

VANGUARD NEWSLETTER

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THE EIGHT DAY STRIKE OF POSTAL WORKERS

A Turning Point in the Class Struggle in America by Harold Robins

The first strike of postal workers in the 200 year history of the republic lasted 8 days.

In the vanguard of the strikers were the union locals of mailmen in the Manhattan and Bronx sections of New York City. Negro workers were notable in large numbers among the most militant. There was no nonsense about splitting the ranks of the working class with white unions or Black unions. There was class unity in the fight to protect their living standards.

It has been conservatively estimated that this strike cut off some hundreds of millions of dollars due to money lenders and business firms in New York City alone. The strike paralyzed the stock exchanges and the commodity exchanges, which helplessly talked about closing down for the duration of the strike.

The New York postal workers were partially successful in bringing the postal workers of other cities into the ranks of strikers, in the fight to force the government to grant wage increases to match the ever rising cost of living. The great power of the postal workers on strike was evident to everyone.

The largest of the New York banks were among those businesses that suddenly found a great part of the their day-to-day income cut off by

the strike. Department stores, public utilities and loan agencies could not send out bills for collection with the mails completely shut down. The capitalists screamed for government action to get the mails moving again. It was commonly urged --even by some of these gentlemen-- that the postal workers be given their pay raise and put back to work moving the mails.

President Nixon, who had cynically broken his promises of wage raises to the postal workers, proved responsive to the cries of the suffering money lenders and other capitalists. But he took measures to try to settle the strike by paying lower wages than even his own postal commission had recommended.

This commission had recommended a 12% hike in one lump to bring the pay of government postal workers up to the levels paid in private industry. Nixon proposed a lower wage increase at first and then agreed to a 14% pay boost in two installments, with 6% payable as of January 1, 1970, and the other 8% on July 1, 1970, on condition that the Congress vote to transform the Post Office into a public corporation. "The man is the method". Nixon

operates as a shoddy chiseler.

At Nixon's instigation the federal courts issued injunctions against the strike and its leaders, and the military establishment mobilized thousands of unwilling reservists for strike-breaking duty in moving the mail. Newspaper interviews with these soldiers clearly indicated that they were overwhelmingly sympathetic to the cause of the strikers. Nevertheless, they were "democratically" compelled to take on the strike-breaking chore against their will in this land "where the people decide matters." Everywhere, the knowledge of the miserable wages paid the postal workers, won them the sympathy, especially of workers, and also of those "middle-income" social layers feeling the inflationary pinch today.

Class conscious workers spoke of the need for a general strike of the trade unions to support the strikers. But these class conscious workers are still not organized into a left wing in the unions, either locally or nationally.

Building a left wing in the unions is the most important historic task of the moment on the American scene. A left wing in the unions would combat the do-nothing policies of the trade union leaderships. The workers must fight to abolish the use of injunctions in labor disputes, and the use of the military for strike-breaking purposes, if they are to protect their living standards and their organizations. The government "of the people" has opened up a vicious, sly attack on the "real" wages of all workers, at a time when government taxes eat up almost every wage increase won by them over the past years, and during a period when the wealth of the nation was increasing in the most notable manner.

The revolutionary Trotskyists connected with VANGUARD NEWSLETTER raised the call for immediate establishment of strike-relief committees to aid the postal workers strike.

They took the lead in calling for escalator pay increases which not only reflect rising prices but also

rising taxes. Even when employers are forced to give cost of living increases, the government takes a cut out of every wage increase through increased taxes.

By this means, government nibbles away constantly at the "real" wages of the working people until, as things go today, the capitalistic tax dodgers get out of paying their "fair" share of taxes because they are organized and control the major political parties. The workers have been finding out in increasing numbers that the tax burden has been insidiously shifted to help the price profiteers cut down the living standards of most of the working class. It is obvious that trade union workers must and should be organized into a political party of labor which they control. Without such a party, the organized and unorganized workers will continue to be victimized and impoverished.

The conservative trade union leaderships have been demonstrating that they are unfit to organize and lead the workers in the necessary fight to protect their living standards. Those who would split the working class into white and Black unions are also demonstrating that they are rotten conservatives.

These trade union leaderships never gave the impoverished postal workers one cent for strike relief. When the government used the military for strike-breaking, the top trade union leaderships issued pious statements of objection, when the task before the trade union was to break the power of the courts and the political control of the capitalists. This role of the union leaders corresponds to their pro-capitalist views and loyalties.

VANGUARD NEWSLETTER also called the turn, in warning the postal workers that they would be sold out, if they returned to work before their demands were met, as their national leaders had urged.

As of this writing, the Senate Post Office and Civil Service Committee has decided to postpone consideration of the second-step, the 8% increase, and so-called postal

reform, and to concern itself only with the 6% retroactive pay increase for all federal employees. Even that 6% is not as yet guaranteed.

The demand for a \$8,500 minimum, is now completely ignored. If a 6% pay raise is passed, the present floor will increase from \$6,176 a year to little more than \$6,500! Evidently, the "equal opportunity employer", the federal government, hopes to use the higher unemployment rate--which falls with greater force upon the especially oppressed minorities--to fill these starvation wage jobs.

Agreement had been reported--and used to get the postal workers back to work--on total amnesty for the strikers and their leaders, and for a shortening of the time to reach maximum pay levels, from 21 to 8 years, and is now also ignored.

No wonder then, that the postal workers in New York and Chicago are, as the president of the Chicago branch of the Letter Carriers put it, "bitter, angry and frustrated".

The economic condition of the postal workers led vast numbers of them to take on one or more part-time jobs to supplement the low pay allotted them by both Democratic and Republican administrations of the nation. Wives and children too were pressed into taking part-time jobs to supplement the inadequate wages paid during these years of great and long lasting capitalist prosperity. Many postal workers were reported to be receiving supplementary aid on the public welfare rolls.

After trying to get by with all of these emergency income measures, the postal workers quit being passive, lost a part of their conservative outlook, and suddenly became transformed into militant strikers, playing a leading role in the class struggle of the American workers.

Had there been a left wing in the unions, the strikers would not have been forced back to work so easily.

The professed "friends of labor" in the two houses of Congress, played a typical Judas role throughout the entire period before the

strike and during the walkout, but when the cry for government aid came from the capitalists, the Congress decided to forego its Easter vacation to "get a pay increase for the postal workers".

Look at the record of the Congress prior to the outbreak of the strike. The House of Representatives (having already given itself a substantial pay boost) passed a bill to provide a 5.1% pay boost for postal workers. The Senate then passed its own pay raise bill which called for an immediate 4% pay raise with another 3.1% increase on July 1, 1970. But then, neither house of Congress did anything to pass a bill providing pay raises. They sat and waited for President Nixon to present his views, until the strike broke out.

Pres. Nixon, during this period of patient waiting by the Congress, and growing anger by the postal workers, proposed in the name of the balanced budget, that all pay increases for federal employees be held back for 6 months. Of course, the organized tax dodgers continued to use all the tax privileges and loopholes that an indulgent Congress had provided, so as to get away with their usual swindling.

It was quite clear, that Nixon and the capitalists have decided to make the poorest workers pay the cost of government burdens. However, the strike by the postal workers has set this plan back to some extent, in spite of their sell-out national "leaders". The postal workers have shown that they have the strength and the will to use it.

This strike is a landmark in the fight of American workers to get wage increases that will, at least, maintain their living standards--a sharpening and spreading fight waged by more and more workers, e.g., teamsters, air-controllers, newspaper guilds, rail-road workers, etc.--against the sly price-tax policies of American capitalism and its two major political parties.

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INFLATION AND THE ECONOMY

All sections of the population are now paying sharp attention to the roaring inflation.

The workers who feel the lash of rising prices most, are also demanding to know why prices are going up, and how inflation can be stopped.

Some "experts", the professional economists and bankers, are quick to give these "laymen" glib and simplistic answers, which answer nothing. Others assert that the whole matter is "too complicated" for them to understand. But it is of vital importance to the workers and those who expect to lead them, to know why the purchasing power of their wages continues to fall, and with increasing speed.

A rising chorus of demands for "wage and price" controls, is now heard from "respected" members of the "establishment", e.g., Congressmen, the administration, the press, the "business community", and, lo and behold--a not-so-recent recruit, the "leader" of the AFL-CIO, George Meany, has now been heard from!

Striving for a more militant pose in accommodating "friends of labor", Meany supported these "controls", provided "profits" were also "controlled". "Wage-price" controls historically means freezing wages and thawing prices. Meany, the corporations' little helper, evidently, means to "control", i.e., help maintain profits at their present high levels.

Clearly, under the guise of controls, the executive committee of big-business, which is the executive branch of the government, plans, with the help of its labor-lieutenants, to place the increasing burden of the inflation upon the backs of the workers. In preparation, propaganda is spread that "excessive" wage demands are "fueling" the inflation--when, in fact, the workers have been running after the inflation, and falling further behind.

A vast confusion prevails among most of the population as to the nature of, the reasons for, and the implications of the inflation for

the future--radicals not excluded. We hope, in this series, to introduce some Marxist clarity into this question, and, thereby, illuminate the road ahead. We need to evaluate the developing crisis in the national and world economy, and the strategic and tactical implications for revolutionists, more concretely.

Our examination, "Inflation and the Economy", will, we hope, provide a popular presentation, which workers will understand. We hope to strip away some of the complexities, without vulgarizing and oversimplifying the essential content.

Before we can deal with the question of inflation, however, we must first re-state some fundamental Marxian propositions.

All societies are, in the final analysis, organized to produce and distribute those goods and services necessary for human existence. Past societies differed in the methods of production and distribution, but all class societies have in common the fact that the means of production are in the possession of a minority which appropriates the surplus product, all save that needed to keep the majority laboring for the minority.

Capitalist society, as Marx expressed it, appears as an "immense accumulation of commodities", of useful goods and services, which are produced for sale in the market, and are distributed via the exchange of "equal" values, e.g., 1 suit = \$50 = 20 pounds of wool.

But how, on the basis of supposedly equal exchange, does the class of capitalists manage to accumulate more and more money for investment in means of production, and to consume an increasingly disproportionate share of the other commodities produced? This mystery, Marx was to solve.

How is the value of each commodity determined?

When viewed as a whole, the dif-

fering products of varying types and levels of "concrete" human labor, have in common the fact that they are the products of "abstract", socially-necessary, labor which can be measured by time. Commodities then, are exchanged in the market in proportion to the amounts of such labor-time, which they incorporate. This then, is their value.

But labor-power--not labor--is the commodity which the capitalist purchases. The worker is hired by the hour, day or week, at the lowest possible price, a price which reflects the "socially-necessary" labor-time required to produce him, and to reproduce others who can replace him, i.e., the labor-time incorporated in commodities such as food, clothing, shelter and education, for himself and his family.

Labor-power harnessed to the means of production is labor, a portion of which now enters into each commodity produced. These are sold, however, not on the basis of the labor-power purchased and other costs, but on the basis of the total labor which they now contain. The capitalist has paid for the commodity, labor-power, quid pro quo, but, has not paid for part of the labor which he has used, has appropriated the surplus labor, the basis for surplus value--has exploited the worker--one more than another.

The capitalist calculates his profit on his total investment--"variable" capital, wages--and "constant" capital, machines, buildings, raw materials, advertising, clerical staff, etc. With the growth of modern industry, however, workers tend to operate more and more expensive equipment and machinery, in more efficient plants. The proportion of constant to variable capital is, therefore, constantly increasing. But, as the only source of profit is the labor of the living worker, the rate of profit tends to fall with the rise of industry, even though the mass of profits rise.

Why don't the capitalists keep the rate up by keeping the "organic composition"--the proportion of constant to variable capital--down?

Because the more efficient plant has a lower cost per item produced, and the less efficient is driven out of business, and because innovators, at first, gain a higher rate of profit than their competitors.

Capitalists, of course, seek to invest their capital at the highest rate of profit. Competitors rush into a particular industry, set up plants, flood the market, and, as a result, wind up with less than the average rate. "Investors" go elsewhere, repeating the process, and, in this manner, an average rate of profit for all industry is established, regardless of "organic composition". Industry, as a whole, therefore, found Marx, functions on the basis of a selling price for commodities which is composed of the cost of production plus an average rate of profit, and which he called the price of production.

Wait! Isn't something wrong here? We first found that commodities exchanged at their values, in accordance with the amount of labor measured by time. But, if they are exchanged on the basis of prices of production, then those commodities with more labor-time incorporated in them--from plants with a lower organic composition, are exchanged for those with less--from plants with a higher organic composition. True! Still, total prices are equal to total values.

And, under capitalism, social laws exist only as averages, as tendencies, as the result of the movement, of the molecular interaction, of individuals and groups, within and between classes.

Has anything happened since Marx's Capital was written, to modify his findings? Yes! "Free" competitive capitalism became monopoly capitalism, entered the stage of imperialism, with the turn of the century.

What has all this to do with inflation? It is indispensable background for the discussion. However, before we can determine what inflation is, we will have to discuss what inflation is not.

(to be continued)

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NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

The Arab-Israeli Question --Imperialism and the Soviet Union

The second World War exemplified, as did its predecessor, the law of uneven and combined development.

Both gave explosive expression to the underlying fact that the productive forces imprisoned in separate national states, no longer corresponded to the hierarchy of imperialist privilege, that the more backward had become the more advanced. Both wars, were, in essence, struggles for the re-division of the world, for a new balance which would reflect the new relationship of forces.

The involvement of the Soviet Union as a participant on one side, however, introduced a greater degree of complexity into the second world slaughter.

The fundamental antagonism between the collectivized property achieved through the October Revolution, upon which a parasitic bureaucracy had arisen, and the capitalist property relations elsewhere, cut across the battle lines, conditioning the strategy and tactics of the contending camps. In turn, the strategy and tactics of the bureaucratic ex-crescence on the first workers' state, "socialism in one country", its attempts to acquire security for its "own" base of power, at the sacrifice of the world socialist revolution, interacted with and conditioned that of the imperialists.

The first four Congresses of the Communist International, which were led by Lenin and Trotsky, hammered out clear and consistent revolutionary policies.

For the advanced capitalist countries: The proletarian revolution. In the event of an imperialist war, revolutionary defeatism. Only the revolutionary struggle against one's "own" capitalists, could prevent the workers of the "enemy" camp from making common cause with their bourgeoisies, could achieve proletarian internationalism.

For the colonial and semi-colonial countries, e.g., the Middle East:

The struggle for national liberation through a proletarian revolution as in Russia, to the extent that a working class and a revolutionary leadership had developed.

Where, however, pre-capitalist relations still dominated, where the working class was still nascent, the international proletariat was obligated to support the most advanced elements in the population, i.e., the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, to the extent that they conducted a struggle against the feudal and colonialist elements.

Even then, the banners of the young emerging working class were to be kept separate from those of the bourgeoisie, and the workers taught that the overthrow of feudal and colonial regimes was an initial preparation for the overthrow of capitalist relations, i.e., for the "permanent revolution".

In this manner, instead of a preserve of imperialism, the underdeveloped sectors could become transformed into a reserve of the international socialist revolution, whose victory, however, would only be secured by successful revolutions in the advanced countries.

It was this understanding which Trotsky incorporated into "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International", the "Transitional Program", in 1938.

Stressing the combined character of the countries dominated by imperialism, of "primitive economic forms" combined with "capitalist technique and culture", Trotsky posed the need to unite the demands for independence and bourgeois-democratic rights with the world socialist struggle, wherever a proletariat capable of "independent politics" had developed.

The proletariat could win the peasants, the bulk of the popula-

tion, to them in opposition to the "national bourgeoisie", not by attempting to skip the bourgeois-democratic stage, but by transcending it. The "political level of the proletariat" and its "bond" with the peasantry would determine when the demand for soviets could be raised, and when the masses led by the proletariat could go on to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

The Soviet bureaucracy achieved its Thermidor in 1924, and undertook the defense of its base of power, the Soviet Union, by bureaucratic maneuver, utilizing the international Communist and working class movement as small change, as dispensable pawns.

Beginning with scepticism toward the revolutionary potential of the international working class, the attitude of the new caste matured through unconcern to outright counter-revolutionary policies.

In its neo-Menshevist phase, it disarmed the British Communists at the time of the British general strike, and subordinated the Chinese workers in 1926-7 to the Kuomintang.

Its ultra-left period reflected the bankruptcy of the earlier neo-Menshevist policies, its resultant isolation, and its need for an anti-Trotskyist political cover. Under the banner of "social-fascism", it disarmed the German working class against fascism, and also succeeded in isolating the Communists from the industrial working class everywhere, in the under-developed as in the advanced countries.

A more overt counter-revolutionary phase was opened in 1934-5 with the Stalinist shift to the policy of the "people's front". The Communist parties in all countries were subordinated to their liberal bourgeoisies, in the hope of cementing a military bloc with the "democratic" imperialists against Hitler.

In Europe, the Stalinists helped to derail the French general strike in 1936 and to destroy the Spanish revolution in 1937, thereby ensuring its defeat by the fascists.

In the colonial and semi-colonial sectors as well, the Kremlin went

to great lengths to convince the "democratic" imperialists, that it was not fermenting revolutions, that, in fact, it was now among the most vigorous supporters of the status quo, and that its Communist parties in this sector were little more than agrarian reformers.

The order of the day became, not confiscation of the landlords' estates, but land reform, not the preparation of the struggle against capitalism in the process of overthrowing the feudal and colonialist regimes, but only a limited struggle against the "feudal" elements for reforms. And, in fact, capitalist relations in agriculture were re-labeled "feudal", at the same time that the liberal wings of the bourgeoisies were pictured, in typical "popular front" style, as fervent allies in the struggle against "feudalism" and for "democracy".

While continuing to refer to national independence, only in general terms, so as not to cut off mass support, the CP's were also careful not to develop or encourage any struggles toward this end.

Except for the first 21 months of the second World War, before the attack by Hitler on the Soviet Union --when the Kremlin emphasized the imperialist nature of the war by calling for the liberation of French and British colonies--the CP's took the position that all struggles for national independence should be halted in the name of the "fight against fascism".

Where, as in Algeria, India and Egypt, the question of national independence came sharply to the fore, their CP's forfeited mass support, and an historic opportunity to place themselves at the head of the broad masses.

Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam sealed the pact of the Soviet bureaucracy with the "democratic" imperialists, guaranteeing them from social revolution, either in Europe or in their colonies, insofar as it could make such guarantees. Always true to its bargains with the imperialists, it allowed the Greek uprising which followed the German evacuation,

to be shot down by British troops, and then disarmed and led the French and Italian workers back toward parliamentarianism and capitalist relations.

[But the last blows of the second World War, the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were also the first blows in the "Cold War"]

The world imperialist system was a shambles. Capitalism remained in eastern Europe, but in extremis, had only been rescued through the efforts of the Stalinists, and remained at their mercy.

The advanced capitalist countries of Europe had also suffered enormous losses in national wealth. The industrialized sector of Germany was safely in "western" hands, but its industry lay in ruins. The working classes of France and Italy had shifted to the "left", from the now discredited Social Democracy to the more militant appearing neo-Social Democrats, the Stalinists, who, moreover, and at great cost to their cadres, had headed the resistance movements as "patriots", and fought for their bourgeois "fatherlands".

The weakened grasp of the imperialists on their colonial and semi-colonial preserves was soon demonstrated by the rising crescendo of struggles for national independence now led by representatives of the liberal and petty-bourgeoisie.

With the "Cold War" temperature rising, Stalin was not averse to a Mao Tse-tung presiding over the Chinese bourgeois state machinery instead of a Chiang Kai Shek.

[In Vietnam, where the Stalinists had also not been discredited by an open abandonment of the struggle for national independence, Stalin cut the ground from under them, in deals with his "allies" at Yalta, divided the country into two parts and presented them to the "democratic" imperialists and their dependents, to Great Britain and Chiang Kai Shek.]

Elsewhere in the under-developed sectors, the Stalinists entered into "national fronts" with "their" bourgeoisies. In the Middle East and elsewhere, where their past pro-

"democratic" imperialist policies had not isolated them, e.g., Iraq, some of the CP's were able to gain considerable peasant support with petty-bourgeois agrarian and reformist programs.

But the revolutionary possibilities everywhere, in the advanced countries as well as the "Permanent Revolution" in the more backward, were destroyed by Stalinism.

The Fulton, Missouri "iron curtain" speech of Churchill in 1946, which formally marked the onset of the "Cold War" was, in effect, an announcement that world capitalism would now attempt to roll back the Soviet bloc, that it would attempt to rescue the then still surviving capitalist relations in eastern Europe, and maintain its imperialist holdings in the rest of the world, that the basic contradiction between capitalist and collective property relations was uppermost, now that the German and Japanese rivals of the "democratic" imperialists had been vanquished.

In defense, the Stalinists junked the bourgeois state machines over which they had presided as caretakers, and states, qualitatively indistinguishable from that of the Soviet Union, now emerged.

However, the "Cold War" was also conditioned by a prolonged post-war capitalist development, now at an end. The contradictions of world capitalism did not reach a stage which required it to risk a nuclear war with the Soviet bloc, in an attempt at taking title to, and restoring the vast resources and market to its direct and complete domination.

The Bonapartist figures in the Middle East, as well as in other under-developed areas, were able to step upon the stage of history, only in the aftermath of the disorientation of the working classes there and in the advanced countries by Stalinism, and under world economic conditions which enables them to continue receiving considerable concessions from the two power blocs, by balancing between them.

(to be continued)