

THE NEWSLETTER

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a service to socialists

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Summing up the TUC

WILL LEFT DEEDS MATCH THESE LEFT SPEECHES?

By Our Industrial Correspondent

THE 1957 Trades Union Congress produced plenty of Left resolutions and Left speeches. It rejected wage restraint and called for the forty-hour week, higher old age pensions and the ending of nuclear tests. But the question militant workers are asking is: 'Will the Left speeches be translated into militant deeds?'

Frank Cousins and the other members of the General Council may have left Blackpool satisfied with their handling of the Congress. It was the quietest TUC in years. There were no revolts, no clashes between floor and platform.

Sir Tom Williamson and Cousins (and Hugh Gaitskell) can congratulate themselves that the thorny question of public ownership was tidied up with an unopposed motion which commits the TUC to precisely nothing.

The platform took up a position midway between the demands for more nationalization and the share-buying proposals of 'Industry and Society'.

The Constructional Engineering Union had a clear and forthright motion on the original agenda reasserting that

USA

JOSEPH CLARK BREAKS WITH STALINISM

JOSEPH CLARK, foreign editor of the New York *Daily Worker*, this week resigned from the paper, and from the U.S. Communist Party of which he had been a member for twenty-eight years. He said in his resignation statement:

'To remain in the party tends to lend support to the disastrously anti-Marxist policy which has time and again isolated us from the American workers, as in 1939.'

Party membership had dropped by about 60,000 in the past ten years, including the great majority of its working-class and Negro members as well as writers, scientists, professionals, party organizers and *Daily Worker* editors and reporters.

Last year party membership fell by at least 7,000 from its total of 17,000 members, he revealed.

Joseph Clark believes that American communists should have shown 'solidarity with the Hungarian workers opposing Soviet intervention' and that 'socialism can be served only by a complete break with Stalinism'.

The American Communist Party, he adds, 'has increasingly tried to impose its dogma upon American reality'.

FAST ACCUSED OF 'ZIONIST FABRICATIONS'

An attack on Howard Fast in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of August 24, referring to observations made by Fast about the treatment of Jews in the USSR, claims that he 'repeats the fabrications of bourgeois nationalists and the most aggressive reactionary agents of Zionism'.

STILL THE TRUTH, WHOEVER SAYS IT

Sovetskaya Kultura for July 3 quotes with pleasure an article in the Madrid fascist paper *Arriba* praising a new Soviet film about Don Quixote, together with expressions of alarm at the prospect of an American film on the same topic.

No doubt the praise accorded to the Soviet film is fully deserved—and this example may be recalled when the hoary old argument is used about praise in the bourgeois Press being automatic proof of treason to socialism!

MAURICE PELTER'S ARTICLE REPRINTED

There has been considerable interest in Maurice Pelter's account of his conversations with young Russians at the World Youth Festival in Moscow (*The Newsletter*, August 31, p. 115).

This article is therefore being reprinted as a twopenny pamphlet, 'Russian Youth Awakes'. Copies can be obtained from *The Newsletter*, 180, Clapham High Street, London, S.W.4.

WHAT THE RUSSIANS WERE TOLD

This was how Pravda's correspondent at Blackpool reported, in that newspaper's issue of September 6, the Trades Union Congress discussion on Hungary:

'A brief but stormy debate took place on the section of the General Council's report in which the Right-wing leadership of the British trade unions gave an estimation of the events in Hungary borrowed from slanderous American propaganda.'

There follows an excerpt from the speech by Leo McGree (described as 'representing the woodworkers' union') in defence of the Soviet action in Hungary, and one from the speech of Dave Bowman, but no indication is given of what was said by Bob Edwards or Brian Behan.

The report ends: 'It was characteristic that not one of the members of the General Council dared to come out in defence of the section of the report dealing with Hungary.'

'However, utilizing the complicated rules of British trade union procedure, they managed to get this section adopted without a vote.'

'the first step in building socialism is the public ownership of the basic means of production and exchange'.

This motion, however, was merged with others into a composite motion in vague terms, which was supported by the General Council.

On its behalf W. Heywood declared: 'I hope no one will go away with the idea that there is a wide and growing divergence between us on this subject, because, in fact, we regard the differences as differences of emphasis which are not irreconcilable.'

'The General Council regards the Labour Party statement as an adjunct to a nationalization programme rather than a substitute for it.'

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COMMENTARY

TOWARDS BRIGHTON

THE eyes of the Labour movement are turning to Brighton. The rank and file want a conference that will prepare for victory at the next General Election, which they are determined will take place long before the Tory Government has run its full term. For the working class can less and less afford the luxury of a Tory Government. Profits and dividends have swollen. Prices have risen. The old age pensioners and other groups with fixed incomes and no industrial strength are especially badly off. Brighton must translate the wishes of the organized workers into a political programme for sweeping the Tories out of office and returning a Labour Government to power.

Perhaps no debate at Brighton will have wider or more immediate repercussions than that on the Rent Act. Nothing the Tories have done in their term of office has affected so many working-class (and middle-class) homes. By now most tenants know what increases they have to pay—and on top of these substantial rate increases are almost inevitable. All over the country people want to hit back at the Tories for this piece of class legislation. The working class is looking to the Labour Party for a lead.

Unhappily none of the motions about the Rent Act, as they now stand on the Brighton agenda, is entirely adequate. They call for legislative action after the return to power of a Labour Government. Amendments which will appear on the final agenda, and the conference discussion itself, will make it clear that what is wanted is action *now*. Mass demonstrations up and down the country; refusals by Labour-controlled councils to help implement the Act; organized resistance to evictions: these are the only steps which can meet the situation. If the conference adopts such a lead it will help sound the death knell of the Tory Government.



KINDNESS—AND TERROR

ON Sunday the American army granted the wish of a Negro woman who was born as a slave 108 years ago that before she died she should see 'a tank, a general and the flag coming down'. It was a charming act of kindness to an old woman who must have drunk her fill of her race's cup of sorrows. But it cannot wipe out the memory of countless acts of racial discrimination and violence that stain American history, recent history included. It cannot bring back to life 14-year-old Emmett Louis Till, kidnapped from his grandfather's house in Mississippi and brutally lynched by men who were later acquitted by a white Mississippi jury. It cannot make up for the missiles which greeted Autherine Lucy when she tried to attend college; or for the terrorism currently being used at Little Rock to prevent Negro students from receiving education. As long as the Ku-Klux-Klan mentality is allowed to flourish in the South, American protests about Hungary at the United Nations are so much hypocrisy.

TUC (Continued from front page)

Clearly the fight of the rank and file for a socialist policy will have to continue.

Though rejecting wage restraint the TUC is still continuing its regular collaboration with the employers and their government on bodies like the British Productivity Council and the National Production Advisory Council on Industry.

Moreover, the TUC did not throw out arbitration as a weapon of the employers. On the contrary, union leaders admitted, in effect, that they found some of the arbitration legislation useful in controlling the rank and file.

Bank employees' motion

Thus the National Union of Bank Employees submitted a motion complaining that Industrial Disputes Order 1376 was being used by the banks to favour their own company unions—and the General Council asked the bank employees to remit the motion, as Order 1376 protects established unions from breakaway organizations and unofficial bodies.

The main shortcoming of the Congress was its failure to discuss a policy for meeting the growing employers' offensive against trade union organization, which includes the victimization of militants.

The lessons of the Briggs and Covent Garden struggles have evidently not been learned.

But unless the offensive is met and defeated all the positive decision of the 1957 will remain up in the air. The workers already have the militancy needed to defeat the offensive. But have they an adequate leadership?

ECONOMICS

WAGES UP, BUT SOAP STILL GOLDEN

By Our Economic Correspondent

TOTAL sales by the Royal Dutch-Shell group in the first half of 1957 are up by £22,292,000 over the first six months of last year.

Total sales were £1,307,499,000 in 1957, as against £1,095,157,000 in 1956. Net profits are £110,518,000 compared with £84,044,000. This is a very gratifying result for the shareholders.

It is not surprising that £1 shares of Shell Transport are standing at £10, while Royal Dutch Petroleum shares (nominal value 20 florins—approximately £2) are quoted in London at £23 8s. 6d.

Losses offset by higher sales

So far as Royal Dutch-Shell is concerned losses in Iraq and Kuwait through Suez were more than made up for by increased sales of Venezuelan oil.

Very different, though, was the experience of Unilever Ltd and Unilever N.V. Here again there is an Anglo-Dutch partnership, this time in soap, margarine and retail groceries.

The two companies notched up £846 million in sales in the first six months of this year, against £813 million in the first half of 1956.

In spite of this net profits have dwindled from £22,400,000 to £19,400,000. This, by the way, is another answer to the argument that higher wages must lead to higher prices and therefore a loss of sales.

Plenty of jam left

Unilever Ltd. and Unilever N.V. have both had the same trouble as Imperial Chemical Industries and Associated Electrical Industries—increased costs have had to be met out of profits.

Of course in each case the profits have been adequate to meet the increased costs and still leave plenty of jam for the shareholders.

These are useful facts to keep in mind next time we are told that increased wages would price British products out of the world's markets.

The Week at a Glance

CUBA: Rebel forces which attacked the south district naval station at Cienfuegos were driven off after heavy fighting.

TUNISIA: The president, Habib Bourguiba, ordered a state of emergency to be declared along Tunisia's frontier with Algeria.

POLAND: Gomulka announced that this year's harvest was bigger than in recent years, and thanked the peasantry. About 700,000 peasant households were now entirely free of all compulsory deliveries to the State, he said.

FRANCE: Witold Chomentowski (46) head of the broadcasting department of the Polish foreign service, who had gone to France to buy television equipment, was arrested by French police. It is alleged that twelve years ago he was condemned in his absence to forced labour for life for collaboration with the nazis.

JORDAN: Mortars, anti-tank guns and 106-millimetre recoilless rifles were among the 'emergency defence weapons' which the USA began ostentatiously pouring into Jordan, to guard against 'communist subversion'. There is to be an emergency programme for training the Jordanians in the use of the weapons.

GHANA: Geoffrey Bing, QC, former Labour M.P. for Hornchurch, was appointed Attorney-General.

GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC: Many members of the outlawed West German Communist Party were arrested, and propaganda material seized.

ITALY: Two people were killed and several others injured in a clash between police and wine-growers demonstrating against poor prices at San Donaci, near Bari. The police opened fire with rifles and sub-machine guns.

KASHMIR: Prime Minister Ghulam Mohammed said the police had seized 'huge quantities of arms and explosives following the arrest of a number of [presumably Pakistani] 'enemy agents', and that 'sensational evidence' was found.

USA: Judge Davies rejected a petition for a postponement of racial integration of classes at the Little Rock high school. Governor Faubus of Arkansas said that in spite of the Federal Court order state troopers would continue to turn back any Negro children who tried to enrol at the school. A school was blown up with dynamite at Nashville (Tennessee) within a few hours of the first Negro child's admission.

The Wolfenden Report: A Socialist Doctor's View

By Our Medical Correspondent

THE MAIN substance and recommendations of the Wolfenden Report are by now widely known. Its implications for socialists have not, perhaps, been so widely discussed.

The findings of the Committee were made on the basis of evidence submitted to them by a wide variety of organizations and individuals including several self-acknowledged homosexuals—but no prostitutes, despite the efforts of the Committee to obtain their point of view.

The first observation to be remarked is the widespread occurrence of both homosexuality and prostitution. They appear to have no more class differences than other basic human activities, such as eating or sleeping.

Homosexuality is common not merely throughout the human race and human history, but is frequently observed among higher animals. Prostitution, on the other hand, remains a phenomenon of social mankind, unrelated to its class structure.

The next problem for socialists arises from that posed by the Committee itself: how far has the State the right to interfere with the private moeurs of its citizens?

It cannot be outlawed

The Committee decided that, so far as homosexuality was concerned, no compelling reason exists to justify such interference. In consequence—and to bring Britain's laws into conformity with those of the majority of European countries—the Report recommends that homosexual practices between consenting adults should be longer be illegal.

(Homosexuality, of course, cannot be made illegal, any more than ingrowing toenails; it is an integral, if unfortunate part of the individual.

Recognizing this, the Committee propose that the laws be altered to allow these individuals to lead fuller and happier, if rather unusual, lives. Had it been ingrowing toenails, they would have recommended the changing of the law prescribing universal tight boots.)

Apart from the difficulty of defining 'adult' in this context, the Committee have inevitably met other difficulties in the violent and violently expressed opposition of the sexual purists.

This despite the Report's clear warning (para. 24) that 'a persistent and indignant preoccupation with the subject of homosexuality has been taken to suggest in some cases the existence of repressed homosexuality'.

The nature of this opposition, coming as it does from the

same quarters which demand the retention of the death penalty and the reintroduction of corporal punishment for juvenile delinquents, may persuade the unwary socialist into an easy and almost uncritical acceptance of the Committee's recommendations.

Charles Connell, interviewing Sir John Wolfenden on television, emphasized the inconsistency of denying the State the right to legislate against homosexuality while allowing it to legislate against incest. The paradox exists, and the Marxist must examine it seriously.

The role of public opinion in influencing the laws of the country has also been examined, both by the Committee and their critics.

If the Committee are accepted as objective and impartial seekers after truth, their recommendations must have been made on the basis of the evidence submitted to them.

Grave public disquiet

Since it was possible for any opinion, public or private, to be expressed to them, it seems reasonable to deduce that the Report reflects at least a knowledgeable and influential section of public opinion.

Moreover, the establishment of the Committee three years ago was the outcome of grave public disquiet over the sudden increase in police action against homosexuals at the time—action which many think was initiated under U.S. influence in an attempt to 'clean up' the foreign service, and which spread to some unexpected corners. This theory is not accepted by the Committee, which rebuts it on rather flimsy evidence (para. 30).

In general the Committee's review of the problem of homosexuality offers a comprehensive and well-balanced account of the psychological and social medicine of the phenomenon, with a careful assessment of the methods available to deal with its less socially desirable manifestations.

Commonly believed myths

In particular its appeal for more research into the subject and for a review of the prison medical service will win wide support among socialists.

In its second section, the Report explodes some commonly believed myths concerning prostitution. The Committee are particularly concerned with the souteneur and the brothel keeper, though here they are more emotional and less rational than when dealing with homosexuality.

The Report acknowledges (para. 302) 'that the arrangement between the prostitute and the man she lives with is usually

(Continued overleaf, col. 2)

THE PRESS ON THE REPORT

Here is a selection of newspaper headlines and comments on the Wolfenden Committee's report the day after its publication:



THE TIMES: Proposal to Relax Law on Homosexuality

Nearly all civilized countries recognize the futility of making into crimes what are regarded as sins against morality. Britain recognizes this too in respect of fornication, adultery, prostitution and Lesbian practices, but not in respect of male homosexual practices. This differentiation . . . is now . . . firmly condemned by the Wolfenden committee.

The report is equally sound on its second big issue, the law of prostitution . . . Much heavier penalties are also justified.



MANCHESTER GUARDIAN: Easier Laws Urged on Homosexuality

A fine piece of work . . . There is a strong movement of public opinion in favour of some quick action which would make the evil [of prostitution] less apparent, even if it is hardly less real . . .

If a prostitute seeking customers affronts public decency, so does a man seeking a prostitute; if she commits an offence which may put her in prison for three months, should not he . . . be liable to a charge at least of aiding and abetting?



NEWS CHRONICLE: Sex Law Clash Ahead

It is very doubtful whether the committee is right to resort to increased penalties as its solution to clearing the streets. Mere concealment may do more harm than good . . . although the committee dismisses it lightly, there would also be greater opportunities of corrupting the police . . .

The only real answer lies in education and the moral attitude of the citizen.



DAILY HERALD: The Vice Report Starts Row.

The Government . . . should act more sternly against the organizers of vice than the committee proposes . . . Homosexual vice—or weakness—is so abhorrent to normal minds that public opinion will be slow to accept [the proposed] change.



The **DAILY WORKER** was the only national daily which did not have an editorial on September 5. (Five days later its women's page editor commented, but only on the prostitution aspect.)

Its headline said: **Big clashes likely on sex-law report** and its political correspondent wrote:

The committee's report . . . is sure to be attacked by many for being too lenient, by others for being too harsh in some directions.



DAILY TELEGRAPH: No Early Action on Vice Report

[The committee] has done a considerable service in its attempt to define the boundary between public and private morality . . . Many will share [Mr. Adair's] opinion that homosexuality in any form, if legalized, may spread like an infection.

WOLFENDEN (Continued from previous page)

brought about at the instance of the woman, and it seems to stem from a need on the part of the prostitute for some element of stability in the background of her life'.

It states categorically: 'In the main, the association between the prostitute and the "ponce" is voluntary and operates to mutual advantage.'

To this sad but human situation the Committee apply the emotional criterion which springs from the abhorrence we all share towards the 'organizer and exploiter' of prostitution—a figure who elsewhere in the report is reduced to a size offering much reassurance to the ordinary citizen and bitter disappointment to the gutter Press.

In these circumstances, the Committee appear to have failed in applying the same praiseworthy objectivity to their recommendations as they do in the case of homosexual practices.

The Wolfenden Committee's Report cannot be criticized for not doing what it was not asked to do, and the main body of the Report is confined carefully—and very properly—to the Committee's terms of reference, namely, the relationship, present and proposed, of the law to sexual matters.

In doing so it finds time to be informatively discursive and analytical, and makes a number of recommendations which the forward-looking among us must find courageous and commendable—and a number of others which, at the very least, are arguable.

It is this stimulus which the Report offers to further discussion and airing of these hitherto shadowed problems, and the possibility thereby of providing an informed opinion on them, which is its greatest virtue.

Its most unfortunate—but probably inevitable—demerit is its failure to publish, in even condensed and anonymous form, the evidence on which it based its findings.

DAILY MAIL: Vice Storm Breaking

As we have said here before, great nations have fallen and empires decayed because corruption became socially acceptable . . . [The country should say] it will have nothing to do with proposals consenting to legalized degradation in our midst.



DAILY EXPRESS: Vice: the Storm Breaks

A report on vice that adds nothing to what was already known about it . . .

Why did the Government ever sponsor this cumbersome nonsense? Anyone would think prostitution and perversion were a widespread problem. In fact the majority of British homes never come into contact with either.



DAILY MIRROR: VICE: OFFICIAL Don't be shocked by this Report. It's the Truth. It's the Answer. IT'S LIFE

If the Government accept the Report—and act on it QUICKLY—the streets will be cleaned up. The youth of this country will not be exposed to the temptations of blatant and corrupting vice.



The **DAILY SKETCH** had the previous day prepared its readers with a 'sober, responsible and unfettered account' of 'Lawless London: the Brutal Truth'. It headlined its account of the report: **Starkest report of all time. STREETS OF SHAME—SIR JOHN**, and commented:

There can surely be no objection to their views on prostitution . . . They would make life tougher—and less profitable—for the women of the streets.

YUGOSLAVIA

TWO ATTITUDES TO WORKERS' COUNCILS

By Tony Guthrie

WORKERS' COUNCILS in Yugoslavia have developed beyond the experimental stage. In Poland their resurgence after eight years has provoked a certain confusion born of hope and fear. In Yugoslavia the party leadership encourages and helps their development.

In spite of the continued influence of a personality cult in Yugoslavia, in spite of the country's own brand of bureaucracy, workers' councils have become powerful.

This factor will no doubt influence the Polish leaders during the discussions in Belgrade.

The same adherence to principle that enabled the Yugoslavs to stand up to Stalin and weather years of isolation and economic boycott lies behind Yugoslav support for workers' councils.

In both Poland and Yugoslavia workers' councils are seen as a development of socialist democracy.

But the predominant section of the Polish United Workers' Party leadership saw them as **advisory bodies** at the Ninth Plenum—while in Yugoslavia they are seen as the responsible organs of management, as the essential means of **workers' self-government**.

Forces the leaders further

The existence of powerful workers' councils tends to force the Yugoslav leadership further along the path of socialist democracy. In this respect, in spite of local displays of extreme bureaucracy the Yugoslavs are ahead of the Poles.

Seven years ago, when they first encouraged workers' councils they had learned that they must either accept or encourage some form of genuine workers' control—or they would degenerate and sink back into conservative 'Stalinist' dogmatism.

This is something that the Polish party leadership has yet to learn. In Yugoslavia a third way was neither desirable nor possible.

In spite of the improved situation created by the Soviet Union's declaration of friendship for Poland and Yugoslavia it is unlikely that the two sides will be completely outspoken in any joint declaration, either about their proposals on internal administration or about international questions, particularly relations with the rest of the 'socialist camp'.

We can expect polite references to Soviet experience; but the mood of the Polish and Yugoslav peoples will also play a part in shaping the joint declaration.

Of the greatest advantage to European socialism would be the expression of views—either implied or stated in black and white—differing from Russian party dogmatism.

BULGARIA

BULGARIAN JEWS CONFER AFTER 5 YEARS

THE Warsaw *Folksztimme* carried a report by A. Levy of Sofia which stated that Consistory of Jews in Bulgaria recently met, for the first time since April 1952, in Sofia.

The conference heard a report by Isaac Francez, chairman of the Consistory, on activities during the last five years.

Mr. Francez said: 'It is our task to enlighten and convince all Jews that our own interests are in full harmony with the interests of the Bulgarian people.'

The conference decided to set up a Social and Cultural Federation of Jews in Bulgaria and adopted the statutes of this new organization.

USSR

MALENKOV'S MISTAKES IN AGRICULTURE

IN A full-page article in *Pravda* of August 24 N. Belyayev, one of the secretaries of the central committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, reviews the successes achieved in recent years in the opening-up of virgin and long-fallow lands in South Siberia and North Kazakhstan and discusses new plans for the development of this area.

He incidentally gives some particulars of the struggle between Khrushchev and Malenkov over this programme of activity.

Malenkov, it appears, misdirected agriculturists by declaring that 'now that the sown area has been restored to its pre-war extent, the only correct line for increasing agricultural production is to improve the yields'.

He also misdirected them by stating that it was old-fashioned to estimate the progress of agriculture by the amount of grain produced.

On the contrary, Belyayev insists, increased production of grain is the necessary basis for progress in all other branches of agriculture, and one of the chief ways of securing it is through opening up new lands.

ANOTHER WRITER WARNED: BE JUST

V. TENDRYAKOV, one of the small group of writers headed by Ovechkin—who have hitherto been held up as examples of 'reasonable' and 'fair' critics of Soviet officialdom—receives a warning in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* for August 3, in connexion with a recently-published story of his.

'One certainly cannot say it suffers from any excessive confidence in the positive opportunities and possibilities of man . . .

Tendryakov talks of party executives at three levels, from branch to regional committee, but has not one kind word for any of them. Is this just?'

Tendryakov's story 'Son-in-Law' has recently been issued in English as a Russia Today Book Club 'choice'.

SO THE PLAYWRIGHT 'DANCED THE GOPAK'

THE FOLLOWING appears in the report in a recent issue of *Teatr* [*The Theatre*] of a discussion among playwrights, dramatic critics and others connected with the stage.

Yu. Yurovsky said: 'Not long ago I had occasion to read a play in which a wedding at a collective farm figured in one of the scenes.

'At this wedding a collective farmer aged one hundred years out-dances all the other people present—except the party organizer.

'I asked the playwright what on earth he meant by this: in reality it certainly would not have happened like that. The writer answered: "In the original he out-danced the party organizer, too, but they corrected my text."

DON'T SHOUT AT THE MAN, COMRADE!

'Some party officials try their hardest to avoid addressing the working people because they fear what are called ticklish questions . . .

'Even if these are the sort of "ticklish questions" that demagogues sometimes fire at a speaker to embarrass him and give him a hot time and interrupt the normal course of a meeting, is it becoming for a party executive to fear this? . . .

'We need not cringe to backward elements but must come to grips with them and show everyone how wrong and harmful their conduct is. We must expose their views as being alien to the character of Soviet man . . . Shouting is not an argument but the sure symptom of the lack of arguments.'—*Party Life*, No. 14 (July), editorial.

SOME OF MY HEROES ARE BRASS HATS

In *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of August 31 Konstantin Simonov writes to explain, in reply to recent criticisms of a story of his in which an Army officer appears in a bad light (see 'What Made Baburov Afraid', *The Newsletter*, July 27, p. 87) that he really likes the Army and its commanders very much.

He mentions military men who figure as positive characters in his writings. The editorial board appends a sceptical comment on this apology.

A SOVIET LAWYER SPEAKS OUT

'It is high time to stop underestimating the role of the defence in criminal proceedings and categorically to reject the false conception of the advocate's work as being an obstacle to the dispensing of justice.

'For a correct verdict to be given in criminal cases, for the establishment of objective truth, the court must have reliable proof.'

Professor M. Strogovich, in *Izvestia*, August 24.

SCIENCE | The Origin of Life Conference

By J. H. Bradley

THE RECENT conference in Moscow on the origin of life has been given very little publicity in the British Press.

This is especially unfortunate, as it brought together for the first time noted experts in many fields—Professor H. C. Urey, geophysicist from Chicago, Professor J. D. Bernal, biophysicist from London, Academician A. I. Oparin, biochemist from Moscow, Academician A. P. Vinogradov, geochemist from Moscow, and others—each specializing in one of the many new branches of science indispensable to an understanding of this most complex of all studies.

The problem is no longer to suggest means by which life could have evolved (for everyone is agreed that under the conditions of our planet it would eventually do so) but to find the means by which in fact it did evolve.

We no longer have to deal with theories of divine intervention, or of the import of life on a meteorite, which give unlimited scope by being quite unverifiable.

* * *

Studies by Professor Urey on meteorites roughly parallel those of Academician Schmidt in the USSR, and suggest that the Earth formed about 1,000 million years ago. The presence of light compounds, such as water, shows that it was never much above its present temperature, and confirms the beautiful photographs of meteorites showing them to have been broken in fragments at fairly low temperatures, and never melted since.

The composition of the elements on Earth suggests they were formed around 3,000 million years ago in a very hot star—above the temperature of the present H-bombs—as there are many heavy elements like uranium and lead.

The work of Academician Fesenkov on new stars and nebulae, of many astrophysicists and nuclear physicists on thermonuclear reactions, and of geologists such as Vinogradov on the amounts and distributions of the elements have to be invoked here.

According to most theories, the action of ultra-violet light from the sun led to the formation of complex organic (carbon-containing) compounds; all life is based on carbon compounds, since carbon has the unique property of forming millions of different chains and rings, containing one to a few thousand atoms, and can combine with many other chemical groups.

* * *

Compounds with all kinds of different properties are made in this way, and their very versatility is the cause of many difficulties, e.g., the Asian flu.

This primitive 'world soup' may or may not have been in an atmosphere containing oxygen, and this is one of the important questions outstanding.

Some people think that all the oxygen was formed by green plants, and the evidence is very conflicting. There are few better studies in scientific method than the works of Vinogradov, Dole, Lane and others on the isotopic composition of water and oxygen, and its change in biochemical processes.

At any rate, there were no bacteria to purify the 'soup', in which more and more complex compounds would be formed. Prof. Bernal suggests that certain mineral surfaces would assist essential reactions, which could easily explain the strange fact that biochemicals tend to rotate polarized

light mainly to the right. Pasteur first showed that the corresponding left-handed substances were often of no use to living organisms.

Academician Oparin has made a close study of systems in which droplets separate out of a solution, forming little jelly-like masses which might have evolved into cells under undisturbed conditions.

Nearly everybody is agreed that the first organisms proper had one cell, but it is very doubtful whether these were bacteria as we now know them.

Biochemical studies are revealing many basic chemical mechanisms used by all forms of life; some adduce the adaptability of bacteria as evidence that they are primitive, while others think that adaptability can depend only on a highly evolved complexity.

This argument is one question which, happily, Zhdanov overlooked, and his lesser rivals had not the knowledge or the wit to build up a dogmatic body of pseudo-Marxism tied to the party.

Very few people pay much attention to the claims of Olga Lepeshinskaya to have observed the formation of cells from cell-free material—though her work is not an unmitigated waste, in that it has drawn attention to biochemical processes outside the living cell.

Work on the origin of life is not likely to cast any light on the evolution of higher organisms, though some sketchy attempts were once made by Haldane to relate such evolution to the conditions on Earth, and to see why an organism like man should be the predominant form.

It is not possible to review the particular work of the Moscow conference yet, nor would a proper review be very useful unless the reader knows something of the basis of argument and the different opinions.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

- Bernal, J. D.** *The Physical Basis of Life* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951)
- Oparin, A. I.** *The Origin of Life* (Macmillan, 1938) (A new edition of this book is long overdue)
- New Biology*, no. 16 (Penguin Books, April 1954) (articles by J. B. S. Haldane, J. D. Bernal, N. W. Pirie and J. W. S. Pringle)
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WHY THE SOVIET NUCLEAR POWER CUT?

By Our Science Correspondent

FOLLOWING my recent article in *The Newsletter* (August 24, p. 107) on the cuts in the Soviet nuclear power programme, I have found two clues to the scope and causes of this change.

Mr. W. K. Davis, of the American Atomic Energy Com-

mission, in a speech on July 22, 1957, pointed out that cuts were explicitly announced in a series of papers presented at the Belgrade meeting of the World Power Conference.

The plan has come down from 2,500,000 kilowatts to one million kilowatts by 1960. Considerable changes of emphasis on reactor types have also taken place.

This excludes my hypothesis of technical difficulties of a recent and sudden nature.

The real reasons are still obscure, though a little light is cast on them by two other reports.

Some British engineers say that industrial power in the USSR costs 0.3 pence per kilowatt-hour, as against one penny in Britain. This is largely attributable to hydroelectric power, and means that nuclear power has to fall below the 0.4 pence at which the British Atomic Energy Authority is aiming.

Since the depreciation on capital is about 0.25 pence per kilowatt-hour for present atomic power stations, with a life of twenty years, this is unlikely to happen.

Another factor is the Soviet plan to have coal power stations of 67 per cent efficiency by 1960, which exactly parallels the plans of this country. Present best efficiencies are about 37 per cent, and the new stations must have steam at 4,200 pounds per square inch and about 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit. This involves very severe difficulties with swelling and corrosion of steel pipes, difficulties which apparently are well on the way to solution.

The use of high efficiency power stations as district heating plants is just as worth-while as with present stations, and means similar slight reductions in the efficiency of the generators. This might bring the 67 per cent down to 60 per cent.

I hope to comment on the Belgrade papers when I have seen them. They seem to contain no plans for nuclear stations for industrial steam and domestic heating, which would be the simplest and most economic use of all. There has been one report of such a station for Sweden, on a small scale.

CINEMA

THE FIRST AMERICAN WITCH-HUNT

The Witches of Salem. (Academy, London)

WELL ABOVE the usual standard of French films received in this country is *The Witches of Salem*. Based on Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and adapted for the screen by Jean-Paul Sartre, it is most appropriate in these days when another kind of witch-hunt still continues.

The plot is laid in newly-settled America. The leaders of the Church fear that they are losing their grip on the local population, and eagerly seek a pretext to bring pressure to bear on them.

The pretext is provided by a beautiful young girl, Abigail, whose jealousy leads her to resort to the help of an acknowledged witch.

Abigail and her companions are caught in a blood-drinking mass, and innocent people, enemies of Abigail, are accused of being in league with Satan and acting for the Devil in helping to 'possess' her.

The Church authorities waste no time in getting an inquisition under way. Fear reigns in Salem, and four peasants are convicted and sentenced to death.

The alleged witches are offered their lives provided they confess their guilt. The resemblance to the Rosenberg case is striking.

One lesson emerges vividly from the film. The rich merchants of Salem, at first supporters of the purge, soon realize that they themselves are in danger. They form a committee to end the witch-hunt, and the people support this committee.

But the people soon see that the merchants are in fact supporters of the planned hangings. The people arm themselves, since they alone are capable of smashing oppression.

Bob Potter

BOOKS

ACCURATE SURVEY, FABIAN CONCLUSIONS

Post-War Economic Policies in Britain. By Harold Wilson, M.P. Fabian Tract 309 (Fabian Society, 1s. 6d.)

THE VALUABLE part of Harold Wilson's pamphlet is his survey of Britain's post-war history. There he shows the plight of British economy at the end of the war and its decline in relation to the United States.

He declares that the problems facing Britain could not have been solved without the 'internal planning and controls' of the Labour Government. But his survey shows that the basic problems were left untouched when the Labour Government failed to dig out capitalism at its roots.

We are told that a 'desperate condition' of all European economies was overcome by Marshall aid. 'But in the spring of 1949 the whole basis of our recovery was knocked away by a slight recession in America. This was no slump, merely a minor recession in American economic activity . . .'

The outbreak of the Korean war caused a boom in dollar earnings and pushed up gold and dollar reserves. There followed a period when 'world trade remained active and there was a continuing healthy demand for British exports'.

Wilson's solution for a capitalist economy dependent on world trade conditions is essentially the same as that of the Tory Government—'increase the drive for exports. He would attempt it slightly differently, of course.

His policy for a Labour Government is to spur forward increased investment as a means to maximum production, to 'pay our way abroad' and earn a surplus 'for the very necessary task of investing in under-developed areas abroad'.

But the colonial peoples will rightly view increased investment as increased exploitation. Certainly these areas need the products of British industry, as we need their primary products. The foundation for a joint solution of problems is their independence.

And a Fabian wind-break of 'controls' and share-buying will be scant protection against an economic blizzard when it blows on the world market.

George Cunylin

LETTERS

IS THIS WHY THEY DID NOT COMMENT?

COMMENT by the *Daily Worker* on the Wolfenden Report has been conspicuously lacking.

A factor hindering its freedom of comment may be the circumstance that homosexuality is a punishable offence in the USSR.

As the Webbs mention in their book 'Soviet Communism', in March 1934, without any public discussion, the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee suddenly issued a decree requiring all the republics of the USSR to add to their criminal codes an article making homosexuality between adult men punishable by three to five years' imprisonment . . .

When the great French writer André Gide—a well-known homosexual—joined the Communist Party he was acclaimed with enthusiasm; one of his books was even run as a serial in *Humanité*.

But when, on his return from a visit to Russia in 1936, he published his critical reportage 'Back from the USSR', his peculiarity was brought up to discredit him—all his criticisms being alleged by the Stalinists to derive from his disapproval of the treatment of homosexuals in the USSR.

London, S.W.

J. Brough

SAID 'FASCISM'S HERE'—IN 1932

THE '25 Years Ago' feature in *Labour Monthly* has this month a certain grim interest.

It takes the form of a quotation from an article by Thael-
(Continued at foot of next page)

There Are Two Johnny Gollans

By Alison Macleod

IT is always a strange experience to switch on TV and see a person you know. As a rule people pretend to be much nicer than they are; conscious sweetness flows like treacle from the actress who is a bitch in private.

But this pretence was reversed when John Gollan, general secretary of the Communist Party, appeared in the B.B.C. programme 'Give and Take'. For Gollan is a man whom I know to be, in private, good and kind.

In public he appeared as a callous politician, waving aside the slaughter of thousands, or trying to balance it against the slaughter of more thousands somewhere else.

EXPLAINING THINGS AWAY. The man I have known as endlessly patient in explanation was here not concerned to explain things, but to explain them away.

Three people were questioning him—Peter Calvo-coressi, Denis Healey, MP, and the BBC's 'anonymous' psychiatrist, whose name is Dr. Stafford Clark.

Whenever the questions asked by one of these became awkward, Gollan turned gracefully to a less awkward discussion with another.

He began by denying that British communist policy was 'the Soviet Union right or wrong'.

So Denis Healey asked him when his party had ever disagreed with the Soviet Union.

'But what,' asked Gollan with an air of astonished candour, 'do you want us to disagree with the Soviet Union about?'

Dr. Stafford Clark reminded him of the party's sudden change of line in 1939, when Stalin signed his pact with Hitler and then invaded Poland.

THEIR BREATH BACK. 'Russia never invaded Poland,' said Gollan, and succeeded in explaining about the Curzon Line before any of his questioners had got their breath back.

'We never opposed the war effort' was his reply to the next obvious question. 'Our members who were called up went and fought as well or as badly as anybody else.'

It was lucky for Gollan that his questioners did not recall Pollitt's TV interview last year. For Pollitt then admitted that from October 1939 to June 1941 the party had opposed the war, that he had voted against this policy, and that he still thought the policy had been wrong.

But instead of pressing the point they started asking Gollan about spies, with special reference to the late D. F. Springhall. Gollan parried that one easily by pointing out that the party had expelled Springhall for his activities.

Denis Healey asked about somersaults in the Party's policy. 'I am delighted to talk about somersaults,' said Gollan. He was glad the Labour Party had somersaulted, from supporting the making and testing of the H-bomb to opposing it.

He was asked how it was that his own somersaults always coincided with those of the Soviet Union.

'You defended every act and word of Stalin—until after he was dead.'

'There are many things done by Stalin which we still support' said Gollan. 'There were other things of which we had no knowledge . . . If we did not know these things about Stalin, how could we protest?'

Denis Healey asked incredulously if he really had not known that in the purges of 1937-41 Stalin shot 80 per cent of all the generals in the Red Army, and that of all the Politburo members of Lenin's time, only Stalin himself was left.

'Published in Pravda,' said Healey, when Gollan asked him where he got his facts. They hadn't been, of course, as Gollan pointed out. (This was a lucky quibble; the Khrushchev speech was never published in Pravda, and not even the speech gives exact figures.)

Gollan went on to account for Stalin's excesses by his war-time experiences; the Soviet Union had suffered more than any other country, and 'it tore the guts out of the Nazi Army'.

'An interesting phrase, showing hate,' murmured the psychiatrist, who apparently did not know that the phrase was Churchill's.

HIS MASS MURDERS. When it was put to him that Stalin's wartime experiences did not account for his mass murders in the thirties, Gollan said: 'I dispute that these killings took place to the extent you say'. He went on to talk about the 1,035 executions in Kenya.

'But why does that make it all right anywhere else?' asked the psychiatrist.

Brought back from Kenya, Malaya and Cyprus to the subject of Stalin's murders, Gollan said: 'When we knew about these killings, of course we denounced them.'

'After the Russians had done so,' said Denis Healey. 'Of course, after the Russians themselves had supplied the facts,' returned Gollan calmly.

There was another quibble when Healey said that Professor Hyman Levy had found 'rampant anti-Semitism' in the Soviet Union. Gollan said that Levy's report did not say that. (It does not, in fact, use that phrase.)

INNOCENT THOUSANDS RELEASED: But he did not quibble when Healey quoted the reports from the Polish papers that thousands of ordinary people had been released from prison, having been kept there for no crime.

Gollan asked his questioners to look at the record of the past forty years as a whole. Communism had raised countries from the dust. It had given the land to the peasant. It had not launched wars of aggression. (In the background someone repeatedly asked: 'Wasn't Finland a war of aggression?' but Gollan ignored this.)

The communist system, he went on, possessed within itself all the forces needed to put its own abuses right.

'Communism,' he concluded 'brings happiness.'

As the discussion faded out we saw Dr. Stafford Clark, not arguing, but simply studying Gollan, with a look of rapt professional interest. He might have been quoting Pope.

'Who would not laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?'

LETTERS (Continued from previous page)

mann, the German communist leader, which appeared in the Labour Monthly of September 1932.

In this passage Thaelmann refers to 'the fascist Papen-Schleicher Government'—an example of the way the Stalinists were sabotaging the fight against fascism in that fateful period by calling every conservative grouping fascist and talking as though fascism had already arrived.

London, W.3

'Historicus'

YES, WE SHOULD STUDY THE STATE

James Klugmann writes, in World News for September 7: 'There is nothing more important than bringing out into the open the class nature of the British State, because only when this is discussed and understood will the British people be able to see the road forward to socialism . . .'

Very true—and they'll see the fallacy in the Communist Party's British (Parliamentary) Road to Socialism!

London, N.

A. Jenkins