

Book Review

GEORGE HARDY'S STORY

Those Stormy Years, by George Hardy. (256 pp. Lawrence & Wishart, 15s.)

PICTURE to yourself a young lad, son of a farm labourer, turned plater's helper, dock worker and soldier by turns, packing what trifling possessions he has and going off, with a group of emigrants, to open up for himself a new life in Canada. Among his meagre possessions there was a trade union card. This, with a healthy body, a will to work and an even stronger will to see that he got properly paid for whatever work came his way, provided the ingredients for the story of the amazing range of activities and the amazing area of the earth these activities covered in the life of George Hardy. Jobs in Toronto and its vicinity. The reasons for leaving them or losing them, leading to victimisation. Then off across the country to Edmonton and after a job or two there, further on to the farthest west, Victoria on Vancouver Island. During this time a political awakening. In Victoria

he met some socialist friends and got an introduction to Karl Marx and other well-known writers. As he says on page 28:

A little later I went to hear E. T. Kingsley of Vancouver lecture on economics. That was a real eye-opener. I believe my political education began in that period.

A sign of educational advance is given on the next page:

There was a good tradition of trade unionism in Victoria and in my own trade no union at all, and I decided to tackle the job of organising the teamsters. My early agitational efforts with their 'bull at the gate' methods now seem to me to have been wrong. I would try tact.

From then on it was a continual case of agitation and organisation. Successful strikes and strikes that ended in defeat, but always advancing in knowledge and experience. The Teamsters' Union belonged to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters which was affiliated to the American Federation of Labour. The A.F. of L. was in general made up of strictly craft unions and it took

no interest in, or showed the least concern for, the many millions of unorganised workers outside their own particular crafts. It was in this situation that the Industrial Workers of the World appeared, attacking the pro-capitalist outlook of the A.F. of L. leaders and seeking to organise the un-organised masses on the basis of a strong militant policy aimed at the complete overthrow of capitalist power. But this great task was to be accomplished by industrial action alone. Politics were anathema to the I.W.W. and politicians, without distinction, fakers and frauds. Because of the reactionary character of the international leaders of the Teamsters' Brotherhood, the Teamsters of Victoria broke away and joined up with the I.W.W. This not only severed their connection with the A.F. of L., but it also disassociated them from the trade union movement of British Columbia. 'A serious mistake' says Hardy (page 38).

But there he was, still in his middle twenties, married and with his first boy, the organiser and leader of a trade union, battling through strikes, lockouts and continual studying to get an understanding of Marxism and all that it would mean for an advance of the working class. I cannot in a short review follow him on his trip to Australia where he found what an inspiring influence Tom Mann had had upon the working class movement; or to New Zealand and from there back to Canada; all the time agitating and organising. With the coming of the first world war the fight became ever more intense. Then in the autumn of 1917, while he was up in Alaska, he read in an evening paper 'Haywood Arrested—All I.W.W. Offices Raided by Federal Officers'. Big Bill Haywood was the fighting leader of the I.W.W. and he and all

other leaders were in jail. George Hardy returned to Chicago to take over and was soon in jail along with them. It is not possible here to give anything like an idea of the corruption, the brutality and the murderous character of the American bosses and the use they made of armed thugs and the law courts to suppress the active leaders of the working class. It is a terrible revelation, even to those who have been reading something about McCarthyism.

After his release from imprisonment and the end of the war, there came the bitter struggle for the formation of a Communist Party. Inspired by the great October Revolution George Hardy took his stand with the Communists and was soon in conflict with the reactionary so-called 'unpolitical' leaders of the I.W.W. who were among the most vicious enemies of the young Soviet Union. After the break from this organisation and his work in helping to get the Party started in America he returned to Britain and played a very big part, with Harry Pollitt, in the Minority Movement. Then over to Moscow, and from Moscow to Berlin where under semi-legal conditions he carried on work at the Bureau of the Red International. While there he was pressed to go to China to participate in the work of the Advisory Bureau there. Three years he spent, three years of the most appalling terror carried out by Chiang Kai-shek as agent of American imperialism. The Canton Rising—suppressed in a sea of blood. The executioner's sword rising and falling with incessant regularity. What a ghastly story. How the unfortunate masses of China were beaten down into what appeared helpless passivity. But all the time, cool courageous leadership on the part of the

Chinese Communists, with all of whom Hardy and a few others were closely associated, made it possible for the author to write that in April, 1951:

I had the supreme happiness of witnessing one of the greatest of all these moments when at the age of 67 I visited China in the early months of the Liberation.

What a joyful experience that was, in contrast to the terror that he saw 22 years earlier. Later on he visited South Africa to help the comrades there. To all parts of the world he has gone. Always with the workers in their struggles against the oppressors. Always with the colonial peoples in their fight for liberation. Strikes, lockouts, massacres. All this has been part of the growth of the working class movement in the various lands, and George Hardy has been associated with that growth and has grown politically himself in the process.

After all these stormy years he was with me in 1935 in a quiet backwater in Fife, the mining village of Kelty, where he and a few other comrades did a remarkable job in bringing about the election of the first Communist M.P. This is a book that abounds with lessons for those who desire to play a part in the working class movement. Follow George Hardy in his world-wide travels, in his world-wide experience of working class struggle and of revolution, and you will be richer, politically richer, for your study.

WILLIAM GALLACHER