

# Direct Action

## For Workers' Control of Industry

*New Series, incorporating*  
**WORKERS' VOICE**

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**PUBLISHED BY THE SYNDICALIST WORKERS' FEDERATION**

## The General Strike That Never Was - Tom Brown

Millions of workers are in pay dispute with their employer at this moment. The Government's pay pause directly affects only those workers employed by the State, civil servants, postmen, telephone engineers, teachers, State dockyard men and also, the workers in nationalised industries, rail, power and some road transport, and the miners. In this field alone does the Government have power to deny a wage increase, this should give thought to those unions who are always passing resolutions to "nationalise the industry", or calling for State subsidies.

But the Cabinet's stand against the annual wage rise also encourages those employers who may have felt strong enough in any case to resist the regular wage hike. Chief among these are the engineering and shipyard bosses with about 3,000,000 workers. It is natural, then, that there should be speculation about a General Strike, for if all workers now in dispute acted together, by design or accident, the number on strike would be greater than that of 1926.

The Communist Party, trying to cash in on this situation is calling for a General Strike, but, like the man who wants to get to the moon, they wouldn't know what to do with it if they got it. In 1926 the C.P.'s sole contribution to the struggle, while the General Council of the T.U.C. was active in betraying the Strike, was to call for "ALL POWER to the General Council".

But there is little chance of a General Strike by accident for the workers are too divided by too many unions and by compromising leaders. In engineering the clerks have refused to join even the one day strike or take a strike ballot, and the N.A. of Clerical and Supervisory Staffs have told their members to be sure to blackleg on March 5th. A.S.S.E.T., will not take a ballot.

No more has been made by the unions to link the various State workers in their struggle, much less get them to join with their workmates in private owned industries.

Of course, Communists and various groups of Trotskyists are calling for a Labour Government as a means of getting around the "Tory wage pause". They want us to forget that the Labour Government of 1945-51 operated, with the aid of the unions, a much harsher wage freeze, and these same people had called on the workers to return that Labour Government.

In any case, would Gaitskell and Co., risk their chance of winning the next General Election by supporting a General Strike?

With or without an impending election, with a Tory or a Labour Government, the leaders of the trade unions and the Labour Party are opposed to the General Strike in any circumstances.

They were opposed to that of 1926 but they were pushed into it by the

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# Jagan Calls in the White Raj

Eight years ago, in October 1953, the British Government flew troops and directed warships to British Guiana, informing a stubbornly sceptical world that Dr. Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party was plotting to subvert democracy and take the country into the Communist camp. In this way Her Majesty's Government conferred on Jagan her highest award for colonials, the coveted accolade of martyrdom so thoughtfully provided for such other coloured nationalist leaders as Nehru, Nkrumah, Kenyatta, and Banda. Such medicine magnifies marvellously the potency of their mesmerism of the masses.

But like vaccination, the magic doesn't last for ever. Heroic reputations won in "the fight for freedom" are tarnished by the tawdry realities of ruling. The people who once adored their champions come to detest their masters. It has happened to Nkrumah and in some measure even to Nehru, who is less inclined to model himself on Lenin. It will happen to Banda, Kenyatta, and the rest. The special, ironic twist reserved by history for Jagan is that it has happened to him even before "freedom" has been won, so that he has been obliged to call in the White Raj to bolster up his tottering regime.

British Guiana is a country with a built-in racial split. Its population of under half a million is made up principally of the descendants of indentured Indian labourers and the descendants of African slaves. The Indians, who are in the majority, make up most of the sugar plantation workers and the rural population in general, and also own most of the small businesses, most of the big businesses - the Bookers and co. - still being, of course, in British hands. The Africans form the bulk of the urban population, as civil servants, policemen, schoolteachers, nurses, and so on.

In 1953 the People's Progressive Party was the great popular party, with a decisive majority in the Legislature, but it now holds only a slender majority, 19 seats out of 35. It has been said that when Forbes Burnham led his faction out of the P.P.P. and formed the People's National Party it was because of ideological differences with Jagan and his American-born wife Janet, but it is far more likely that the split was a consequence of rivalry for power. But whatever the cause, the effect has been the division of the country into two racial camps, with the Indians for the most part supporting Jagan and the Africans Burnham.

Jagan's Budget measures - raising customs and excise, levying a tax on property, increasing income tax, and introducing a compulsory savings scheme - were designed to meet a prospective deficit of over 7 million dollars caused by increased debt charges, higher pay for civil servants, and above all by the flight of capital. In the past few years the amount of money sent abroad 'by the bourgeois' exceeded all the aid received from Britain and from international organisations.

But the measures hit hard the industrial and professional workers and the civil servants, and a general strike was called by the Trades Union Council on February 13. At least six people were killed and over 200 injured in pitched battles with riot police in Georgetown, the capital, before the strike was called off on the 19th.

At first sight perhaps the sympathy of the capitalist press for this Communist "revolutionary" coming face to face with the realities of governing (sympathy not unmixed, of course, with pleasure at his dilemma) is surprising. But men of power always have much in common and like the Bolsheviks Jagan is only an ersatz communist, a State capitalist, not one of those maniacs who really believe in equality.

D. Pedelty

THE GENERAL STRIKE THAT NEVER WAS. Continued from front page.

desire of the rank and file to make a stand, and if they had not lead it they could not have betrayed it.

The attitude of "Official Labour" was best expressed by Beatrice Webb, their foremost writer and wife of a Labour Cabinet Minister, Lord Passfield, in her diary, written in 1926 but not published until 1956,

"May 4th - When all is said and done we personally are against the use of the General Strike in order to compel the employers of a particular industry to yield to the men's demands, however well justified these claims may be. Such methods cannot be tolerated by any Government - even a Labour Government".

A General Strike must be organised, but it never will be by the T.U.C. Only when a Rank & File Movement has been built in every industry will the Great Strike be fought to victory. If you believe in the General Strike you've got to start now, in however small a way.



# Victims of the Apprentice System

Brion Bamford

A crowd of bureaucratic Youth Employment Officers have this week (according to The Guardian and The Times of February 12th) accused employers in general of "failing to provide adequate training" for their apprentices. When a rebuke comes from such characters as these, polite and refined though it may be, we can be sure that it is none too soon. It would be natural for militants to query, why our Trade Union Official rag-tags were not first off the mark to raise their voices on so vital an issue? Alas not even the utterance of a dissident fart has been detected from their direction!

The survey was carried out amongst leavers at Secondary Modern Schools. The report states, to quote The Guardian, that some employers "fail to give school-leavers any details of the jobs they offer, and even mislead them about the work they will be expected to do". Yet still not one harsh word is uttered from the lips of the trade-union masters, is it little wonder they are praised on all sides for their restraint? Of course school leavers do not own a union card, might this be why they must fight alone? Ungracious terms like 'Cheap Labour' or 'Apprentice Labourers' is at no time suggested in the respectable press comments, but this would seem to be the bosses only object in cheating the lads at their interviews. On top of this The Guardian did modestly remark the apprentices in training "found the first month or so tiring and this persisted for some of them". In other words a spot of labouring on the cheap, for juveniles in toil.

One of the same papers some months ago recorded an accusation by Dr. Kate Liepmann (Research Fellow in Economics) who neatly nailed the employers for their recent assault on apprentice education. The indication was that since youth's have ceased to be forced by the Government to go in the army at 18, it is no longer necessary for the boss to send lads to school to ensure deferment until 21. For the lad who learns a trade this means more night school, and less day school. A workshop youth who has to swear and sweat at night school will have to contend with three nights a week toiling at Technical College, before he starts entertaining himself with homework, laboratory work etc., after grafting all day in the factory. For day school students it will be found to be somewhat easier with only one night at evening school plus the rest.

To conclude the abolition of 'Cheap Labour' will only be achieved, when apprentices get more than their present sorrowful wages. For example £2.10s. approximately basic at 15 years rising to £4.10s. at 18 yrs. in Engineering. Day school for all, will become a reality when night school is refused by all! In turn, to realise these dreams, and others, of better training in interesting jobs, apprentices must organise regardless of trade union barriers in a rank and file fashion. Youth would no longer rely on the benevolent intentions of Union clap-trap, the Gaffers Federation, and the Government bureaucratic underlings.

THE DEAD AND THE FLOWERS. Continued from page 5  
place in the case of Government changes.

Waiting for an end to the Algerian war conditions the parties and unions. Nothing will be done against De Gaulle or "his" Government until the "cease-fire" is a fact. Criticisms, warnings and half-hearted attacks are made against the Debré Government, never against the regime. And, as everyone knows De Gaulle will make no Government changes until the Algerian war is over, the opposition's offensive has no firing power.

If this odd tactic suits the Socialist or Radical Left, who see themselves as an eventual new Government, what about the CP? It does not campaign against the General-President; only against his Ministers. For the CP, the General is a possible international tool. With his nationalism, his conception of a "Europe of the Fatherlands", his wish to be independent of NATO's strategic needs, De Gaulle could be a card for the Russian hand, at least in the present situation.

S. Parana



## Review

Readers of "Worker's Voice", now re-named "Direct Action", will not need reminding of the importance of the 12-week strike at British Light Steel Pressings, Acton, London last year. We gave it full coverage, supporting the workers' battle against redundancy, publicising their appeals and raising what financial aid we could. It was an important dispute because of the issue of solidarity at stake, because the line-up of forces against the strikers -- an alliance of Rootes Group employers and union officials -- were determined on a showdown with one of the best-organised groups of workers in the motor industry, and because the struggle raised a revolutionary demand: shorter hours, without loss of pay. Because support from outside was lukewarm, the B.L.S.P. strikers suffered a crushing defeat. Their shop organisation was smashed, the employers achieved their original intention of slashing the labour force at Acton and victimisation of militants was given full rein.

Now, following the B.L.S.P. Joint Shop Stewards' Committee own pamphlet outlining their struggle, comes THE BLSP DISPUTE, The Story of the Strike (by Ken Weller, Solidarity pamphlet No.8, 6d.) It contains an interesting record of what happened at Acton, documents the treachery of the union leaderships (specifically those of the AEU and NUVB), gives deserved praise to the BLSP shop organisation, with its tendencies towards job control, but in our view misses out by failing to stress the demand of Shorter hours, without loss of pay. That, to us, was the lynch-pin of the strike. Yet, on reading and re-reading the pamphlet, one finds no mention of it. A curious omission, in view of Weller's claim "to assist .... by drawing all the lessons of the dispute."

He contradicts this claim, incidentally in the final chapter, headed "Lessons", by saying: "Solidarity" does not like to devote a large proportion of its space to lengthy analyses and 'lesson drawing'. We prefer to dig up the real facts and present them." Later comes this passage: ".... there is an important role for an organisation of militants and socialists attempting to develop such consciousness, to build links between workers, to combat misrepresentation, to disseminate accurate information and to provide facilities to help workers in struggle. Such an organisation must see as its main aim to help workers in dispute to win, not use them for political ends."

It reads curiously like the National Rank & File Movement leaflets, "Unite to Fight the Employers," and "Unite for Militant Industrial Action." A clear case for collaboration, one might think. Yet the "Solidarity" Group, which under its then title of "Socialism Reaffirmed", helped sponsor the first Rank and File conference in London, January, 1961, has exercised a virtual boycott of the N. R. & F.M. since, despite repeated invitations for its participation. During the National Press (Sunday Telegraph, Daily Mail, Daily Express) campaign of last June-July, the "Solidarity" Group was repeatedly confused with the N.R. & F.M., although no liaison between the two existed.

We are puzzled to know where this "Solidarity" Group is going. One of its members recently described its policy to us as "A bit of Anarchism, a bit of Syndicalism and a bit of something else." The third ingredient remained unspecified.

During the last 18 months they have had brief affairs with, among others, the Workers' Party, S.W.F., London Anarchist Group and Socialist Advance League, devouring the last-named and quickly abandoning the rest. Now their attention and activity appears to be centred on the Committee of 100. A clear statement of their intentions would be welcome. At the moment too much is left unsaid.

Ken Hawkes.

Rank & File

Industrial Conference

Sunday 11th March 10.30 - 5.0 p.m.

KING & QUEEN Hotel 67, Harrow Rd., W.2.



Letter from France.

## The Dead and the Flowers

On Thursday, February 8th a demonstration was organised by the Paris district T.U. committees of C.G.T. (Communist), C.F.T.C. (Catholic) and F.E.N. (independent teachers). Its aim, to protest against O.A.S. terrorist activity. The Minister of the Interior banned it.

On the evening of the 8th, the assembly points were occupied by big forces of police. There were few fights and less incidents than on earlier demonstrations. When the processions, broken up by the police, were dispersing, however, a particularly violent charge was made by a detachment of municipal police near "Charonne" underground station. Groups of demonstrators sought to escape down the stairs, but the platform gates were closed and soon they were crushed by fresh waves trying to avoid being batoned. The coppers beat up the last arrivals, hurled their bodies on to the packed mass below, then bombarded them with iron street gratings. Eight people died from asphyxia, fractured skulls and internal injuries.

Were the demonstrators looking for a fight? For the most part, no. Slogan of the Communist cells was "Don't let yourselves be provoked." The Minister's subsequent statement, speaking of Communist "commandos", is a stupid lie. If some people, principally youth, were determined not to be suffocated without putting up a fight, they belonged to groups from the Catholic unions, Unified Socialist Party (P.S.U.), teachers and National Union of Students (U.N.E.F.)

Had the police and Republican Security Patrols (C.R.S.) orders to brutally suppress the demonstration? Unlikely. The C.R.S. almost immediately issued a statement disclaiming responsibility. On the other hand, even before the processions formed, some police formations in Place de la Bastille were beating out with their truncheons the three short and two long notes of "Al-gé-rie Fran-caise".

The first reaction to the news was stupor. The Minister's justification, relayed by radio, was a jumble of contradictions and bad faith. Several journalists of R.T.F. (French Radio-Television) refused to handle it.

The Press, with few exceptions, protested on the following day. Eight victims of anti-OAS convictions, i.e. of support for official Government policy, was too much to swallow. Political parties, trade unions, groups of all kinds voiced their anger. The Government excuse about Communists playing the OAS game and OAS murders playing the Communist game carried no weight, nor did that of the need to maintain order.

The Socialist Party (SFIO) appealed for a silent vigil, at Place de la République in Paris and before war memorials in the provinces. The Left parties, CP included, supported this proposal, forbidden by the Government. Non-Communist unions called for a half-hour strike at the end of morning shift on the following Monday.

Finally came Tuesday, February 13, date of the collective burial of the victims, with an appeal for a half-day general strike, signed by the C.G.T., F.E.N., C.F.T.C., and U.N.E.F. and supported by the C.P. and P.S.U. Working-class Paris turned out in force. Despite rain and gales, several hundred thousand men and women joined the procession. This time Government and police permission was given and not a copper was in sight (there are between 60,000 and 80,000 in Greater Paris).

The imposing mass of mourners made a huge impression. Apart from their silent, ominous presence, however, little was clear about their will, hopes and demands. This lack of a "working-class policy" was felt by important sections of workers. The Printers' Federation made a sudden decision, under rank and file pressure, that no papers should appear. In several factories arguments and fights took place between groups of workers wanting action and their "moderate" leaders.

Why this lack of policy by working-class organisations, when the time was ripe for a mass movement? Why no general strike to demand the resignations of the Minister and Prefect of Police?

The answer varies slightly according to the particular union or party, but in general no Left-wing political faction wants to launch a frontal attack on De Gaulle in the present situation. All are manoeuvring for the best

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# Contempt of Court

L. Otter

One of the Committee of 100's more naive supporters declaimed on the day that the judge refused the defence submission - thereby giving notice that he intended to disallow the production of any important evidence - "It shakes one's faith, it shakes one's faith in British Justice;" and indeed anyone who had such a faith must have had it shaken: since the Judge refused any evidence that questioned whether Nuclear Weapons are any Defence, and whether in fact opposition to such weapons can be construed as "contrary to the interests of the State and furthermore he later directed the jury that they must assume that Nuclear weapons are in the interests of the State.

The Judge presumably to add insult to injury, assumed that "these six young people have so behaved because they came under the influence of Lord Russell who is old enough to know better;" and one of the accused themselves added to the insult to his colleagues by saying to Russell, "You have been an inspiration to us all," (In fact, three, Michael Randle, Ian Dixon, and Terry Chandler, - the Anarchists among the accused, - had been imprisoned for their opposition to nuclear weapons long before Russell formed the Committee of 100.) However this insult had the effect of emphasizing the grossly selective way that the state had picked out these six to send to prison hoping thereby to frighten the others.

Since the State had accused them of acting contrary to its interests and since in the past politicians have had to admit that Nuclear Weapons are no defence; the six had hoped to turn their trial into a trial of the Government, though knowing full well that this latter would be both Judge and Jury in its own defence. The Anarchists among them had had considerable misgivings about their line of defence - "that their actions were in the true interests of the State" as they in fact have no illusions that the State is anything else but the ruling class, but were having to assume for the sake of their Defence that the state exists for the people. (Mike Nolan had suggested to them that the offer to be a prosecution witness so that he could declare, of course the Bomb is in the interests of the Capitalists, just look at the profits its producers are making.) However any hope that by recognizing the Court they might get extra publicity for the views of eminent scientists who oppose nuclear weapons was defeated, since the State could not afford to let the truth be known and "Justice" had to be twisted to gag them. The six refusing to be bound over were sentenced for Contempt of Court and who would not be contemptuous of Bourgeois Courts of Injustice.

## 'RANK & FILE'

The Voice of the

NATIONAL RANK & FILE MOVEMENT

Ideas - Letters URGENTLY NEEDED

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