

THE NEWSLETTER

Edited by Peter Fryer, 1 Seymour Terrace, London, S.E.20. Subscription 10s for 12 issues, post free.

a service to socialists

Vol. 1, No. 1

May 10, 1957

COMMENTARY

AS was made clear in the circular announcing its publication, THE NEWSLETTER has no sectional axe to grind. Its main purpose is to provide socialists with news and documents which they will not find adequately treated elsewhere. It is addressed in the first instance to what a speaker at the Wortley Hall conference of the Socialist Forum movement called 'anti-Stalinist Marxists': that is to say, those who have left the Communist Party since the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU; the oppositionists who are remaining inside that party to fight; and the large number of socialists inside and outside the Labour Party who have many fundamental aims in common with these Marxists.

This first issue gives particular prominence to two things: the situation in the Communist Party since its recent Congress; and the Wortley Hall conference. It does so because the decisions that communists are taking in these first few post-Congress weeks, and the deliberations of such gatherings as Wortley Hall, are shaping the future of the Marxist movement in Britain for years to come.

THE NEWSLETTER has no intention of becoming obsessed by the crisis within the Communist Party, now deeper than ever. But the resignation of such a lifelong militant as Don Renton is immensely important. Here is the answer to the sneers about 'spineless intellectuals' who have 'lost their nerve'. Renton is a man of exemplary courage, zeal and devotion to principle. What have Gollan and Pollitt to say to this man who has walked out of the party in disgust, not because he has ceased to be a communist, but because he remains a communist? Renton has quit because the leadership evaded and will continue to evade all the questions of principle which the Congress ought to have faced. As long as these leaders continue with the old methods and policies those who are true to principle, true to their life-work, true to their records of service to the working-class movement, will stream out of the party. This is the lesson that Congress report-back meetings all over the country are driving home.



THE question arises: what are the ex-members to do? It is not THE NEWSLETTER's job to answer this question for them. But as well as reporting what they are in fact doing, our columns are open to an exchange of views. Can a genuine communist movement be built in Britain? What part have the Forums, these arenas of lively controversy, to play? Should we join the Labour Party? Or should we set up something new? These are the questions that readers and readers-to-be are discussing. Their letters will be welcome.

WHY I LEFT THE COMMUNIST PARTY

by Don Renton

(who was described by Harry Pollitt in 1954 as 'a fine example to all of us by his devotion to the cause of Communism' and by Waf Hannington as 'a fearless fighter for the working class and a most sincere and loyal member of our party'.)

SIX MONTHS before the Khrushchev revelations at the Twentieth Congress I raised the issue of the absence of collective leadership in the CPSU at a meeting of the Scottish secretariat.

I argued that the CPSU could not be all we had cracked it up to be if Khrushchev's account of how the breach with Yugoslavia took place was true.

I challenged the trials in Eastern Europe, declaring that Khrushchev's account of Beria's activities brought under suspicion the 'evidence' under which Communists were persecuted. Later Rajk, Kostov, Gomulka and others were 'rehabilitated'.

No discussion took place in the party. I came to the conclusion that our party leaders knew what had been going on both in the USSR and Eastern Europe, but deliberately concealed the facts from the membership.

At the recent party congress I was shown letters from Pat Dooley about Czechoslovakia, written several years ago.

In both this case and that of Dr. Edith Bone I am convinced that the party Centre knew what was happening—but they refused to act.

They say they were shocked by Khrushchev's revelations. I believe them. They were shocked that Khrushchev let the cat out of the bag—but that the cat had been kept in the bag did not concern them.

I remain loyal to the principles which brought me into the party. I cannot be 'loyal' to leaders who have abandoned those principles.

Don Renton's career

Don Renton joined the Labour Party when he was fourteen and the Communist Party when he was seventeen—28 years ago. He served in the British Battalion of the International Brigade, was wounded at Jarama, and spent months in Franco's prisons.

Sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment, he was rescued by an exchange of prisoners.

'Spain,' he says, 'was only an incident, and a brief one, in my career, with nothing heroic about it. Other and better comrades died in the hands of the fascists, and what is worse in the hands of brother communists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.'

In London in the late thirties Renton took part with J. B. S. Haldane in dangerous breathing-apparatus tests after the Thetis disaster, and worked untiringly as a leader of the unemployed. With them he took part in lie-down demonstra-

(continued on page two)

NEXT WEEK'S NEWSLETTER . . .

... will contain the first instalments of two important series:

Talks with Soviet Leaders on the Jewish Question by J. B. Salsberg. These famous articles, now to appear for the first time in any British publication, have been specially translated from the Yiddish for The Newsletter.

The Last Two Years in Poland by Stanislaw Kowalski, our Warsaw correspondent. Kowalski is a young Polish journalist who has been in the thick of the struggle for democratization.

(continued from page one)

tions; with them he invaded the Ritz Hotel. During the war he served for nearly six years in the Royal Artillery.

When he celebrated his 25th anniversary as a party member—he was then area organizer in Edinburgh—John Gollan wrote to him: 'I congratulate you on all you have done and know this is nothing compared with what you are going to do in achieving the aims for which we both joined the party.'

DICK NETTLETON RESIGNS

Prominent member of the Communist Party in the Lancashire and Cheshire Area, Dick Nettleton, has announced his resignation from the party.

Nettleton considers that the Communist Party is completely discredited in the eyes of the working class and feels that he can better assist the struggle for socialism by joining the Labour Party.

Because he opposed Soviet intervention in Hungary he gave up his full-time job as area organizer in November 1956. From then until the Hammersmith Congress he remained on the District Committee, hoping that the Congress would bring changes.

Hungary, John Gollan's political report to the Congress and the Soviet hydrogen bomb tests were factors that finally influenced him to resign.

His local branch at Walkden, he says, is more or less defunct. There have been a number of other resignations, including Dick Tyldesley, full-time Electrical Trades Union organizer in the Bolton Area. He, too, applied for membership of the Labour Party.

The neighbouring branch at Farnworth, which in 1947 had a membership of ninety, today has only one quarter of that figure on the books. Only three of these play an active part in the party work.

Nettleton joined the Communist Party in 1939 and became well known among engineers in the North. He led the apprentices' strike at Metropolitan Vickers.

In 1946 he became a full-time organizer for the party and in 1948 was the Young Communist League district secretary in Lancashire, a post he held until 1950. From then until 1953, he was the national organizer of the YCL and visited China as a member of a youth delegation. Released from YCL work he returned to Manchester, and until his resignation was the area organizer.

SCOTLAND

In Edinburgh about fifteen members have resigned since the Congress and about the same number are planning to resign at report-back meetings. Some branches are left with only one member, and half of the Area Committee is gone.

All those who have resigned are agreed that a Marxist movement of some kind is necessary, but whether they should go into the Labour Party, set up a Forum or build a new Communist Party is still the subject of keen debate.

In Glasgow there have so far been no widespread resignations. The report-back meeting at Partick branch was stormy. Twelve members of the Bridgeton branch are expected to resign. There are small opposition groups in Drumchapel and Renfrew branches.

NOTTINGHAM

About twenty-five attended the report-back meeting in Nottingham. Delegate and Area Committee member Dave Bates, reporting from the floor of the meeting, shattered full-time official John Peck's rosy picture of an 'epoch-making congress'.

The first speaker in the discussion, John Murray, member of the Area Committee, resigned on the spot, saying the party had shown itself incapable of adapting itself to reality.

Since the aggregate a meeting of members of various dissident trends has taken the first step towards the formation of a group that will conduct an open principled fight within the party.

STROUD GREEN

Seven members of this branch have resigned since Hungary. One working-class critic is being described as a 'noisy McLoughlin type'.

MUSWELL HILL

After a report-back to the Muswell Hill branch—the delegate made no reference to what Hyman Levy and Johnnie McLoughlin said at the Congress—Alison Macleod and Beatrix Tudor-Hart announced their resignations.

Alison Macleod has also resigned as television critic of the Daily Worker; this is the paper's thirteenth resignation.

One member of the branch said in resigning that the leadership of the British party was 'politically and morally dishonest'.

CANTERBURY

As it was from Canterbury and Herne Bay that one of the first 'faction' meetings of the 'revisionists' sprang, it is not surprising that the Communist Party branch has been affected by the Congress.

Following my own refusal to toe the line and resignation one other member has resigned. Two others will leave after the Congress report meeting and two others are considering resigning.

The secretary will be left with three of the 'Old Guard' But those who have left are on good terms with those who have stayed in.

Jane Swinnerton

SCIENCE

THE SOVIET H-BOMB

by J. H. Bradley

The Soviet test explosion reported on April 21, 1957, is the first which can be asserted beyond all possible doubt to be 'dirty', as far as non-governmental research results go.

It may be an entirely new type of weapon, hardly more expensive than a 'small' atomic bomb. The report given in The Times of April 22, 1957, is so confused as to be quite misleading, and in parts smells of special pleading. Its assertion of the absence of uranium 238 in the debris is hard to accept. A good summary is given in the Manchester Guardian of April 23, 1957 (page ten).

The significant fact is the presence of much plutonium and neptunium 239 without any uranium 237. U²³⁷ first allowed a diagnosis of the fission-fusion-fission bomb, and its absence indicates that few of the neutrons present had energies above 4 million electron volts (MeV). In other words, they were not from a lithium deuteride fusion reaction.

The Guardian talks of a possible new fusion reaction, but it is not clear that any fusion is needed. A new reaction would need much higher temperatures than the LiD system, and it is uncertain whether that is feasible with current detonators. My theory is that this was probably a rather large atomic bomb surrounded with much U²³⁸ or natural uranium. It would work like a hydrogen bomb in all points of military interest, except the price.

These questions can only be solved (other than by the Soviet Government) by a knowledge of the power of the bomb, or the amount of even heavier elements formed in it. The first should be obtainable from measurements of the blast wave, and would show whether an atomic bomb COULD be the detonator on its own.

The second would reveal approximately the peak rate at which neutrons were released during the explosion, and the absence of elements beyond plutonium would confirm the loaded atomic bomb hypothesis. Their presence was first detected in the debris from the American test of March 1954, and confirmed the Japanese evidence. This indicated a new nuclear process, and exemplified the change of quantity into quality, the rate of passage of neutrons being rapid enough to make generation faster than decay.

It is clear that the Soviet Government has joined Britain and the USA in the manufacture of the most barbarous of all weapons.

"For an explanation of 'dirty' and 'clean' H-bombs, see page seven.

FORUMS the Wortley Hall Conference

OPENING the conference of Socialist Forums held at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield, on April 27-28. **KEN ALEXANDER** said it was not an attempt to set up a new political party, but a means by which those on the Left in the Labour movement could exchange ideas on policy and organization.

Ex-Communist Party members of fairly recent vintage, 'rebel' communists, Labour Party members and representatives of other groups were present. He appealed for a certain amount of restraint to be shown.

MARXISM UNIMPAIRED

PROFESSOR HYMAN LEVY, whose subject was 'Why Marxism is Unimpaired', said Marxism was in a process of development. In that sense he was a 'revisionist'. But there were certain principles which had not been subject to change.

To him Marxism was a scientific approach to problems of theory and practice. It should be possible to apply criteria to what was done in the Soviet Union much closer to the criteria applied in a scientific experiment.

A scientist did not abandon his scientific method if the outcome of an experiment was not what he expected. We should not say 'Our Marxism is wrong', but rather 'We didn't know enough about the factors. We have learned a little more. We will use it as a guide to action'.

'If you call that a weakness in Marxism, well and good,' Prof. Levy said. 'But I know of no other method of approaching social and political issues.'

Prof. Levy said the elementary Marxist principles that remained unimpaired included:

The materialist interpretation of history:

The theory of the superstructure and its relationship with the economic basis;

The theory of the class struggle: that the motivating forces in society were class forces. The pattern of capitalist society had undergone tremendous changes; in particular the middle class had grown tremendously. Therefore Marxism had to be restated in terms of the present day;

The role of the individual. Gollan tried to show that one half of Stalin's character—I don't know whether it was his right or his left' (Laughter)—was responsible for the negative aspects in the Soviet Union. This was not a Marxist approach, but a nonsensical approach;

The relativity of values. It was easy to say we were shocked and horrified by what had happened in the Soviet Union, but you got a rational pattern once you began to see the connection between the economic conditions and the superstructure. Ethical values were relative to a society and must not be transferred in a mechanical way. He did not know anything about any 'absolute values'.

They knew but did not tell

Prof. Levy said his great criticism of the leaders of the British Communist Party was that they had known a great deal about what was going on in the USSR and had kept many of the members uninformed.

In so far as that part of socialist history had been closed or distorted the minds of people who had been trying to get a Marxist understanding of it had been distorted.

It was terribly important to try to fit what had happened in the Soviet Union into a rational Marxist pattern, to see what new forms had shown themselves in the first socialist experiment.

Was it an inevitable part of a socialist society that the kind of bureaucracy that had undoubtedly grown up in the Soviet Union should come into being? Could we learn the lessons from what had happened there so that we could avoid here the wrong things that had happened?

'How did it come about that that kind of bureaucracy grew up there?' he asked. 'You can see certain factors in the situation: the vast expanse of the Soviet Union; whom are you going to depend on to carry out the plans except relatively illiterate people? ...'

The Marxist approach had been vitiated by a denial of information about the great historic experiment in the Soviet Union. The leaders had kept the members in ignorance, had given them a false picture.

Could you have a Marxist party if you gave the members a false picture?

Turning to problems of the capitalist world, Prof. Levy declared that in his view Marxist economists had completely failed in their approach to the development of British and American capitalism.

They had forecast crises, but 'it looks for the moment as if it is going to go on for a very long time'. Would capitalism possibly go on indefinitely without another crisis?

He did not know—but he would say that Marxist analysis had been inadequate. He was waiting for Marxism to justify itself in that field, instead of handling the issue in terms of an earlier epoch.

Answering questions, Prof. Levy said that up to a certain level in the USSR, it was his impression that the workers controlled their methods of work. On top of that was a section rather like our administrative class, which was doing very well out of it and hanging on to its jobs. 'Woe betide these people finally,' he warned.

Moral condemnation in a vacuum was completely meaningless. We must try to understand how and why things went wrong.

MERCIA EMMERSON (Islington) said one of the things that made her join the Communist Party was the recognition of working-class values, that there was no such thing as absolute values.

The danger lay in a party regarding itself as the fount of wisdom and condemning those who questioned that as 'objectively' counter-revolutionary. Were there not absolute humanitarian values? The 'traitor' of today was rehabilitated 20 years afterwards.

JIM ROCHE (Leeds) said the working class needed truth. Marxism had been distorted by those who denied it to them. He believed there were proletarian values—on the question of blacklegs, for example. There were standards of proletarian conduct that had been distorted.

The need for a Marxist party

KEN COATES (Nottingham) said Marxism was inseparable from struggle. Therefore the task of those present was to go forward to build a Marxist party. It could not be done today or tomorrow.

The Communist Party leaders had betrayed exactly the things they claimed to uphold; they had impaired the most fundamental value of Marxism, the class struggle, because they were prepared to make a deal.

RAYA LEVIN (London) said that to the extent the Soviet Union had not achieved a classless society, to that extent the moral values of the proletariat had been distorted. A Marxist analysis of the Soviet Union involved an analysis of why a classless society had not been achieved there.

PETER WORSLEY (Hull) said that for a long time it was denied that there were any contradictions in the Soviet Union, but they had to start analyzing what the contradictions were. He looked at Marxism as a tool. But there had not been much Marxist analysis in the last few decades.

'The sort of analysis that Deutscher and Trotsky have made, the kind of new fresh analysis we must make of the class changes in our own country; these things have hardly been touched on,' he said.

'There has just been a repetition of what Lenin said fifty years ago, and an acceptance of the Soviet handout—except for people like Trotsky.'

They must start from the beginning and make a critical re-analysis.

TOM KAISER (Sheffield) said the officials of the Communist Party were prepared to see their organization disintegrate rather than give up power. They thought they knew what was best for the mass of the people.

ADRIAN GASTER (Wolverhampton) thought that what happened in the Soviet Union was inevitable, but agreed that their task was to analyze what went on there and find out the practical limits which would condition the kind of socialism we got here.

JOHN DANIELS (Nottingham) said one of the things he had learned was to study the sources, including Trotsky, who devoted a great deal of attention to finding a Marxist explanation of developments in the Soviet Union.

They must study not only the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy, but the rise of all bureaucracies in the Labour movement.

DICK GOSS (London) said things went wrong in Russia not because they lacked beautiful ideals, but because they oversimplified their economic tasks and did not take the best from capitalism.

ALAN LAMOND (London) said the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the theory of the State had also to be examined. On many points of fact and interpretation Marxists had been wrong and other people right.

Marxism had proved to be a defective tool in the analysis of history in the past forty years. He did not think the Trotskyist interpretation of the Soviet experience was correct—'nor is their current policy'.

The most crucial question of all was the relationship of Marxism to its institutions. Democratic centralism was based on the idea that a Marxist party should be a supreme institution. If the attempt was made to put the principles of Marxism in the hands of a new party they would get stagnation.

H. KENDALL (London) said Prof. Levy seemed to have adopted a kind of double standard which allowed him under no circumstances to attack what was wrong in the Soviet Union when it was wrong, but only afterwards.

BERT WYNN (Derbyshire) said their biggest mistake as Marxists had been to dogmatize about the breakdown of capitalism, instead of paying due regard to the victories the British working class had already won because of its strength.

JACK BRITZ (London) said Lamond had given no reasons for Marxism being wrong. They could all sit back and agree about historical materialism, but what about the class struggle under capitalism? What about the State machine?

HAROLD SILVER (Hull) said that by denying fundamental humanist concepts and by supporting the Soviet Union without knowing the full facts, Communists had cut themselves off from the possibility of acting in a truly Marxist way.

We must study history

ERIC HEFFER (Liverpool) said in order to protect the interests of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union the Stalinists had been prepared to hold back the class struggle in country after country throughout the world.

'Let us get down to the real task of rebuilding the movement, particularly in Britain, so that we can create a genuine Marxist movement,' he said.

JOHN SAVILLE (Hull) said they must stop talking hot air and build a body of Marxist ideas that meant something to the British working class. That implied studying our own working-class movement and its history, about which far too little was known.

'We have not done anything yet to analyze our economy over the last thirty years. There is nobody here who can give an analysis of exactly how the working class are robbed by the Welfare State. We have not started yet to apply our Marxist tools of analysis to our contemporary society.'

M. HAMILTON (Leeds) said Prof. Levy should have stated exactly what he meant by Marxism. Marxism was both a body of theory and a method. The fundamental concept of Marxism was the application of scientific method to the problems of society.

'A scientist never says his scientific method is wrong. You test your theories in practice. In so far as it is possible to apply the scientific method to the problems we are faced with that is the only way we can tackle it.'

Replying to the discussion, Prof. Levy said it was a peculiar thing that the conference had concentrated on ethical issues. This was a symptom both of the type of gathering and of the situation in which they met.

'You must not ask too much of Marxism in predicting the course of events,' he added.

LESSONS OF THE STALIN ERA

Opening a discussion on 'Lessons of the Stalin Era', another speaker stressed the importance of a fresh study of the history of the Soviet Union and of the Communist International.

There was a view that the discussion of anything else except the affairs of our own country and the affairs of the present was remote from present-day realities. He thought that was wrong.

On the contrary, it was becoming clearer every day that what had happened and what was going to happen in the Soviet Union in particular had more importance for world socialism than anything else.

The distortions and crimes of the Stalin era had seriously compromised the very name of socialism in many people's minds. Stalinism had also led to an unnecessary gulf between the revolutionary socialists and the so-called democratic socialists.

The character of the British Communist Party and its policies had come to be determined in ways that bore little or no relation to the real needs and interests of the British working class.

'We substituted for Marxism a very crude form of pragmatism,' he went on. 'It consisted of observing what the Soviet leaders were doing and then finding reasons why it was right and providing the necessary quotations from the classics to justify them. We became rather discredited as scientific Marxists.'

There had been honest British Stalinists and cynical ones, who knew very well what was happening in the Soviet Union; he had no hesitation in naming Andrew Rothstein as an outstanding example of the latter.

How was it that the Stalin system arose in the Soviet Union? Some said the origin of Stalinism was to be found in the First Five-Year Plan (1928-32), that it came about as a result of economic necessity.

This was not an entirely satisfactory theory. Looking more closely, one could see the elements of Stalinism gathering in the early twenties.

In 'The Interregnum' E. H. Carr showed how bureaucracy began in the life of the party and spread into the State machine and into society.

'In Lenin's articles written on his sick-bed in 1923 we see his increasing worry about this bureaucratic development. Particularly important in this connection is the self-criticism which Trotsky later made in his autobiography for having agreed to certain political changes which had been one of the sources of this degeneration of the party and the State.'

The speaker instanced the ban on opposition parties and the ban on factions within the Bolshevik Party. The bureaucracy became detached from the workers and developed as a caste.

Was it in fact socialism, he asked, that had been built in the Soviet Union? Or was it a transitional regime between capitalism and socialism?

In his view the contradictions in the Soviet Union were those of a system which was not yet socialism. The further advance to socialism might involve a number of crises. Perhaps there might have to be political revolutions of one kind or another.

If it was not socialism, why wasn't it? Here one had to examine again whether the absence of socialism was due to the fact that the very idea of building socialism in a single country was perhaps revisionist, as many people said it was when the idea was first put forward in the autumn of 1924.

The whole problem of what was meant originally by socialism, and whether socialism could be constructed within the national frontiers of a country of the type of Russia, had to be re-examined.

Perhaps the idea of socialism in one country was the ideology (in the full Marxist sense of the word) of a bureaucracy which sought some justification for its rule in the eyes of the Soviet workers and of socialist-minded workers all over the world.

The disputes of the twenties about socialism in a single country might, if examined again, give the key to the rise of Stalinism, and also perhaps the key to its present crisis.

The root of the reason why a lot of us are doubtful about Marxism now is that over a long period we have failed to apply it to Russia,' the speaker suggested. They had not examined such phenomena as the tremendous spread of incomes in the USSR, which would have been noticed and analyzed if they had occurred in other countries.

In his studies of the development of Soviet society he had found most valuable such writings of Trotsky as 'The New Course'—it was quite uncanny to read this now—'The Real Situation in Russia' and 'The Revolution Betrayed'.

'I make a particular point of saying this because in the 23 years I have been a member of the Communist Party—and I still am, incidentally—I made something of a speciality of baiting the Trotskyists and speaking and writing against them, and I must say it seems to me one of the most regrettable features of my political career.'

Turning to the influence of the Stalinized CPSU on the Communist International and the CPGB, the speaker said the internal degeneration of the Soviet system might have begun partly as a result of the failure of revolutions to take place in the more advanced countries.

He pointed to the way in which the Comintern, particularly from 1924 onwards, was transformed, under the guise of Bolshevizing the Communist Parties, into a foreign agency of the CPSU and for practical purposes of the Soviet State.

Power was concentrated in the hands of a very small political bureau, who got rid of anybody in leading positions who showed himself a bit independent and not likely to accept mechanically any change of line that happened to be handed down from Moscow.

What this meant was the imposition on these Communist Parties of the sort of regime that was introduced into the Bolshevik Party only in the early twenties. With such a regime perhaps the Bolshevik Party could not have made the October Revolution.

What effect did this have on the prospects of the revolutionary movement outside Russia?

Holding back the movement

In 1926-27 the Chinese party restrained the workers' and peasants' movement and placed tremendous confidence in Chiang Kai-shek, until the whole thing collapsed like a house of cards.

Also worth study by Marxists was the amazing policy carried out by the Comintern in Germany in the period 1929-33. What other policy would they have followed if it had been the conscious intention of the people in the Comintern headquarters to bring about the victory of Hitler?

In Spain the working-class movement was held back, on the ground that this was the way to win the war against Franco. It had the opposite effect. Someone suggested that the policy of socialism in one country had developed into a policy of no socialism anywhere else.

This policy of turning the Communist Parties into a kind of Soviet frontier guard was based on the thesis that the criterion for a real revolutionary movement was its attitude to Russia. But was not the test of Russia its attitude to the revolutionary movement abroad?

It was essential to shake off this one-sided type of relationship with the Soviet Union, not only for the sake of our own movement, but for the sake of the Soviet comrades also.

'If we have a feeling of solidarity with the Soviet people,' the speaker concluded, 'we cannot show them better than by very honestly and frankly coming out over such things as the events in Hungary.'

'The spirit of the October Revolution is inseparable from a policy of evaluating in an independent Marxist way what is happening there and speaking our minds quite independently.'

JERRY DAWSON (Merseyside Unity Theatre) said dependence on the Soviet Union was best illustrated in the field of culture. How many people had been alienated by the slavish following of Zhdanov?

T. COWAN (London) thought there was a danger of putting Trotsky on a pedestal.

HAROLD RUBEN (London) said Gollan used the word 'revisionism' as a term of abuse. But Stalinism itself was an integral, well-knit system of revisionism.

It was a revision of the heart of Marx and Lenin on the nature of the State. This was seen best in Hungary, when the worst condemnation of Pravda was that the workers' councils had come into collision with the State power.

This contemptuous attitude to the working class was the political basis of Stalinism. Its ideological basis was the Big Lie. Its philosophical basis was the substitution of idealism for materialist dialectics.

The season for reading

G. HEALY (London), who said he was expelled from the Communist Party 21 years ago for opposing the Moscow trials, called on those who had come into opposition to Stalinism more recently to have a little patience with the enthusiasm of anti-Stalinists of an earlier vintage.

'This is the season for reading books, not burning them,' he said. 'Let us have no label-sticking in advance. Let us get rid of demagoguery. Don't put anybody on a "pedestal". Read and study. Examine every point of view.'

Declaring his support for the defence of the Soviet Union against its capitalist enemies, **JACK GALE** (Leeds) said the real way to defend the Soviet Union was to face up to what was wrong, analyze it and put it in its context: the socialist basis of the economy.

JEFF BARKER (Birmingham) felt there was a danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. He was not convinced that the methods used in the Soviet Union to build socialism might not turn out to be historically justified.

JOHN ST. JOHN (London) said the cult of the individual was closely tied up with the cult of the party. They needed Marxist analysis of the present as well as the past; there were going to be increased conflicts in the Soviet Union.

'There are forces arising out of the technical and social developments of the Soviet Union which are going to do the job. These people are our allies,' he declared.

DAVID WOOD (Nottingham) said the lecturer had tended to discuss too much what might have been. They must take notice of the tremendous material and cultural achievements of the USSR.

He was prepared to give much of the credit for the change in the balance of class forces in the world to the much-maligned Stalin.

JOHN FAIRHEAD (London) said communists had neglected work on behalf of the colonial liberation movements.

MARTIN FLANNERY (Sheffield) said the economic basis of socialism had been laid in the Soviet Union despite all the bad things that had happened. Khrushchev's revelations had been forced by the movement of the Soviet people, who were 'going to force a lot of other things'.

The main failing of the Soviet leadership was a lack of faith in the working-class.

In reply, the lecturer said the Soviet bureaucracy was not a ruling class; it had not come to power in the way that ruling classes do. While the bureaucracy might not submit without some rather sharp fights, and it might come to some kind of political revolution, there was no scope for a social revolution.

'This is at the basis of our whole attitude of friendship, plus criticism of the Soviet authorities,' he added.

'We must associate ourselves with the majority of the Soviet people who are struggling by many means, political, literary and others, to bring about an all-important adjustment in the nature of Soviet society.'

WINNING SOCIALISTS

'A discussion on 'Winning Socialists' and the future of the Socialist Forum movement was opened by four speakers who had done much to build the movement and organize the conference: Pauline Harrison (Sheffield), Joe Young (London)*, Lawrence Daly (Fife) and Tom Kaiser (Sheffield).

PAULINE HARRISON said there were 136 people at the conference, about 60 of them from Yorkshire, about 30 from London and about 20 from Lancashire and Cheshire.

JOE YOUNG said the Forum movement had a big part to play, between the opposite poles of Welfare Stateism and Stalinism, in the rethinking that the Left needed to engage in.

'We need a kind of movement which is the opposite of the dogmatic approach, of a "line", he said.

LAWRENCE DALY said they all agreed that the objective was socialism. The question was: what kind of socialism? He believed firmly that the Communist Party was absolutely right to propound the idea of 'The British Road to Socialism'. But it never had the intention of carrying it out.

They could not solve their problems by going back to Lenin or anybody else. It was living thinkers who had to supply the answers to today's problems. Emotional fanaticism expressed in a sectarian form was one of the biggest obstacles to the advance of socialism.

TOM KAISER opposed the formation of anything that would resemble a new political party. The rôle of the Forums would be to create a new centre of political power but to stimulate a new climate of socialist opinion.

They would thereby stimulate activity throughout the whole Labour movement. This was more important than membership or the search for a mass party.

PETER FRYER (London) said a new Marxist party would be premature—a vanguard with no one following it. He believed that Marxists should enter the Labour Party because that was where the workers were, and where experience in leadership could be gained. At the same time the Forums had an important part to play in the field of ideas and controversy.

ROYDEN HARRISON (Sheffield) said there was only one decision the conference should take, and that was that the discussion should go on.

The Forum movement needed a journal. The editorial boards of two Forum journals, published in London and Sheffield, had met and agreed to amalgamate.

RALPH SAMUEL (London) said the Forums could not be primarily concerned with what happened in the Communist Party. The sooner the Forum movement had within it Left Labour people who were militant and did not give in to Fabianism the sooner it would get away from this type of introspection.

They should integrate themselves as much as possible with the Labour Left wing.

EDWARD THOMPSON (Halifax) said they must start from real people: the British people, the Colonial peoples, the whole of humanity under the threat of world war. Their political positions were not derived from the statement of principles alone.

'For us to set up Forums which ignore people who think themselves socialists is to cut ourselves off from hundreds of thousands of people. Therefore I think the Forums must orientate themselves towards the Labour movement.'

There were hundreds of forms of activity which did not depend on joining a party or taking up an attitude.

RAYMOND CHALLINOR (Stoke-on-Trent) said the question was how best they could influence members of the working class. They must have some publication which reflected their common views. Only through an interchange of ideas could they hope to break down the barriers which past sectarianism had raised.

PADDY MACMAHON (London) said the interests of the working class comrades and the intellectual comrades must fuse. Both had a contribution to make. It was wrong to think that the workers were not interested in ideas.

Unless the Forums made provision for the participation of industrial workers they would not win them.

They must continue to iron out their differences and so

build an effective movement. The working class did not look on parties as hobbies, they looked on them as tools to help them achieve their class aims.

The Forums should try to help the ferment of discussion going on inside the Communist Parties.

JOHNNIE MCLOUGHLIN (West Ham) said this gathering arose on the anvil of world communism. It was the first large attempt to create a really organized movement of the 'Marxist anti-Stalinist Left'.

The key question was the conquest of power by the working class. He himself remained in the Communist Party because he believed that in that party was the largest number of people who could deal hammer-blows at the capitalist system.

The Labour Party had not got and could not have factory organization. The Communist Party branch at Briggs was of great value to the workers there.

The workers' movement could be built only on clarity of ideas. He thought a Marxist workers' party would be built, and he believed that it still could be done, within the Communist Party. 'I urge comrades to fight within the party,' he added.

MICHAEL SEGAL (London) said that there was a danger of having nothing at all within a couple of months if they did not organize. On the other hand if they adopted a programme and formed a party there was a danger of becoming one more little sect, and he was not interested in that.

They should set up a national liaison committee and prepare for a further conference attended by elected representatives from all over the country—a national conference of the Left to discuss the whole range of problems that concerned the British working class.

The spirit of co-existence

Mercia Emmerson suggested that industrial comrades and economists form a study circle to thrash out a Marxist analysis of the development of present-day capitalism, and produce a sort of discussion pamphlet. Perhaps the Trotskyists could also contribute.

'If we cannot contribute this original thinking we are doomed,' she said.

The proposal for the setting-up of a national co-ordinating committee was carried unanimously.

Winding up the conference, John St. John* said there was general agreement that they did not want to set up a new party. But even if they did not have a platform there might emerge a recognized viewpoint, just as the Left Book Club had a viewpoint in the thirties.

Referring to the 'wonderful spirit of co-existence' which had manifested itself at the conference, Mr. St. John quoted Galileo as saying that the art of doubt was the only progressive art. That was something they might take to heart.

Between the various groups of Trotskyists, the various vintages of ex-Communists, there could be agreement—or at least friendly discussion. The proceedings had given them reason to be hopeful and encouraged.

A vote of thanks to the organizers of the conference was moved by Edward Thompson.

* In next week's issue of the The Newsletter, John St. John writes on the future of the Socialist Forum Movement.

USSR

YOUNG OFFENDERS IN THE USSR

Older readers will remember the sensation caused when, in 1935, the law was changed in the Soviet Union so as to subject children of twelve to the penalties of the Criminal Code.

That this is still the position, but also that there is a movement demanding that it cease to be so, is shown by a passage in an article in *Izvestia* of March 21 by I. Vetrov, Minister of Justice of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

'It is high time,' he writes, 'to revise the law on the criminal

responsibility of juveniles. The present law, under which juveniles of 12 to 14 years are liable to be held criminally responsible for certain crimes, and those over 14 for all crimes, cannot be regarded as correct. It is necessary to dispense altogether with the criminal punishment of children between 12 and 14, and to limit substantially the criminal responsibility of minors between 14 and 16. It is clear that educational measures alone should suffice.'

L.H.

H-BOMB TESTS: THE SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS

by our Science Correspondent

In order to discuss H-bomb tests, it is essential to understand the scientific facts involved. Otherwise one might be in danger of believing Mr. Macmillan.

Many very important facts are kept secret, not for any military purpose, but because their release would cause an insuperable reaction against the present insanity. Some of the things I shall have to say are not quite certain, yet the facts are alarming enough to need no committees and commissions of inquiry wasting years, but immediate banning of all tests. Such commissions are mere pretexts for obstructionism.

The worst tests are those near solid ground, such as the notorious American test of March 1954, and some of the Christmas Island tests. Tests high in the air, or over water, are in some ways less dangerous. A test near the ground takes up many thousand tons of dust, which is made radioactive by the radiations from the explosion, and by the material of the bomb which condenses on the dust. Many of these particles fall out near the explosion, as on the Japanese fishermen, but part of them is carried up into the high atmosphere, and falls all over the globe for several years. Bursts high in the air, or over water, form much finer dust which remains harmlessly in the stratosphere for far longer.

Since the activity formed in the explosion slowly decays, the longer it remains in the stratosphere the better. This dust gives an infallible means of detecting and dating any test, as shown by the Japanese. Pressure waves formed by the blast can be detected thousands of miles away, and these facts make nonsense of Macmillan's talk about undetectable tests.

H-bombs are divided into 'dirty' and 'clean' according to the amount of uranium in them. Plutonium can replace part of the uranium, but this makes hardly any difference. 'Dirty' bombs give a very high and persistent activity, and are comparatively cheap—only a few million pounds each, as against tens or hundreds of millions for a 'clean' bomb of similar power.

The British bombs are certainly 'dirty', on economic grounds alone. The authorities are not willing to admit that a 'clean' bomb has ever been tested, though it is rumoured that the first Russian bomb (1953) contained no uranium at all. It is certain that several thousand million dollars worth of plant was scrapped by the Americans just after the Russian test, when they learned they were on the wrong track.

If it is true that the Russians use no uranium, that puts them many years ahead of the British. A 'clean' bomb gives comparatively little radioactivity, almost all of which would decay within a few days, and so be a danger only near the point of explosions. Allegations before the Hubbard Association of Scientologists (Manchester Guardian, April 15, 1957), that the large amount of gamma-rays produced makes the 'clean' Russian bomb more dangerous than the American 'dirty' bomb, are wishful thinking. Gamma-radiation is not important outside the blast area, where everything is dead anyhow.

The ultimate effects of the radio-isotopes produced are almost unknown, which is no excuse for poisoning ourselves with them. Reports of sudden increases in the amount of skin disease in the Pacific (Tribune, April 12, 1957), and unusual numbers of deformed plants in Britain (Manchester Guardian, April 15, 1957), should be treated as unproven, but require investigation with the utmost urgency.

Cancer of the blood

Such events could be examples of 'biological fractionation' by which plants and animals take up isotopes readily from their surroundings, and can cause dangerous accumulations of activity. Large amounts of photographic film were lost in the USA through being packed in cardboard made from straw grown near an atomic plant. British factories have a much better record in this respect.

Tests in the Pacific are very objectionable, since the fish upon which many Asians depend take up radio-strontium formed from uranium or plutonium in the bomb, along with radio-calcium formed from the coral of the islands used for tests. The fish can also take up other elements, such as iodine, which will be concentrated in one vital organ of any human who eats them.

Fortunately only a small amount of such other elements is

formed in a H-bomb explosion. Calcium and strontium are concentrated in the bone marrow, where they cause a very dangerous cancer of the blood. Secondary infections, due to destruction of the body's protective powers, are very common. Skin diseases could be due to concentration of an isotope in the skin, or to contact with active dust. The skin is very radiation-sensitive, and complications would almost certainly follow.

The aim of the present Soviet and American tests is probably to develop small, light bombs to fit in long-range rockets. It is folly to imagine that Britain can compete with the economic giants—America and Russia—in this way. The banning of tests is now very urgent, as the Russians already have 1,500-mile rockets, and in two to five years will have 5,000-mile rockets. These missiles would be useless without H-bomb warheads. If they are once put in store, they cannot be detected, and will keep for many years without attention. The aim of the British tests is impossible to discover, and seems to be just as much a sham as the Civil Defence programme.

It is very difficult to allocate blame between nations, as we are not allowed to know how much each test or each nation has contributed to the total fall-out. Perhaps the least objectionable are the Nevada tests, which have deposited dangerous amounts of activity only in Hollywood and Los Angeles.

Similar objections apply to all nations' tests, since all use the worst type of bomb tested under the worst possible conditions, contaminate the whole globe, and produce effects which are largely unknown but certainly very dangerous. The British tests have the added distinction of being the biggest, most expensive, and most pointless political fraud in human history.

LETTER

NO WILD ACCUSATIONS, PLEASE!

If we want to understand what happened at the recent Communist Party Congress it is no use making such wild accusations as Peter Fryer in his recent Tribune article. The delegates were not 'handpicked', nor were they intimidated by their district secretaries. They did not have to be.

True, there was 'rigging' in the sense that the most extreme amendments and resolutions were selected for discussion, so that there would be the biggest possible vote against. But there would have been a majority against even the moderately phrased amendments.

The fact is that the majority of party members never knew what the battle raging within the party was about. In fact many of them did not know that it was raging at all. This was brought home to me just before the Congress, when I met a comrade, formerly the most intellectual of Hampstead intellectuals, who is now a member of a remote little branch in Scotland. Looking up her old friends in London, she was completely bewildered and dazed to hear them attacking the party leadership. Her branch had been too busy discussing the Rent Bill to notice that there was any crisis within the party. They had passed even the infamous Political Resolution as it stood, without amendment and apparently almost without discussion.

Those who did notice there was a crisis, and have taken the side of the leadership, do not see themselves as being dragooned or intimidated. They think they are standing firm, being loyal to the working class, putting unity above all else, etc.

And the leadership feels just as virtuous. I recently saw an EC member terribly upset because a rank-and-file member, announcing her resignation from the party, said the leaders were 'dishonest'. How could she make such a charge, he asked, against people who had proved their honesty time and again?

'Honesty', in this context, gets mixed up with financial honesty. Full-time Communist officials know that they are not making any money by being Communists. The district secretary, in his patched old jacket, may sit among well-dressed engineers who are making twice his wages. So he reasons: 'I have no selfish financial motive for believing as I do. Therefore—it's a fallacious, but very natural, argument—therefore what I believe must be right.'

From this follows the next argument, just as fallacious but just as natural: 'Anyone who brings forward facts to make me believe otherwise is a paid hireling of the capitalist class'.

What's wrong with the Communist Party, in fact, is what's wrong with the human race. We don't like to face facts; we don't like to listen to arguments; and we don't like to think. Hence the present danger of universal destruction.

Alison Macleod,
London, N.10.

JOURNAL

Cash and criticism needed

A word of thanks to all those who have sent donations, ranging from a welcome two shillings to an £8 money order from Australia.

The Newsletter's only resources are its subscribers' goodwill, its contributors' energy—and the evident need for such a publication as this to serve the new ferment on the Left.

Financial help is important. But if The Newsletter is going to perform the task it has undertaken there is something no less important: criticism and comments. Please put pen to paper.

GBS in Warsaw

When the Polish Theatre in Warsaw recently staged Shaw's 'Saint Joan' the audiences' favourite line was where, in the Epilogue, the Earl of Warwick addresses Joan's ghost 25 years after her execution.

'My congratulations,' he says, 'on your rehabilitation.' At this point the Warsaw audiences roared with laughter and applauded for a long time.

Commented the weekly *Swiat*: 'This phrase hits so accurately at the heart of the present situation that some people have suspected it was added to the text or that the translator paraphrased the original. It is not so. One plainly sees in the original: "My congratulations on your rehabilitation."'

Sign of the times?

Shortly after the 20th Congress, the portrait of Stalin which for many years had graced the main staircase in one of the Soviet Embassy buildings in Kensington Palace Gardens was taken down.

Recently, little more than a year since the Congress, a statuette of the late dictator has been placed in a prominent position in the Embassy library. The figure represents Stalin embracing a little girl who has just given him a bunch of flowers.

Freudian slip?

St. Pancras Labour Councillor Mrs. Peggy Duff had her name spelled 'Dutt' in the Daily Worker the other day. Which sub-editor has got Big Brother on his mind...?

How to win a seat on the Thame Council

Choose an opponent who can't fill his nomination papers in properly.

FRANCE

BOURDET ON THE NOUVELLE GAUCHE

by Mercia Emerson

Hearing and seeing Claude Bourdet, editor of *France Observateur* and one of the leaders of the *Nouvelle Gauche*, at a recent crowded meeting in the underground recesses of the Royal Hotel, produced one or two shocks.

He spoke in fluent and colloquial English. Attractive with a fine, intelligent face and reasonably young. Politician or waggish young don? His manner was decidedly not what one expects from ambitious politicians. No demagoguery, no playing to the gallery, no histrionics, hardly any 'conducting',

which for a Frenchman I thought showed remarkable control.

Instead we heard a lucid, objective account of the background leading to the terrible crimes committed in Algeria by the French 'Socialist' Government. This is a truly shocking revelation, which has moved many Frenchmen today in the way Nazi crimes did in the last war. The irony—and lessons—of a socialist government committing such moral crimes and political folly seem to have hit deepest.

Strong independent growth

In reply to questions, Claude Bourdet (or as someone called him 'Mr. Bordeaux') described the growth of many 'New Left' groupings all over France, anxious to be integrated into a central organization. The 'Centre's' attitude was not to rush things, but to encourage strong independent growth before talk of integration.

His forecasts for the future were modest and cautious. There was no 'wishing a movement into existence'. There is a great deal of disillusionment among many supporters of the Communist Party and among the socialists of Mollet's Party.

The problem before the 'New Left' in France today was not so much that of programme but how to combine the militant economic materialism of Marxism, which many more workers and intellectuals adhere to than in Britain, with the idealist morality of a Catholic people. Marxist economics plus idealist ethics was what he said the *Nouvelle Gauche* needed to get the best support and the best results.

'If I may say so without causing offence, the English are a very insular nation', said M. Bourdet amid cordial agreement. He described how international protests secured his release after only one day's detention when he was last arrested by the French police and he appealed to the British Left to be more aware of and more interested in what is happening in Europe.

Governments were moved by protests from other countries. Apart from which we would all benefit from closer contact. The audience obviously echoed this sentiment and we felt grateful to the Universities and Left Review Club and the Movement for Colonial Freedom for taking this initiative.

As I write, the news of the seizure of *France Observateur* has just come through. M. Bourdet might almost have known! Let us protest as individuals and as organizations in defence not only of France's liberties, but ultimately, of our own.

HUNGARY

★

QUI TACENT CLAMANT (They Who Are Silent Cry Out)

I was with you that day when before Bem's statue
You raised high Hungarian and Polish banners.
I know not who is wounded and who is no more
Now the voices are silent, and the fires blaze.

Your voice, Tibor Dery, in the hour of confusion,
Asked me over the telephone if I was safe;
And I heard that voice from the Parliament building
Broken off in the ether; a last cry of despair.

We, who were history's conscience, are silent,
And to, this silent speech is 'raison d'état'...
Where acrid smoke shrouds fallen bodies of rebels,
This last myth has crumbled. Bem's statue remains.

ADAM WAZYK,
November 25, 1956.

★