singing the "International" and organised into workers' councils. History itself will provide the answer soon, when the transitory phenomenon of Stalinism, the freak created by peculiar historical circumstances has passed into obscurity.

Marxism and the Pilkington Strike

by TED MOONEY

During the protracted struggle of the Pilkington glass workers at St. Helens, several articles appeared in "Militant" on the question by an GMWU member and by Ted Mooney, an AUEW shop steward at the Liverpool GEC factory, which was recently the scene of a proposed "occupation" in protest at the combine's massive redundancies. These articles provoked a letter from Comrade John Chappell of Cambridge, which is printed below together with a reply by Ted Mooney.

The issue raised in this discussion are so important and so fundamental, that we have decided to use the pages of M.I.R. to develop the arguments fully. - EDITOR.

LETTER FROM COMRADE CHAPPELL

I was sickened to read in your paper, T. Mooney's article on Pilkingtons with its smug, gloating attitude of "I told you so". Apparently his view is that workers should stay inside their original unions however reactionary in order to "fight inside them". But how do you fight inside the GMWU? Rank-and-file members at Pilkingtons had no right of entry to "their" branch meetings, which were only open to the "shop stewards". The latter were elected by their shop subject to veto by the branch committee which itself was elected by the "stewards". Thus, given an initial conservative majority on the committee it is impossible for the workers in any shop to choose even the mildest progressive as steward and, since they have no other access to the branch, the latter becomes a self-perpetuating clique. From this level up, the GMWU is like the army; branches can be "re-organised" and their officers (including the secretary, who is a full-timer) deposed by the Regional Officer, who in turn is appointed by Lord Cooper.

Presumably the GMWU still has occasional Rules Revision Conferences and presumably Cooper has no power to appoint his successor as general secretary for when he dies. But even then, how can the lay member use his democratic rights if he is excluded from branch meetings, as at Pilkingtons? And until R.R.C. comes round or Cooper dies, with the set-up described above, fighting inside the GMWU is about as realistic a proposal as "fighting inside" the Manpower Staff Agency, which at least levies no charge for its "services" from the workers on its books. Mooney's attitude to the GMWU conflicts oddly with his gibes at other "left" tendencies as "alien to the Labour Movement"; of

the latter, "Tribune", like "Militant" is a tendency working in the Labour Party, while the Communist Party still has a greater proletarian following than "Militant" ever had. As for his vague allusions to the dockers "Blue" Union, what "lessons" are to be learnt? He does not say. In fact, the success of the breakaway dockers in gaining entry into a small union enabled them to dig in as an entrenched militant body on the docks. Whilst admittedly still a minority, it is since the advent of the N.A.S.D. that the TGWU has no longer been able to play its former notorious policing role on the docks, indistinguishable to that of the GMWU at Pilkingtons or that which the TGWU still plays on the buses.

Of course, the breakaway glassworkers never intended to go it alone; their new union, originally called the Provisional Pilkingtons Trade Union, was conceived, as the name implied, as a temporary expedient pending absorption into another suitable union (eg. TGWU, Chemical Workers Union, or Ceramic and Allied Trades Union) as happened on the docks. Of course, this would be a breach of the Bridlington agreement which on the pretext of preventing poaching, actually serves to deprive workers in undemocratic unions even of the basic right to vote with their feet; the severest penalty for this would be expulsion from the TUC of the receiving union, leading to free transfer of members between it and others and to competition for membership throughout industry. Whilst the Chemical and Ceramic Unions could not face the ensuing war, the giant TGWU certainly could, and would probably stand to gain more than they lost from free competition, in terms of a mass influx of members from reactionary unions. In particular the GMWU officer caste would be forced to change their policies or wake up to find themselves without any members at all; likewise in the ETU. All that the T&G leaders would stand to lose would be their place in the TUC establishment, giving access to the Whitehall "corridors of power" and the possible knighthoods and peerages later on. However the big "Left" T&G chiefs apparently reckoned this too high a price to pay for shaking up the clique of ossified oligarchs which run the TUC, so they cynically stood back, brandishing Bridlington, whilst their lordships Cooper and Pilkington crushed the fighting glassworkers of St. Helens between them.

The lessons to be drawn from the GGWU failure was not that one should never form breakaway unions, but that such unions cannot hope to be absorbed by an established body; even the powerful T&G bosses with all their "left" demagoguery apparently prefer to rub shoulders with people like Cooper and Cannon in the TUC rather than accept genuine militants like the glassworkers into membership. The new union must therefore have solid support where it is formed, and good prospects of spreading elsewhere rapidly if it is to survive.

If the original Pilkington strike had ended in victory for the workers over Pilkington and the GMWU this would almost certainly have happened. But the tragedy of the GGWU was that it was BORN OUT OF

DEFEAT, and therefore did not have a real chance. Only half of the St. Helens glassmen felt ready to provoke more trouble by joining it, and when it came to the crunch most of those were too exhausted from the previous unsuccessful struggle to be ready to fight for their new union. In fact, the GGWU did not even spread to the outlying Pilkingtons outposts (eg Pontypool) let alone to other glass companies (mostly TGWU-organised, but little better off for it). In summary, then, the lessons for the Pilkington breakaways are:

1. Expect no help or support from the oligarchies of other unions, however "left" an image they affect.
2. Just as in the pioneering days of trade unionism in the 1890s (eg the formation of the Gasworkers, the militant ancestor to the GMWU) a stable and viable new union can only be formed on the basis of a victory, and not on the demoralisation following defeat.

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A REPLY TO COMRADE CHAPPELL by TED MOONEY (AUEW)

Comrade Chappell's letter to the "Militant" is particularly worthy of consideration at this time. At the time of writing, about 130 leading members of the massive Pilkington Strike walked the streets of St. Helens, many of them disillusioned and embittered, with little or not chance of finding work anywhere within the area.

The responsibility for this state of affairs rests primarily with an ultra-left sect which throughout the dispute exercised a great deal of influence on the leading elements on the strike committee. "Socialist Worker" of the "International Socialism" group, vociferously and uncritically supported the break-away from the GMWU and the subsequent formation of the new union, the Glass and General Workers' Union, which now no longer exists. Other groups share the responsibility as they likewise gave uncritical support to the split.

"Militant" supported the Pilkington workers from beginning to end, but the "Militant" stood alone in the Labour Movement in warning the Pilkington militants of the dangerous path they were treading. Unfortunately, Comrade Chappell has learnt absolutely nothing from the Pilkington dispute. He continues still at this stage, even when the IS is having second thoughts about its position, to put forward the same old ideas that led to the downfall of the Pilkington workers. Comrade Chappell was, so he says, sickened to read my article on Pilkingtons with its "smug, gloating attitude" of "I told you so." Having re-read my article a number of times and also having discussed it with numerous people in the Labour Movement, including Pilkington workers, I am afraid that I simply cannot see the "smug, gloating attitude" that he refers to. Might I also add that a number of the

leading elements on the Strike Committee read the article; not one of them suggested that it was in any way "smug" or "gloating". On a number of occasions I myself, with other supporters of "Militant" discussed at length with the entire committee at Pilkingtons. We received in the most comradely manner and accepted as workers who had a positive contribution to make. Further in every way, I personally alongside all "Militant" supporters, offered every help to the striking workers; on two occasions I took factory collections to aid them in their struggle.

In retrospect, Comrade Chappell, I see no reason whatever to apologise for my article. If I were to write it again I would do so as it stands.

Democracy in the G & MWU

Comrade Chappell raises the question of the structure of the GMWU. His approach is to write off any right-wing or undemocratic trade union in simplistic terms as an incorrigible agent of the employers, as much an instrument of the state as are the armed forces with their hierarchical officer caste. He fails to see the mass organisations of the working class dialectically in constant flux through internal antagonisms, in the dual role that was always implicitly recognised by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. On the one hand, Chappell is right; the right-wing trade union bureaucracy, as personified by Cooper, Cannon, Carron or Deakin, act as a policing agency for the ruling class over their own rank-and-file membership. But on the other hand, with the rising militancy of the workers, this role becomes increasingly untenable, and the bureaucrats fall more and more under the remorseless pressings of their membership. To protect the source of their privileges, they are forced to reflect superficially the radicalised mood of the workers, if only to betray it the more effectively. In the process they are compelled to concede some elementary reforms, which in turn prepare the ground for their replacement by elements closer to the experiences and aspirations of the workers.

In 1926, Havelock Wilson, General Secretary of the N.U.S., which incidentally remained a semi-company union up to the recent period ordered the seaman to remain at work. Many thousands ignored him and joined the General Strike. Subsequently the NUS was expelled from the TUC. Today the NUS can be considered to be moving to the left. The events of 1961 and 1966 serve as an indication that once the members become radicalised and put pressure upon the leaders, then they have to move with the pressure or the leadership will get changed.

Anyone who considers himself a socialist and is not prepared to work inside the unions with reactionary leaders can in no way be classed as revolutionary. Lenin once said "that if necessary we will work within these unions in order to win those backward elements to socialism."

Is it not true that the structure of the G&M at the Pilkington factory since the strike has undergone far-reaching changes, even though they leave a great deal to be desired. Cooper was forced to concede one of the main demands put forward by the rank-and-file Committee, i.e. a branch for each of the six factories in St. Helens, thus allowing the members the basic right to voice their opinions in the branch. If the leading elements had stayed in the G&M then their other demands:- removing the "Company" stewards and replacing them with the Rank & File Committee members; branch committee members to be elected by the branch - thus ending the appointment system operated by the Regional Secretary; and capturing the nine seats allocated to the St. Helens group on the glass NJC - would have been achieved; for the very obvious reason that the rank and file gave unswerving support to the strike leaders during the dispute!

Is it not also true that shortly after the Pilkingtons strike 4,000 GMWU members in the GKN Sankey Group in Shropshire, who had never previously been involved in strike action came out demanding £5 a week increase, and stayed out for six weeks with OFFICIAL support from the union. During the recent local authority workers strike also, which cost the G&M £400,000 in strike benefits!, the union leadership were forced to involve the members to a point - unprecedented in the past - of holding delegate conferences. AND during the recent Electrical supply claim the leaders were forced to report back to a delegate conference on two occasions!

If Comrade Chappell requires further proof of the tremendous movement now taking place inside this Union, last year twenty one strikes were recognised as Official (significantly more than any other union) which cost £700,000 in strike benefit! In 1967 the G&M paid over £27,000 in benefit!

We know of course this does not signify a revolutionary change in the G&M leaders; but it does reflect a significant change of mood by the rank and file membership of that union and once this pressure is exerted from below the leaders are forced to move in that direction.

The fact is, Comrade Chappell, that a new awakening is taking place in the G&M. An awakening, that unfortunately, the militants who led the Pilkington strike are now excluded from participating in and giving conscious leadership.

This new mood among the workers and the relationship of their TU officials started some four or five years ago in the AEU and the T&G, and now is catching on in the formerly most conservative Unions like the G&M. In the coming period it will gain strength and find its expression in the ETU and USDAW, etc. Let me remind Comrade Chappell that a few short years ago the AEF was among the most reactionary of TUs. Lord Carron reigned supreme; Carron's law was the

order of the day. Today things are somewhat different. Is Comrade Chappell suggesting that during Carron's reign, the militant shop stewards should have led their members outside the AEF? If this had been done, then what would the position have been today? Likewise with the T&G. Even during the time of Frank Cousins this Union failed to reflect the mood of its most advanced members: for a time it continued the banning of members of the Communist Party from holding office; but under the pressure of events, the union now stands to the left of the trade union movement. Some workers, however, did leave the T&G. They formed the NASD, the Blue Union, but more about that later.

The Rule Book

Comrade Chappell refers to the G&M rule-book and wonders if it will ever be changed or is it possible to change it. A perusal of the rule book does indeed show that it is a document needing radical change in order to ensure a move in the direction of democratising the union. To a great extent the rules provide for a self-perpetuating bureaucracy and quite obviously for the G&M membership this means a struggle to amend the rule-book. But Comrade Chappell should be aware that numerous branches of that union have in fact already tabled amendments which will be discussed later this year at the G&M annual Conference. They illustrate the growing demand of the members for democracy. One of the many amendments calls for the election of all officials, subject to recall - re-election every two years, their wage to be based on the average skilled workers' pay, etc. Perhaps they will not be carried, but once again they indicate a movement within that union, a movement which needs direction, and a movement from which Comrades Potter and Caughey are now excluded because they followed the advice of the I.S. Comrades Potter and Caughey, I believe, recognise their mistakes in relation to this aspect of the struggle. (See "Socialist Worker", 10th October, 1970).

During the strike "Militant" supporters discussed with the rank and file committee the question of staying in and linking up with those other sections fighting for democracy. If this had been done, then the St. Helens factory branches could have been the established basis of the left move within that union. Some of the strike leaders, in personal discussion, admitted at that time that this would have been the most obvious thing to do, but as this had not been fully discussed with the St. Helens glassworkers, in desperation they took the advice of the IS and led the movement for opting out of the G&M. Had the glassworkers' federation been successful in forming their own union, then quite obviously the management would have been able to play one sections off against the other. Because this move was doomed to failure - and not for the reasons Comrade Chappell has pointed out - the G&M bureaucrats, in liason with the Pilkington management, re-employed these glassworkers with the loss of their pension rights and union benefits.

Comrade Chappell has a mechanical approach to TU democracy. Democracy concerns more than an alteration of the rule-book; it concerns the involvement of workers in struggle. How was Carron able to dominate the A.E.U? The answer is simple. It was because Carron held office during a period of relative prosperity; during a period when because of this prosperity the membership was inactive, were not involved. But economic circumstances have changed; the members started to move, and hence the election of Scanlon. Ah! says Comrade Chappell but the AEF has a democratic rule-book. This is true to a great extent. But it still didn't stop Carron from putting it aside and getting away with it. Carron committed the greatest sin possible in the AEF: he over-ruled the Final Appeals Court and got away with it; this would be almost impossible at the moment. In short, democracy is more than the rule-book; it is concerned with the participation of workers who are moving in a more radical direction, and a leadership of such workers should involve them in the course of struggle for a change in rules.

Might I add, Comrade Chappell, that even when the left wing have control of a Union, if the workers are not involved in struggle then bureaucracy can thrive. The bureaucrats can still have control in certain areas of the AEUW. Certain districts of this union are most right-wing in their attitudes, despite the apparent control of the district committees by the left: In short, when the leadership have an inadequate base among the members. Such is the immensity of the work with the D.C.s have to do, that they become rubber stamps for the officials. But when the workers move, officialdom is swept aside.

The Blue Union

What are the "lessons of the Blue Union", asks Comrade Chappell. The lessons of the Blue Union are many. Is Comrade Chappell not aware that, prior to the formation of the Blue Union in 1956, on the Liverpool Docks there was 100% membership of the T&GWU? At the time of writing there are large pockets of non-unionism on the docks (some estimates put it as high as 20%) and this is a result of the formation of the Blue. What happened was quite simple: thousands left the T&G and joined the Blue, thousands more left and joined no union at all. At the moment there are three groups on the Liverpool docks: T&G members, non unionists and NASD members, with many of the latter holding two cards.

Comrade Chappell suggests that all the militancy on the docks stems from the existence of the Blue. Nothing could be further from the existence of the Blue. Nothing could be further from the truth. The facts are that on the Liverpool docks, almost every single militant is a member of the T&G. In relation to the Devlin recommendations, which propose large scale redundancies, shift work, etc. the Blue Union

were prepared to accept the report almost in its entirety; simply because it offered them limited recognition. It might also be worthy of mention at this stage that Blue Union shop stewards have only limited recognition by the employers. Their authority as stewards ends at shipboard level. When it comes to negotiating with the employers, they are debarred from participation. Under these circumstances their work as leaders of the working class is hampered by unnecessary fetters.

Comrade Chappell thinks it worthless but the Blue Union has no voice on the TUC. I cannot agree with his attitude. It is true, that the TUC is no general staff of labour. It plays a reactionary role on most issues and acts as a fetter on the development of the movement. Nonetheless, many genuine militant workers have illusions in the TUC and work within its ranks. To say that it has no role is to abandon it and once again divorce oneself from the very people we are trying to influence, ie, genuine rank-and-file militants. It is necessary to have a voice within its ranks, and to demand that it live up to its historic responsibilities in giving leadership to the entire movement.

Other Tendencies

It would indeed be a great pity if we adopted Comrade Chappell approach to a discussion on other tendencies. I am not concerned to argue in childist terms of "we are bigger than you". This would be a degeneration of politics. The criticisms I made of other political tendencies were criticisms of a programme, or lack of a programme, for workers in struggle. I am well aware that many workers hold allegiance to the Communist Party, the "Tribune" group and even the I.S.

Tribune

What was the position of "Tribune" in relation to the Pilkington dispute? "Tribune" has made no secret of its political programme. It sees itself not as an organisation which proffers a lead to workers in dispute, but simply as a radical left-wing newspaper, with an emphasis on objective factual news. It offers a platform to the most diverse elements to put forward their ideas (including Harold Wilson and Barbara Castle).

In specific relation to the Pilkington dispute, it gave plentiful reports of events, opening its pages to John Potter, one of the leading elements in the dispute. Tacitly they thus approved his actions without commitment. Oh! no doubt "Tribune" can argue that at no time did they ever say "we support the break-away from the G&M." But neither did they warn the Pilkington workers against such action and draw the lessons of similar mistakes made in the past.

The Communist Party

Like "Tribune", the "Morning Star" reported the dispute daily; every move in the dispute was covered at length. But, like "Tribune" also; as a newspaper giving objective news. Once again, no advice was given on the direction which the workers should take, no attempt to inform the Pilkington workers of the experience of the Blue Union. No doubt too, like "Tribune", they can absolve themselves from blame by suggesting that they did not support the break-away but only "reported the facts". Such a claim by "Tribune" is at least plausible as they claim no other role, but the C.P.G.B. claim the leadership of the working class.

'International Socialism'

From the outset the "International Socialists" grouping, as we have previously said, played an influential role in the Pilkington dispute. A number of I.S. supporters were regularly on the picket lines issuing leaflets etc., and generally supporting the struggle. But the credit they earned in this manner was completely negated by the criminal irresponsible ideas that they poured into the minds of the leaders of the dispute, which were eventually passed on to the Pilkington workers: ideas which directly resulted in the present state of affairs at St. Helens.

The culmination of the I.S. activities at Pilkington's was the publication of a pamphlet by Colin Barker entitled "The Pilkington Strike". It is a "Socialist Worker" pamphlet. We can assume without hesitation that it lays down the official I.S. line.

Barker poses three alternatives for the Pilkington workers. First of all, he says they could stay in the G&M and form an opposition movement within, but he dismisses this as impractical. "Can the GMWU be reformed from within? The obvious answer is to say no, since the right-wing bureaucracy has so many safe guards built into the constitution to prevent militants getting into influential positions, since the rules prohibit organisation between branches, and since history shows now the NEC can chop off and re-organise any sections whose policies, etc. it does not like". But then Comrade Barker does an apparent about-turn: he goes on to say: "Nonetheless there are 800,000 workers in the GMWU and it is useless to suggest that they should just sit there and take it. What is needed is a real fight inside the union, over a long period, probably, to re-introduce the basic principals of trade unionism into that organisation, to clean the union up".

Comrade Barker and the IS should be more specific. Are they staying in the GMWU or not?

Alternative number two, says Colin Baker, is to leave the G&M and form a break-away Union based on the glass industry. On this issue he isn't quite sure what to do as a perusal of the first section of page 22 of his pamphlet will show. He points out some of the advantages of such a move, ie "On first sight this (idea) has obvious attractions: the rule book could be a genuine democratic one from the start, the members would not be bound to sets of procedures and officials they distrust, etc." He goes on to mention many of the snags, and concludes the passage as follows:- "All in all, the prospect of an independent union for glassworkers does not seem very encouraging. Those who proclaim this idea should look up the history of other attempts of this kind."

Once again no commitment from Comrade Barker. I suspect that Comrade Barker is against such a move now that the damage has been done. But this most certainly is not the position that was held by the IS during the actual events.

The third alternative is to join the T&GWU. But, says Comrade Barker, it won't be easy and, once in, no problems will be solved. However there are differences between the T&G and the G&M. They are only small but they are there, and if you do get into the T&G it will only be with the help of other workers. These are the comments of the IS at this stage. But yet again we have no recommendation from the author; just the simple posing of three alternatives with a few of the pros and cons thrown in.

In short the IS pamphlet is a typical academic production; it explores some of the avenues in a completely abstract manner. Its conclusions, so far as they exist, are merely ideas which are dangled in the air from which the workers may take their pick. And such is the general approach of the IS to work within the Labour Movement.

The pamphlet in other ways too illustrates just how far out of touch the IS are in regard to our movement. For instance, Comrade Barker believes that the ETU is moving to the right. Nothing could be further from the truth. Likewise Comrade Barker believes that the "Closed Shop" is a tool in the hands of the employers. Ironically, at this stage the Tory government agrees with Comrade Barker that the Closed Shop should be abolished, and at the same time the entire Trade Union movement is fighting for the safeguarding of the Closed Shop, a condition it has struggled for years.

Conclusion

These then, Comrade Chappell, are my criticisms of the tendencies involved in the Pilkington dispute. They have no other intention than to clarify the issues, to draw the correct conclusions for the benefit of the Labour Movement. In my article in the "Militant"

I attempted to do that. Perhaps within the technical limitations of such a publication it was done inadequately. However, I did categorically state that to leave the G&M would be incorrect and would only lead to fiasco. And finally, that the line of action should take place within the G&M which under the pressure of its members will move to the left at a later stage. Events have confirmed the validity of my approach.

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Militant

Lessons of the Paris Commune

It is now one hundred years since the workers of Paris took a tremendous historical step forward and formed the Paris Commune. We are marking the Centenary of the Commune by publishing, for the first

time in English, an article by Leon Trotsky, published as the preface to "Le Commune de Paris" by C. Tales, on the fiftieth anniversary in 1921. The translation is by J. Erber.
EDITOR.

Whenever we look at the history of the Commune we see it in a new light thanks to the experience of the latest revolutionary struggles, especially of the recent revolutions not only of the Russian revolution, but also of the German and Hungarian revolutions. The Franco-German war was a bloody explosion, the omen of an immense world-wide bloodbath. The Paris Commune was the striking omen of a world-wide proletarian revolution.

The Commune is an example of the heroism of the working class, or their capacity to unite into a single fighting force, of their ability to sacrifice themselves in the name of the future, but at the same time it shows us the inability of the petit-bourgeois to choose their path, their indecisions as regards the way forward for the movement and their fatal tendency to stop after their first successes, thus allowing the enemy to regain lost ground and re-establish its position.

The Commune came too late. It had every chance of seizing power on the 4th September which would have allowed the proletariat of Paris to put itself at once at the head of all the workers of the country, to lead them in their struggle against all the forces of the past, against Bismarck as well as against Thiers. But the power fell into the hands of the loud-mouthed democrats, the deputies of Paris. The Parisian workers had neither party nor the leaders who could unite their struggle with those in the rest of the country. The petit-bourgeois patriots, imagining they were Socialists and seeking the support of the workers, had, in fact, no confidence in them. They tricked the proletariat into giving them their support, they continually hovered about in the wake of famous lawyers, of journalists, of deputies whose whole stock of opinions consisted of nothing but ten or so vaguely revolutionary phrases, in order to entrust them with the running of the movement.

The reason why Jules Favre, Picard, Garnier-Pages & Co. could take power in Paris on 4th September is the same as that which allowed Paul-Boncour, A. Verenne, Renaudel and several others to be the masters of the proletarian cause.

The Renaudels and Boncours, and even the Longuets are, by their sympathies, intellectual leanings and deeds, far nearer to Jules Favre and Jules Ferry than the revolutionary proletariat. Their socialist phraseology is nothing but a historical mask which allowed them to impose on the masses. And it is exactly because Favre, Simon, Picard and others abused the democratic-liberal phraseology, that their sons and grandsons were obliged to have recourse to the socialist vocabulary. But have the sons and grandsons remained worthy of their fathers? And when it became necessary to decide the question not of the composition of a ministerial clique, but the far more important one of knowing which class of French society was to take power, Renaudel, Varenne, Longuet and their ilk were on the side of Millerand - the collaborator of Galliffet, the hangman of the Commune with the advent of the revolution, in real life, the revolutionary salon lions and parliamentary lackeys found themselves on the opposite side, although they did not realise it.

The Need for a Party

The genuine working class party is not a machine for parliamentary manoeuvring but the accumulated and organised experiences of the proletariat. It is only with the help of the party, based on its whole past history, foreseeing on a theoretical level the way ahead for the future and all the stages on this way, extracting from this the necessity of continually repeating from the beginning its hesitations, indecisions and mistakes.

The Parisian workers did not have such a party. The bourgeois socialists, with which the Commune was teeming, raised their eyes to heaven, awaiting a miracle or even a word of prophecy, hesitated, and during this time the masses wavered and lost their heads owing to the indecision of some people and the futile illusions of others. The result was that revolution broke out in their midst - too late, for Paris had been surrounded. Six months had gone by before the proletariat were reminded of what they had learnt from previous revolutions, of past combats, of repeated betrayals of the democracy; and seized power.

These six months were an irreparable loss. If, in September 1870, the centralised party for revolutionary activity had been at the head of the French Proletariat, French history, and with it the history of mankind would have taken a totally different direction.

If on the 18th of March, the power was in the hands of the workers of Paris, it was not that it had been consciously seized, but because their enemies had left Paris.

The latter lost ground more and more, the workers mistrusted and hated them, the petit-bourgeois no longer had any confidence in them, and the bigger bourgeoisie thought they were no longer able to defend them. The government fled Paris to muster its forces elsewhere. And thus it was that the proletariat became master of the situation. But it only realised it the day after. The revolution came upon them without their expecting it.

The first success was a new reason for the workers to rest on their laurels. The enemy had fled to Versailles. Was it not a victory? At this moment the government clique could have been wiped out almost without bloodshed. In Paris all the ministers with Thiers at their head could have been imprisoned. Non-one would have lifted a finger to help them. They did not do that. There was not a centrally organised party, which had an overall view of the situation and special means of carrying out its decisions.

The remains of the infantry did not want to retreat to Versailles. The bond between officers and rank-and-file was indeed tenuous. And if there had been at Paris a party headquarters they could have incorporated into the retreating army - since there had been the possibility of retreat - several hundreds of devoted workers, who would have been given the following orders: arouse further the discontent of the rank-and-file against the officers and profit from the first favourable psychological moment to liberate them from the officers and bring them back to Paris to unite with the people. That could have been easily carried out, even in the opinion of most of Thiers' partisans. No-one even thought of it. There was no-one to think of it. In view of the great events which took place elsewhere such decisions could only have been taken by a revolutionary party awaiting and preparing itself for a revolution not having lost its head, by a party which is used to having a comprehensive view of the situation and is not afraid to act.

The central committee of the National Guard was, in fact, a Council of Deputies (Soviets) for the militant workers and the petit-bourgeois. Such a council immediately elected by the masses who had taken the revolutionary path, gives an excellent impression of action. But at the same time it reflects exactly because of its obvious and simple connection with the masses who are in the state that the revolution found them in, not only the strong points, but even more so the weak spots of the masses: it manifests the spirit of indecision, of expectancy, the tendency to lie dormant after the first successes.

National Guard Central Committee Vacillates

The Central Committee of the National Guard needed guidance. It was indispensable to have an organisation which incorporated the political experience of the proletariat and was always present, not only on the Central Committees, but also in the legions, in the battalions, in the deepest strongholds of the French working-class. By means of the Council of Deputies - in this case it was by means of the organs of the National Guard - the party could have been in continual contact with the masses, could know the level of their morale; the central party could each day have given the word of command, which transmitted by the militant members could have spread to the masses, raising the level of their thought and their will.

Scarcely had the Government retreated to Versailles when the National Guard hastened to rid itself of its responsibility at the very moment that this responsibility was enormous. The Central Committee had visions of "legal" elections for the Commune. It entered into negotiations with the mayors of Paris to "legalise" this. If at the same time a violent attack had been prepared on Versailles the negotiations with the mayors would have been a wholly justified and a premeditated military tactic. But in reality these negotiations were only started to somehow avoid an armed struggle. The petit-bourgeois radicals and the utopian socialists who respected "legality" and the individuals who incarnated a part of the "legal" state, the deputies, mayors etc., hoped at the bottom of their hearts that Thiers would give way respectfully to revolutionary Paris and would go over to join the "legalised" Commune.

The passivity and inaction were in this case justified by the sacred principle of federation and autonomy. For Paris, you see, is nothing but a commune in the midst of other communes. Paris wants to force nothing on anybody else; it is not fighting for a dictatorship.

In all, it was nothing but an attempt at replacing the developing proletarian revolution with a petit-bourgeois reform: communal autonomy. The truly revolutionary task consisted of assuring that, throughout the whole country, the power was in the hands of the people. Paris should have served as a base, as a citadel, as an army for all this. And to attain this goal it was necessary to conquer Versailles without further delay and to send out agitators, organisers, and armed men to all parts of France. It was necessary to get in touch with sympathisers, reassure those who took the middle way, and break the opposition of the adversaries. Instead of this strategy of attack and aggression, which was the only thing capable of saving the situation, the Parisian leaders sought to retreat behind their "communal autonomy"; they did not attack the others if the others did not attack them: each town had its sacred right of self-government. This idealistic chatter -

reminiscent of out-and-out anarchy - hid in reality the unwillingness to carry out revolutionary activity, which had to be brought to its local conclusion since otherwise it was not worthwhile beginning.

The hostility shown towards the centralist organisation - a heritage of the petit-bourgeois parochialism and autonomism is without doubt the weak spot of a certain section of the French working class. The self-government of the counties, sections, districts, army battalion towns is for some revolutions the highest guarantee of true activity and individual freedom. But this is a great mistake, for which the French working class paid a heavy penalty.

Under the guise of a form of struggle against "despotic centralism", against the "stifling discipline" is fought a struggle for the self-preservation of the several groups and sub-groups of the working class, each with their minor local leaders and visionaries. The working class as a whole, while preserving its culture and trends of political thought, can act with reason and with firmness, without lagging behind events, each time striking its mortal blows at the weak points of its enemies; on condition that at its head above the arondissements, the districts, the groups, a centralised apparatus organised and bound together with an iron discipline. The tendency towards particularism, whatever form it takes, is a heritage of a dead past. The sooner French communism - both socialist and syndicalist communism - frees itself from this the better it will be for the proletarian revolution

Revolutionary Intervention

A party does not create the revolution at its own whim. It does not arbitrarily choose the moment to seize power, but it intervenes actively in events, gauging every moment the state of mind of the revolutionary masses and evaluating the resistance of the enemy, thus determining the most favourable moment for decisive action. That is the most difficult part of its task. The party is not infallible in every situation. A correct theory is needed, a firm connection with the masses, an understanding of the situation, revolutionary insight, bold decision. The deeper a revolutionary party penetrates into every corner of the proletarian struggle the more it is united in its aims and discipline, and the better and quicker it can resolve its tasks.

The difficulty lies in getting a firm connection between this central party organisation, united by an iron discipline, and the ebb and flow of the masses. The conquest of power can only be attained by powerful revolutionary pressure by the working masses. But to achieve this an element of preparation is completely inevitable. And the bet

the party understands the situation and the moment, the better the bases of resistance will be organised: the better the forces and the tasks are distributed, the surer will be the success and the less victims it will cost. The co-ordination of a carefully prepared action with the rising of the masses is the politico-strategic tasks when taking power.

Comparison with the Russian October

The comparison of the 18th March, 1871, with the 7th November, 1917, is from this point of view very instructive. In Paris there was a complete lack of initiative for action on the part of the leading revolutionary circles. The proletariat, armed by the bourgeois government, was, in fact, master of the town, provided with all the material means of power - cannons and rifles - but it did not realise this. The bourgeoisie made an attempt to take back all its arms at once; it wanted to steal the cannons from the proletariat. The attempt failed. The government fled in panic from Paris to Versailles. The field was free. But it was not until the next day that the proletariat realised it was master of Paris. The "leaders" were tail-ending the events and only realised them when everything had already happened and did their best to blunt the revolutionary knife-edge.

At Petrograd the events turned out differently, the party went on firmly and decisely to seize power, having its men everywhere reinforcing each position, making greater the distance between the workers and the soldiers on the one hand; and the government on the other.

The armed demonstrations of the July days was a strong feeler put out by the party to sound out how strong the connection was between the masses and the enemies' power to resist. The feeler was transformed into a struggle between the advance guard of both sides. We were forced to retreat, but at the same time there was a bond established between the party and the masses by the action. The months of August, September and October saw a powerful revolutionary movement. The party profited from it and increased in a considerable manner its strongholds in the working class and the soldiers. Later the harmony between the preparations for the conspiracy and the action of the people went almost automatically. The Second Soviet Congress was fixed for the 7th November. All our previous agitation was to lead to the seizing of power by the Congress. Therefore the coup d'etat was adopted in advance for 7th November.

This fact was well known and understood by the enemy. Kerensky and his advisers could not make any attempts to consolidate their position in even the smallest way for the decisive moment in Petrograd. So they had to try and move the most revolutionary section of the garrison out of the capital. On our part we profited from this attempt

by Kerensky to make something out of this new conflict, which had a decisive importance. We openly accused the Kerensky government - our accusation was later confirmed in writing by an official document - of having planned the transfer of a third of the garrison at Petrograd not because of military considerations, but for counter-revolutionary reasons. This conflict put us into closer contact with the garrison and posed before the latter the clear task of upholding the Soviet Congress fixed for the 7th of November. And since the government insisted - although in a lax enough fashion - that the garrison be moved, we created, besides the Soviet of Petrograd, which was already in our hands, a revolutionary committee of war, under the pretext of verifying the military reasons for the governments' plan.

Thus we had a purely military organ at the head of the Petrograd garrison, which was, in reality, a legal organ of armed insurrection. At the same time, we put commissars(communists) in charge of military units, military stores, etc. The clandestine military organisation carried out its special technical tasks and provided the revolutionary committee of war, for the important military tasks, with militants in whom it could have complete confidence. The essential work of preparation, the realisation of armed insurrection was done openly and with such method and clarity that the bourgeoisie, with Kerensky at its head, could hardly understand what was going on in front of their eyes. (In Paris the proletariat did not realise until the next day its real victory - which moreover it had not consciously looked for - that it was master of the situation. In Petrograd it was the opposite. Our Party, with the support of the workers and the soldiers, had already taken power, the bourgeoisie spent a quiet enough night and only learned the next day that the government of the country was in the hands of its gravediggers.)

In all that concerns strategy there were many differences of opinion in our party.

One section of the Central Committee declared itself, as is well known, to be against the seizure of power, believing that the moment for it had not yet come, that Petrograd would be isolated from the rest of the country, the proletariat, the peasants, etc.

Other comrades believed that we did not attribute enough importance to the military sides of the scheme. One of the members of the Central Committee demanded the surrounding in October of the Alexandrine Theatre, where the Kadet Conference held its sessions, and its Central Committee put out its proclamations. They said: by concentrating our agitational work as well as our military preparations on the day of the Second Congress we would give away our plan to the enemy, we would give them the possibility of arming themselves, and even of dealing us a fatal blow. But there was no doubt that an attempt at a military coup and the surrounding of the Alexandrine Theatre would have been too hasty a move for the natural development

of events, and that it would have been disconcerting for the masses. Even in the Petrograd Soviet where our faction was in the majority a similar undertaking which prevented the logical development of the struggle would at this moment have provoked great confusion above all amongst the garrison where some regiments would have hesitated and lost their confidence in us - especially the cavalry regiments. It would have been easier for Kerensky to crush a coup not supported by the masses than to attack the garrison, then consolidating himself more and more on this position: the defence of his inviolability in the name of the future Soviet Congress. Therefore, the majority of the Central Committee rejected the plan to surround the Kadet Conference, and with reason. The time was well chosen; armed insurrection almost without the spilling of blood triumphed on the very day, fixed openly in advance, for the convocation of the Second Soviet Congress.

This strategy could not, however, become a general rule, it required special conditions. No one believed any more in the war with the Germans, and the soldiers, the least revolutionary group, did not want to leave Petrograd for the front. And, although it was solely for this reason that the soldiers were on the side of the workers, they became more militant as Kerensky's machinations became more and more obvious. But this state of mind of the Petrograd Garrison had a still deeper cause in the situation of the peasant class and the development of the imperialist war. If there had been a split in the garrison and if Kerensky had had the opportunity of putting pressure on some of the regiments, our plan would have fallen through. The purely military elements of the scheme (conspiracy and mobility in action) would have prevailed. It would have been necessary, obviously to choose another moment for the insurrection.

Similarly the Commune had the chance of taking over regiments composed of peasants in the same way, since they had lost all confidence and all esteem of the government and their commanding officers. However, it undertook nothing to this end. The blame lies here, not in the lack of connection between the peasants and the working class, but in the revolutionary strategy.

What will be the situation for this connection in the European countries in our own time? It is not easy to make any predictions about it. However, events are unfolding slowly and the bourgeois governments are making their efforts to utilise past experience and it is easy to see that the proletariat, in order to win over the sympathy of the soldiers will, at a given moment, have to overcome a great resistance, and a well organised one. An attack which is well carried out and at the same time propitious for the revolution will therefore be necessary. The duty of the party is to prepare for this. That is exactly why it is necessary to maintain and to develop its character as a centralised organisation, which openly directs the revolutionary movement and the masses and is, at the same time, a clandestine apparatus of armed insurrection.

The question of the election of the commanding officers was one of the reasons for the conflict between the National Guard and Thiers. Paris refused to accept the commanding officers delegated by Thiers. Varlin then formulated the claim, after which all the commanding officers of the National Guard, from top to bottom, would be elected by the men of the National Guard themselves. This is how the Central Committee of the National Guard found its support.

This question must be envisaged in two ways; politically and militarily, which are linked with each other, but must be distinguished from each other. The political task consisted of purging the National Guard of the counter-revolutionary commanders. Complete right of election was the sole means to this end, the majority of the National Guard being composed of workers and revolutionary petit-bourgeois. And besides if the slogan "election of the commanding officers" had also applied to the infantry, Thiers would have been deprived in one go of his essential weapons, the counter-revolutionary officers. A party organisation in order to achieve this aim was missing, an organisation having men in all levels of the army. In a word the principle of election had as a task in this case not to give good commanders to the battallions, but to liberate them from commanders devoted to the cause of the bourgeoisie. The principle of election served as a wedge to split the army into two parts according to the distinctions of class. Similarly things happened thus amongst us in the Kerensky period, especially before the beginning of October.

But the liberation of the army from the old apparatus of command leads inevitably to the weakening of the organisation's cohesion and to the lowering of its combative strength. An elected command is most often weakest on the technico-military side and in what concerns the maintenance of order and discipline. Thus, when the army is liberated from the old counter-revolutionary command which oppress them, there arises the question of giving it a revolutionary command, capable of fulfilling its mission. And this question cannot simply be resolved by elections. Before the great majority of soldiers acquire the experience to pick and choose their commanding officers well, the revolution will be beaten by its enemies, who are guided in their choice of officers by the experience of centuries. The methods of informed democracy (simple elections) must be ended and to a certain extent replaced by a degree of selection from above. The revolution must create an organ composed of experienced and sure organisers in whom one can have absolute confidence, in whom one can give full power to select, delegate, and educate the commanding officers. If particularism and democratic autonomism are dangerous for the proletarian revolution in general, they are ten times more dangerous for the army. We have seen this from the tragic example of the Commune.

The authority of the Central Committee of the National Guard stemmed from the democratic right of election. At the moment when the

Central Committee needs to develop to the greatest extent its initiative in the offensive, deprived of the leadership of a proletarian party, it lost its head and hastened to transfer its power to the representatives of the Commune, who needed a wider democratic basis. It was at this time a great mistake to have elections. But once the elections were over and the Commune was reunited it was necessary to concentrate wholly and completely on the Commune and create for it an organ possessing the power to re-organise the National Guard. It was not to be.

At the side of the Commune stood the Central Committee; the fact that the latter was elected gave it political authority, thanks to which it could exist in competition with the Commune. But that deprived it at the same time of the energy and firmness necessary in the purely military questions which, according to the organisation of the Commune justified its existence. The right of election and democratic methods are ONLY ONE OF THE WEAPONS in the hands of the proletariat and its party. Elections can in no way be a fetish or a remedy against all evils. They must be combined with the concept of delegation. The power of the Commune came from the elected members of the National Guard. But once it was set up the Commune should have reorganised the National Guard from top to bottom with an iron hand, given it trustworthy leaders and established a severe discipline. The Commune did not do this being itself deprived of a powerful revolutionary leadership. Thus it was crushed. We would thus look over all the history of the Commune page by page and we would find therein a single lesson: a strong party leadership is essential. The French proletariat more than any other has made sacrifices to the revolution. But more than any other too, it has been misled. The bourgeoisie has produced, with the help of its agents, its lawyers and its journalists, a whole mass of democratic, parliamentary and autonomist formulas which are nothing but fetters on the feet of the proletariat, hindering its movement forward.

The temperament of the French proletariat is a raging revolutionary furnace. But this furnace is blocked at present by the ash of scepticism - the result of many deceptions and disappointments. Also, the revolutionary proletarians of France must be more severe towards their party and unmask all the more mercilessly the contradictions between word and deed. The workers of France need an active organisation, strong as iron with leaders controlled by the masses at each new stage of the revolutionary movement. How much time will history give us to prepare ourselves? We do not know. For fifty years the power was again in the hands of the French bourgeoisie, who drove the Third Republic over the bones of the Communards. The fighters of '71 did not lack heroism. What they did lack was clarity of method and a centralised organisation to lead them. That is why they were defeated. Half a century has passed before the French proletariat is now able to pose the question of avenging the deaths of the Communards. But this time the action will be more decisive, more concentrated. Thiers' heirs will have to pay their historic debt in its entirety.

Zlatoust, 4th February, 1921.

