

April 23, 1955

TO THE EDITING CHAIRMAN:

Dear Friends:

The ILS decided to begin sending around rough drafts of some of the articles its members write either as Front Pages or columns for discussion by the local committees. This will both give the locals a view of some of the projected articles by the centre and give the centre the benefit of the local discussions so that the drafts can be rewritten accordingly before we go to press.

The first article contributed by Weaver is here appended for discussion. It is written as presented to the ECE and not rewritten afterwards. Therefore it is necessary to state that the suggestion by Nelson to begin on the note of Eisenhower's statement at the time of Stalin's death and the reaction to it on the part of the workers and public in general, and the one by Frazier that the article include reference to the fact that Victor Roubter who was to have been the European representative of the UAW promptly left Europe after June 17th revolt and never returned. When the local discussions are in as well the article will first be rewritten.

Milton stated he could have his column ready in two weeks, and Watkins his review of Indignant Heart, which will precede the serialisation of the work on the Negro page will follow. The ECE hopes that the locals will do the same and that all this material will not only circulate ahead of ~~the~~ publication but so will discussions on it. That is the best way to begin getting the feel of the paper as a whole, instead of each local concerned with but one section and losing sight of the whole.

Weaver

TWO PAGES OF TODAY'S HISTORY THAT HAVE SHOWN THE WAY TO FREEDOM

On June 17, 1953 the East Berlin workers came out in a strike against the Communist rulers. This unprecedented action began as a strike against "higher norms", that is, speed-up, and developed into calling for the release of political prisoners and the formation of a new government through free elections. It was the first strike to have occurred in a country under Russian occupation and it thereby changed the political face of Europe.

A few weeks later another "first" occurred that shook the Kremlin to its foundations. This time it was a strike at its own slave labor camp at Vorkuta. This strike, inspired by the East German revolt, was even more remarkable than the first in that it was organized underground by prisoners who had no rights whatever and right under the noses of the NKVD (Russian Secret Police).

We now have the story of this other strike in a most remarkable book by a Dr. Joseph Scholmer, an inmate there who experienced imprisonment by the Gestapo

12042

for his anti-Nazi activities only to be rearrested by the Russian after his liberation for his anti-Russian sentiments. This eye-witness account of the Vorkuta revolt is distinguished from all other stories of forced labor camps by its passionate and unrelenting struggle for freedom. Even the horrible conditions in these camps stand out not for their terror but by virtue of the prisoners' sense of honour: from their reference to the guards' Tommy guns as "balalaikas" to their tales of how Jews meet the new anti-Semitism by writing, next to the word, nationality, "Indica". It is this humanity, this comradeship, which made living tolerable and united them not alone in the spirit to revolt but the actual planning and execution of it.

"Not in the wildest dreams"

The strike in July 1953 could not have occurred without the previous underground formation of resistance groups within the camps which were led by the various nationalities of Russia, mainly Ukrainians. Yet the strike as it occurred was entirely different from the action planned previously.

Prior to June 17 all the preparations for resistance to the totalitarian rulers were based on the eventuality of war and therefore looked to the Western rulers to start. When Stalin died hope spread through the camp but all that came from the Kewshovers and Churchill was condolences to the leaders who continued the Stalin regime. Once June 17th took place, on the other hand, the Vorkuta prisoners saw that the workers and only the workers, of whatever country, must achieve their own liberation and by their own methods. East Germany had shown the way and they decided to follow up that strike.

"For a time," writes Dr. Scholmer, "the prisoners had not really been thinking in terms of outward success at all. They were just intoxicated by the strike...For all those taking part in it, the strike was simply the first positive defiant action of this sort ever to take place within the Soviet Union. And that was enough. It was something unheard of, something which no one had ever thought possible even in his wildest dreams."

that the system was unassailable."

One Face of Treachery

Five months after June 17th one of the leaders of the Russian resistance group met an East German student in Vorkuta and naturally the talk was all about the East German revolt. The Russian leaders first then grasped the treachery of "the West". Not alone had the Eisenhowers and the Churchills sided with the Stalin regime in Russia as the prisoners here knew, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ^{from} ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ but they now found out that even their safe Allied radios no encouragement to the workers in revolt was coming. To the prisoners' "why", the East German students replied, "because they were afraid that any aggravation of the situation might lead to war."

"But it's clear from the reports from the prisoners that the Russians were also afraid it might lead to war! Each side was afraid of the non-existent courage of the other!"

The East German students resumed their tale that the labor bureaucrats, as well as the West German Government, found nothing better to tell the West Berlin workers than to be sure "not to compromise themselves". Finally the Russian resistance leader saw how wrong it was at all to depend on "the West". He said: "These radio stations are controlled by the various governments, aren't they? Well, on June 17 they had to ask the government officials what they were to do. And the government officials have a professional dislike of popular uprising, wherever they take place."

Back in Democratic lands "The man in the street has the best idea"

The epilogue Dr. Scholmer writes is much more depressing than the conditions at Vorkuta. For here he was free at last, he thought. He had been one of some thousands of slave laborers released during the Big Four Ministers Conference. He had a story of revolt to tell and the press to listen to him. They listened but they didn't hear. First, these Russian experts could not understand that a revolt had occurred: they were ready to discuss abstractions, such as could such a revolt occur, but not the concrete fact that it has occurred. Then he was given

the line that "the time was inopportune" to tell his story.

"When I first mentioned the word, 'civil war' to these people", Dr. Scholmer concludes, "they were appalled. The possibility of a rising lay outside their realm of comprehension. They had no idea that there were resistance groups in the corps..."

"I talked to all sorts of people in the first few weeks after my return from the Soviet Union. It seemed to me that the man in the street had the best idea of what was going on. The 'experts' seemed to understand nothing."

The man in the street does indeed know more than these experts because the American worker, as the American public in general, in its own struggles with the bureaucrats, inside and outside factories, inside and outside governments, in its own aspirations for a new society and struggle for it feels at one with the Russian and East German workers. It is not a question of language. It is a question of experiences and expectations.