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BEHIND THE LAOS SETTLEMENT

We reproduce herewith an article from the May 25th issue of Workers World on the situation in Laos in light of the steps to get a settlement. This journal is not an organ of the Fourth International but the information and ideas of the article are in general accord with our position. Ed. Note.

Imperialism must find a new stooge in Laos

Just how much of a 'neutralist' is Souvanna Phouma, the Laotian prince who has finally stopped his Paris holiday to go and form a coalition government in Laos? He is of course not an extreme Right Winger nor is he a tool of U.S. imperialism, or he could not have been Premier three times with the qualified support of the Patriotic Front and the Pathet Lao each time.

But the U.S., Britain and other imperialist powers are suspiciously anxious to put Souvanna Phouma into the saddle. Granted that they are frightened of an easy and successful Communist-led revolution if they don't do this, how is it that they are anxious to support this 'neutralist' that 5,000 U.S. Marines have gone to Southeast Asia to put him in office? Phouma's 'neutralism' half-heartedly went along with Pathet Lao when that revolutionary army was sweeping the crumbling right-wing before it. But this same 'neutralist' can easily change his political stripe if put into power on the gunbarrels of 5,000 U.S. Marines.

The following factual account by Anna Louise Strong clearly reveals the political character of Souvanna Phouma, and how easily imperialism operated against him when it could not operate through him.

"A headlined article with photograph in the New York Times for August 18, 1960, described Prince Souvanna Phouma as the new premier of Laos and a 'pro-Western neutralist.' The same issue stated that if General Nosavan should move against Vientiane, he would meet with no opposition from Washington. Thus, nine days after Kong Le's dawn adventure (in overthrowing the U.S. stooge and putting in Souvanna Phouma for the third time - Ed. note), it was made clear to the world that Prince Souvanna Phouma was the recognised premier but that General Nosavan intended to fight him and was able to count on the U.S.A..

"Prince Phouma at first did not seem to take Nosavan's opposition seriously. He flew personally to Savannakhet on August 23, had a talk with Nosavan and returned to tell a press conference that everything was 'well settled,' since 'the U.S. ambassador had assured him that Washington would not interfere in Laos.'" Said Phouma: "These assurances are sufficient for me." The Time magazine, however already noted that General Nosavan not only was rallying troops but had the king in Luang Prabang 'under something like house arrest.' For several weeks Prince Phouma gave more attention to placating Nosavan than to any neutralist policy or negotiations with the Pathet Lao. It is a common habit of middle-of-the-road politicians to take the support of the Left for granted and try to placate the Right.

Phouma kept Nosavan in the cabinet as Vice-Premier and Minister of the Interior. He sent Kong Le (who had led the revolt which put Phouma in power) back to his job as captain and spoke of him slightly when the people made him a popular hero. On August 29, Phouma met Nosavan in Luang Prabang and tried with concessions to dissuade him from the armed attacks he openly prepared. None of this appeasement worked. Nosavan moved openly against the government in Vientiane (capital of Laos) with Thailand's help. (then follows the story of the military movements of the counter-revolutionary Nosavan and proofs of the all-out support given him by the United States - Ed. note).....

"When Phouma's six weeks courtship of Nosavan had clearly brought nothing but war, the Patriotic Front began a courtship of Phouma. On October 1, it sent him an official reminder that the Patriotic Front had been waiting for some time for the promised negotiations. ...They proposed that appeasement of Nosavan cease, that democratic rights be returned to the people - who were already throwing out Nosavan's local governors in the provinces - that a coalition government be formed and diplomatic relations be set up with the U.S.S.R., People's China and North Vietnam.

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"The following day, the Pathet Lao pointedly asked Phouma why he had taken no steps in his 'neutralist policy,' why he 'persecuted the Youth Committee for Peace and Neutrality' and why he 'excluded Kong Le from the Committee for the Defence of Vientiane.' This sharp reminder brought results. Phouma began to rally the help available to him as a neutralist. On October 5, he signed an agreement with Burma to fly in food and gasoline. On the 6th, he declared diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R.. On the 7th, he announced that negotiations would soon begin with the Pathet Lao. The Soviet ambassador flew in from Cambodia and agreed to airlift food and gasoline into Vientiane and to give other assistance if needed. But Phouma's neutrality was still strictly formal. When the effervescent Kong Le greeted the Soviet ambassador at the airport with a paratrooper display, Phouma reprimanded him and put him under house arrest.

from : Cash and Violence in Laos and Vietnam, pages 66-68.

Who's Who and What's what in Laos (extracts)

BOUN OUM: The extreme Rightist prince who works with the CIA and whom the U.S. would much prefer to run Laos. Has utterly no popular backing. The U.S. was giving him \$3 million a month subsidy until a couple of months ago. The State Department cut off the subsidy in an effort to get him join the coalition with 'neutralist' Souvanna Phouma. But Oum remained intransigent. It is thought that the CIA has been supplying him with the money which the U.S. had formally cut off.

PHOUMI NOSAVAN: The 'strong man' general behind Boun Oum. How strong he is may be judged by the fact that his army of 70,000, well supplied by the United States, has been constantly defeated by the 8,000 to 15,000 man Pathet Lao

SOUVANNA PHOUMA: 'neutralist' - He has been premier three times. The last time was in 1960 when he was overthrown by Boun Oum and Phoumi Nosavan with U.S. financial and military help. Souvanna Phouma is popular, but seems to have very little really independent following. Each time he has taken power, he has met great opposition from the Right and only the forces of the Left sustained him.

The Patriotic Front and the Pathet Lao only sustained him because they were not yet organised and centralised enough to put in their own man, even though they already had the majority of the country. Their man was:-

SOUPHANOUVONG: the almost legendary leader of the Pathet Lao and the Patriotic Front. Brother of Phouma and also a prince. Jailed by Sananikone in May, 1959 most probably under U.S. orders. At first, both police and military detachments refused to arrest him. Finally imprisoned by a 50 man army unit amid apologies and self recriminations.

After about a year, Souphanouvong and his followers, having won ^{over} their prison guards, broke jail, took the guards with them, walked through swamp and jungle all the way to Sam Neua (a trip of several month's heroic suffering) where they organised a new army which in a year's time had won over two thirds of the country.

PATHET LAO: 1954-The name Pathet Lao originally used by the French in 1954 because the Laotians marked their documents 'Pathet Lao' (Land of Lao) to distinguish themselves from the Vietnamese at the Geneva Conference of that time. The Laotians themselves began to use this name but - The official name of the movement was Neo Lao Otsala - or liberation Front of Laos. That movement grew broader and was later named Neo Lao Haksat - or Patriotic Front.

As time went on, Pathet Lao came to be the name for the military and Patriotic Front, the name for the liberation movement as a whole.

1957:- in November of that year, the Pathet Lao was demobilised by agreement and alliance between Souvanna Phouma the 'neutralist' and Souphanouvong, the 'pro-communist' leader of Pathet Lao.

Of the 7,000 man Pathet Lao army, about 5,500 returned to their homes. And the remaining 1,500 were incorporated as two battalions in the official Royal Army.

1958:- But of course the liberation forces were doublecrossed. In 1958, the new alliance won the elections, but lost the premiership (when Souvanna Phouma was ousted by American cash) and the liberation forces were demoralised for a time. A classical example of the Left bowing to the Centre and getting clobbered by the Right.

1959-60:- The Pathet Lao atomised and dispersed, the political leaders of the Patriotic Front in jail.

1960-61:- Pathet Lao army reorganised under Souphanouvong after his sensational prison break. Kong Le (the neutralist supporter of Souvanna Phouma) joins forces with Souphanouvong. Thus was formed the Patriotic Alliance. This includes both the 'neutrals' and the 'pro communists' as the capitalist press calls them. Formed in about December 1960. The armed forces of the Patriotic Alliance, including Kong Le's troops which are in the minority, are still usually referred to as the Pathet Lao.

1961:- Decisive military victory at Plain of Jars, series of other victories followed. Liberation forces clearly winning the whole country.....

This process continued through 61 and through 62. Thus was set the scene for U.S. intervention to save what they could by imposing Souvanna Phouma.

U.S.D.A.W. move against right wing

At its last meeting, the Nottingham Central branch of U.S.D.A.W. adopted the text of a letter to be sent to Union's National Executive and the Regional Committee which sharply criticised the Gaitskell wing of the leadership of the Labour Party. The criticism was along three lines:

- (1) The attack against the Young Socialists by proscribing and 'invest-gating' their papers, threats against National Committee members, etc.
- (2) Gaitskell's assurance to the I.C.I. that it wouldn't be nationalised given with ^{out} any authority.
- (3) The threats to the four sponsors of the Moscow Peace Conference - Russell, Collins, Wootton and Chorley.

The branch also mandated its delegates to the Labour Party, Trades Council and other bodies to support and initiate moves to protest along these lines.

Govan (Glasgow) protest against dissolution of Young Socialist Federation

The Govan branch of the Young Socialists passed the following resolution, which is supported by the Constituency Labour Party, shortly after the May Day incidents:

"The Govan Branch of the Young Socialists protests most strongly at the dissolution of the Glasgow Federation of Young Socialists. We regard this as an entirely undemocratic attack in many ways similar to the method of collective punishment used by the nazis. The whole cannot be punished for the action of the few.

"While in no way countenancing the action of the irresponsibles we feel that to dissolve the federation will have a most demoralising effect upon the growing youth movement at a time when the greatest activity is necessary to build the mass pressure to get rid of the Tory Government and prepare the way for an overwhelming victory for the Labour Party at the next election.

"We call upon the officials of the Scottish Council and the City Labour Party to withdraw the notice of dissolution and by an example of tolerance give members the confidence to go forward."

Mapperley protest against youth paper ban

At its last meeting Mapperley ward Labour Party (North Nottingham) unanimously passed a resolution for forwarding to the Constituency Party protest-against the proscription of Keep Left and the threatened action against Young Guard. The resolution recognises the right of the Young Socialists to produce their own papers especially in view of the fact that New Advance is not under their control. At the same meeting 3 people were proposed for the panel of municipal candidates - each of whom was either a supporter of the youth papers or very much opposed to their banning.

Lenton fights the witch-hunt

Among the actions opposing the witch-hunt which were taken at the last meeting of the Lenton (South Nottingham) ward Labour Party were a resolution condemning the threats against the four sponsors of the Moscow Conference and a letter of greetings to Lord Russell on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

All the members present supported the moves except the Secretary, who stated that he could not find his way clear to signing the letter to Russell. There was considerable discussion on this question during which it was pointed out to him that this would not commit him personally. The final result was that the secretary resigned and an acting secretary was appointed in his place.

Eastern Region opposes witch-hunt

At the Annual Conference of the Eastern Region of the Labour Party held the first week end of June the Young Socialists moved a resolution deploring the disciplinary action threatened against Lord Russell and others, which called upon the N.E.C. to adopt a more tolerant attitude in the interests of party unity. Despite all the attempts of the leadership the resolution went through by 107 votes to 42.

EDITORIAL NOTE: It is very important that we get speedy reports of all action against the witch-hunt. Will all readers make a point of sending in reports at the earliest opportunity for publication.

The following article extracted from Labor Forward, Australian left wing Labor Party journal, gives an important commentary of the differences between the British and Australian Tories. Ed. Note. The article reads:

Judged purely as a publicity stunt, McEwen's trip to Washington and Brussels must be seen as an enormous success. But, underneath the headlines, McEwen was engaged in a desperate attempt to protect Australian trade interests against an inevitable development of European, British, and American capitalism. His attempt to safeguard Australian exports against the trade interests of Europe and America must, in the end, be futile and absurd. While it is possible that he might win for Australian capitalism a few token concessions from the Common Market and the U.S. - which would be granted merely to keep onside, and soften the immediate blow of a deficit - it would be alien to the interests and the basic intention of the Common Market to grant Australia, or any Commonwealth country, any permanent or large amount of protected trade.

For Labor to align itself with the Menzies Government (together with a minute section of British capitalists who still live in a sentimental dream that confuses the Commonwealth with the British Empire) would indicate that it has no understanding of the issues involved. Since Menzies sees his hope in British and the U.S. concessions, we should see exactly what it would mean to those countries themselves if they agreed with Menzies. If the British capitalists were to maintain their present trade relations with Australia, they would not be permitted to enter the Common Market. But Britain must choose the Common Market over Australia in its interest, in every field.

Britain has a rate of growth which is much less than the Common Market countries, and is therefore producing less and selling less. In 1913 Britain's share of the world market was 13%, in 1950 it was 10%, and in 1960 it was 7.8%. Britain must therefore find a large market for its products immediately, or suffer a rapid decline. Britain's share of Australia's imports bill has been steadily shrinking, and while trade with Britain looms large for Australia, Australia only buys a very small section of British exports (Britain, of course, needs to export a great deal more than Australia because of its larger size.)

Australia's main exports to Britain are foodstuffs and metals. Most of the food that Britain needs could be imported from the Common Market countries and the U.S.. These countries, like Australia, subsidize their farmers, and want Britain to enter the Common Market as a purchaser of their foodstuffs. In any trade with Britain, the Common Market countries would lean heavily on foodstuffs and some could not trade with Britain otherwise. Internal political considerations of the Common Market countries (their own farmers, etc.) would prevent those countries from admitting Britain to the Common Market should it make other agreements for wheat, etc.. The supply of metals and raw materials for basic industry in the Common Market again excludes Australia. (see below).

The members of the Common Market are all heavily industrialised European countries. To carry on their industry they need a supply of raw materials. In the past most of these countries had colonies which they bled of the materials they needed. Since the war they have lost their colonies and find it difficult to dominate their ex-colonies either economically, politically or militarily, in order to assure themselves of raw materials at the prices they want to pay. The Common Market countries acting together, and with the United States, can dominate the world market for raw materials on their own terms, either by depressing the market, or political pressure of outright force. The collusion of Britain, France and Belgium to safeguard their copper interests in Katanga dramatically illustrates their intentions. Australia's high priced raw materials can find no place in this scheme.

Incapable of sustaining their traditional colonial systems, Britain and the Common Market countries see in union their only hope of maintaining their traditional markets and sources of supply.

Not only in relationship to the colonial countries, but with the Soviet Union, Britain and the Common Market hope to have a collective political influence which none of these countries could ever achieve individually. The aim of the Common Market is to eventually form a Capitalist United States of Europe with a common foreign policy and a defence policy based on N.A.T.O.. Taking all aspects of the question into consideration, we believe that it is inevitable that Britain join the Common Market. Her entry would only complete the development of existing integration, consolidating the cartels which British industry has already established with European manufacturers. The only thing which could prevent it

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Australia and the Common Market continued/

would be the interference of a larger capitalist power.

In spite of their talks with McEwen, and any talks they may have with McEwen, the U.S. supports every aspect of the Common Market, economic, imperialist and political. The U.S. not only has stated as a policy that Britain should cease granting agricultural trade preferences to the Commonwealth, it has a vested interest in the requirements of its own economy directly opposed to the Commonwealth and in favour of the Common Market. McEwen's attempts to dictate policy to the U.S., Britain and the Common Market, is nothing short of ludicrous. It is doomed to failure. Any crumbs that Australia might get will not solve the economic problem created by Britain's entry into the Common Market. Labor must realise this and produce a concrete policy, recognising the Common Market for what it is. It must immediately advocate that Australia look around for other markets, including Asia, the Soviet Union, and China. Above all, Labor must ensure that the disruption of Australian capitalism will not be used in an attempt to lower the standards of the workers.

Menzies' Minister for Shipping and Transport (Opperman) has already said that any increase in wages would ruin trade prospects. (S.M. Herald, 28/4/62). Opperman claimed that good working conditions, long service leave, penalty rates and superannuation were a 'burden' and a 'penalty' which were interfering with trade. Labor must oppose this nonsense, defend the workers' standards and convert this struggle into an anti-Government offensive. Labor must not place itself in a position where it has to support the Liberals in the hopeless task of begging from the Common Market in order to prevent dislocation of the economy, but rather it must fight for distinctive socialist objectives.

In addition to a broad trade policy, the A.L.P. must bring forward a plan for internal economic development, based on the expansion of the vital public sector of the economy, and fight for it against capitalist confusion. Labor must fight for the nationalisation of key industries and banks in order to institute a sound economy based on socialist planning, not handouts.

CONDITIONS OF THE INDIAN AND PAKISTAN WORKERS

An article in the May issue of the Ministry of Labour Gazette gives a summary of working conditions in India and Pakistan. We quote some of the facts and figures.

India: "Statistics on wages, collected under the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, are published from time to time. The latest available figures show that in 1959 the highest average annual wage was £115.5s. (in electrical engineering), the lowest, £78.7s (in the leather industry), the average being £100 ^{per week} Ed. note: these figures work out at approx. £2.4.4d, £1.10.2d and £1.18.5d per respectively. "It is estimated that nine-and-a-half million persons are unemployed and some three-and-a-half millions will join the labour force each year as against less than three million jobs being created as industrialisation progresses. In the rural areas there is considerable under-employment which has been estimated at between 15 and 18 millions." In other words capitalism has proven quite unable to solve the problem of giving work to the Indian masses and what's more the situation will grow worse each year.

Pakistan: "The minimum age of admission to factory employment is 12 years..." (our emphasis) "Information about wages is collected through various sources, including returns from factories registered under the Factories Act. The latest report, relating to 1959, shows that the highest average annual wage was £126. 4s (in the paper and printing industry), the lowest, £65. 12s (in the textile industry), the average being £74.7s) Ed. note: these figures work out at approx. £2.8.6d, £1.5s. and £1.8.7d ^{per week} respectively. "There are no national security provisions..." and because there are no real Government employment agencies the '...only statistics published relate to a small section of the labour force and for this reason are unsuitable for purposes of comparison." In other words no one knows how many unemployed there are.

STEEL PRODUCTION DOWN IN COMMON MARKET COUNTRIES

In the first four months of this year production of steel in the European Economic Community was 3.2% lower than the 1961 level: the figures being 24,082,000 tons as against 24,887,000. There has been some recovery during the month of April with a 7.5% increase in orders for rolled steel. In Britain steel production at 5,220,000 tons for the first quarter was 16% down on the same period for 1961

Judging from the last meeting of the Central Committee of the Merseyside C.N.D. held on May 31st, it is clear that the C.P. in this region, at least, is making a bid to control the whole movement. No doubt one of the ultimate objectives being to jettison the Industrial Action project as soon as may be 'decently' done. We intend to counter this by attempting to draw in specifically industrial delegates from C.N.D. factory committees.

The whole atmosphere of the meeting was obnoxious in the extreme. The C.P. elements (mostly in the semi-antique class) rejected any idea of a younger Vice-Chairman on grounds of 'lack of experience' and tried to exclude in future any observers (because of a rumpus at a previous meeting.) Experience of the industrial work, etc., points ever and again to the pernicious influence of these self regarding mutual admiration bureaucrats who see themselves as some super-beings destined to channel the movement into a path carefully worked out by themselves alone. Such has been the incompetence of this self-righteous committee that the resolutions before the annual C.N.D. Congress were not even distributed to the membership for discussion.

On a national scale the C.P. will probably throw its weight against industrial action by lining up with the Peggy Duffs. Although C.N.D. will, no doubt, continue to expand, the miserable alliance between the 'liberal' elements and the centrist Krushchovite deadbeats is something to be watched, as it is most seriously also in other parts of our struggle, in the trade unions and the Labour Party itself.

COMMITTEE OF 100 SCHOOL

We have been asked to announce a school organised by the East Midlands Committee of 100 under the title of 'Meet the Committee of 100.' It is to be held in Nottingham at the Co-op Education Centre, commencing at 10.30 and ending at 6.15 (with 1.00 to 2.00 for lunch) on Sunday the 8th of July. People from Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and other towns will be taking part. The marxist view will be forcibly put during discussion.

ERNIE ROBERTS TO SPEAK ON NEW TRADE UNION PAPER

Ernie Roberts, Assistant General Secretary of the A.E.U. will speak at meeting organised by the Nottingham New Left Club on Saturday the 7th of July, at 2.30 held at the Co-op Education Centre. He will speaking on the subject of the new trade union and socialist paper to be launched by the new year.

NURSES' ACTION COMMITTEE SET UP IN NOTTINGHAM - ORGANISES DEMONSTRATION

A Committee representing nurses from all the hospitals in the Nottingham area has been established to campaign against the Government's treatment of the nurses and their wage claim. Its first major activity is to organise a demonstration in collaboration with the Nottingham and District Trades Council on Sunday the 24th of June, commencing at 3.00 at the Victoria Embankment, Trent Bridge. From there the demonstrators will march to the City centre where an open air meeting will take place. The Committee has called upon all sections of the Labour and Trade Union movement to take part in the demonstration. It is hoped that there will be a large participation by the Young Socialists in the demonstration and it has been suggested that special propaganda material be brought out by the Young Socialists in connection with this campaign.

ERNIE ROBERTS TO SPEAK AT KESSINGLAND CAMP

Ernie Roberts has agreed to speak on the role of trade unions in the fight for Socialism at the Kessingland Camp, this fact should be used to bring trade unionists etc. to the camp. Since we last gave the position deposits have been received from Nottingham (2), Birmingham (1) and Keele (1). We would ask all comrades to redouble their efforts to get deposits as speedily as possible.

U.S.D.A.W. RECRUITING DRIVE AMONG SHOP WORKERS

The T.U.C. is sponsoring a campaign to unionise the distributive trade and has circulated all unions, trades councils, etc. When this was discussed by the Nottingham Trades Council it was decided to have joint activity with the U.S.D.A.W. joint branches' Committee. The first fruit of this will be a series of open-air meetings, to be held twice a week if successful, in the Old Market Square. Large numbers of Shop workers spend their dinner hour, in the good weather, in the Square and there should be a ready audience. Recently agitation among Shoe multiple shop workers owing to a refusal (taking advantage of a technicality) of the bosses to implement wage increases has led to an important increase in union membership.