

Views & Comments No. 37

Libertarian League

February, 1960

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VIEWS AND COMMENTS is published as often as finances permit by the New York Group of the Libertarian League. All printing and other work connected with the magazine is done by volunteer labor.

Subscriptions: \$1 for 12 issues. Single copies: 10 cents.

Address all correspondence to:

VIEWS AND COMMENTS

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Cooper Station

New York 3, NY

Steel...and the crisis In American Labor by S.W.

After a number of postponements during which the steel trust and the United Steelworkers Union failed to negotiate an agreement, the general strike of 500,000 steelworkers was called on July 15th, 1959, shutting down 85% of steel production. After 116 days, the longest tie-up in the history of the steel industry, the workers were driven back to the mills by the Taft-Hartley injunction ordered by President Eisenhower. If no agreement is reached within 80 days, the workers are legally free to continue the strike and the President can then call upon Congress to take such action as he may recommend or as the Congress may see fit to take. At this writing the injunction has not yet expired.

The basic issue of this strike is the right of the employers to change the work rules. "Mill executives tell that doubling and tripling efficiency of specific operations by squeezing out manpower could save millions." (Wall Street Journal) Where no new machinery is installed, the boss wants a free hand to change crew sizes and conditions in his favor. Even the steel companies had recognized that the terms of the old contract did not interfere with their rights to automate and to decide how many men were needed for handling the new equipment, new processes and new materials.

However, the bosses want to be completely assured of full power to regulate and determine the conditions of labor without any threat of interference from the union and without the consent of the men on the job. Approximately one hundred thousand jobs are at stake. If the work rules are changed as now planned by management, one out of every five men will be discharged. The survivors of this purge will be forced to work harder. Their complaints will be ignored. Should they dare revolt by calling a wildcat strike they will lose one day of vacation pay for each day of the unauthorized strike. If the workers persist in such violations, they will be discharged and their local union will be held responsible.

There can be no question that the industry-wide strike was provoked by the steel trust after consultation with the leaders of American industry. A Dunn and Bradstreet survey of the presi-

dents of 175 leading industrial firms indicated their complete support of the steel trust. Robert J. Cordiner, Board Chairman of the General Electric Company declared: "A nationwide steel strike is inevitable because industry will not capitulate to the wage demands of the United Steelworkers." Before the strike, the steel companies had agreed that if the union struck any of them separately, the rest of the industry would support them financially and in other ways. A.H. Raskin, labor expert of the New York Times, in a report from Pittsburgh, Oct. 31, 1959, revealed that:

"Large employers who cannot get steel because of the strike, are willing to suffer a temporary drop in their own profits because they feel that the outcome of the steel conflict will determine whether the employers recapture the upper hand in their dealings with the unions. In the railroads, the automobile industry, electrical manufacturing and other fields, management is seeking to solidify its ranks in collective bargaining, with the double purpose of holding down labor's economic gains and of rooting out manpower waste. In that sense the battle in steel is the battle of all management."

In previous steel strikes the automobile manufacturing companies had pressed the steel industry and the President to settle. This time they had prepared for the strike by stockpiling enough steel to make 940,000 cars, and they did not complain when they later had to shut down the same auto plants due to a shortage of steel.

Management's "break the union" offensives in steel, railroads, the Atlantic and Gulf Coast docks and in the meat packing industry have received the broadest publicity. Although less publicized, the same thing has been taking place on an even broader front in medium and smaller businesses across the country. The North California Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America told its members: "Big steel has shown us the path. Now it's up to the rest of us to carry on the fight for managerial rights." The regional director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service in San Francisco reported that, "Management for the first time insists on work rule compromises."

The demands of the employers everywhere are in essence the same. The complaint of an official of the Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers Union, against the strike-bound Anaconda Copper Company, as reported in the Wall Street Journal sums up the sentiments of other unions in almost every strike situation:

"In return for paltry economic concessions, Anaconda proposes a series of provisions that would weaken the job security of the miners and smelters and deprive them of previously-won contract provisions, the company proposals would give the company the unqualified right to abolish jobs, deny the union the right to arbitrate disputes over pay rates for new jobs, further limit the union's right to process grievances and make the union responsible for production rates and discipline."

American capitalism has declared war against the labor movement. The steel strike marks the beginning of a new era of great class struggles. These conflicts will revolve around the profound social problems created by the second industrial revolution which was brought on by automation. Who will decide what will be automated and how rapidly? Who will decide which workers will be cast into the industrial garbage can and what provisions—if any—must be made for them? Will the boss continue to get the cream and the worker the skim milk? Each of the three main power blocs in North American Society—Big Industry, the State and the Labor Movement—will each try to resolve these issues to its own advantage. Who will get what, will depend upon the amount of pressure exerted by each in-the course of the contest.

In warfare the timing of an attack can be decisive. Why did the steel trust pick this particular time to launch its all-out attack? Why did the steel trust refuse to accept the modest demands which they had granted in previous negotiations? They felt that the time was ripe for a variety of reasons: the changed economic situation, the accommodating labor bureaucracy and the favorable administration in Washington. The steel strike represents the breaking of a pattern that was set in 1946, characterized by the granting of periodic wage increases which were passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices far exceeding the increased cost of labor. According to the Kefauver Sub-committee of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

”In our examination into the 1957 price increases, the Sub-committee found that the increase in price was substantially in excess of the increase in labor cost resulting from the rise in wages and other benefits as provided in the second year of the three year contract between the steel companies and the United Steelworkers of America... Steel scrap is an important element in steelmaking... Using data from the steel companies themselves, the Sub-committee estimates that the amount saved by the steel companies as the result of the decrease in scrap prices was greater than the wage increase. Labor costs had increased between \$2.50 and \$3.00 a ton of finished steel; prices increased \$6.00 a ton, leaving a margin of about \$3.00 and \$3.50. The steel companies thus raked in higher profits per unit from two sides—higher prices for finished steel in excess of larger labor costs and lower scrap prices. Every year has seen a rise in net income after taxes for each ton of steel shipped. In 1952, steel profits stood at \$6.80 per ton; by 1957 they had increased to \$17.91, an all time high...”

From this alone it is clear that the wage increases won by the steel strikes in 1946, 1949, 1952 and 1955, gave the bosses the pretext to raise prices. Furthermore, the strikes had all been called during the slack season. The steel industry however, can produce enough steel in less than nine months to last the full year.

In the 1959 negotiations the union had every reason to hope that the same pattern would be followed. It had advanced 250 demands dealing with the problems of automation, longer vacations, shorter hours and other far-reaching proposals. After initially proclaiming them, these important demands were in effect jettisoned by the union which then fell back on the old pattern, concentrating on the demand for a 25 cent hourly increase. To the surprise of the union the bosses refused to go along. They asserted that they could no longer grant wage increases which would only result in increasing prices. A slight increase in wages would be granted only on condition that the company reduce the number of men working and at the same time increase the amount of work to be performed’ by them—in other words—greater speed-up.

The steel corporations found this an opportune time to launch their all-out campaign to smash the union. A further consideration for the employers lies in the fact that almost one-half of their strike losses are tax-deductible. Hence the Bethlehem Steel Company saved \$42 million in taxes and United States Steel saved \$59 million. These companies do not of course pay supplementary unemployment insurance during a strike.

The contention of the companies has been that foreign competition from West Germany and other parts of Europe, from Japan, and from the international economic offensive by the world’s second greatest industrial power—Russia—have effectively shrunk the world market. Foreign competitors can sell steel at lower prices because their workers are paid lower wages. This contention is only partially true. The American steel industry is to some extent confronted with this problem.

Lower prices, say the steel companies, can come in only two ways—automation and the speed-up. But the workers know there is a third way which the companies fail to mention—that of reducing prices by lowering their own profits. They want to compete and undersell everyone and still make as much or more profit than they did when they had the market all to themselves. Since reduced prices are not to come out of profits, the cost of competing must be paid out of the sweat and blood of the worker and by the introduction of automatic gadgets that will ultimately abolish more than half of the jobs in the steel industry as had already happened in coal-mining and elsewhere. This is the real issue that is concealed by the innocent phrase, "change in work rules."

American industry is now engaged in the economic colonization of the world. Instead of exporting finished goods to Europe and other countries, U.S. capitalism is now manufacturing steel, automobiles, farm machinery, chemical products, etc. in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. North American capitalists own or indirectly control gigantic industrial combines throughout the world. An article by Richard M. Gardner in *The Reporter* (Dec. 10, 1959) says: "We have promoted competition not only by our tremendous recovery programs but through the establishment by American companies of branches and subsidiaries overseas." A breakdown of Gardner's figures shows that the American factories abroad exported to other countries and sold in the European market \$14 million worth of goods in 1958.

A headline in the *Wall Street Journal* of December 3, 1959 states: "Yank Plants in Europe Multiply to Tap Vast Market, Avoid Tariffs". The article that follows states: "The drift of American corporations into Europe's nascent common market is turning into a stampede... Yanks already on the scene are waving newcomers on, asserting profits are more prodigious and marketing prospects more pregnant than those back home." Another inducement (*Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 6, 1959) is that, "the flight of Yankee capital to distant shores, lured by the eye-popping ability of workers in other industrial nations to live quite comfortably on wages that seem by U.S. standards to be startlingly low."

Strange as it may seem, the steel companies and other American industries are competing with themselves!

The dilemma of capitalism is to compete in a shrinking world market without reducing its astronomical profits. To do this, automation is necessary, as well as greater speed-up and the lowering of wages wherever possible. Strikes cannot be tolerated. To the industrialists, a "good" union is a "responsible" organization which cooperates with them in their struggle for international economic supremacy. Unions may be transformed from fighting organizations into company unions. The doctrine of such unions must be that of straight class collaboration based on a "partnership of capital and labor."

Leaders of the most powerful North American unions, such as George Meany, David McDonald, Walter Reuther, David Dubinsky, are already fanatically committed to the principle of class collaboration. They head the labor aristocracy, the elite class of professional labor leaders, lawyers, welfare specialists, statisticians, journalists and other specialists who administer the ever more complex operations of their highly centralized labor empires. These people are labor brokers who act as middlemen between the employers and the Government at the top and the rank and file members of their own unions at the bottom. The labor broker, after making agreements with the bosses, sees to it that these contracts are obeyed by the workers under his control.

This new bureaucratic sub-class is a product of American capitalism and grew up along with it. They are prepared to make every concession to the bosses, but they can only do this if they keep a rigid control over the only commodity they possess—the economic power of the workers under their control. Should they lose the confidence of the workers they would no longer be able to deliver the goods. They would then be out of a job and would descend to the lowest rung on the economic ladder, to wit—they would have to go to work. They would lose the pleasant company of their cronies and fellow members of the upper managerial class.

By its very nature the leadership of the North American labor movement is incapable of conducting a militant counterattack against the capitalists. In the case of the steelworkers, the situation called for a fight that could bring the benefits of automation to the workers in the form of shorter hours and higher pay. The union should refuse to tolerate any layoffs because of automation or speed-up. If the rate of production is higher, the hours of labor must be shorter. The old slogan of the I.W.W., "So long as one man is fired because there is no work, the hours are too long," should head the list of demands of every labor union.

The Steelworkers' leadership did nothing whatever to prepare their members for the strike. They did not even see the depth of the crisis provoked by the employers. They did nothing when the mills worked night and day at a feverish pace to pile up steel in preparation for the stoppage. They did nothing when the steel trust laid off 150,000 men because of automation.

The leaders of the Steelworkers union expected token opposition from the employers. A small wage increase and a few changes here and there would show the members that their leaders were deserving of their big fat salaries. The leaders could then be assured of remaining in power until the next contract, when a few more concessions could be secured, and so on ad infinitum. It has been this way for years, but for once something unexpected-occurred. Emboldened by the compliant attitude of the union leadership, the companies demanded not a mere concession here and there, but a complete surrender by the workers of the few remaining shreds of independence which the leadership and-the companies had not yet taken away from them.

However, at this point, the reaction of the membership to the provocation of their employers changed the nature of the strike. Once more the anonymous rank and file wrote a glorious page in labor history. Such organs of big business as Newsweek, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal agreed that the demand of the steel trust for the revision of the work rules, transformed a routine bargaining session into a full-fledged class struggle.

A.H. Raskin wrote in the *New York Times* (October 25, 1959):

"No group ever gave less signs of welcoming a strike than the steelworkers when money was the issue. But when the company made clear their determination to get a free hand in changing established work practices, the men announced that they would let the furnaces rust before they surrendered... The union's morale appears firmer than ever. The lost wages and the hardships of feeding and clothing their families with no money coming in have brought no hint of readiness to capitulate on the rules issue. On the contrary, the sentiment in the mill towns is to stay out forever rather than let the industry have its way."

It was this attitude of the workers which prevented their venal leadership from capitulating to the employers. Against the wishes of their spineless leaders, Locals 2058, 1414, 2869 and 5726 in Southern California organized a motorcade to the La Quinta estate of George Allen, a director of the Republic Steel Company where his friend President Eisenhower was indulging in a golf spree. The demonstrating workers wore black arm-bands in-sign of mourning for the right to strike, killed by the Taft-Hartley-Eisenhower executioners.

A district director of the Steelworkers Union declared, "without the employers the strike would have been a disaster. Each week it went on the men got sorer about the things the company wanted to take away from them. This is an experience they won't forget for the rest of their lives, and the companies will pay for it every day."

Thus far, the members of the Steelworkers and other unions have been lulled by the class-collaborationist lullaby of the labor-capitalist-government trio. But the honeymoon is over. The harsh realities of the class struggle are opening their eyes. The workers are showing their exploiters and their leaders that they are a force to be reckoned with.

It takes this sort of crisis to remind the workers that the strength of the union lies not in the marble headquarters of Washington, nor in the size of the union treasury, nor in the pomp and circumstance of their officialdom. The fate of the union depends upon the dedication of its members and the will to fight for the ideal of free labor in a free world.

The leadership would undoubtedly have effected a sellout had it not been for the reaction of the workers who refused to hand over to the bosses the limited control that they still retained on the job. They became stubborn and would not agree on changes in the work rules. This placed the union officialdom in a most embarrassing position. To yield to management demands for a revision of the work rules would mean a full-fledged revolt by their membership.

McDonald had not forgotten that in 1956, the Rarick opposition had come close to unseating him. In spite of its incoherent character, the opposition was not dead. The Union bureaucrats were forced to take a stand. Open defiance of the capitalists by the leadership would mean a renunciation of their old policy of class collaboration. They could not make this revolutionary change because such a switch would be psychologically impossible and economically suicide for them. The dilemma paralyzed the leadership and the union. The bureaucrats were mortally afraid that out of the mass movement from below, new elements of leadership, harking back to an earlier tradition of revolutionary unionism might emerge and sweep them aside as had often happened in past crises in the history of American labor.

The labor fakery are trying desperately to extricate themselves from this trap. They are desperately seeking a reconciliation with the industrialists and are calling on the government to expedite it. George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, asked President Eisenhower to call a joint labor-management conference under White House auspices. The first two sentences of his letter to the President reveal this policy of reconciliation:

"With the steel strike fresh in our minds, I think it is appropriate to advance a proposal for reducing the likelihood of recurrence of such prolonged and costly industrial strikes. I would like to suggest that you call a national conference of union and industry leaders to consider and develop guiding lines for just and harmonious labor-management relations. In my opinion such a conference is most urgent." (N.Y. Times, Nov. 14, 1959)

The President agreed to consider the proposal, but the leaders of American capitalism, through the National Association of Manufacturers, refused to cooperate. They are genuinely class-conscious. They demand what amounts to complete destruction of the labor movement, while Meany is openly trying to negotiate away labor's greatest weapon—the economic power of the workers.

In 1955, this same George Meany told the National Association of Manufacturers:

"... I am president of this great organization (AFL-CIO) that has such tremendous power and I never went on strike in my life; I never ordered anyone else to order a strike in my life, never

had anything to do with a picket line. So if that is the type of power people have in mind, they should get another fellow for president, because I have no experience with that type of power.”

In this speech Meany spoke not only for himself. He was proclaiming the basic policy of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy.

In renouncing the principle of class struggle on the economic field, the labor movement had no alternative but to accept the principle of parliamentary action on the political field—a policy which had had disastrous results. This policy opens the door for control of the labor movement by the state since the fate of the labor movement comes to depend on the election of a ”friendly” administration. The battles of the working class must then not be fought out on the picket line but at the ballot box instead. ”If an unfriendly government is elected and passes anti-labor legislation,” say the Labor leaders, ”we must live with it. We will obey the law. When the next election rolls around, we’ll elect a liberal pro-labor government that will repeal the bad laws and enact good ones.”

Labor’s faith in the power of the ballot box stems from ”New Deal” days, a quarter of a century ago, when the Roosevelt administration made certain concessions to labor. These ”pro-labor” actions had the purpose of bringing the mass movement of the workers under control and prevented their upsurge from wrecking the stability of the system.

This faith has been recently renewed by labor’s great political ”victories” in the last elections. The labor ”politicians” were elated. Nationally, three-fourths of the candidates for the Senate and two-thirds of the candidates for the house of Representatives who were endorsed by the AFL-CIO were elected. In the state elections, two-thirds of the labor-supported gubernatorial candidates were elected. The anti-labor ”right-to-work” laws in California, Washington, Colorado and Ohio were defeated by labor’s votes.

Labor was confident that the votes of the grateful congressmen whom it helped elect would defeat the reactionary Landrum-Griffin Bill. Labor’s pre-election ”friends,” with rare exceptions, voted in favor of this anti-labor bill. Labor was deeply disappointed and George Meany’s lament that another such ”victory” will kill the labor movement indicates the scope of this catastrophic defeat.

While the Taft-Hartley Act was concerned mainly with government regulation of the relations between labor and management, the Landrum-Griffin law is concerned with the regulation of the internal life of the unions, not only nationally but on all levels.

Now the Government contemplates even stronger measures. The type of action that Congress may take is foreshadowed by the declarations of both Republican and Democratic congressional leaders and the titular heads of the political parties, Adlai Stevenson, President Eisenhower, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, Harry S. Truman and others. The so-called liberal and conservative factions of both parties are in substantial agreement on what action should be taken to protect the interests of the State in this period of increasing ”welfarism.” All their proposals boil down to the abolition of the right to strike. Conflicts that cannot be prevented—must be settled by enforced arbitration. The decisions of the arbitration boards must be enforced by the legal machinery and police power of the Federal Government.

The evolution of State regulation which began with the Wagner Labor Relations Act in the Roosevelt administration, was carried forward by the ”Fair Deal” administration of the ”liberal” President Truman and is now continued by the ”conservative” Republican administration of Eisenhower.

Both labor and big business are against compulsory arbitration by the Government because each is afraid that the Government may rule against it. The *Wall Street Journal* (Dec. 16, 1959), organ of big business, has this to say:

"Management, on the record, ought to be wary of compulsory arbitration. For in the early days of the New Deal, management had more than a bitter taste of what happens when government decides... Compulsion has two edges, and the time might come when the needs of government for production from the mills and the factories will balance the scales against the wishes of labor."

The State is neither neutral, nor is it as the Marxists say, "the Executive Committee of the Capitalist Class." If this were true, big business would welcome compulsory arbitration and gladly accept all the infringements on its power "for the good of the class." The State becomes a class in itself, seeking to increase its own power at the expense of all other institutions of Society. It is the supreme pressure group in modern society. The State jealously guards its own power and seeks always to extend it.

A strike lasting 116 days in a basic industry, which is not settled due to the irreconcilable interests of the contending parties, threatens the stability of the system. The big industrialists, the labor bureaucracy and other pressure groups each contend for greater power. As long as they can adjust their differences without affecting the nature and structure of the social order, the State may abstain from drastic action. However, when the struggle threatens to go beyond that point, interfering with the overall strategy and commitments of the government, when its continuance threatens the prerogatives of the State and no agreement can be reached—then the State steps in and, in its own fashion, compels a settlement.

Governmental arbitration involves the establishment of new legal procedures. This means the erection of new governmental agencies, the creation of new jobs for new hordes of technical, advisory and police termites. Thus the natural ability of such termites to multiply at a prodigious rate is accelerated.

To the extent that the power of the State is increased, freedom in Society diminishes. All great movements in the past which in any way contributed to the well-being and freedom of people have been accomplished by civil disobedience. The solution of the crisis in the labor movement cannot be found within the framework of the social system that is responsible for the crisis in the first place. Only outside of it, and in spite of it, can effective, meaningful solutions be found.

No law which violates the nature of man and his will to freedom should be respected. The right of a man to lend his labor power, to give his strength, or to withhold the use of his labor power or of his body for purposes of which he does not approve, is inviolable. The right to strike is the economic expression of the Bill of Rights. No law on the statute books can contravene it. Man has the right to give or to withhold his labor, individually and collectively, Taft-Hartley, Landrum-Griffin or other laws notwithstanding. A refusal to work under conditions that are regarded as slavery is Labor's most effective weapon.

These are principles which must guide the coming revival of the American labor movement. In the process of such a rebirth it will outgrow and finally free itself from the bonds which have limited its development.

Laugh if You Will by Lilith Lorraine

(from *The American Rationalist*, Jan.-Feb. 1959)

Laugh if you will at the fools who died
In your futile wars,
Laugh if you must as madmen laugh
Through golden bars.
Walk if you will in the Valley of Bones—
Bones that were ours,
Lay on our graves your blasphemous wreaths of innocent flowers.
Toast if you will "The brave who died,"
To make you Free,
Free to plunder the Treasure House of Liberty.
Smirk if you will in your smoke-thick haze,
You have had your day,
Laugh if you will, for we know we were fools, But do not pray.
—Alpine, Texas

* Dixie

From *The Crusader*, published in Monroe, N.C., by Robert Williams.

There is a new exodus in America today. The number of displaced persons is on the increase and added to the sum total is the American "captive people" commonly known as third class citizens designated by the title Negro. The toll of cities is rising wherein Negroes are becoming the pawns of racist-motivated phony housing programs. From St. Louis, from St. Paul, from Cincinnati, from Atlanta and Gadsden (Ala.) emanates the same repeated story reenacted in different locales and settings.

In Atlanta, 1,000 Negro families have been displaced with no place to go. Other cities are duplicating this record. The Negro press and the NAACP are strangely silent during a national racial crisis. Negro leaders are in the sensitive position now of being undecided about these so-called housing projects. Out of fear of being branded perpetrators of slum conditions, they take a wait and see attitude that entails possible complete chaos. Negro leaders are hoping and praying with all their hearts that the uphill climb of urban renewal toward racial animosity will level off before they are forced to show their true colors in the struggle for Negro liberation.

This ostrich type leadership is flirting with certain calamity. This problem of housing is the most important single issue ever to face the modern day Negro. The fate of all Negro gains hinges on whether the Negro will be allowed to live and share fully in American life or be forever banished to inferior ghettos and black reservations. The bigots of the South and their fellow travelers in Washington are planning a far-ahead chess board strategy that will rout and frustrate the Negro's march from Jim Crow and a third rate black satellite world. The Negro must display equal foresight for the future and struggle to break the vicious circle that forever remains to kill the dreams of a captive people.

In the South today and elsewhere, slum clearance is not purely slum clearance. It is sometimes well-cloaked "Negro Clearance" and a gold-digging property grab. No sane humane person could ever oppose decent housing for all people, but it is merely a matter of just plain common sense that even a shack is a better home than the open road. Modern society should rid itself of slum dwelling and slum standards of living but it is foolhardy to destroy the shack of the unemployed, the aged, incapacitated and pensioners who half survive on \$40 to \$60 a month and build new dwelling units that rent for from \$30 to \$40 a month plus other added expenses. The true slum conditions among Negroes in Monroe, N.C., stem from too little employment with substandard

wages. A good 95% of Negroes here have substandard incomes; it is asinine to think that the standard of living of these people can be raised without first considering this factor. Just where does the federal government expect Negroes here to obtain the extra money needed for added housing expenses? And what about the ones who own their own shacks now, but will not be able to comply with stiff rent demands or cannot qualify for a federal loan? Oh yeah, there is always the sub-standard Jim Crowed County Home (Po' house).

A new exodus is fermenting in America today. A new era of motion akin to the Grapes of Wrath era. People are on the move and some with no place to go. A sugar coated dictatorship is being played on the unwitting populace. State regimentation moves under the disguise of federal benevolence. Confusion is rampant. Negro leaders are highly sensitive about having to bear the responsibility for being branded leaders of a race, cold to social advancement, thus they fiddle while the program takes on added momentum.

Thousands of Jews became the eventual victims of their own apathy and indifference, out of a false hope of personal immunity, and trust in the good motives of Hitler's Third Reich. We hope the new exodus is not the sordid beginning of another race being wooed to the gas chambers and ovens under the pretense of being cleansed and de-liced. We hope not. However, we hope our social conscious government will soon offer to eliminate all slum type jobs with sub-standard wages. This, of course, will leave no ground for suspicion of an honest desire to banish slum living.

* * *

From *The Crusader*, published in Monroe, N.C., by Robert Williams. This mimeographed magazine is published weekly. Subscription rate: \$4.75 per year, \$2.50 for 6 months. Address: THE CRUSADER, 410 N. Boyte St., Monroe, N.C.

We recommend this publication to all those interested in following the struggles of the militants among the Negro people, those among them who, unwilling to limit their struggle to prayers, petitions and pacifist action, propose instead a policy of militant direct action, with an insistence on the elementary human right of self-defense by all means available.

History of "Utopia" by Maristo

Sointula is a small logging and fishing village located on Malcolm Island, about 159 miles north of Vancouver, British Columbia, in the jumbled maze of channels and islands of the inside passage to Alaska. The total area of the island is close to 30 square miles. It is more cleared of trees than the neighboring islands, and seen from a passing boat, Malcolm Island presents a tranquil air of settlement; but a closer look reveals that most of the farm homes are abandoned, standing forlorn and weather-beaten in derelict fields, among which the occasional clumps of ragged fir stand out as survivors of the rich forest that once covered the low hills.

On the south shore, facing Johnson Straits, and overlooking a small harbor used mainly by fishing boats, is the village of Sointula. The village is a collection of wooden houses that follows the curve of the white stone beach for about a half mile, with a few more houses scattered in open areas of broom and fireweed on the slope of the hill that rises toward the interior of the island. The single street is dominated by a two-story general store, and Sointula's amenities include a cafe whose juke-box offers the incongruous combination of Elvis Presley records and Finnish

ballads. A community hall is used to exhibit Hollywood films; the last time I was ashore there, an old Bing Crosby-Grace Kelly film was being shown.

Except perhaps for its isolated location, there is nothing much to distinguish Sointula from most other small Canadian towns. It is no better, or no worse; its inhabitants follow the usual occupations, and the village is well integrated into the logging and fishing economy of the coastal areas of this province. Its future, if any, is dubious, and its present a dreary conformity to the standards of the present inhuman social order, but Sointula does at least have a past in which social idealism played no small role; in fact, its past is the only thing about Sointula that is likely to engage anyone's interest today.

The very name Sointula suggests its curious origins; in Finnish it means "Place of Harmony," and this was the site of the only attempt ever made to establish a utopian community of any size in British Columbia.

The idea of the colony was the creation of a group of emigre Finnish Marxists, who worked out an elaborate blue-print. that was a typical masterpiece of utopian planning. But in common with many another band of dedicated planners, they came a cropper when they attempted to put their plans into practice. Their ignorance of local conditions was appalling, and their rigid planning made no allowances for the variable factors in human behavior.

The first party of pioneers landed on the heavily wooded shores of Malcolm Island in 1901, and from the very beginning, the ineptitude of their preparations, and the general atmosphere of fractured reality that surrounded the whole venture, involved them in an unending series of calamities and sufferings. From this point on, the history of Sointula is the depressingly familiar story of hardships and disillusionment that the history of many a similar venture provides.

To begin with, there was no cleared land for farming. The settlers, expecting to cope only with trees similar to the slim birch woods of Finland, found themselves confronted with the swollen giants of the British Columbia rain forest—the felling of which proved to be an exhausting and hazardous effort for inexpert labor. A considerable area of the island was swampy and its drainage involved a vast amount of back-breaking toil. The colony was never able to raise enough farm products for its own use, much less produce a surplus for sale, as was called for in the original plan. The soil and climate of Malcolm Island is not really suited for agriculture, and efforts in this direction were eventually abandoned; to this day the island is not self-sufficient in farm production. The community began on borrowed money, and was never able at any time during its existence to extricate itself from a crippling burden of debt. Attempts to put the colony on a paying basis by the sale of fish and lumber proved a failure, as prices at that time were very low, and the colony continued to slip further into debt.

The winter climate of Malcolm Island, although not subject to extreme low temperatures, is never the less often below freezing and for days on end receives a persistent downpour that is not quite rain, snow or sleet, but is rather a foul mixture of all three. With these depressing conditions, there were never enough weather-proof houses and many of the settlers lived in tents. Illness was general, cattle died from exposure, and life generally was a discouraging round of misery.

The original blue-print called for the application of a selective principle to new members of the community, but like many other good resolutions, this broke down when would-be colonizers began to stream in from all parts of North America, and even from as far away as Finland. Many came expecting to find a flourishing utopia, and instead found only the prospects of a winter in tents, and food in short supply.

Many departed as quickly as they came, and the colony had the transient atmosphere of a Greyhound bus depot. More than 3,000 people lived in Sointula for varying periods during the four years of its existence, although the average population never exceeded 200.

With every strike against them, it is a measure of the courage and capacity for self-sacrifice of the settlers that that colony lasted for even four years. Eventually the general misery of their existence, the lack of any foreseeable improvement in their living conditions, plus the inevitable internal discord, all combined to rub the bloom from their utopian vision. A fire which killed eleven settlers, and caused irremediable damage, was the final blow. When the creditors moved in to administer the coup de grace in 1905, only 36 never-say-die colonists remained to carry through the dissolution of Sointula.

The collapse of the colony was not, however, the end of Finnish colonization at Sointula. Many of the ex-members, after repairing their fortunes elsewhere by one means or another, returned to the site of their old failure, and today Sointula is largely inhabited by former members and their descendants.

But the heroic period of Sointula's history was over, and no further application of socialist principles has ever been attempted. The adaptation to the values of the capitalist order has been complete, and Sointula stands today as a frustrated monument to the collapse of another utopian mirage, a victim of both the chilly pressure of outside economic forces, and the built-in negative qualities of the utopian myth—the cult of planning without reference to human nature. The only relic of Sointula's socialist past that remains is the village co-op store, and its influence is felt elsewhere only in the vague legend that persists along the coast that the community was once somehow involved in the practice of "free love."

A brief, Indian-summer outburst of enthusiasm was felt in Sointula over the 1917 revolution in Russia. The red flag was raised over the community hall, and the old radical blood seemed to be working in their veins again. But the enthusiasm dissipated rapidly, and the village was soon back at its usual pursuits.

The evolution of Sointula from its idealistic beginnings to its present status of just another small cog in the mighty machinery of the capitalist order, dedicated to the ubiquitous pursuit of the fast buck, seems to be an almost classic example of the futility inherent in utopian planning. The urge to "get away from it all," to withdraw to an oasis of communal life from the surrounding desert of the old order, is understandable enough, but in effect it is more likely to be a retreat not from a bad reality into a good reality, but actually a retreat from a bad reality into no reality at all, thus by default promoting the negative forces at work in the present social order.

The social revolutionist who rejects the temptation to "get away from it all," and who chooses to throw in his lot with the rest of humanity, experiencing if necessary the rat race of life in the great population centers, and the common horrors of the nuclear age, has at least the satisfaction of knowing that he is in a position where some possibilities exist for influencing the destiny of mankind in a libertarian direction. It is my belief that only by aiding mankind in finding the road toward a libertarian solution of social problems can we reasonably find any hope of a less menacing future.

Concerning Anarchist Morality

”To be an Anarchist, it is not enough that one refuse to tolerate oppression, and strive to be free, with the ability to develop one’s own personality to-the greatest degree. If-this aspiration to unlimited freedom is not accompanied by the love of all mankind and the desire that all others be equally free, than it can only make rebels, but is not enough to make anarchists. To be an Anarchist means to make a choice between hatred and love, between fratricidal war and fraternal cooperation, between egoism and altruism. That choice is naturally for altruism, fraternal cooperation and love.”

—Errico Malatesta

Workers Councils by Balkansky

A certain Western specialist and sincere supporter of the workers’ struggles for emancipation recently visited Yugoslavia and expressed his disillusionment with the Workers’ Councils of that country in the following terms:

”To my questions, during visits to factories, most of the members of these councils shrugged their shoulders, embarrassed and impotent. Nodding their heads negatively, they proceeded to seek out the Director, as the only one in a position to answer my inquiries.”

This friendly intellectual unconsciously allowed his own prejudices as an expert to be seen. His professional attitude caused him to underestimate the institution of the Councils itself—an institution of which he had been a declared supporter. The logical development of his observations led him to the conclusion that the only one competent to manage an industrial enterprise in a period of great technical development was the engineer in charge.

This but indicates the extent to which the Workers’ Councils, their nature, and true economic and social functions continue to be misunderstood in spite of the numerous articles that have appeared in the press since the Yugoslav split, the ”Polish spring,” and above all since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

The idea of the Workers’ Councils as collective organisms for the control and management of industry—a profoundly proletarian syndicalist concept—is very old. It is encountered among the founders of the First International, especially in the writings of Michael Bakunin and James Guillaume, and in a still more precise form in those of Fernan Pelloutier and the early French and Spanish syndicalists. It never had anything in common with the Marxist theoreticians nor with the concrete tactics and activities of the authoritarian socialists who place all their hopes for social emancipation on the conquest of State power, which is expressed in the ”Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

As regards the Workers’ Councils as an institution, these sprang up spontaneously during the Russian Revolution of 1905 and again in that of 1917. Their constructive application was particularly convincing during the Spanish Revolution (1936-39), when direct syndicalist action through the Workers’ Committees had placed large sections of the economy in the hands of the working class.

The Yugoslav initiative, timidly imitated by the Poles, and greatly exceeded by the Hungarians in 1956, found their inspiration in the Spanish example.

The historic facts are such that many of our contemporaries ignore them completely or frequently forget them when they examine the Yugoslav experiments, judging the Yugoslav Workers' Councils as an isolated phenomenon.

On the other hand, the fact that Muscovite orthodoxy denounces the Yugoslavs as deviationists and revisionists, while the Yugoslavs themselves demagogically present the Workers' Councils as a concrete example of the "weakening of the State" in the present stage of the "building of socialism" passes almost unnoticed by many observers.

But no new idea, no new institution, is of itself automatically and miraculously revolutionary—a sort of master-key for the solution of all problems. The efficacy of any new social form is determined by the real social content given to it. And this content is in turn determined by the action of the people involved, by their thought, their spirit and the degree of their revolutionary impetus. The Bible recommends not putting "new wine in old bottles," but it should also be borne in mind that new containers can also be ruined if first contaminated by vinegar.

The Yugoslav Workers' Councils are but a parody of the really revolutionary institution they are supposed to be, since they lack the free creative spirit and the indispensable atmosphere and setting necessary for any effective renovation or reconstruction of society. Revolutionary Workers' Councils are incompatible with the existence of party cells in the labor organizations and with political and police dictatorship in the factories and in social life. Such dictatorship renders impossible the free election for positions of responsibility of the most qualified and most competent members—from any point of view, be it technical, managerial or social.

Administration of the factories by Workers' Councils, in no way eliminates the need for the technical competence of the engineer, the technician and the qualified administrator, whose designation and right to initiative must be assured within the collective enterprise as well as are those of the other workers, skilled and unskilled. The collective management of the factories is not a question of authority, personal or collective imposition, nor can it be allowed to present any obstacle for the exercise of the maximum competence and skill on the part of all concerned.

The Workers' Council must express the collective will, coordinating the efforts of all with complete freedom of expression for all opinions. It must assure collective control of the functionaries of the plant or industry, and the most judicious utilization of the available manpower and of the means of production.

The most efficient and best intentioned Engineer-Director or highly skilled technician, when "freed" of such collective control will inevitably substitute his own authority in carrying out the work for which he is qualified. This leads to abuses and dishonesty and at times to actual paralysis of the operation, causing at least a partial loss of his own technical efficiency. This has been demonstrated frequently in the Russian economy, especially in those cases where the top technician or administrator is also the top "party man" in the shop or in the industry.

Memo to a Tax Collector by John Average

Reprinted from *The Independent*, January 1959

You warn me to send a check or else. The condition of my bank account is close to else. My economy is enfiladed by laws: Federal laws, State laws, County laws, City laws, Corporation laws, a host of in-laws, brother, sister, mother-in-laws and pilfering outlaws.

These laws compel me to pay a business tax, amusement tax, poll tax, school tax, gas tax, light tax, sales tax, drapery tax, income tax, food tax, property tax, several excise taxes and a 100% cigarette tax. If I indulge in booze, there is a heavy booze tax.

My brains are taxed. I must have a business license, a car license, a driver's license, truck license, hunting license, fishing license, dog license, a marriage license which amounts to the same thing.

I am besieged by every organization that the touch system can devise. I must donate to the Community Chest, to the YMCA, to a fund to provide the preacher with a new car, to the March of Dimes, to the Cancer Research Society, that flatly refuses to research, to the hospital, that uses a birth or a broken bone to wipe out my savings, to the Red Cross, the Purple Cross, all of which spells double cross, to unemployment relief, to polio relief, to Empty Stocking fund, to rehabilitation of young criminals, to the Salvation Army.

Life is risky. I must carry life insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, burglary insurance, accident insurance, business insurance, earthquake insurance, tornado insurance, unemployment insurance, social security levy, fire insurance, travel insurance.

I am so dominated by rigid rules and collecting leeches, that I doubt that I own anything. I am inspected, suspected, never respected, rejected, examined, reexamined, informed, required, summoned, fined, commanded, and compelled to provide an inexhaustible pay-off for every need of the human race and for every exaction that non producers can invent.

If I balk at some mitt shoved under my nose, I am boycotted, talked about, lied about, held up to neighborhood scorn and disrepute.

Honestly, in the name of the God you all trust in while putting the bee on me, it was a miracle that enabled me to enclose this check. The wolf that haunts over half the doors slipped into my kitchen and had pups. I sold them and here is your money.

Distressedly,
John Average

Two Versions

Version 1

Excerpts from *Astronomy Made Simple* by Meir H. Degani, Sc.D.

The theory of the development of the universe from its beginnings assumes that "once upon a time" there was a vast ball of extremely hot and dense gas. Both the temperature and the density of that gas are fantastic: the density is assumed to have been several billion times that of water; the temperature, billions of degrees. As evidence, physical theory demonstrates that many of the heavy elements can be formed only at such fantastic pressure. For example, the building of an atom of Uranium or Thorium from protons and neutrons is only possible when the density and temperature are of that extent. Other elements, too, were formed in that "pre-historic period," elements like gold, oxygen, nitrogen and iron.

Then, about five billion years ago, the ball began to expand, and has been expanding ever since. In expanding, temperature and density decreased; about four billion years ago, the temperature and density went to the other extreme. At that stage, the gas broke into small fragments and stars began to form.

There are two schools of thought concerning the size of the universe: one theory holds that the original ball of matter was finite in size, say, the size of the solar system, and that the universe is still finite. Larger and better telescopes will eventually reach to the outer surface of this universe. Beyond this surface, presumably there is no more matter. The Einstein theory of "curved space" suggests there is no "beyond."

The other theory holds that the ball was infinite to begin with and that this radius has been becoming ever larger. This theory is generally favored at present. According to the infinity school of thought this is the complete picture: several billion years ago, an "infinite" ball of extremely hot and dense gas began to expand. At a certain stage of the expansion, the gas fragmented to form stars, one of which is our sun. As expansion continued, the stars divided into groups, one of which containing our sun and 100 billion other stars—is our galaxy. When the stars in our galaxy were fairly close together, collisions were not uncommon. In one of these, several masses were ripped off to form planets, one of which is our earth. Later, when the earth became cool enough life appeared on the globe. Eventually, man made his appearance. End of quote.

Version 2

The Creation as spelled out in the bible in Genesis, Chapter 1.

FIRST DAY: God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form and in darkness. God said, Let there be light, divided the light from the darkness, called the light day and the darkness night.

SECOND DAY: God made the firmament, divided the waters which were under the firmament, from the waters which were above the firmament, and called it heaven.

THIRD DAY: God gathered the waters under the heavens unto one place, and let dry land appear, calling the dry land Earth, and the waters He called Seas. On the land He brought forth grass, herbs and fruit trees.

FOURTH DAY: God willed lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser to rule the night.

FIFTH DAY: God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that hath life and fowl that may fly above the earth.

SIXTH DAY: God brought forth the living creatures for the earth, the cattle, creeping things and beasts. Then God created man in his own image and gave him dominion over his entire creation.

SEVENTH DAY: The heavens and the earth were finished. God rested.

The above are the two most widely accepted versions of the origin of the universe. One can hardly accept both. It's easy to see why the church views science with suspicion, and fears its growing acceptance.

What We Stand For

Two great power blocs struggle for world domination. Neither of these represents the true interests and welfare of Humanity. Their conflict threatens mankind with atomic destruction. Underlying both of these blocs are institutions that breed exploitation, inequality and oppression.

Without trying to legislate for the future we feel that we can indicate the general lines along which a solution to these problems can be found.

The exploitative societies of today must be replaced by a new libertarian world which will proclaim — Equal freedom for all in free socialist society, 'Freedom' without socialism leads to privilege and injustice; 'Socialism' without freedom is totalitarian.

The monopoly of power which is the state must be replaced by a world-wide federation of free communities, labor councils and/or cooperatives operating according to the principles of free agreement. The government of men must be replaced by a functional society based on the administration of things.

Centralism, which means regimentation from the top down, must be replaced by federalism, which means cooperation from the bottom up.

THE LIBERTARIAN LEAGUE will not accept the old socio-political cliches, but will boldly explore new roads while examining anew the old movements, drawing from them all that which time and experience has proven to be valid.

Libertarian League Activities

New York:

The Libertarian Center

12 St. Marks Pl. (3rd Floor)

Between Second & Third Avenues

Open Forum every Friday at 8 p.m.

Cleveland:

3705 West Park Road

(near Lorraine and Triskett)

Discussions on the last Friday of each month at 8 p.m.

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Libertarian League
Views & Comments No. 37
February, 1960

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