

English Maoist Is Influential Unionist

By VICTOR RIESEL

LONDON, England—Certainly the Maoist revolutionary cadres have infiltrated the "hard core" of American cities. Why should the United States be different? There are hard working champions of Peking's Communist party here in urban and urban London. Others operate all over western Europe, directed and financed by an unofficial Maoist headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

Unlike the small, rifle toting sniper cells which infest some of our smoldering United States cities, the English Maoists walk erect by daylight amid the public. They seek powerful office. They defy the ideologically bewhiskered Marxists of the 33,000 member Communist party on King street.

Thus the Maoists have come this far west—far distant from the jungles of southeast Asia.

OF COURSE, it is strange to contemplate Maoists on the mod, swinging, miniskirted streets of London. But permit me to personify what the Chinese Communists. Their leader is what the British insiders call a nice, quiet chap, not given to ranting, an effective labor leader by the name of Reginald (Reg) Birch.

He is a member of the national executive council of the powerful Amalgamated Engi-

neering Union (AEU) whose 3,000 branches in Britain's strategic industries claim more than one million members. In the recent AEU presidential election—easily the most important labor contest of the past 20 years—Birch ran for president and rolled up a goodly number of votes. Not enough to win, but enough to show power.

The kicker in all this—for those of us who marvel at the Britons' calm—is that Birch has been a loud, outspoken, fast moving Maoist for years. Some time ago, he was suspended by the British Communist party as a warning to abandon his devotion to Mao's little red book. Blithely, he ignored the Muscovites. Serenely, he continued to build his own machine. So, some three months ago the party control commission met secretly and expelled him.

Birch cared little what the King st. Moscow followers did. At the end of July, he flew to Peking where he was graciously received despite the cultural chaos.

THERE IS significance in his date of departure from London. On July 29, the Ford Co.'s British installations shut down for vacations. This gave Birch a breather. For he is the counterpart here of Walter Reuther's colleague, Ken Bannon, head of the United Auto Workers' Ford council.

At least 17 national British unions deal with Ford here. They operate through a seven man negotiating committee of which Birch—avowed Maoist revolutionist—is the activist. Thus Birch is so strong a labor figure here, so influential, so personally popular among the big unions, that they turned to him to deal with the Big American company, which has had so much difficulty at its famed plant in nearby Dagenham.

This respect for Birch and his overt respectability, reflect the acceptance of Pekingism in European intellectual circles. It is, in effect, the tolerance of the theory that permanent revolution has its place in today's society, just as the fervent and emotional champions of the then unknown Lenin and Stalin 50 years ago made Moscowism fashionable.

TO GET THE FULL feeling of this new acceptability it is important to know that the Peking man, Birch, enjoyed the right to run for AEU president against three candidates. One of them is John Boyd, chairman of the ruling British Labor party. A third candidate, Hugh Scanlon, quit the Communist party in 1956.

Apparently the British Communist party is suffering from the generation gap. The young people flock to the Peking milieu. The elders,

except inside the Moscow controlled Communist party, say this is the privilege of the young just as it was the right of young radicals to be Muscovites politically 50 years ago.

In left wing circles Peking is the new revolution. It is the mode, the mod, and the mood. And it is seeping across the Atlantic. Some of it is in Stokely Carmichael's "black power." Some of it is in tiny white cells, mostly in New York, which want to attach themselves to the Carmichaels and put the torch to American cities.

The Birches have their base and need no money. The younger revolutionists in America have no base yet and need money. Intelligence sources, here and in Switzerland, have told this columnist that the Peking paymasters are in Geneva.

They have financed splits in the Italian Communist movement, violence in Belgium, and now, sniper cells in the United States.

Peking's operations are of many kinds. Most of them still are hard to trace. But Birch is evidence that Maoism can gain power and "respectability" as well as throw molotov cocktails.