

# THE NEWSLETTER

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## BUILDERS AND BUSMEN ARE GOING INTO BATTLE

**B**UILDING workers, busmen, hospital clerks are in the front line. They are resisting the attack by the Tory Government and the employers on jobs, wages and trade union organization. This week a militant building worker and a militant busman write about their industries' problems. BRIAN BEHAN tells of the struggle against sackings now developing on the building sites. BOB POTTER explains the background to his workmates' 25s. wage claim. Our economic correspondent analyses the crisis and suggests a socialist policy to meet it. And our commentary discusses the need to prepare for major battles in view of the Government's 'declaration of war'. These four articles (together with an article by TOM KEMP on the economic outlook which will appear in The Newsletter next week) will be reprinted as a pamphlet.

### BUILDING WORKERS NEED RANK-AND-FILE MOVEMENT TO PROTECT JOBS

By BRIAN BEHAN

'THE Ragged Trousered Philanthropists', Tressall's description of building workers, lost all meaning with the post-war building boom. Many building workers thought the old days were gone for ever.

Unfortunately capitalism is rapidly getting back to 'normality'. In January 1957 there were 52,831 building workers on the dole. Not many in an industry employing 1,250,000. But two sinister trends appear in this figure:

First, it was an increase of 20,000 on the previous year.

Secondly, the winter of 1956-57 saw the best weather for building in years.

The first results of the increase of the Bank Rate to six per cent. were coming home to roost. Now it is up to seven per cent., and the Tories are really axing the Welfare State.

It will be impossible for local councils to build at the old rate. At three per cent., under a Labour government, it cost £2,325 to borrow £2,000. Every week the interest burden in the rent was 14s. 11d. At five and a half per cent, it cost £4,825, with weekly interest amounting to 31s. 2d.

### What can Marxists do?

At seven per cent. the cost of borrowing £2,000 will be £6,000, with a corresponding rise in rents.

The Tories have no intention of rehousing the homeless. Indeed in their view the 'back of the housing problem is broken'.

Their economic reasoning is simple. Almost £2,000 million a year is spent on building of one sort or another. The industry has a large labour force.

The Tories aim to cut the amount invested in building and use it to bolster up capitalism. They need capital to invest in the colonies and to strengthen their position against German and Japanese competition.

If people are homeless and building workers unemployed—well, it's just too bad. A degree of unemployment will also cheapen labour costs and increase the rate of profit.

The big question for Marxists is: What can we do about it?

First, it has to be recognized that because building is a casual industry many workers are leaving and heading for what they consider safe jobs. It seems that this has for some time masked the real problem.

It's no solution, of course, because capital investment is being cut in other industries, too, along with rationalization and speed-up.

Secondly, the Right-wing slogan of 'Wait till a Labour government gets back' is looked on by many workers as the solution.

Thirdly, workers in industries other than building are not sufficiently aware that unemployment in building, together with

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### LONDON YCL OPPOSITION GROUP LAUNCHED

A 'London YCL Opposition Group' has been organized and has issued a duplicated bulletin appealing to members of the Young Communist League to 'stay in and organize'.

Referring to the League's loss of 44 per cent. of its members in the past two years, and to its isolation from the working-class movement, the bulletin says the first duty of League members who want to see a Marxist youth movement in Britain is to organize 'the national opposition movement which alone can bring about a change in policy and a return to Marxism in the League'.

The bulletin goes on: 'We know that many comrades have doubts about breaking the rules of the League . . . We feel that the present position of the League is so weak that action must be taken now, and the legality of that action will be decided by the course of events.'

### MAURICE DOBB WRITES IN PROSPECTUS

Prospectus, the new American bi-monthly from which we took Howard Fast's 'The Writer and the Commissar', contains in its first issue (November) a number of other contributions worth reading.

Of particular interest are: 'Will the Boom Continue?—Two Views' ('No Downturn is Foreseeable', by Leon H. Keyserling, and 'The Economy is in Danger', by V. Lewis Bassie); 'The British Labour Party: Failure of Success', by Samuel J. Hurwitz; and 'Marxism Revisited—What Remains of its Economics?' a symposium by John Strachey, Maurice Dobb and Joan Robinson.

Published in New York, Prospectus is edited by Maurice Spector. It costs one dollar.

### L'ETINCELLE SUSPENDS PUBLICATION

'A profound examination of the entire international situation of the communist movement' has led L'Etincelle, the clandestine journal of a group of oppositionists inside the French Communist Party, to suspend publication 'provisionally'.

Tribune de Discussion, which for a time was incorporated with L'Etincelle, has expressed its disagreement with the latter's analysis, which it considers leaves out of account the role of mass movements in the USSR and people's democracies in eliminating Stalinism.

### SAYINGS OF THE WEEK

'We believe that ex-colonial countries like Tunisia have the right to buy arms wherever they can get them.' (Daily Worker, November 18)

'M. Pineau . . . claimed: "The Soviet Ambassador in Paris has assured me that Russia will never deliver arms to Tunisia".' (Daily Worker, November 19).

## COMMENTARY

### EVE OF BATTLE

BRITISH capitalism is now committed to an attempt to preserve itself at the expense of the British workers, to an offensive against wages, jobs and workshop organization from which there can be no turning back. As a result Britain stands on the threshold of industrial strife that may well be wider, more protracted and more bitter than anything experienced in this country since 1926. Disagreeable though this fact may be, anyone who tries to hide it from the workers is doing them a disservice; but it would be a worse disservice to flatter the workers by suggesting that they are anything like so well prepared for the impending battles as their employers are. The bosses and their government are mobilized for struggle, politically and industrially; and in a long series of local, limited and little-publicized try-ons they have for many months been gathering information about the workers' militancy and will to resist. On the other hand the workers are not yet mobilized for struggle, and their leadership at anything higher than job level is not in very good shape. The months ahead are going to put working-class morale and organization to the test. In the course of the fight the workers will have to shed two illusions which Right-wing leaders are doing their best to foster.

The first of these illusions is that we can afford to wait for the return of the new Labour Government which is bound to be elected in 1959, and meanwhile all that is needed is a little strictly constitutional defensive action. Whoever regards the return of a Labour government in 1959 as inevitable is deceiving himself. If the workers are defeated in industry today they can be defeated at the polls tomorrow. This is the lesson of 1926. A long series of political defeats followed defeat in industry. The only guarantee of a Labour election victory is a determined effort by the workers to smash the Tory attack.



THE second illusion is that while protective industrial action is permissible or desirable it should not develop into political action. Leaders who try to hold the movement back with this kind of advice are in for some pretty severe shocks. A 'declaration of war' by a Tory government against the Labour movement is a *political* act. Resistance will be ineffective unless it is mounted on the scale of a powerful counter-offensive, and this in turn cannot but be a *political* act. It is all very well for Gaitskell to talk in terms of sacrifices from all sections of the community. The workers will be satisfied with nothing less than a clear class programme which recognizes that the cause of Britain's problems is the capitalist system; that the class struggle alone can determine at whose expense these problems are going to be solved (pending the abolition of problems and system alike); and that the fight against individual employers and federations of employers leads by its own irresistible logic to the fight against those employers' political wing. Henceforth every partial struggle is a link, large or small, in a chain which can pull down the present Government.

The task of socialists and of militants, therefore, is to go all out to win every small struggle, no matter how isolated it may seem, so that a clear picture of the employers' offensive as it develops, and of the lessons to be drawn from it, can be put before the working class as a whole. Every issue on which the workers are prepared to offer resistance provides abundant proof of the need to prepare for major battles. The employers are tirelessly probing, as the recent spate of overtime, victimization and redundancy disputes shows. Militants should just as tirelessly arm the rank and file with the conclusions that flow from these efforts at enforcing industrial 'discipline'.



ONE of the most important of these conclusions is the incapacity and, in some cases, downright treachery of certain of the Right-wing trade union leaders. Their conduct in some recent disputes has been deplorable. They refuse to organize the workers for struggle. They are prepared to accept settlements which severely handicap their members. Their failure to lead is a great encouragement to Hailsham, Thorneycroft and Macmillan and a source of comfort to the employers. The struggle will undoubtedly put on the agenda the demand for trade union democracy, for the fullest consultation with the membership before settlements are agreed to. Moreover it will bring to the forefront time-honoured forms of working-class activity—such as public demonstrations—which, while not to the taste of certain leaders, will help to develop the fighting spirit and initiative of the whole movement.

Another important conclusion to be drawn from recent partial struggles and Ministerial threats is the urgent need for solidarity, between shop and shop, between factory and factory, between industry and industry. Rapid exchange of information; the speedy dispatch of delegates from each embattled section to report to workers elsewhere and gather financial and, if necessary, other aid; an embargo on the handling of black goods: these are elementary steps which shop stewards' committees, trade union branches and trades councils should be ready to take at a moment's notice. This implies the development of a conscious, alert and combative rank-and-file movement, able to give back blow for blow, able to strike shrewdly at the employers, where it hurts, the moment they attack.

If the struggle is fought whole-heartedly it can lead to the replacement of the Tory Government by a Labour government. But a Labour government which fails to carry out a socialist policy will not be much use. The time to begin making sure that the policy of the next Labour Government is a socialist one is in the course of the struggles now beginning. Workers in action to defend and improve their wages, to preserve their jobs and their organization, will more easily realize the importance of such Left demands as the nationalization of the shipbuilding, engineering, building and chemicals industries; workers' control of nationalized industries; East-West trade without political strings. Such demands flow logically from a mortal struggle which may quickly involve millions of British workers.

# The Crisis and the Workers

By Our Economic Correspondent

**T**HE economic crisis is not just Tory propaganda. The British, American, French and other economies are all trying to solve their problems at each other's expense—and at the expense of their own working classes.

The crisis is taking on many of the classical features of past capitalist crises. There is a balance of payments problem and there is over-production, particularly of basic commodities: of food and of the raw materials of industry.

**Wheat** has been over-produced. Canada's carry-over is at an all-time record level; and although America's has been reduced, the reduction has been achieved partly by giving it away to Canada's customers (so intensifying the crisis in Canada), partly by paying the farmers not to grow it.

**Cotton** has also been over-produced. And the USA is dealing with its cotton problem in the same way—by giving it away and by paying the farmers not to grow it.

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**THE SOIL BANK.** Every acre taken out of production goes into the so-called soil bank and is paid as if it were growing crops.

But since productivity is constantly increasing the policy of cutting down the area under cultivation has failed to stop the over-production of wheat or cotton—or of **barley, maize, sugar or sago**. Wholesale prices have fallen.

**Jute** is also in difficulties. It is meeting the fierce competition of man-made fibres. Until recently **wool** alone could meet this competition. But now wool prices, too, are beginning to shrink.

As with food and fibres, so with metals. **Copper, zinc, lead, tin, antimony, wolfram:** all have been over-produced, with consequent price tumbles.

Exceptions? **Aluminium** has held firm. In Britain **iron and steel** prices have even gone up. But only because, instead of the surplus being dumped on the world's markets, production has since the summer been cut and cut until it is down to 78 per cent. of capacity in the USA—and the prosperity of West Wales is in danger.

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**BRITAIN'S MAJOR CUSTOMERS.** The result of the fall in commodity prices is that the countries which produce them have suffered a serious fall in their incomes.

But these countries are also the major customers for British manufactured exports: so their ability to buy has also declined.

So much so that the terms of trade have moved in Britain's favour from an index figure of 101 last April to 93 at the beginning of this month. In other words it takes only £93 worth of British exports to buy what would have cost £101 worth of British exports seven months ago.

Obviously the quantity of **chemical products, ships, motor cars, washing machines, aeroplanes, radios, steel rails** and machines of all kinds that Britain's customers can buy has been reduced.

The effects of these developments, plus the growth in manufacturing capacity, have already shown themselves both in the USA and in Britain. In both countries new factory building (a certain indicator of the level of present and future productive investment) has fallen.

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**UNEMPLOYMENT INCREASE INEVITABLE.** In Britain, for example, the number and area of new factory building schemes in the third quarter of 1957 were the lowest for any comparable period since 1953.

And the Board of Trade estimates that as a consequence the state of capital investment is declining rapidly,

and that productive investment in Britain has already declined over the year as a whole by 10 per cent. and will decline still further next year.

Thus the tendency for a big falling-off in production already existed before the Bank Rate was increased to seven per cent.

An increase in the level of unemployment in the **building** and ancillary trades, in **chemicals, in engineering** and in manufacturing industry generally, was practically inevitable in 1958.

This is the moment chosen by Thorneycroft to cut the proposed investment by nationalized industries, local authorities and the Post Office.

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**TORIES WANT UNEMPLOYMENT.** This is the moment chosen to raise the Bank Rate to seven per cent. in order to force a further cut in private investment in the manufacturing industries by making the cost of credit prohibitive.

Why? There is growing unemployment in building, so the Government deliberately cuts investment in local authority building. It wants to reinforce the growth of unemployment in building and ancillary trades.

Unemployment is on the way in engineering. The Government reduces its investment, in real terms, in the **railways, electricity, gas and mining** industries, and in the **Post Office** as well. It wants to speed the growth of unemployment.

Is the Government mad? Not in the least! It foresees cutthroat competition in the world's markets, and its purpose is to slash costs in British industry by cutting down wages.

Hence its refusal to countenance further wage increases based on a rising cost of living. You can have a wage increase if you increase productivity; but, generally speaking, that is impossible, because of the Government's cuts in real investment.

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**DECLARATION OF WAR.** This policy has been rightly called a declaration of war on the trade unions. Last spring the Government manoeuvred the most powerful section of the working class out of the way by means of the twelve-months no-claim agreement in engineering.

But the struggle now beginning is not merely an economic one. It is a political one as well. Whom are the busmen and the railwaymen fighting? Not the London Transport Executive and the Railway Executive alone.

And if the workers in private industry find themselves on strike to enforce a wage claim, they will be fighting the Government as well as their employers.

Political methods are being used to enforce industrial aims. And the busmen and railwaymen will have to use political as well as industrial methods if they are to win their fight.

The workers need a programme. Statements written in trade union offices that no newspaper will publish without distortion, plus peaceful picketing, are no longer enough.

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**SMASH THIS GOVERNMENT.** The Tories want to 'solve' the crisis by cutting wages.

The workers' answer is: nationalize engineering, ship-building, chemicals, building and the banks. And to do that we must smash the Tory Government.

If the coming strikes are fought passively the working class can be defeated piecemeal, as it has been in the past.

But if we fight aggressively, by putting forward political demands as well as sectional ones, and by mobilizing the whole movement behind each section's struggle, then the fight can be won.



**BRIAN BEHAN (Continued from front page)**

bricks, cement, etc., can run to hundreds of thousands—a very large army indeed for the employers to play with.

**We have to show the workers that there is an alternative. And we have to fight for that alternative.**

The building unions have a policy which goes some way to meet the situation. It calls for shorter hours (the 40-hour week); higher wages (the 8d. an hour claim); and nationalization (the Federation plan for public ownership).

What's lacking is a powerful rank-and-file movement, based on site organization, that will drive through the official machine and make these demands a practical reality.

Waiting for a Labour government is a snare and a delusion. By all means let us return a Labour government—but let it be one based on the conscious struggle of the working class so that it is elected not as a poor alternative but as a socialist opportunity.

On my own job we are hoping to call a meeting on unemployment and launch a campaign throughout the industry. It is urgent that workers in other industries should unite with building workers to fight a common evil, and a common enemy.

## LONDON BUSMEN WON'T LET ANYTHING BRAKE THEIR FIGHT FOR THE 25s.

By **BOB POTTER**

LEADING the queue for wage increases are the London busmen. And rightly so, for in no other industry have pay and conditions been allowed to deteriorate to the same extent.

In 1937 London busmen struck for four weeks for the 'right to live a little longer', and over the years established a working day of 7 hours 40 minutes. Last year a new agreement gave the busmen a working day of 8 hours 15 minutes—the longest for twenty-five years.

Compare conditions with those of thirty years ago. The average takings of a conductor were about £3 per day, the bus carried 34 passengers, average speed was 10 m.p.h., the weekly wage was £3 10s.

Today the average takings are between £13 and £20, the bus has 56 seats and will soon have 65, travelling speed is 30 m.p.h., even 40 m.p.h., and the weekly wage is £9 13s. 6d.

**From the second best job in the country for rates of pay, the bus industry is now about fiftieth down the list.**

Glance at these figures governing the road operations of the London Transport Executive for the first six months of 1957 compared to the same period of 1956.

Passenger receipts .....	+£2,502,000
Passengers carried .....	+6,836,000
Car miles run .....	-4,786,000
Drivers and conductors employed	-301

These figures illustrate a process that has been continuing for years: more passengers carried in fewer buses, worked by fewer crews, and with cash receipts on the increase. On this latter point let the figures speak for themselves again:

Receipts for four weeks ending

April 21, 1956 .....	£5,846,000
December 2, 1956 .....	£6,102,000
April 21, 1957 .....	£6,349,000
June 16, 1957 .....	£6,358,000

Spokesmen for the Government are continually telling us that further wage increases cannot be granted unless there is a corresponding increase in production.

Well the facts show that London busmen have increased production and they are determined to get their share of the extra money going into the kitty.

They note that there is never any difficulty in finding the odd £5 million which is paid each year as compensation to the ex-stockholders.

Woe betide Frank Cousins and his colleagues if they try to brake the demand for an increase of 25s.

## FRANCE

### ALGERIAN WORKERS' LEADERS MURDERED

From Our Paris Correspondent

IN the summer of this year the Algerian workers in France—there are more than 300,000 of them—decided to launch their own independent trade union federation, Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs Algériens (Union of Algerian Labour Unions).

The parent organization of the USTA in Algeria, also called the USTA, had been disbanded and its leaders sent to a concentration camp by Lacoste's police in May 1956.

In France the founding congress of the USTA was attended by 324 delegates representing the overwhelming majority of the Algerian workers employed in French industry. One of the distinctive features of the congress was the active participation of the Algerian women workers and the election of a woman to the executive committee.

The reason for setting up the USTA was frankly and clearly stated by Ahmed Bekhat, the late general secretary of the USTA, in his opening address:

'The Algerian workers joined the CGT. The leaders of this organization set up North African labour commissions. What did we see? These commissions served only to ensure the Stalinist indoctrination of our workers. Not to lead a campaign for the application of the social service laws or for the special demands of our workers, but to bring the workers and their leaders into the Communist Party.'

Since its foundation the USTA has become the target for a campaign of unparalleled terror and hostility by Press, police, Stalinists and, above all, the Cairo-sponsored National Liberation Front (FLN).

The leaders of the FLN fear the independent organization of the Algerian workers more than they do the French imperialists. They want an independent capitalist Algeria. The USTA and its political counterpart the Movement National Algérien (MNA) want a democratic socialist Algeria. Hence the conflict and the wave of terror.

Here is a list of the latest victims of the FLN murder squads:

**Ahmed Semache**, Paris Secretary of the USTA, shot September 20, 1951.

**Mellouli Said**, USTA organizer in the Renault factory, shot September 24.

**Hocine Maroc**, organizer of the USTA in the Panhard motor-car factory, shot September 24.

**Abdallah Fillali**, executive member of USTA, seriously wounded October 7. (Fillali, a popular leader of the MNA since 1933, was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Vichy authorities for his activities in the Algerian liberation movement.)

**Ahmed Bekhat**, 27-year-old general secretary of the USTA, murdered October 27.

This is by no means a complete list of the working-class martyrs who have fallen to the knives, bombs and bullets of the paid assassins of the FLN. But it will suffice.

A protest against these unprovoked murders has been signed by some of the leading intellectuals of the French Left, such as Pierre Hervé, André Breton, Marceau Pivert and Daniel Guérin. Even Bourdet, a champion of the FLN, has been moved to protest.

Can British Labour stand aside while trade unionists are murdered in cold blood—especially now that Britain is supplying arms to Tunisia, some of which may well find their way to the FLN?

**FOOTNOTE:** Since this article was received a further series of murders has been committed by FLN bands. The most recent was the shooting down of six Algerian workers by an armed group in a suburb of Paris. The way the crime was carried out suggests strongly that this was the work of an FLN murder squad.

## HUNGARY

### DERY JAILED NINE YEARS FOR THIS . . .

My friends, I accept the responsibility. I am happy and proud, with my fellow-writers, that our profession made us the first listeners to and reporters of the nation's voice.

This, the greatest revolution since the beginning of recorded Hungarian annals, was not incited and carried out by individuals or political groups, by ideas and opinions, but by the will of the people.

In 1945 I believed that workers, peasants, all of us who had been excluded from the nation, would find a new country. But for ten years the country has been stolen inch by inch from under our feet.

We thought we would be able to build socialism; instead, they put us behind prison walls built of blood and lies.

I can only now assess the deadly cruelty of the pressure exerted upon the people—so great that they replied to it with universal accord, with bare hands against tanks.

This statement was made by the Hungarian communist writer **TIBOR DERY** on November 2, 1956, two days before the second Soviet intervention in Hungary.

For refusing to retract it and call the Hungarian events a 'counter-revolution' he was last week sentenced to nine years' imprisonment. Three fellow-writers and fellow-communists were also sentenced for their loyalty to the Hungarian Revolution.

**GYULA HAY** was sentenced to six years' imprisonment; **ZOLTAN ZELK** to three years'; and **TIBOR TARDAS** to eighteen months'.

### SOCIOLOGY STARTS AGAIN IN POLAND

A recent issue of Polish Facts and Figures quotes Professor J. Chalasinski on the resumption of sociological studies in the universities of Poland.

A number of fields of sociological work 'have been very adversely affected by the several years' break in sociological studies,' he declared, 'so that we now have few trained research workers . . .

'We now have less scientific knowledge of the working class, the peasantry and the intelligentsia, of the internal structure of these social strata, and of their mutual connexion, than we had before the war.'

### WANTS TO GIVE SON HIS RIGHTFUL NAME

Literaturnaya Gazeta's campaign for reform of the Soviet illegitimacy and divorce laws (see The Newsletter, October 5, p. 155) is carried further in its issue of October 1 by the publication of a letter from a father whose son is nameless because born out of wedlock.

His wife refuses him a divorce out of spite, he claims, and so he is unable to give his name to the youngest of the descendants of his 'great ancestor'. The letter is signed A. G. Pushkin.

## LETTERS

### INFLATION IS GOVERNMENT SWINDLING

INFLATION, according to my dictionary, means an abnormal increase of the currency, which raises prices by printing notes without more goods to buy with them.

The only authority that can print notes is the Bank of England, which is now under the Government. Therefore, if there is inflation, the Government are responsible.

To say that wage increases are responsible for inflation is mere impudence. It amounts to saying that if the workers win a wage increase, the Government will print more notes

and so inflate the currency rather than let the employers meet it out of their profits.

Inflation, in short, is the method by which a capitalist government comes to the rescue of the employers, saves their profits, and then puts the blame on the workers. Its other name is swindling.

The Tories, being the party of Big Business, will launch a frontal attack on the workers as far as they dare. A strong Labour movement may make them careful about how they do so—especially if the movement is strong both industrially and politically.

London, N.6.

James D. Young

### STATEMENT OF AIMS WAS REARRANGED

Many thanks for giving so much publicity to the Forums.

I would like to point out though that the revised Statement of Aims as printed in your November 16 issue is not quite the same as adopted at our conference.

The differences, however, are entirely ones of wording and arrangement and do not affect the substance of the aims.

42 Beaconsfield Road, London, S.E.9 **Richard Goss**

(Acting secretary, London Socialist Forums)

[Our version, it seems, merely incorporated the 'raw' amendments into the original draft, which, as amended, was later polished and rearranged.—Editor]

### DON'T LIMIT THE LIST TO TWO JOURNALS

I WAS surprised to hear one of the leading speakers at the conference of London Socialist Forums refer to '*Universities and Left Review* and *The New Reasoner*—the journals associated with the Forums'.

Why these only and not also others? Socialist Review, for instance, to which Michael Segal recently contributed an article on Forum affairs; or Labour Review, which had an editorial on the Forums; or The Newsletter, which has regularly reported Forum developments?

This limitation of the list of journals associated with the Forums to the ones which are rather Right than Left, rather Cole-Stracheyist than Marxist, is perhaps connected with the remark of another leading speaker about 'the emergence of a Forum point of view'.

The passing of the Hornsey amendments must have come as a disagreeable surprise to those who were assuming they had already captured the Forums for their pet trend.

London, N.

Observer

### I FIND YOU 'THINKERS' TOO ARROGANT

I AM not satisfied that the Forum movement can be of any real service to the Labour movement. In spite of emphatic statements on the need to belong to and strengthen the Labour Party, the Forums can in fact have the opposite effect.

In the first place, instead of stimulating discussion inside the existing organization of the Labour Party, they carry it outside among an élite described by John St John as 'socialist thinkers'.

What are the majority of active Labour Party members but socialist thinkers? It is true that they speak plain English instead of Jargonese: it is true also that in many constituency parties political discussion has fallen into abeyance, but it only requires patient effort to revive it.

There seems to be among some ex-communists a hangover of intellectual arrogance, which makes them forget that countless members of the Labour Party have a sounder grounding of political theory, gained in night schools, colleges, week-end schools and self-study, than they ever had.

Secondly, any organization which dissipates the time and energy of even a few potential Labour Party active members by organizing its own meetings, conferences, money-raising efforts etc. is doing a real disservice to the Labour Party, where every available active member is needed.

The Forum movement can so easily become an escape for those ex-communists who cannot face the humdrum work in Labour Party organizations and are missing the cosy sectarianism of the Communist Party.

New Malden (Surrey)

Elin Williams

## TROTSKYISM IS STALINISM MINUS SPUTNIK

YOUR anniversary number, despite many good features, seems dominated by the Trotskyist legend. I am not using Trotskyist as a term of abuse, nor am I disputing the need to study Trotsky's own works.

So much that the Trotskyists used to allege about the Soviet Union has now been officially admitted that the superior smile on the face of the Trotskyist is very easy to understand.

Nevertheless Trotskyism as a myth, or system of myths, is no more than unsuccessful Stalinism—Stalinism without the Sputnik.

Like Stalinism, it has its own vocabulary of jargon. Bukharin, we learn from your potted biography, 'held legalistic position on Constituent Assembly'.

In English, this means that he thought the Constituent Assembly, Russia's first attempt at founding democratic institutions, ought not to be dissolved. If that is what he thought, then three cheers for Bukharin.

Every democratic means of expression that Lenin suppressed, every paper he closed down, every rival Left-wing grouping that he drove into exile or silence, made Stalin's road to absolute power that much easier.

### Such a romantic veil

To understand the roots of Stalinism, we must go back to Lenin. Here Trotskyism is a terrible hindrance, because the Trotskyists throw such a romantic veil over the figure of Lenin and it's hard to study what he actually did. For example, they all agree that Lenin, at the moment of seizing power, counted on a German revolution.

'The Bolshevik leaders . . . believed that it would be a well-nigh impossible task to achieve the transition to socialism without the support of the west European working class,' writes Michael Banda.

This doesn't prove Lenin a scientist. It proves him a gambler. And it wasn't the fault of Stalin that this gamble didn't come off. What Stalin and Trotsky disagreed about was how best to pick up the pieces, after the revolutions in all other countries had failed.

Stalinists claim that all the ensuing crimes and horrors were a necessary consequence of the attempt to build socialism in one country. Trotskyists will tell you exactly the same.

The only difference between them is that the Trotskyists think the attempt should not have been made; the Stalinists think it should. If this really were the issue, I'd be on the side of the Stalinists.

But it is not the issue. It was no help to the building of socialism in one country when Stalin deported whole nationalities and persecuted Jews.

### They had a tough struggle

The suppression of all freedom in speech and writing was a hindrance even to the people who did the suppressing. They were so far the prisoners of their own propaganda that in the first draft of their textbook on economics the Soviet 'experts' declared that the British workers were worse off than they had been a hundred years before.

The British communist leaders had a tough struggle to convince them they were wrong. (The French communist leaders, I understand, did not even struggle, but obediently stated that the French workers were worse off.)

It is no help to any kind of socialism that first its masses and then its leaders should be denied all access to basic facts.

But this is a process that goes back to Lenin. Read his speech of May 19, 1919 (published in this country by Lawrence and Wishart under the title 'The Deception of the People') and observe his insistence that the people should not be allowed to read the works of the socialist-revolutionaries, which he, Lenin, had found it necessary to read.

Where's the difference between this and Stalin's action in suppressing the works of Trotsky? The culmination of the process was that Stalin himself ceased to read anything distasteful to him, so that before his death he had a completely fantastic picture of the outside world.

This was not the result of a conscious 'betrayal', as the Trotskyists are so fond of calling it. Nor was it the result of anyone's class interests. People get persecution mania. They get it, as a rule, when they have in fact been persecuted; but it is none the less a terrible illness, and the things the patient does when he has it are not in his own interests.

Whole nations can be ill in the same way, as Britain was with the spy mania of the 1914-18 war, as Germany was under Hitler, as the United States was when swayed by McCarthy.

And no doubt the purge mania in the thirties, the cold war mania before Stalin's death, affected a great part of the Russian people.

What brings a nation back to sanity after one of these bouts is the voice of the sane minority. Where it has no voice, as in Hitler's Germany, the whole nation has to suffer with its lunatic leaders. And Stalin's Russia just escaped the same fate.

For Stalin started the Korean war, or at least failed to stop it when he could have done, and Truman was within a few hours of dropping the atom bomb which would have set the world alight.

If Britain had had no sane minority, no freedom of speech and the Press, would Attlee have flown to stop Truman? If the Soviet Union had had a well-established free Press, could Stalin ever have plunged so far towards disaster?

We have too long accepted Lenin's idea that no 'legalistic' checks and balances are needed to control a leader who really believes himself to be acting in the interests of the workers. But the leader may be mistaken. He may be mad. To judge from his own writings, Trotsky, in Stalin's place, would have been even more of a menace to humanity.

Democratic institutions, freedom of speech, Press and meeting—these are not hindrances on the road to socialism. They are the stuff of socialism itself.

London, N.10

Alison Macleod

## MARXISM TODAY'S VICAR OF BRAY

So we are to have a series of articles in *Marxism Today* on the history of the British Communist Party from the pen of R. Page Arnot—a Vicar of Bray if ever there was one!

In the history of the Russian Revolution which he wrote for the Labour Research Department in 1923 he showed the New Economic Policy as the brain-child of Lenin and Trotsky, 'the most far-sighted of the Bolsheviks'.

In the obituary of Lenin he contributed to the LRD Monthly Circular for February 1924 he wrote that in October 1917 'Lenin and Trotsky alone said "This is the moment".'

In the history of the Russian Revolution Arnot wrote in 1937, however, both the October Revolution and the introduction of the New Economic Policy are made to take place against Trotsky's opposition!

Readers will doubtless study Arnot's forthcoming articles with great care, comparing his statements wherever possible with contemporary documents.

London, W.

Historicus

## THERE'S NO WOOL OVER THEIR EYES

AN atomic power research station is being set up near the village of Winfrith, in the parish of Wool, a 'picturesque' but neglected area which includes part of Thomas Hardy's Egdon Heath.

Recently, Wool parish meeting passed a resolution welcoming this project—and expressing the hope that now the area may at last get the piped water supply and modern sewage it has hitherto had to go without!

Comparing a small thing with a great one, I should think a lot of people in Russia are reacting in a similar way to the sending up of the satellites.

'Good! And now, perhaps, the authorities who can do such wonderful things on that plane will get a move on with the provision of adequate housing for the people, and so forth.'

Wareham (Dorset)

J. Williams