Natural Catastrophies Under Capitalism

When I heard of the earthquake in Yugoslavia and the terrible fate of the victims, it brought back to mind my own terrifying experiences in Vienna, as it must have reminded millions of others in the world, who survived the bombing of their homes and the carnage in the 1940s. The blind forces of nature could not then be blamed. No, these deeds were unspeakable crimes perpetrated by deliberate human design, scientifically organized and directed by the monster, and the paid managers of capitalism, supported and blessed by the church!

That 20 years later this ogre should still be able to stalk the earth, and openly parade, with impunity, his armour, and boast of the ever growing destructive power of his megaton bombs and Polaris-craft, will probably be one of the phenomena incomprehensible to a future society no longer afflicted with political mental inertia.

The suffering of the survivors of the earthquake in Yugoslavia has been temporarily relieved, as usual, under capitalism, by charitable effort, Caritas, collections and other alms from many countries; it could indeed equitably, appropriately, i.e., properly be dealt with only under socialism (the classless, price-profit-money-less system of society), where no one struck by some misfortune would become a beggar.

If the experience on this sad, macabre occasion will only show that there is neither in Yugoslavia, or in Soviet Russia or in China, or anywhere else in the world, any sign of a social system other than capitalism; in other words, if another nail can be driven into the coffin of what those unscrupulous usurpers of power, those master liars and frauds, claim to be communism, some good will have come out of even this tragedy. Perhaps the inglorious break-up of the so-called Ideological Conference in Moscow will drive yet another nail into the Bolshevik coffin.

R. FRANK, Vienna

WSP: Not Too Revolutionary?

(Reprinted from "The Intellectual Informer," Milford, Michigan, Oct. 1, 1963)

The following is in reply to a letter which we sent to the World Socialist Party asking for comments on our Special Socialism Issue:

"You ask for comments or criticism. On page 7 you have listed our organization (for which we take a deep curtsy) and immediately comment, 'while less revolutionary than the S.L.P. it is nevertheless a Marxist group.' This is a strange statement. There is no explanation...only a judgment. In our view to be revolutionary in a political sense can only mean to advocate a complete overthrow of the existing social relations and introduction of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth.

"This is our object.

"In our opinion the S.L.P. does not aspire to our concept of socialism. The DeLeonist Industrial unionism is a rigid society that talks of "labor checks" or wage payment. Socialism is the abolition of the wages system.

"There are many inaccuracies throughout your paper. On page 5, for example, 'Socialism basically is an economic system in which the major industries are regarded as publicly owned.' The government supervises industry, etc. This is just RUBBISH.

"Public ownership indicates state capitalism and not socialism. Existence of government implies those being governed.

"Your writer has not done any homework. The Marxist classics that are readily available on the subject of socialism have religiously been ignored."

L. FENTON

PASS THIS COPY — — ON TO A FRIEND

BOOK REVIEW

"JOHN W. DAFOE, Editor"

The socialist is under no delusion as to the function of a city newspaper editor. In a broad sense he is the mouthpiece of national ruling class interests, and in particular he advocates the special interests of the capitalists in the area in which his paper operates. It is his job to so present his editorial data that it appears to be representative of the views and ideas of the local community and at the same time in the national interest. In other words he is a ruling class propagandist. Should there be any doubt on this score a reading of Professor Ramsay Cook's book, "The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press" (1963), will help dispel it.

Did His Job Well

For 43 years Mr. Dafoe ably fulfilled his task. A Liberal in politics, he had served as editor on several eastern Conservative newspapers before settling into the editor's chair at the Manitoba Free Press in Winnipeg in 1901. His predecessor, A. J. Magurn, had been fired by the owner, Mr. Clifford Sifton, for "failure to live up to his contracted obligation of 'holding yourself to the advancement of the interest of the property.'" Dafoe soon received his working orders from Sifton. The latter regarded all of Manitoba and in fact all the western prairies as his paper's constituency. The material and news articles "had to be written and arranged so as to best influence the reader. If this is done properly 'the simple minded farmer will swallow it, and a great many people who are not farmers and who ought to know better.'" "The objective of a Party newspaper was to 'get the public mind saturated with its views and ideas.'" (Sifton letters to staff members. 1901, p. 15-16.)

The joining of the forces of Dafoe and Sifton paid off. For Sifton the "property" became an increasingly profitable enterprise and at the same time a powerful lever to advance the political careers of the Sifton family. For Dafoe came the opportunity to peddle his version of Liberal nationalism on domestic and international affairs. He was accomplished in the use of words and could build plausible editorials, though often based on false premises. His reputation soared. In fact it was said during his lifetime that "for the past generation now it has been generally true that what the Free Press thinks today, western Canada will think tomorrow and the intelligent part of eastern Canada will think a few years hence." (p. 285.)

1919 General Strike

While debating the pros and cons of ruling class party politics Dafoe was masterful, calm and serene. But he lost his composure completely when the economic phase of the class struggle broke loose in full flood in Winnipeg in 1919. Roughly 35,000 workers of a population of 180,000 went on a sympathetic strike. The issue—collective bargaining, the right of workers to bargain as a group with their employers on matters of wages and working conditions. The railway workers were out. So were the milk and bakery workers. Restaurants and theatres closed. The civic workers, including all fire departments and a large majority of the police force, were out. Street cars and cabs stopped running. The building trades, metal trades and printing trades ceased work. Almost all industrial activity stopped. The Free Press itself was reduced to a single page, printed somewhere.

This was intolerable. The employers organized a "Citizens Committee of 1000" to break the strike. Dafoe, just returning from European postwar conferences, accepted their views. The Free Press had by this time gained a national reputation. In its reduced form, its readers were now