

LABOR ACTION

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Looking Back Over 1951's Headlines

By GORDON HASKELL

Once more, at the year's end, it may be useful to glance back over the full span of the past twelve months. One year is far too short a time in which to attempt to place events in full historical perspective. Yet the pace of events is so rapid, and we appear to be in such a period of historical frenzy, that reviewing even one year may help in assessing the main lines of development and separating them from what has been more or less accidental.

The main headline in LABOR ACTION for January 1, 1951 reads:

THE HARD LESSON OF THE DEFEAT IN KOREA

At the time, the American troops were in full retreat from the Yalu River. The big question was: Why? The article points out one of the main fallacies of American foreign policy: that Stalinism can be stopped and defeated merely through the military might of America.

After a whole year during which the Korean people and their wealth have been subjected to fantastic destruction and American casualties have reached figures exceeded only in two or three of the major wars in our history, a military stalemate has been achieved. . . . But is the U. S. any closer to stopping or destroying Stalinism?

Truman Message Means: The Fair Deal is Dead, Cold-War Deal to Rule

(Jan. 15)

Almost no comment is required. In President Truman's State of the Union message (with which the article deals) he listed a ten-point program for the year ahead, the first three points of which dealt with the expansion of American and Allied military might. Some of the remaining points gave lip service to Fair Deal planks in watered-down form. Although much legislation and vast appropriations have been passed for the military mobilization, not a single one of the Fair Deal points has been passed, in any form.

Auto Workers Fear Unemployment In Detroit Despite Boom

(Jan. 22)

What was a fear at the beginning of the year has become a stark reality at its end. Now, after a full year of rearmament, Detroit has over 100,000 unemployed, with further large-scale layoffs in the auto industry looming. The leadership of the United Automobile Workers (CIO) has been looking hopefully to Washington for a "solution."

But the gentlemen in the government are much too busy with other problems to concern themselves with the plight of the auto workers. During the whole year the ferment in the ranks has been growing under the pressure of the layoffs and the speedup. The union leaders' answer: Sit on the lid, discuss with Washington, and pray it will blow over.

U. S. to India: Vote Our Way—or Starve!

(Feb. 5)

The setting: (1) nearly a hundred million people in India in acute danger of starvation. (2) In the United Nations, the Indian delegation leads the fight against the U. S.-sponsored resolution to declare Stalinist China an aggressor and to apply sanctions as punishment for the aggression. A number of other governments are following India's leadership.

The Indian government has asked the United States for wheat. The U. S. government threatens: Either drop your opposition to our resolution in the U. N., or you get no wheat!

The results: India does not vote for the resolution. But enough governments are impressed by the tough stand taken by the U. S. to vote for it. Later, India gets the wheat she needs. But the American sham of impartial "humanitarianism" is exploded. Americans may have forgotten this episode. In Asia, it will long be remembered.

Labor Walks Off Wage Board in Protest; Can Keep Free Hand Only by Staying Off

(Feb. 26)

This was probably the most significant single event in our domestic history during 1951. All sections of the American labor movement, except for the United Mine Workers and the Stalinist-controlled unions, participated in a dramatic demonstration against (1) the disregard for the workers in the wage-freeze and spurious price-freeze legislation. (2) The exclusion of the labor leaders from all significant participation in the mobilization planning, and the monopoly of control over the mobilization in the hands of businessmen.

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Government Heads Stall on Florida Anti-Negro Terror

By MEL HACKER

Terror is at work in Florida. Negro and Jewish communities have been terrorized by a series of dynamite blasts aimed at Negro homes and Jewish synagogues in central Florida. These are the probing fingers of a rotting Southern reaction. It is trying to maintain the state of peonage and the exploitation of the Negro—the patterns of segregation in housing, education, employment—if not by legalisms and traditional pressures, then by terrorism. Anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic feelings have also arisen from the crusade to preserve pure lily-white Protestantism from the encroachments of aggressive civil rights groups.

The most recent bombing claimed the life of Harry T. Moore, Negro educator and co-ordinator of NAACP affairs in Florida. Moore had been touring the state speaking at meetings, militantly attacking Florida terror against Negroes, raising defense funds for the surviving two of four Negroes accused of raping a white woman at Groveland, Florida, in 1949.

Two of the Negroes died violently. Ernest Thomas was shot to death by a posse near Greenville. Samuel Shepherd was shot to death by Lake County Sheriff Willis V. McCall while the sheriff was

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HUNGARY AND FLORIDA

The country has just been swept by a "wave of indignation." Every American feels "humiliated," the press informs us. The situation is disgraceful. Something should be done about it. Why doesn't Truman act? This can't go on very much longer . . . etc., etc.

The above indignation does NOT refer to the cold-blooded assassination of a Negro leader who died because he dared to defend his people's right to live like human beings even in the state of Florida. Harry T. Moore was killed by a dynamite explosion, as the climax to a series of terrorist blasts against Negroes, Jews and Catholics in the Miami area, because he was a champion in the fight against Jim Crow.

But the "wave of indignation" was not for him. We should have been humiliated last week, we were told instead, because Hungary had fined four U. S. flyers. (For comment on the Hungarian affair, see World Politics column, page 4—Ed.)

Highly indignant and deeply humiliated senators have called on the White House to break off diplomatic relations with Hungary, because that barbarous country dared to exact a \$120,000 "ransom." But the Department of Justice—whose bailiwick covers civilized Florida, if not Hungary—is still officially wondering whether there is any reason for it to step into the Moore investigation.

President Truman—whose capacity for uncontrolled indignation is well known since his impetuous telegram to a Sioux City address in the case of Sergeant Rice, the Indian veteran whose color clashed with the decor of a "white" cemetery—has not yet made public any telegrams on the matter.

Wishing to believe the best of people, even in the face of difficulties, we have no doubt he is privately indignant to a suitable extent. But in his hands lies the power to see that punishment is brought to the race-hating assassins who are guilty of a crime greater than Hungary's \$120,000 slap at the U. S. But he does not move—because unity with the Dixiecrats is more important. Meanwhile the hue and cry over the \$120,000 "insult" is whipped up to a national frenzy.

Americans have grimly laughed at the (by now) old joke about the Russian who parries references to Stalin's slave-labor camps with "What about lynchings in the South?" They see the point—when its edge is turned against the other fellow. While Harry T. Moore's body lies unavenged in Florida, in spirit beside the body of Samuel Shepherd, the American press has been yelling abroad: "What about your \$120,000 ransom?"

Anti-War Left Wing Wins in YPSL

By HENRY GALE

NEW YORK, Dec. 31—At its 1951 convention, which took place here on December 28-30, the Young People's Socialist League, youth group of the Socialist Party, broke sharply with its recent tradition and reoriented itself in the direction of an anti-war, revolutionary socialist policy. The dimension of this change is perhaps indicated by the fact that they felt so uncomfortable with their old traditional name that they decided to trade it in for a bright and shiny new name, "Young Socialists."

For the past three years, since the bureaucratic suppression and expulsion of its "Libertarian" left wing (many of whose members have since joined the Socialist Youth League) the YPSL had declined precipitately.

Both as a cause and an effect of this decline, it occupied a position on the extreme right wing of the socialist movement, echoing the SP in its support of American imperialism and of the Korean war.

As the YPSL began to return to political life, a new left wing, centering around its two relatively active sections, Los Angeles and New

York, gradually coalesced. At the convention just concluded, this left wing, for the first time, gained a majority.

The basic issue confronting all political tendencies today is the world power struggle between the U. S. and Stalinist Russia, the threatened third world war and its overtone, the Korean bloodbath. It is especially the attitude toward this struggle that determines the character of a socialist organization; it can either capitulate to one or the other imperialist camp, or it can oppose both. On this decisive question the YS has chosen the

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(Youth & Student Corner) |

Looking Back over 1951's Headlines — —

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Eventually, a deal was reached and labor returned to the mobilization setup. Since then it has had no more real say in the economic plans than before; and although wage controls have been loosened somewhat, they remain essentially what they were in the face of the almost complete collapse of price control.

But neither the government, nor the labor movement have forgotten the panic, on the one hand, nor the excitement and feeling of strength and solidarity, on the other, which accompanied this action.

Mass Strike In Barcelona Defies Franco (Mar. 19)

This event was followed by mass strikes or demonstrations in Madrid, the Basque country and elsewhere. The movement was not led by any organized political party nor did it have any concrete political goal. It was an elemental expression of the growing dissatisfaction and unrest in Spain, and its relative success—indeed, the very possibility of its happening—was an index to the weakness of the Franco regime.

The movement gradually died down, and on the surface tranquillity seems to prevail. But while Washington has been openly propping up the Franco government during this whole year, the workers and the people of Spain generally have not yet had their final say on the fate of their hated government.

MacArthur Replacement Highlights Crisis in American Foreign Policy (Apr. 16)

MacArthur was dumped, and embarked on his "triumphal" tour of the United States. Another "Great Debate" raged in its full sound and fury, signifying not too much. But the crisis in American foreign policy is no closer to solution than it was last April.

For its source lies neither in irresolution nor in the conflicting policies advocated by powerful economic and political factions. It lies in the basic inability of the United States to win a real political victory over Stalinism in Asia or Europe.

British Labor Left Wing Breaks With Attlee on Arms, Foreign Policy (Apr. 30)

At the end of 1951 Winston Churchill, now in power, was forced to admit that Aneurin Bevan was right on the inability of Britain to maintain the pace of rearmament proposed by the Labor cabinet last spring. In the meantime, the Bevanite program—which might be summarized as: Less for Arms, More for Socialism—has put more vigor in the Labor Party than it has shown since 1950.

Iran: Four Hands Grab for Oil (June 4)

Part of this article reads: "Whether or not it is still possible to prevent the ultimate catastrophe of Stalinist conquest of Iran is uncertain. It may be too late regardless of what is done."

And in referring to what a correct British Labor policy should be, the article continues: "The beginning of a democratic attitude must be the admission of the right of the Iranians to repudiate imperialist and unequal treaties—treaties, incidentally, which give a smaller share to Iran than the U. S. grants to other Near Eastern nations in comparable enterprises."

The drama in Iran has not yet reached its climax. But one thing is clear: the failure of the British (or Americans) to adopt a democratic policy on Iranian oil has (a) strengthened the position of Stalinism in those areas; (b) stimulated the national aspirations of all the peoples of the Middle East; and (c) for the moment, at least, strengthened the control of the reactionary feudal cliques which rule most of these countries and which have placed themselves at the head of the nationalist movements.

High Court OKs Smith Act, Using Stalinist Reasoning (June 11)

Thus the notorious Smith "Gag" Act, which makes it a crime to advocate revolutionary ideas in America, was given final court approval, despite the vigorous dissent of Justices Black and Douglas. The specific case was the conviction of 11 leaders of the Communist Party under the act. The country took another stride along the road which leads to the police state.

Since then, the arrest of a number of other Stalinist leaders has taken place. All are charged with violating the Smith Act. But despite the general contempt and hatred with which the Stalinists are regarded by the labor movement and the vast majority of liberals and progressives in America, the dangerous implications of the Smith Act have sunk home.

In November the national CIO convention passed a strong resolution against the Smith Act. On December 13 the national headquarters of the ADA announced that it was launching a campaign against the Smith Act.

Who's Halley and Where's His Program? Liberal Party Puts Up a 'Crime Buster' (June 25)

The headline tells the story, almost in full. After a rather dull campaign, Halley won the election for president of New York's City Council. This was the first time the Liberal Party, based on the hat and garment workers of New York City, actually nominated and ran a major candidate on their own ticket against both the Democratic and Republican machines. But they ran him on a straight "clean government" platform, devoid of any specifically "Liberal" content.

The great significance which LABOR ACTION saw in this development lay in the fact that the Liberal Party was bucking the old-party machines with its own candidate; and it was for this reason, in spite of the nature of its candidate, that Independent Socialists called for a vote to the Liberal Party in this election.

At year's end Liberal Party leaders and members were keeping their fingers crossed: How long would Halley play ball with the Liberals?

IN KOREA: IS IT PEACE? The People Look Forward to an End of the Killing (July 2)

The truce talks in Korea had started. The "little people" of the world hoped fervently that they would bring a speedy end to the senseless slaughter in that unhappy country.

Six months later the negotiations are still going on, and the killing continues, though at a much lower rate. The world looks hopefully to the truce negotiations, not only because people want the war to end there but even more because they feel that a truce in Korea would be a symptom of the true intentions of the major powers in the cold war. A truce may mean a lull in that world-wide struggle. No truce may

mean that its speed will be stepped up. No one looks to a truce as the end of the war threat, and certainly no one thinks that it will bring unity and peace to Korea, the chief victim of the great imperialist struggle.

THE SHAME OF CICERO (July 23)

The police force of Cicero, a Chicago suburb, aided eventually by an inflamed mob of some 8000 men and women, prevented a Negro bus driver from moving into an apartment in the town with his family. This was one of the most dramatic incidents of the year in the struggle of the Negro people for full equality in America.

The shame of Cicero was made even more shameful when a local grand jury indicted, not the cops and the rioters, but the Negro's lawyer and the people who had rented the apartment to him. Later, to be sure, the indictments were quashed, and a federal grand jury brought indictments against the police, or at least their chief, and other town officials.

Many other incidents of discrimination, ranging from the murder of Negro prisoners by a police officer to the open refusal of one of New York's swankiest night clubs to admit a famous Negro artist broke into the headlines during the year. The struggle against Jim Crow is making progress, but Jim Crow still stands dominant in the lives of the Negro people of America.

War Budget Plus Decontrol Bill Equals Inflation (Aug. 13)

Throughout the year, the mobilization of industry for war production continued. But the pace was slower than had been anticipated. While factories were being built and others tooled up for armaments, the civilian economy spurred ahead to new highs. Though purchasing power was strong, people were fearful of spending their money, and many lines of commodities failed to move at volumes which had been expected. Prices kept up a fairly steady increase in some lines, but in others fell below the ceilings set by earlier legislation.

By mid-year the clamor from the businessmen for an end to controls resulted in legislative action. The control bill was emasculated of almost everything but wage controls (and even these were considerably weakened).

Yet everyone knows that the big inflationary push lies ahead. By the late spring of next year, military production is planned to be at flood-tide. This will absorb more and more of the raw materials and manpower now going into civilian production. And when the real squeeze comes on, the government will not have the legal machinery to keep inflation in check.

IUE Still Faces Task of Beating CP With Militancy (Sept. 10)

This headline applies specially to the IUE, the CIO electrical union, but also to the rest of the American labor movement. Despite all the advantages of the anti-"red" hysteria in the country, help from all sections of the government and the expenditure of vast sums of money, the American labor movement has failed to completely eliminate the Stalinists from influence in the labor movement. The Stalinist-led UE, the West Coast longshoremen, the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, and a few others are far from dead.

There is only one explanation for this: the labor movement generally has been far too prone to use organizationally bureaucratic and politically reactionary means against the Stalinists. And although the power of the latter has been reduced, many militants still rally to the Stalinist leaders in sheer revulsion against the tactics and ideology of their opponents.

Socialists of India and Japan Declare Unity In Fight for Third Camp vs. Both War Blocs (Oct. 8)

The statement signed by leaders of these two important mass socialist parties in Asia is fraught with significance for the future. In contrast to this expression of an ardent desire to stay aloof from the capitalist and Stalinist camps in the world-wide struggle, and to build a new camp of the oppressed and exploited peoples, the social-democratic parties of most other countries have lined up unequivocally in the camp of American capitalism. Foremost, as could be expected, is the dominant leadership of the American Socialist Party, despite opposition from the ranks and from the YPSL. But the Indian and Japanese joint statement gives further hope and determination to all those who are seriously seeking a way out of the impending world catastrophe.

Space does not permit us to trace all the other important political developments and trends of the year. We have had to leave out the political scandals which revealed corruption in all branches of the American government. We have not mentioned all the extremely important developments surrounding the growth and gradual consolidation of American power in Western Europe via NATO, and the accompanying growing hatred and suspicion of America displayed by most Europeans. We have not traced the struggle over academic freedom which has been going on throughout American educational and academic life.

In looking back, we can say that the dominant feature of 1951 has been this: It has been a year of preparation. Few trends have found their culmination during this year—which is another way of saying that there have been few major breaks, few sharp or decisive turns.

The American economy has been building up to an inflationary crisis; the rearmament program has had much more serious repercussions abroad than here, but even overseas the big impact still lies ahead; the American labor movement has taken steps toward political independence, but steps away from it too; the tendency toward suppression of civil liberties has continued, but it has neither taken a decisive turn to the police state, nor have really powerful forces been mobilized against it; neither in Korea nor elsewhere has the momentum toward the Third World War become so great as to place that catastrophe in the immediate future.

It has been a year of gestation. It would be foolhardy to attempt to predict just when any of these trends will reach their apex. It would be even more foolish for socialists to believe that they can safely sit back, observe the trends, and merely speculate on the velocity and direction of their future development. That velocity and direction depends on them as much, if not more, than on others. But it will depend on them only if their study of the political and economic world serves as a guide to action.

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