

London, March 15th, 1945

This is the first number of our News-letter to be issued from time to time by our Group. It is felt that there is a need for a means of interchange of views and information among militant workers in this country about the class struggle at home and abroad. While almost all publications issued in this country have their own axe to grind and use the worker's case for their respective political ends, this News-letter sets out to be a forum of expression for workers in all industries written by the workers themselves. We, therefore, invite our readers to send us their comments and contributions on any issue of working class interest. While no charge is being made for the News-letter readers will realise that in order to produce it a number of overhead expenses must be met and we, therefore, invite those who consider it a useful contribution to the independent struggle of the workers to give whatever financial assistance they can.

Ken Hawkes

News, views and hard cash should be sent to: The Secretary, A.F. (London) 15, Parliament Hill, London, N.W.3.

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WORLD TRADE UNION CONFERENCE. You will have read the newspaper accounts of the Conference which closed with the appointment of a Committee of 41 to draw up a permanent Constitution of a World Trade Union Organisation.

The decisions of the Conference were the usual modern political stock-in-trade: "Greater relief for the liberated countries", "More T.U. participation in industrial change over and production in general," "Price control", "40 hour week", "Jobs for all", "Social Security", "T.U. delegates to Peace Conference", "Try War Criminals", "Full reparations and control of Germany".

All this is to be achieved, not by strike action, but by collaboration with the governments of the various countries. The decisions on Japan show how, instead of embarking upon an independent policy on behalf of the workers, each T.U. section slavishly follows its masters. A resolution that "the war against Japan must be prosecuted with the same vigour as the war in Europe" was signed at first by the Russian delegates. When later objection was raised by the Russians the Conference amended the clause to "must be prosecuted by those nations at war with her (Japan)". That is how the so-called representatives of the workers waste their time playing power politics.

Workers have shown little interest in the Conference. This is understandable, for little concerning themselves was discussed at this politicians' meeting. Five and a half years of war have accustomed us to the servility of T.U. leaders towards the employing class and their Governments. To-day "Bevinism" to most workers is the general term covering labour conscription and the sacrifice of all hard-won T.U. rights. To this the T.U. movement as a whole through all its leaders has lent its eager and willing assistance. What we are witnessing at the World T.U. Conference is the development, this time on a world-wide scale, of the Trade Union-Capitalist collaboration so familiar and so repulsive on the national scale. The Russian unions in this fraternity are even a greater fraud, for they are State institutions, like the Civil Service.

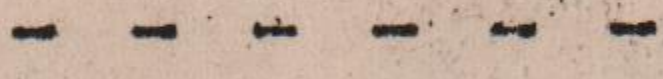
To-day the Trade Unions are not acting as independent working class organisations but as junior partners of the employing class. The World Trade Union Conference is the Labour shadow of their masters' meetings at Yalta and San Francisco.

There is great need of a genuine Workers' International, just as there was after World War No I and will be even more so after this War. You may recall how coal brought from the Continent defeated the miners' strikes of 1921 and 1926, the partial defeat

of the Southampton ship repair engineers by French workers. Think of the small assistance given to the General Strike by the world T.U. movement and you will see that an International of industrial workers is as necessary as a national or factory organisation.

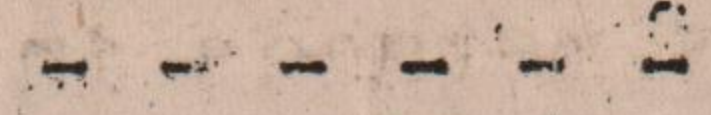
But no such organisation can come from the Conference held in London. They were too busy calling for German slave labour. Just as the militant, independent factory committee must replace T.U. bureaucracy at home, so, on a global scale, the Syndicalist International must replace the State controlled World Trade Union Conference. Let us rebuild on the lines of the International Working Mens' Association. Let us create the International of the Revolutionary Syndicates.

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CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD T.U. CONFERENCE. The Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Mgr. Griffin, gave a reception to which he invited all the delegates to the Conference. The only delegation to respond en bloc was the Russian, over 40 of whom attended. They conversed with the prelates through interpreters and seemed to enjoy Mgr. Griffin's humour as much as his refreshments. To Mgr. Griffin's address of welcome James B. Carey, Secretary and Treasurer of the American CIO replied. Carey, who is a catholic, begged the Archbishop's blessing and prayers that their work might be fruitful.

A delegation from Yugoslavia was there. One of them, a uniformed soldier of Tito's army, wearing Tito's V.C. said he was a trade unionist and a Catholic. He is a leader of the National Yugoslav Union of Workers and a member of Tito's "Parliament". He said that Catholic opinion in Yugoslavia was 100% behind Tito. Evidently, the Catholic Church has not yet forgotten its age-old tradition of siding always with that power in the land which will protect its privileges and possessions.



LONDON DOCKERS STRIKE. The strike began on Thursday March 1st at the Royal Albert Dock and spread rapidly until over 10,000 men were involved, i.e. all the men, stevedores and dockers, ceased work by Friday or Saturday, with the exception of the Upper Pool and some of the wharves and lightering sections. Tilbury men remained at work until Tuesday when they joined the strikers. This meant that all the dockers in the Port of London area were out.

This remarkable solidarity is in itself sufficient indication of the depth of the grievances and of the abominable conditions to which the dockers have been subjected, and which are treated as trivial by the Capitalist press. The newspapers have attacked the dockers consistently with being unpatriotic, holding up supplies to the Western Front and have endeavoured to raise the anger of London's citizens by suggesting that they would be short of food. This allegation had to be denied even by the Government. But the papers made only passing reference to the dockers' grievances and altogether omitted to mention that many dockers had offered to work on a Sunday without pay just to show their sincerity.

The dispute arose because the men at the Royal Albert Dock objected to the shifting of the call-stands at which they have to prove attendance. These have been shifted to a position inside the dock gates. The Dock Labour Corporation officials and the union officials point out that they are now housed in better premises than before. This may well be, but the fact remains that all the dockers and stevedores object to proving attendance inside the docks and they have very good reasons for doing so. As everyone knows the dock gates are guarded by police, security officials, and sometimes by the military, so that the docks resemble to the men a cattle pen or a concentration camp. While waiting about for work they are forced into these pens like so many sheep into the knacker house. Sometimes when proving attendance they have to wait for work for two or three hours. Once inside the dock gates the men become subject to the control of the authorities and among other restrictions imposed on them they are not allowed to smoke.

They prefer to stand outside the dock gates in the rain if necessary, preferring their personal freedom to material advantages.

This is only one manifestation of the hated control exercised over the men by the functionaries of the Dock Labour Corporation. Although this body functions ostensibly with the aid and advice of the men's representatives, they have learned by bitter experience to hate this bureaucratic structure which, by its very constitution, can never operate directly in the interests of the men. The muddle and inefficiency of the Dock Labour Corporation forces men to lose time on many jobs, but if a man is late, or if he takes a day off, he is immediately victimised and suspended. No less than 80 men have been suspended in recent weeks, and this treatment was another issue over which the men went on strike.

On Sunday, March 4th, the capitalist press was confident that the men would be back at work by Monday morning. This optimism was created by the Union leaders, Mr. G. Donovan and Mr. Arthur Deakin of the Transport & General Workers Union had met representatives of the employers and had agreed to call meetings of the men to urge them to return. They expressed confidence in their ability to shout at the men and make them obey. On Monday the press was less optimistic. Deakin and Donovan had been hooded and jeered out of all the meetings they had attempted to address.

At least three strike committees are functioning well. In one case some of the suspended men have been elected to the committee. About 2,000 soldiers were drafted to act as strike-breakers. They belong to the special dock brigades the Government hold in readiness for such occasions. Mostly they are ex-dockers from other ports, but in some cases they are the pre-war mates and sons of the men on strike.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the men's "representatives" on the Dock Labour Corporation are Communist Party men. They evidently believe that workers should be coerced and subjected to disciplinary methods in conformity with the organisational discipline imposed from above by the executive. The "Daily Worker" throughout the strike took the line that the men were smashing the Dock Labour Corporation which had done such good work in doing away with casual labour and unemployment - the system by which dockers before the war fought like animals for a few hours work. They conveniently forget that these conditions were not altered by the Dock Labour Corporation but by the war which changed conditions in every industry.

This strike is the more remarkable in that it is not conducted over the material benefits of shorter hours or more pay. It is fought over the larger issue of individual freedom and freedom from victimisation. Feeling on this score has run high in every port in the country for many months. It should be recalled that the present issue was the subject of a one day strike by 2,000 dockers at the Surrey Commercial Dock last November.

On March 8th the men decided to go back after having won a partial victory. They were given an undertaking that an inquiry into their grievances and into the administration of the Dock Labour Corporation would be opened immediately. The men had demanded such an inquiry and, previous to it being granted, had threatened to come out again if a report of the inquiry was not available by April 1st. In view of the militant action of the workers in this case the Government will probably not be able to employ their usual delaying tactics or to stow away the findings of the inquiry into a governmental pigeon hole - the graveyard of so many promised improvements of the workers' lot.

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REDUNDANCY: BELFAST. The employment situation in Northern Ireland which has been deteriorating for some time, shows no sign of improvement. All indications are that it will become even worse before the summer.

The Prime Minister Sir Basil Brooke, in an effort to be cheerful - though it is no great effort for him - puts out a hope that some new industries will be started up. Yet within the last 3 months the number of workers paid off from aircraft factories and other war industries has risen by 10,000 and now tops the 20,000 mark. Naturally there is great anxiety and unrest all round as to future prospects. The main dismissals have occurred at Messrs Short & Harland's factories, but many smaller concerns have also laid off workers.

Tyneside. In the shipyards the main type of work done at the moment is repair work and this is providing a little overtime to supplement wages, so that as yet anxiety is not too acute. But it must be obvious to the majority of the workers that most of the big war programmes have been completed and that even the contracts for the war in the Pacific are coming to an end. As usual, and more especially at this particular period, instead of giving the workers more money, firms and managements are more concerned with putting capital into technical and other improvements in the yards, in order to be able to face post-war competition at home and abroad. It is strange, however, that the yards are in perfect condition after 6 years of war - only the workers' standard of life, their transport and other facilities have suffered from the strains of war.

There is lack of work in the munition factories on Tyneside, and many workers are being thrown out. These developments are being keenly watched and there is a general tendency to adopt go-slow tactics with success. At one factory the management threatened to stop piece work and go over on time rates.

The inquiry into the dispute at the Walker Naval Yard over the working of new machines is still held up pending the appeal of the 125 men fined at Newcastle Magistrates Court. 550 boilermakers were out on strike over this issue for over 13 weeks. Meanwhile the machines still stand idle.

The news that the big Singapore floating dock has been sunk by Superfortresses has aroused considerable interest on Tyneside. The river was its birthplace in the years 1927-28. This record dock took four months to tow in two parts to Singapore - it took a couple of hours to sink it.

Merseyside. Birkenhead. Delay in dealing with the wage applications in the shipbuilding industry is causing much unrest. In various centres shop representatives are demanding mass meetings to call for an explanation of the delay. As a result the shop stewards have threatened to call a mass meeting if the question is not settled.

There is a strong feeling in Merseyside that the whole question of wage negotiations leaves much to be desired and that the whole machinery is unwieldy and needs smashing up. Unless some definite time limit is laid down there is every possibility of a breakaway from National negotiation. These trends are, of course, deplored by the Union Executives who live quite handsomely off these negotiations and care little how long they drag out. The men will probably urge the superseding of national by local negotiations. This would lead to a position where various rates would operate in different ports, as was the case prior to 1929, when a uniform National wage scheme was adopted. It is obvious that this would be undesirable, but the difficulties could be overcome by closely federated local groups with constant interchanges of delegates. In that way each local group would act in a co-ordinated manner with other groups, so that one united demand could be made direct from the rank and file. In this way local groups would break the executive bureaucracy and the men could exercise greater control over their representatives.

Scotland. Cuts in Production. There are constant dismissals from a Torpedoe factory in Greenock. A factory in Central Scotland has just closed down and is the second in the area to do so recently. War contracts in a Renfrewshire factory have also been completed and the plant has become redundant for such work. The only cheerful indication is that an English firm of furniture makers have just moved into the premises and are starting production soon.

Edinburgh. A dockers club has recently been opened in Leith by the National Dock Corporation. It has the distinction of being the first of its kind in Britain. The club premises are situated at 17, Morton St, Leith, in what was formerly the Seven Seas Club. It has been redecorated and redesigned to afford recreational facilities and sleeping accommodation for transferred workers. It will also be used for educational classes. Accommodation for 400 members at 1/- per week. This appears to be one of the few useful things that have emerged from the Dock Corporation and as such is worthy of note. One may be sure that the premises will be used almost exclusively for government propaganda and it will be interesting to see how long it will take for dockers in other areas to be similarly blessed, now that the show piece is completed.

Careers in Commerce: New schools for foremen and union bosses?

The Minister of Labour and National Service feels some concern for what he considers to be a serious problem for young men and women in the Services who desire careers in commerce or on the executive and administrative side of industry. His worry seems to be that large numbers of men and women will have had little or no business or industrial experience and will be considerably older than the normal age for beginning a career. Being a genial and helpful sort of bloke he wishes to assist them. For this purpose he has set up a committee to investigate the problem under the chairmanship of Sir Frank Newson-Smith, Lord Mayor of London in 1943-44. The committee consists of 16 men drawn from a variety of sources, ranging from Sir Miles Thomas, Vice-chairman of the Nuffield Organisation, and a representative of Anglo-Iranian Oil, to Mr. G.M. Hann, General Secretary of the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants.

While the Minister deplures the lack of experience and training in business and industry, he is confident that all these men and women will have developed other very valuable qualities for such work by virtue of their war experience. The committee put forward the view that a National organisation is needed for the task, based on the Appointments Department of the Ministry of Labour. The cost of the new department will be between £880,000 and £1,100,000. Having nasty and suspicious minds we wonder whether this expensive and elaborate machinery is motivated entirely by the Minister's desire to help the men and women coming out of the Forces. Or could it be that he and his committee of Big Business and Union bosses are trying to recruit from the workers in the Services useful tools which will help to keep their fellow workers down and make them toe the line? However beneficial the scheme may appear at first glance, we see no cause for welcoming a training school for Britain's rising bureaucracy and new little rulers.

Activities of the Organised Syndicalist Movement Abroad.

Finland. The I.W.M.A. (International Working Mens Association) reports great agitation among the workers of the Finnish Seamen's Union against the betrayal of their parliamentary representatives, who voted in favour of a law giving full economic powers to the government and making all strikes illegal.

The Union's official paper writes: "It was a shameful day for the representatives of the workers in Parliament. We want to make it quite clear that those who think they can suppress our strikes by acts of parliaments are profoundly mistaken. When the workers are firmly decided to win their disputes and strike, neither the government nor Parliament can impede their action, for the power of the organised worker is a reality which must be taken into account."

We fully agree with the words of our Finnish comrades. The direct action of the producers, and no other measure, enables them to oppose the reactionary measures of the State effectively. And we mean all States, including the one which the Finnish seamen backed by electing "parliamentary" representatives and entrusting the defence of their interest to politicians.

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Sweden. Next June our comrades of the S.A.C. (Sverges Arbetares Centralorganisation) will celebrate the 35th anniversary of the founding of their organisation. Since 1910 the SAC has maintained an energetic struggle for its existence and for the defence of workers rights and interests and workers' international solidarity. The main aspect that will characterise their celebration of 35 years spent in the struggle for social improvement will be an intensification of their propaganda work. This will include public meetings and a special campaign of revolutionary and syndicalist literature.

Our fraternal greetings go out to the comrades of the SAC from whom we are separated by geographical distance only. Together, one day, we will go forward towards a society without classes, without privileges, without injustice or coercion of any kind.

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Uruguay. As in the past, the anarchists of Uruguay and the F.O.R.U. (Workers Regional Federation of Uruguay) are working intensively to extend their influence and strengthen the syndicalist organisation. The going is hard because of the confusion created among the workers by the well-known tactics of the Stalinists. But the purposeful way in which our comrades defend our common syndicalist ideals are proving more successful every day.

"Solidaridad" the organ of the FORU prints this view - which we share - of reformist unionism: "Ethical values do not count for the reformist or "chamaleon" unionist of the Communist variety. In fact, they are a grave handicap to him. This is not our way. We must go forward to Social Revolution and Anarchism."

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Argentine. The ferocious repression of the militant working class by the reactionary elements of the Army which took possession of the State machinery in the latest "coup d'etat" in the Argentine continues with unabated sadism. The F.O.R.A. (Workers Regional Federation of Argentine) stimulated by the firm belief in their anarchist ideals, is in the vanguard of the struggle against the hordes of murderers in uniform which rule the country to-day. They work along the traditional lines of direct action and have become an example to the militant resistance in the country. Their courageous conduct has won them the respect and admiration of their fellow workers.

Illegal pamphlets, manifestoes, sabotage, strikes and direct attacks on the representatives of Church and Army are some of the manifestations of their activity. We have received a long proclamation by the F.O.R.A. which shows that ruthless oppression has not succeeded in crushing the militancy of the workers of Argentine, but considerations of space prevent us from translating it for your benefit. Their efforts are the more remarkable as they have to be carried out illegally in the face of persecution by a Fascist regime which has nothing to

learn from its European counterparts.

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Freedom of the Press? One of the causes which the soldiers of the Allied nations are allegedly defending on many battlefields with their lives is the much boosted right to freedom of expression, in particular the freedom of the Press. For the same reason workers are asked to forego their most effective weapon in the struggle against their masters, the right to strike. It is the boast of every capitalist orator that democracy means - among other things - that even the humblest worker can buy truthful information for a penny. But what are the real facts?

On January 8th a wide-spread strike broke out in the British Protectorate of Uganda. It reached its height by January 15th and died down after that date. Yet it was not until January 19th that the Government of the Protectorate issued the first statement on the strike. "The Uganda Information Office", writes the paper "East Africa and Rhodesia", "is so leisurely a department that it neither cabled the communique (which would have prevented millions of people in this country from believing that 8 Americans had been killed, as one London newspaper reported) nor even air-mailed it promptly.

"On January 17th - a full week after the disturbances had begun to die down - the department despatched by airmail the first communiques, dated January 19th, 20th, 22nd and 23rd!"

They were only a poor lot of black workers goaded into a strike against their powerful white plantation lords, so the Uganda Government presumably did not think the matter worth the bother. Indeed, it was probably safer to keep the facts secret for there might have been riots and shooting and then, we can be sure, we would never have heard about the affair at all. It seems to have been equally unimportant to deny the rumour that 8 Americans had been killed during the strike. That would have provided a good alibi for the killing of a few of the striking rabble.

"East Africa and Rhodesia" concludes by commenting: "And this (referring to the Uganda Information Office) is the body on which the Uganda Post War Development Committee proposes to spend half a million pounds." Certainly they will, the suppression of news about labour unrest among Britain's black subjects, and the tale of colonial oppression and misrule which hangs thereby, is still cheap at the price.

Freedom of the Press to-day means freedom of our ruling classes to give us the information they consider safe for us to know. The penn'orth of news the worker buys every day is only a vast smoke-screen behind which politicians trade in whole countries and barter away the lives of millions of human beings.

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More Police Persecution against Free Expression and Revolutionary Propaganda.

Comrades Richards, Hewetson, M.L. Richards and P. Sansom known for their association with Freedom Press publications and "War Commentary" have been arrested by the police and remanded on bail, shortly to face charges of various offences against the King's Regulations. The police allege that they are endangering the Defence of the Realm by expressing their opinions. The Realm well knows what it is about. It felt safe from Mosley and is not worried by P.G. Wodehouse. But it can't stand the slightest expression of non-conformism to the approved lines of National Unity. Our readers know that an attack by the police on any comrade is an attack on all of us. We must all do what we can to defend them and to defeat their persecutors. Do what is in your power to express your sympathy and solidarity.

Comrades, look out for our next issue.