

DIRECT ACTION

**SYNDICALIST WORKERS FEDERATION
INTERNATIONAL WORKING MENS ASSOCIATION**

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TWO YEARS TOO LONG!

DURING Parliament's recent recess, the Government increased the period for which young men are to be conscripted from eighteen months to two years.

As at the end of 1948, when the conscription period was increased from twelve to eighteen months, much half-hearted and hypocritical opposition came from some quarters - particularly the stooges in the phoney Stalinist "peace" campaign. They claimed then that the new period was six months too long, while supporting the continuance of military conscription.

But we declare our whole-hearted opposition and resistance to ALL conscription, military or industrial, war-time or peace-time, and say that the new period of National Service is TWO YEARS TOO LONG.

All conscription is slavery - an attack on the working class. We don't want benevolent bureaucrats to tell us how we should live.

Now, as ever, the armed forces of the state are used as a cheap supply of forced labour, to blackleg on striking workers. The Labour Party's Government has used troops in all the major dock disputes - including the 1949 London lock-out - since it took office.

During the last twelve months troops have been used to break the power station strike and, more recently, naval personnel were used in the North Thames gas strike.

Troops, aircraft and armed police are being used in the cruel and murderous repression of African and Asiatic working men, who rightly resist being exploited, dispossessed and bullied.

The military machine in war fights for interests which can

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never be ours. In two world wars the workers have gone to the slaughter for alleged ends which have been exposed as empty promises.

Since 1945 the politicians have haggled without any real will, on either side, to agree and to co-operate in establishing peace. We alone, the workers throughout the world, can prevent another world flare-up - it is our responsibility to freeze militarism to death.

-P.G.

NOVEMBER

Red November, black November, bleak November, black and red; Hallowed month of Labour's martyrs, Labour's heroes, Labour's dead.

Labour's hope and wrath and sorrow - red the promise, black the threat; Who are we not to remember? Who are we to dare forget?

Black and red the "colours blended. Black and red the pledge we made; Red, until the fight is ended - black, until the debt is paid.

- R.C.

SOLITARY SCAB -- "Another working-class speaker who gave similar evidence and received similar acclaim, was Clr. John S. Stetfell, a London bus driver. He lives at Longbridge-road, Dagenham, and is a driver on the 238 bus route. He was the only driver to take out his bus in the East End during the Saturday afternoon bus strike last January."

'News Chronicle' report on the Tory conference.

UNION MEN VICTIMISED -- About twenty men employed by Lyte Ladders Ltd., at Rogerstone., Mon., are being sacked and told they may be re-instated only if they leave their union. The men say there is no dispute apart from their employers' objection to their belonging to the National Union of Enginemen, Firemen, Mechanics and Electrical Workers.

'Daily Express,' 23.9.50.

THE NORTH THAMES GAS STRIKE

FOR THREE WEEKS, in September-October, 1,500 maintenance workers in various London gasworks struck work for a pay increase of 3d an hour. They had been granted 1st of the 4th increase they had sought, making their rate 3s.3d an hour.

THE 1946 STRIKE AND AFTER

A Beckton gasworker tells us that this latest dispute is directly related with the conditions on which the 1946 gas strike was called off. At that time, after the men had struck for an increase of 3d an hour for all gas workers, the employers (for the industry had not then been nationalised) offered a scale of wage increases, ranging from 3d an hour for certain higher-paid grades, down to practically nothing for the lower paid. The strike committee of that time was in Stalinist hands and it accepted this offer. It was with misgiving that many of the workers went back, despite the "Daily Worker" hailing it as a "great victory."

During that strike, the employers posted up copies of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 1875, but they did not take legal proceedings.

After the strike many power paid workers were, naturally, still discontented, and the unions concerned negotiated in attempts to get wage increases. By September this year, the 4th an hour increase sought by the London maintenance men, organised in the A.E.U., had been rejected, and an increase of only 1st an hour granted.

ANOTHER DEFEAT

Matters came to a head when the maintenance men at Beckton decided, by a substantial majority, to strike immediately for the extra 3d. It was a questionable tactic to do this without first approaching other gasworks for support, but as it happened most of the maintenance men at the other North Thames gasworks followed them. Naval blacklegs were moved into the works at Beckton and Bromley-by-Bow, and the Press took its usual line of attack and misrepresentation when workers stick up for themselves.

The North Thames Gas Board brought summonses against ten of the strikers, including a Beckton delegate to the strike committee, under the previously mentioned 1875 act, for conspiring to hinder the supply of gas, etc., and under the 1940 National Arbitration Act, Order 1305, for striking without giving 21 days' notice to the Ministry of Labour. The men appeared at Bow Street on October 5, and were acquitted of the alleged offence under the 1875 Act. Under Order 1305, however, each was sentenced to one month's imprisonment. Bail was allowed pending the hearing of their appeal on November 16. It was an eye-opener

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for many gas workers that the Board of the nationalised industry had taken the matter to court while; in 1946, the private employers had only hinted at action.

On October 9 the men returned to work, on condition that there would be no victimisation, servicemen would be withdrawn, and that the outstanding claim would get further consideration.

In other words, the workers suffered another defeat, even more crushing than that in 1946.

"DIVIDE AND RULE" Once again the State used its time-honoured tactic of "divide and rule." It was not expedient to imprison the 1,500 men (even though the law provided for it); society is too dependent on the working class to be able to do without 1,500 of its key members without serious trouble - apart from the problem of accommodating them in Britain's already overcrowded prisons - so a small number were picked out. It was, of course, some of the most militant elements who were selected.

Reaction to this attack was, let us be honest, disappointing. If you're in a fight, it's no good chucking in the towel when your opponent strikes his first blow. The logical thing to do is to hit him back HARDER. The Bow Street proceedings should have been the signal for a general stoppage of maintenance men throughout the country, and sympathetic action by workers in other industries. The introduction of "black" labour by the Government should have been the signal for production men to have downed tools.

The answer is, of course, that the gas workers did not have an organisation capable of taking the militant action which could have won the strike. The gas strike was just one more example of the urgent need for rank-and-file organisation that can link up workers in different industries on a programme of action.

Now is the testing time for the workers to stick together, for in that way only can "divide and rule" be defeated and the use of order 1305 made ineffective. Victimisation of any one section of strikers makes it a moral duty for their fellows to carry on the struggle. "An injury to one is the concern of all." Solidarity is the rock on which the working class can stand secure.

Another important lesson to be drawn from the 1946 gas strike - and so many others - is: Don't let your committees get into the hands of people whose loyalty is given to something other than the working-class. They'll always be ready to rat on you.

-- SYNDICALIST.

WHEN LABOUR IS NOT IN POWER. . . The Australian Labour Party will use its Senate majority to defeat any Government legislation authorising compulsory military training, the Party's secretary has stated. -Peace News.

TEXTILES TO-DAY

FROM the sixteenth century, when the spinning wheel was introduced into this country, until the eighteenth, a woman would spin with one end and earn enough to keep herself and her family; with the inventions of the eighteenth century, a woman would spin with forty ends, and still only earn enough to keep herself and her family; nowadays she has a hundred and twenty ends and the same still holds good. What then, we might ask, has redeployment to offer?

It is easily understood that the benefits of machines are not for the working man and woman - wages are always directly related to the cost of living, and increase only under pressure when the purchasing power of money decreases. Profits alone are subject to real increase. Wages and profits have never been, and cannot ever be, in step.

The workers in the textile industry only received a fitting wage increase after the end of the war in 1945 and, since then, have constantly been told by employers that they can have no more because there is a slump round the corner. This knowledge is commonplace - alone the government pretend it can be avoided by the wage freeze and increased production. This is explained in the enigmatic poster, "The Danger to Full Employment is not producing too much, but too little and too dear." It took a Harold Laski to make this tripe sound convincing.

While we have suffered the wage freeze, profits have soared and the bosses have moaned as always. They have so many expenses, they say, that when all is paid their money is even less than ours. Of course, they really do need these Bentleys with built-in lavatories!

The effect of redeployment is not uniform, sometimes it is a dress rehearsal for depression, and in other places used as a form of bonus scheme, but in all cases the initial cost is obviously great. As this comes from what would otherwise go in excess profits tax, it is tantamount to a government grant to explore ways and means of bigger and better exploitation.

The lack of uniformity has been useful to the millowners as, combined with the Weavers Association's pretence of guarding the workers' interests, it served to preclude any effective general opposition. The ultimate effect will be the same, whether it will be used as the employers' weapon in a soon approaching slump, or to maintain production during a switchover of labour to munitions; in which case an end to war economy - if such can be envisaged - will inevitably lead to large-scale unemployment. It is more likely there will be an intense national collapse in one form or another before this stage is reached.

In spite of what northern newspapers say, the automatic machines which redeployment has introduced need more maintenance than those used hitherto - any apprentice knows that. Yet non-

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Principles of Syndicalism, 1.

By TOM BROWN

NOT CENTRALISM — BUT FEDERALISM

THE STRIKING WORKER, once he ceases work, must face such problems as, "How shall we pay the rent, how buy groceries, how renew the kiddies' shoes?" Is it not, then, natural that he should look to his union for the payment of a little strike benefit? He has paid, perhaps, two shillings a week for ten, fifteen or twenty years and drawn out not a penny. He has been told by his leaders that the union's funds add up to five or six million pounds. They told him that it was wise to pay his union dues to meet such a need as this.

Unhappy man, to expect anything back from the clutching hands of bureaucrats. First of all he will find that the strike is termed unofficial (more than 99 per cent of strikes are "unofficial" in peace as in war). It may be in defence of some trade union agreement, it is probably in defence of wages, it will most certainly be just that ease for which the worker has paid his trade union contributions. Nevertheless, down to the district or factory will come the trade union officials to condemn the strike.

First will come a lesser bureaucrat, "Lads, I sympathise with you. You are right, but I have my duty to do. You must go back to work." Next comes the big boss. He does not waste time on euphemisms or good manners. The strikers are a bunch of scoundrels, led by agitators, and he hints darkly that if they don't go back to work he will call the police and, in any case they won't get any strike pay, so they'll be starved back.

Does it not occur to the striker to ask, "Who is this person to say I must go back to work? Why should he have the power to withhold from me my own money?" Yes, it does occur, but the worker has long been trained in the centralist principles of trade unionism and the state. (Trade unions are organised on the same highly centralised principles as is the capitalist state).

The trade unionist is in a dilemma. He knows that the strikers, assembled at their place of work, are the ones to decide when to strike, when to pay benefits, and what shall be official and unofficial. But, nevertheless, he wishes the workers' organisations to be so linked that they present one solid, nation-wide front against the common enemy. He does not wish to see the labour forces split into a thousand small units, to be tackled one at a time by the boss and, too often, he believes that centralis-

ation is the only way of achieving this. We affirm that there is another way, and deny that centralisation achieves its desired objective.

Centralisation takes control too far away from the place of struggle to be effective on the workers' side in that fight. Most disputes arise in the factory, bus garage, rail depot or mine. According to trade union procedure the dispute must be reported to the district office of the union (and in some cases to an area office), then to head office, then back again, then the complicated "machinery for avoiding disputes" devised by trade union leaders and the employers' lawyers is set into its ball-passing motion, until everyone forgets the original cause of all this passing up and down.

The worker is not allowed any direct approach to, or control of, the problem. We are reminded of the memoirs of a certain court photographer who was taking a picture of the old Emperor of Austria, and wanted the Emperor to turn his head a little to the left. Of course he could not speak to an emperor, so he put his request to a captain of the court guard, who spoke to his colonel, who spoke to a count, the count passed the request to a duke and he had a word with an archduke, who begged his Imperial Majesty to turn his head a little to the left. The old chap turned his head and said, "Is that sufficient?" and the message trickled back to the photographer via Archduke; duke, count, colonel and captain. The humble thanks travelled back by the same road. The steps of trade union communication are just so fixed.

Centralisation does not bring that class solidarity which the worker seeks. Decades of experience support us in this statement. The miners' defeat of 1921, the betrayal of the General Strike in 1926 and the course of every strike since the last world war are evidence of this. Trade union machinists have blacklegged, officially, on striking iron moulders, engineers on boiler makers. Trade union transport workers have carried black-legs to mine and factory. The National Union of Railwaymen have scabbed on the A.S.L.E. & F. and vice-versa. In every dispute, for one striker there are a score of trade unionists to supply the strikebreakers with power, transport, light, heat, communications and all the many means without which modern industry cannot exist.

Even where the men concerned are members of one union, blacklegging still goes on. The London busmen's strike of 1937 was broken by the continuance at work of the trolley-bus and tramwaymen, members of the same Transport and General Workers' Union as the petrol busmen, who obeyed Bevin's orders to stay at work.

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Had the transport workers obeyed their own class loyalty, had they controlled their own affairs, who can doubt that they would have struck in solidarity with their fellow workers.

In contrast to this official trade union blacklegging, we have the class solidarity of the Swedish revolutionary unions, spoken of by Jim Connolly in his pamphlet "Socialism made Easy." Connolly, in turn, is quoting the "New York Sun."

"If the offending business man happens to be a retail merchant, all workmen are warned off his premises. The drivers for the wholesale houses refuse to deliver goods at his store; the truckmen refuse to cart anything to or from his place, and so on; in fact he is a doomed man unless he comes to terms with his union. It is worth mentioning that boycotting bulletins and also names and addresses of those who are bold enough to help the man out are published in leading type in all the Socialistic newspapers. . . .

"If the boycotted person be a wholesale dealer the proceedings are much the same, or rather they are reversed. The retailers are threatened with the loss of the workmen's trade unless they cease dealing with such a firm; the truckmen refuse to haul for it. It has even happened that the scavengers have refused to remove the refuse from the premises. More often, however, the 'cans' are 'Accidentally' dropped on the stairs."

How are we to achieve rank-and-file control of the unions and yet gain the maximum co-ordination of the labour forces. Syndicalism solves the problem in a simple and straightforward way.

The basis of the Syndicate is the mass meeting of workers assembled at their place of work, factory, garage, ship, loco shed or mine. The meeting elects its factory committee and delegates. The factory syndicate is federated to all other such committees in the locality - textile, shop assistants, dockers, busmen and so on. In the other direction the factory - let us say engineering factory - is affiliated to the District Federation of Engineers. In turn the District Federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Engineers.

Such federations are formed in each of the twenty-five to thirty industries and services - Rail Federation, Textile Federation, and so on. Then each industrial federation is affiliated to the National Federation of Labour, the co-ordination of all the workers' forces.

But how the members of such committees are elected is most

important. They are, first of all, not representatives like Members of Parliament who air their own views; they are delegates who carry the message of the workers who elect them. They do not tell the workers what the "official" policy is; the workers tell them.

Delegates are subject to instant recall by the persons who elected them. None may sit for longer than two successive years, and four years must elapse before his next nomination. Very few will receive wages as delegates, and then only the district rate of wages for the industry. We want none of the thousand-a-year fat trade union bosses.

It will be seen that in the syndicate the members control the organisation - not the bureaucrats controlling the members. In a trade union, the higher up the pyramid a man is, the more power he wields, in a syndicate, the higher he is the less power he has.

The factory syndicate has full autonomy over its own affairs. The district deals only with the general conditions of the district and industry; the national with those things which are general nationally but not particular to the primary syndicate.

By such organisation, the workers would be able to express in deeds their solidarity with striking fellow-workers. The only hope of the greatest labour force coming out in any dispute is that feeling of class solidarity. It is for us to allow it organisational expression. That is the aim of the Syndicalist Workers Federation. "An injury to one is the concern of all."

Next month - "ECONOMIC FEDERALISM"

DIRECT ACTION WINS - IN FINLAND

By JOHN ANDERSSON
(General secretary, I.W.M.A.)

In April, 1941, a stringent anti-strike law was enacted in Finland. It was supposed to be a war measure, but was continued after the war. The majority of Labour members in the Finnish Parliament accepted this reactionary legislation.

"This was a day of shame for the workers' representatives in Parliament," declared the organ of the Maritime Union of Finland, "Merimies." "There are people without hope, who believe it is impossible to use strikes as a means of fighting anti-strike laws. If the workers are convinced that it is necessary to win their demands by means of a strike, all the powers of Parliament will

be useless because the organised workers are also a power, a force with which they must reckon."

The truth of this was shown by the strike of railroad machinists, who went out for better wages and working conditions. Although the government tried to apply this anti-strike law, the strike was effective right from the start. All freight and passenger traffic was paralysed, as well as the postal service. The government then published a declaration that they would grant nothing to the workers. They declared martial law, and ordered the workers back to their jobs, saying that the workers were mobilised as part of the army. The machinists went to their machines, but refused to work them. The situation remained the same - railroads paralysed.

The Minister of War and the head of the army declared the machinists would be tried by courts martial for insubordination. The mobilised machinists held their ground. No trains moved. At this point, all the other railroad workers announced they would join the strike if the government's order was not rescinded. Next day the central union of Finland called on all its members to go on a general strike within five days, if a new wages agreement was not reached.

A day later, the government was faced with a strike of supervisory employees, and began to retreat. First the supervisory workers' claims were granted, then the mobilisation order was rescinded. On the day fixed for the general strike, an agreement was reached. The wages of all Finnish workers, both government and privately employed, were increased by 15 percent, and were also to be further increased in relation to the cost of living index.

This strike was a triumph and a lesson to all workers. It shows working class solidarity is invincible, and must and can win out.

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productive workers, as the bosses call the various mechanics, are being sacked, presumably to find their way into munitions. What farmer would grow turnips and not hoe them?

The future is black whichever way one looks. The Syndicalist methods for labour's defence are the only breath of fresh air. Production for profit, whether conducted by private companies, corporations or governments, and production cannot be for any other purpose when conducted by these bodies, is bound to flounder because of the ever-increasing disparity between wages and profits already mentioned.

There is a limit to exploitation.

- J.O. FILLING