

Rally!

HYDE PARK
6 p.m.
SUNDAY

The Newsletter has called a meeting in Hyde Park on Sunday night, June 1, at 6 p.m. under the slogans: 'Down with de Gaulle!' 'Hands off French Labour!' and 'Freedom for Algeria!'.

Speakers will include Brian Behan and Peter Fryer.

The meeting will be followed by a march to the French embassy, 58 Knightsbridge, S.W.1.

All readers and supporters of The Newsletter in the London area are asked to rally to this meeting, and to bring as many of their workmates and friends as possible.

SMASH DE GAULLE

By PETER FRYER

THE basic fact about the French crisis is that the working class has not been brought into effective action against the threat of military dictatorship. At every stage the leaders of the Left have acted too late. They have tailed disastrously behind the bourgeois leaders while the latter were in conclave with de Gaulle and smoothing his path to power. Behind the parliamentary shadow-boxing there has been a massive act of treachery by Mollet as well as Pflimlin. An 'atmosphere of intrigue', says The Times, surrounded negotiations that were 'one more—perhaps the last—example of the muddy depth of French political waters'. If the democratic rights of the French workers are extinguished, then a heavy share of the responsibility must lie on their 'socialist' and 'communist' leaders. Instead of arousing the workers to action, instead of barring de Gaulle's road with a total general strike and the establishment of a workers' government, they lulled them with the slogan of the defence of—the very elements who have been intriguing with de Gaulle.

The fate of French Labour is of the deepest concern to the whole international working-class movement. For de Gaulle's come-back is part of a world-wide
(Continued overleaf)

THE NEWSLETTER

180 Clapham High Street, London, S.W. 4.

Registered at the G.P.O. as a newspaper

Vol. 2, No. 55

Sixpence

May 31, 1958

LEADERS GROVEL AS DE GAULLE STEPS IN

From Our Paris Correspondent, SEYMOUR PAPERT

THE Algerian rebellion delivers punch after punch to the morale, self-confidence and prestige of the French State apparatus. Each capitulation is followed by a new challenge to its authority. Radio Algeria openly mocks and taunts the régime in France. De Gaulle patiently waits for its final collapse.

Increasingly insecure, Pflimlin bans meetings, censures the Press, seizes highly respectable English, American and Swiss newspapers, arms himself to the teeth. Against whom? Partly against no one—he has to put up a show of force to prove he is 'doing something', to present himself as a strong government. Partly against a possible awakening of the still dormant working class.

Certainly not against a Gaullist *putsch* which would be supported by a large number of his policemen who showed their sympathies in public not very long ago.

As the Government grovels before the settlers the Left parties grovel before the Government, desperately hoping to help it find a 'parliamentary' solution.

The Communist Party's record during the crisis is scarcely credible even to those most convinced of the anti-working-class and reformist policy of that party's leaders.

Slogans eliminated overnight

Overnight it eliminates all slogans against the war in Algeria or against the bosses in France.

The Union of Communist Students suspends an entire branch which published a leaflet condemning the infamous 'special powers' under which the Algerian war is waged.

In Parliament the Communist Party votes for the extension of these laws and even votes for a motion paying homage to the generals and officers in Algeria!

An interesting development is the number of declarations for de Gaulle by Algerian (i.e., 'Moslem') nationalists. These

include FLN leaders (e.g., Ferrhat Abbas) and Liberal intellectuals (e.g. Jean Amrouche) and reflect a definite current down below (e.g., I know a young MNA rank-and-filer who is a rabid 'Gaullist').

There is an irony in the situation. The French Government habitually declares that the nationalist leaders are not 'valid spokesmen' for the Algerian people.

These Algerian nationalists find that Pflimlin is no valid spokesman for anyone, since he is incapable of carrying out any consistent policy whatever.

Some of them hope that de Gaulle will at least be capable of making peace once convinced (by argument or by force) that he can't win the war.

Key issue is Algeria

Perhaps they are right. It would be rash to predict what de Gaulle would do. But what is clear is that for the French working class the key issue is between peace and war in Algeria, not between Pflimlin and de Gaulle in Paris.

Whether the war is prosecuted by the one or by the other the workers will have to carry the can and the Government will need all the dictatorial powers to make them—or perish in the attempt.

SMASH DE GAULLE (Continued from front page)

offensive by Capital. If he succeeds, then every Tory financier and big business man in Britain will take heart and redouble his efforts to smash the living standards, security and workshop organization of the British workers. The success of de Gaulle would spell the first major class victory for world reaction since the end of the second world war. Therefore the working-class movement all over the world must stand four-square behind the workers of France. Even at this late hour, there is much the British Labour movement can do to help our French brothers and comrades. It is imperative that we give our help without stint and without delay.



DE GAULLE is 67, a pompous, opinionated brass hat with mystical notions and a gift for oracular silences. How does it come about that such a comic-opera figure slouches on to the stage of history at this time as the self-appointed saviour of France? How does it come about that the French Communist Party, whose vote is numbered in millions, which controls the biggest of the three trade union federations, whose deputies, newspapers, functionaries—and the self-sacrificing devotion of its militants and adherents—make it the most powerful Communist Party in the capitalist world, has proved so impotent that Tuesday's protest strikes are partial, spasmodic and unimpressive, and Wednesday's protest demonstration is called by somebody else?

The answer to both these questions can be found only in the study of European working-class history since 1923. A terrible pattern has been woven in these 35 years. One bloody strand was the betrayal of the German revolution of 1923. Another was added during the 1926 General Strike in Britain. The advent of Hitler and the collapse of the German Labour movement added a third, the bitter tragedy of Spain a fourth. A fifth we now see to have accompanied the 'Liberation' of France in 1944-45, when Algerian nationalists were branded as Hitlerites by the French communist leaders, and when Clemens Dutt could write in *Labour Monthly*:

De Gaulle himself is not a mere symbol or figure-head. He is the acknowledged leader of the French war effort . . . The real ground of foreign criticisms is not that he is a dictator, but that he is too independent of foreign influence and that he is too revolutionary, having shown breadth of vision enough to rally a front of all elements, including the communists . . . 95 per cent. of Frenchmen accept him and his Government as leader of National Unity in the struggle for liberation (July 1944, pp. 207-8).

He has now the opportunity of making himself the foremost statesman of liberated Europe (Feb. 1945, p. 54).

This is not the place to analyse the pattern whose sixth strand is now being woven in the barracks and town halls of Algeria and Corsica, in the seedy luxury of the Hotel Matignon, on the historic paving-stones of the Place de la République for as long as French citizens can still forgather there. The analysis has already been made; the books are on the shelves for all to read. If these sombre events across the Channel confirm the validity and power of the Marxist method,

then that is occasion less for satisfaction than for us to insist that the lessons driven home again and again in blood, repression, defeat and demoralization these past thirty-five years should this time be acted on. The French proletariat can fight, defeat and sweep away de Gaulle. The great-grandsons of those who in 1871 'stormed heaven' have not forfeited the manhood that their glorious Commune regained for them. The problem is how the French workers are to save themselves from the fate of the Spanish workers; it is they themselves who must accomplish this task, for their leaders are sick.



THE nature of their sickness, and the repeated catastrophes to which it leads, have been discussed by André Marty. Towards the end of his life this revolutionary veteran, hero of the Black Sea mutiny, cast out from his party by Thorez and Duclos for warning against the disasters their path was courting, made a courageous attempt to reassess their leadership. He showed how the communist leaders had held back the independent activity of the French workers in 1944-47 instead of struggling for a socialist-communist government—a perfectly realistic possibility in 1944-45. He criticized the important concessions they made to de Gaulle and to British and American imperialism. He criticized the party's failure to develop a movement against the Indo-China war; its failure to carry through the great strike of August 1953 to the overthrow of the Laniel Government; its damping down of other strike movements and manipulation of the working class from above and outside in accordance with the interests of 'high diplomacy'. Who can now doubt that if Marty's words had been heeded the French Communist Party and working class would have been both better prepared for the present crisis, and better able to meet it in the only effective way: the revolutionary way?



FRANCE'S Communist Party has shipwrecked on the Algerian revolution and on the Stalinist conception of a 'peaceful transition to socialism'. A party which votes for measures to prosecute a repressive war has castrated itself politically and ideologically. It has ceased to be a Marxist, revolutionary party. A party which 'defends' democratic rights by voting for special powers which can then be used to cripple the working-class movement by the first usurper who comes along—such a party has failed in its duty to the workers. Of course the democratic rights won and cherished by the workers must be defended against reaction, against Bonapartism, against arbitrary rule, against fascism. But merely to repeat the slogan 'Defence of the Republic', without explaining to the masses of the people precisely *why* and *how* democracy must be defended, and what is the class basis of this defence—here is the most barren, floundering and bankrupt abdication of the responsibilities of leadership. Instead of educating, Thorez and Duclos have confused the workers. The defence of bourgeois democracy by the working class is a betrayal of basic class interests if it is con-

ducted under the banner of bourgeois republicanism. The workers must be told that what they are defending is nothing but a *form* of capitalist class rule, and that they defend it only because it enables them to organize for the overthrow of capitalism altogether, *and for no other reason*. The workers must be told that the best defence of their democratic rights is to carry bourgeois democracy to its furthest limit *and beyond*, till their own class rule, their own workers' State, eliminates the danger of fascism altogether. The independent class action of the French workers, the formation of workers' defence guards, the 'blacking' of troop movements, the setting-up of committees of action in the factories and pits, the organization of street demonstrations, the launching of a general strike not limited to one afternoon, the establishment of a socialist-communist-trade union government—a workers' government which will nationalize all major industries under workers' control, disarm the fascist bands, arrest the generals, demobilize the army and build a workers' militia: this and this alone is the way to bar the road to de Gaulle. Any other course of action subordinates the workers to those who are in practice conniving at the reactionary *coup*, stifles their revolutionary class instincts in a mishmash of abstract democratic platitudes and helps the bourgeois 'democrats' to tie the Republic—or what is left of it—hand and foot for the conqueror.



LET there be no illusions about the Fourth Republic. Its troops in Algeria have been responsible for some of the worst excesses since Auschwitz. It is no accident that Algeria was the first prize to fall into the generals' hands. Was there ever such a striking confirmation of the way a working class which aids in the oppression of another nation—even by failing to fight adequately against that oppression—thereby forges its own chains?

The French workers are now paying the price for allowing their sons in uniform to torture and massacre

the Algerian people. But it is not too late. The French Labour movement still has it in its power to put an end to the Algerian war by common action in which an unshakable unity can be built between the French working class and the Algerian people. Unless the French workers, by their independent class action, do put an end to the war in Algeria, bring back the French troops from Algeria, and allow the Algerian people their complete, immediate and unconditional independence, then French Labour will pass into the shadows.



IT has become fashionable for British papers to send messages to the French people. All kinds of advice are being poured out, including that of the Manchester Guardian, which tells the French that what matters is not that reaction takes over, but that it should be done in the light of day and by the free decision of their own elected representatives. Our message as British Marxists is to the *workers* of France. We say that what they decide to do in these next few days matters very much indeed, and is far more important than any formal or constitutional considerations. We ask them to realize the immense power that they possess as a class to put a stop to the machinations of those who for eleven years have ruled France without them and against them. We ask them to face up to their responsibilities towards the tormented and struggling people of Algeria. We ask them to remember the traditions of 1848 and 1871, when pages of indelible grandeur were written by workingmen. We ask them not to be deceived by leaders who would lick de Gaulle's military boots if the Kremlin told them to, and who call on them to 'defend' a republic which has made de Gaulle's *coup* possible. We ask them to fight in their own way for the defence of their working-class movement and for a socialist France. We pledge that the British Labour movement will not stand aside from their struggle, nor fail them in their hour of need.

Constant Reader | France: Fascism or Workers' Revolution?

MEMORIES of Franco's revolt in 1936 have been stirred by the events in France. In what sense is the movement associated with de Gaulle a fascist movement?

In the same sense, I should say, as Franco's was at its beginning.

Franco at the start led a military revolt, with little mass basis to it. The middle sections of Spanish society were either neutral or against him.

What brought him a certain significant degree of mass support as the civil war continued (finding organized form largely in the 'Falange') was the failure of the working-class parties to take over in Republican Spain and wage the war in a revolutionary way.

It did not stop at that, either; there was actual strangling of the workers' attempts to take over the factories, form their own fighting forces and so on; a strangling carried out by the Communist Party under the direction of the Soviet representative in Spain.

Putsch need not succeed

In this sense, Stalin gave Franco his victory in Spain, making Spanish fascism possible.

Without the role played by the Stalinists, Franco might have remained a Kornilov.

In France at present, so far as can be seen, the middle sections are hesitant and uncommitted, some even anti-militarist in mood, much as they were in Spain in 1936.

The military putsch need never acquire the solid roots of a real fascist movement if the hesitancy (and worse) of the workers' organizations does not drive the middle sections into de Gaulle's camp.

'There are no exceptions to this rule—fascism comes only when the working class shows complete incapacity to take into its own hands the fate of society . . . We must not identify war dictatorship . . . with fascist dictatorship.

'For the latter there is first necessary a feeling of desperation of large masses of the people.

'When the revolutionary parties betray them, when the vanguard of the workers shows its incapacity to lead the people to victory—then the farmers, the small business men, the unemployed, the soldiers etc. become capable of supporting a fascist movement, but only then.

'A military dictatorship is purely a bureaucratic institution, reinforced by the military machine and based upon the disorientation of the people and their submission to it. After some time their feelings can change, and they can become rebellious against the military dictatorship.'

Thus wrote Trotsky in 1940 in one of his last articles. His

ideas, based on a wealth of practical experience, are as valid today as they were then.

De Gaulle's coup can lead either to a fully-fledged fascist system or to a workers' revolution supported by the overwhelming majority of the French people.

The choice depends on the leadership given now by the most advanced elements among the workers. **BRIAN PEARCE**

LABOUR

WHAT'S BEHIND ST PANCRAS WITCH-HUNT?

By Ursula Verity

As this is written, the news of the suspension of Councillor John Lawrence of St Pancras is in the Press, and I am recovering from the exhaustion of the municipal election. The two things are connected.

Why has John Lawrence been suspended from membership of the Labour Party? The Manchester Guardian, that pope-like arbiter on working-class affairs, says he has embarrassed Lena Jeger, the local MP, while Morgan Phillips denied that it has any connexion with the flying of the Red Flag on May Day, or the fracas with the fascist interrupters.

I believe that the suspension has quite a lot to do with these things.

I have never met Councillor Lawrence, but I heard him speak at the Brighton Conference. During the debate on the Rent Act, he demanded that the increases imposed now under the Act should be cancelled by a Labour government.

He told how he and his colleagues on the Council had 'chased landlords in and out of broken-down lavatories to serve notices of disrepair on them'.

He said he had caused them to be taken to court because of the insanitary condition of the property, but a fine of a few pounds was the only result, with no repairs done.

Gentlemen's agreements shattered

Of course, to embarrass landlords in this way, to refuse to join in Civil Defence, to give Council employees a day's holiday with pay on May Day, and to fly the Red Flag over the Town Hall, are actions which shatter the gentlemanly agreements that exist too often between Tory and Labour civic dignitaries, and between Members of Parliament.

But what has all this to do with the election in my own ward? Well, we lost in the ward, as usual, though the town was held by our Labour Council.

After our well-organized, hard-fought campaign, only 33 per cent. of our electors turned out, even among the working-class part of the ward.

Our disgruntled City Fathers complain bitterly, and say 'Workers deserve all they get, for being too apathetic to vote for us', but sometimes I think that if I were not a socialist I would not go very far to vote for anyone under present conditions.

Always the same questions

We held two indoor meetings, and at each the same questions were put:

'If your side get into power nationally, will you undo what the Tories have done? Will my increased rent go down?'

'Your lot are just like the others. Rents have gone up on our Council estate, but repairs are not being done. You are only landlords after all.'

'I work for the local authority, but the speed-up is as bad as any private firm, and the wages are often lower.'

Too often, all over the country, civic leaders become bogged down in the petty details of administration, and forget that they were elected because they claimed to be socialists, who would have a different policy from that of the Tories.

Birmingham, where houses are to be taken over by the authority when threat of eviction exists, is a striking exception.

Elsewhere, our leaders are dutifully pulling the capitalist cart uphill, while the money-men crack the whip.

Labour Governments have been in thrall to American Finance, and Labour councils bow the knee to Tory Government squeeze measures.

The whole Labour movement needs a crop of modern Lansburys, to defy this vicious Government with concrete actions, rather than merely to whine about it.

When they appear, will they be disciplined, as John Lawrence is to be? Our vigilance must be their protection.

LETTER

WORKERS' COUNCILS TO BE HAMSTRUNG

GOMULKA has proposed joint sessions of workers' councils with the factory works committee and the works council at three-monthly intervals. The works committee is the party branch and the works council is the official trade union committee.

As decisions of this joint standing conference will be considered binding, it is fair to say that the future power in any given factory will not be the workers' council but this conference of three bodies plus the management.

Since the unions have many party members in their ranks and the managers are also frequently party members, this body will in most cases do what Gomulka intends it to do—restore the party's 'leading role'.

Some factories have workers' councils large enough to win a majority vote over the other two committees. Many will find themselves in a minority.

Gomulka's recent statement in Budapest is proof enough of pressure from the Soviet Union:

'We regard as correct . . . decisions take by the Soviet Union to help . . . forces of socialism in Hungary. It was an international obligation on the part of the Soviet Union to act in the interests of the Hungarian people . . .'

Just whom does Gomulka refer to when he talks of 'we'? In late October 1956, in an appeal to the Polish nation, the central committee of the Polish United Workers' Party stated:

'We are of the opinion that the problem of the defence . . . of people's power . . . can be solved by the inner forces of the Hungarian people, headed by the working class, and **not by intervention from without.**'

Mr Dressler quotes the suppression of Po Prostu as a legitimate source of anxiety. I heartily agree with this. But the suppression of Po Prostu cannot be seen in isolation from the recent moves on worker's councils.

Trade unions not trusted

Mr Dressler states that Loga-Sowinski echoes 'accurately and insistently Waclawek's statements [quoted by me] about the aims of the workers' councils'.

I cannot agree. Mr Sowinski refers to the 'continuous fight against bureaucratic resistance . . .' but he does not see this, as Waclawek does, as the role of the workers' councils but as 'the duty of the trade unions' (Polish Facts and Figures, no. 596, p. 4, paragraph 1).

In a country where the unions, in spite of recent improvements, still lack the trust of the majority of the working class, this is a very different matter.

I would not suggest that Mr Dressler, for whom I have the greatest respect, has made a superficial estimation of Loga-Sowinski's statement, as I have no doubt that both our quotations are authentic. Errors can be made owing to the contradictory nature of many Polish official statements.

So, I plead guilty of the misleading use of the word 'fuse', but I cannot accept Mr Dressler's criticism of distortion by superficial analyses, misunderstanding statements and so on.

This sort of debate is good—and overdue. I believe that our interchange of ideas has been valuable. **Tony Guthrie**