

Direct Action

For Workers' Control of Industry

New Series, incorporating
WORKERS' VOICE

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"CALLING ALL SEAMEN"

A word from a member of the oldest national union in the world - and probably the oldest fashioned, the National Union of Seamen. Just now and this year up to October is the most vital in the history of this union. The election of a general secretary and a change of rules year. Slowly, slowly seamen are beginning to realize that they can talk up, instead of being talked down to. Lack of information of the true state of affairs, both in the industry and the union has been the culprit. Organisation is a weapon and is strength. We have started a movement to help get rid of this state of affairs, a Rank and File movement, the National Seamen's Reform Movement, NSRM.

We are learning as we go and fast and then some. Direct Action has achieved quite a lot for us. Once on a ship we come under different laws, but we have put a wonderful weapon in the hands of our union. It takes a lot of blame off their shoulders (the officials), when they meet the owners, by them saying they cannot control the men. We have found even a good man gets contaminated after being in office a while. Regular change is the answer.

If through your paper you could contact even a few seamen and impress the need to register for a vote and put their cross down for J. Slater, the rank and file candidate, true, tried and with a policy. We succeeded in getting him nominated at eight branches: North Shields, South Shields, Sunderland, Newcastle, Blyth, Victoria and Albert Dock, East India Dock and London Dock, which is enough for his name to go on the ballot as candidate for general secretary.

This, to the amazement of most union members, is the only position the rank and file can vote for. We cannot even vote for a branch official. Seamen of the 60's, WAKE UP BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

R. Penalana.

EDITORIAL NOTE

We welcome fellow worker Penalana's letter and the wind of change which promises to blow a little fresh air into the Seamen's Union offices.

For our part, we do not compete for union officials' paid jobs. It is our opinion, without any reflection on the other opinion, that we can be better revolutionaries by remaining out of office. But we understand and sympathise with the sincere motives of the active members of the National Seamen's Reform Movement.

Yet they too see the creeping danger to a militant worker who becomes a union official and, like the I.W.W., believe in frequent change of officials, at least.

At the present stage of development in the Seamen's movement an attempt to change the holder of the only open office is inseparable from their much wider struggle.

That is how seamen see it, but the more important part of the fight goes on, the fight for a Seamen's Committee on every ship.

Editor.

MILITARY COURT

Danger to Working Class

On Monday 29th January, a meeting was held in Dublin to protest against the Military Court established last November by the Lemass Government. The purpose of the 'Court' was to sentence members of the military wing of Sinn Fein to longer terms of imprisonment than that which is empowered by "constitutional" courts.

The meeting was organised by a new body, the National Civil Liberties League formed to campaign against the Military Court. Speakers at the meeting were Joe Christle, the only clerical worker to observe the picket in Dublin during the E.S.B. strike last September, Noel Browne T.D. National Progressive Democrats and Seamus Sorahan, a lawyer and Republican. The founding of the new organisation was prompted by the refusal to act of the Irish Association for Civil Liberties with its bourgeois background and ties with the Establishment. These factors naturally inhibit the Association from taking up such issues as Military Courts.

The Military Court has a history in Ireland, it not only dealt with the so-called "irresponsible extremists" throwing bombs at Customs Posts in Fermanagh but was also used by the State to imprison militant unemployed leaders in the thirties. We hold no illusions that the Military Court might not be used once again by the Executive Committee of Capitalism if the need arises.

During the E.S.B. electricians strike last September, the Government introduced a Bill in Parliament to establish a Court to enquire into the wages dispute and find a settlement which would be binding on the workers - the penalty for refusing to accept their decision was five years imprisonment. This sentence would also be meted out to those who incited the workers to fight back. This piece of medieval legislation was defeated when the Government realised that they would have to battle against very determined workers in the E.S.B. However it does give us an idea as to the intentions of our Capitalist rulers even in this mythical age of freedom and prosperity.

The working class must not judge the Military Court in relation to the Sinn Fein's border policy, but as a very real threat to our interests, to the gains which have been extracted from the Capitalist class through great struggles over the past fifty years.

It is worth studying the set-up of the Military Court in relation to the ordinary "constitutional" Courts, not because we have any illusions about the "justice" given in the "constitutional" Courts, but to see just how much the ruling class will ignore their own laws, when it suits them.

The 'Military Court' was set up last November shortly after the Election at the instigation of the British Ambassador in collaboration with the Minister for Justice, Charles Haughey (brother-in-law of Lemass). Military Courts allow no jury to decide whether the accused is guilty or not guilty, in fact from the moment that you are arrested it is automatically assumed that you are guilty, the question remains of how severe a sentence you will receive. The three officers before whom you are placed have virtually no legal experience, nor have they an attorney to advise them on legal matters (as in a Military Court Martial). The military officers are paid their basic salary in addition to which they are paid a bonus according to the length of the sentence imposed. The prisoner has absolutely no rights whatsoever, in fact the accused person has to prove himself innocent to avoid sentence.

It is significant to know the methods which the so-called democratic government employed in attempting to conceal their violation of the accepted laws of even the Capitalist system. The Minister for Justice, Haughey, is reported to have called in the newspaper journalists and told them that they would have to practice a voluntary censorship on the proceedings of the Court. They were not to report the names of the police officers involved, they were not to report speeches from the dock and altogether they were to keep the reports of the Court at a minimum. It is clear from looking at the newspaper reports that they have followed out their instructions very efficiently, the so-called "free" press has so reduced reports of the sentences that although twenty-five people were sentenced to a total of forty-three years between December 7th and December 29th, the public have not been made

STRIKE STRATEGY

Review ———

It may seem churlish and presumptuous to be critical of "Strike Strategy", for it packs concisely and simply within six pages most of what there is to know about running a successful strike. However, if there is no weakness in the pamphlet, why review it? It is what is omitted and ought to have been included that I want to write about.

STRATEGY OR TACTICS? The title itself will give the clue to what has been over-looked. "Strike Strategy": well, it's good alliteration, but after all, strategy to be effective requires careful planning, and in the pamphlet, the idea of preparatory planning is almost entirely absent; the advice given is much more in the nature of tactics. To drive home the point, let us consider the difference between the epic struggles of the half century before 1926, and the struggles of today. In the days of crude capitalism, exploitation was naked and unashamed: the bosses paid the workers the lowest wages they could force the worker to accept, and when the worker was out of a job, he and his family literally starved. The trade union leadership was just as renegade and supine as it is today, yet the rank and file worker, fighting with no other weapon than class solidarity, sometimes won. His big advantage over the modern worker was that in his trade union he enjoyed a good deal of local autonomy, with powers to hold district ballots, raise district or branch levies, so that however pusillanimous the full time top brass might be, the workers on the job could very often make their own decisions. Sometimes, therefore, it became possible to prepare in good time before the actual strike took place.

AFFLUENT SOCIETY. Today we live in an affluent society and have never had it so good. Our affluence means that we are large consumers, but before we can consume we must produce. Capitalist bosses, trade union bosses, government bosses, religious bosses, royal bosses all combine to tell us that the only objective of life is production - it does not matter whether it is H Bombs or polythene bags used once and thrown away to choke the drains, nearly unburnable and a danger to the life of young children who may play with them. Even though machinery is far more productive than human labour, the worker is still indispensable, for it is only human labour which makes profit possible. The continual harping on production of anything at any cost has made it no longer necessary for the foreman to breath down the worker's neck; the tempo of production is determined by the digital computer, controlled by the electronic box, and the worker is de-personalised and dehumanised into a mechanical adjunct of the productive process.

PROFIT AND EXPLOITATION Capitalism is justified by the profit it makes, and profit can only be made by exploiting the worker. The dehumanising process of modern capitalist production is the new form taken by exploitation in the Western world. But this process is in direct conflict with the needs of living workers, and in the modern factory, where the worker performs meaningless, repetetive operations, geared inexorably to a machine outside his control, producing something which does not appear to make sense, tensions are set up which inevitably lead to that scapegoat of the union bureaucrat: the unofficial wild cat strike.

STRIKE PLANNING. "Strike Strategy" would do well in another edition to stress that capitalist affluence, even when work is performed in an air conditioned, chromium plated industrial palace, does not in any way diminish the worker's natural reaction to withdraw his labour when exploitation becomes intolerable. In fact the strike is not only a prized weapon to be used carefully and judiciously, it is also a concomitant of capitalism. On both these scores strike strategy demands careful planning, and wherever possible preparation before a strike. A rank and file movement can only be virile when it is a part of the workers' organisation within the work-place. Just as in the heyday of capitalist exploitation the greatest battles were fought where workers on the job were able to exercise some direct control over the struggle, the great task of the rank and file movement today is to encourage the building up of a new

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"Come off it, Mr. Grimond"

The Liberal Party's recent by-election victory at the once-safe Tory seat of Orpington caused a big fluttering in the political dove-cotes. Party pundits of all shades have supplied every possible explanation of the remarkable switch that turned a Tory majority of 15,000 into a Liberal majority of 8,000. And yet the answer is surely simple enough: tired of ruling Toryism and not seeing any acceptable alternative from Labour, this predominately middle-class constituency registered a plague-on-both-your-houses vote.

Much the same happened at Blackpool, where the swing was only a shade too small for the Tory majority to be toppled. In this situation, the Liberal Party is cashing in with a typically all-things-to-all-men policy, which is almost openly opportunist. Where Liberalism really stands is more difficult to determine. They manage to attract votes of CND supporters, without being unilateralist, but perhaps the most interesting aspect of the modern Liberal image is their curious policy, in which much play is made with "syndicalism." Typical is this quote from party leader Jo Grimond:

"The Liberal Party should not be frightened of being called syndicalist. What is needed on the Left of politics today is to harness the new sciences to the warmth of the old democratic syndicalist parties. The Kennedy image is too cold for this country and the Labour Party image too conservative." Guardian 13.3.62.

What this remarkable statement means is difficult to decide. Nobody in their senses would think of sticking a syndicalist label on the capitalist Liberal carcass; the two social systems are diametrically opposed. And what are -- or were -- these "democratic syndicalist parties"? Syndicalism is based on the industrial organisation of the working class and aims at supplanting capitalism by a society in which private or State ownership is abolished and industry is owned and directly controlled by the workers themselves. It is not and never has been represented by political parties, which represent something alien to working-class interests: the capture and exercise of State power over the workers. A "syndicalist party" is, therefore, a contradiction in terms. Mr. Grimond may know what he is talking about; as Syndicalists, we certainly don't.

Ken Hawkes.

Socialism Creeping into Orbit

Laurens Otter

An interesting expose of the "just balance" (between Capital and Labour) belief of Liberal political reformers has just been published by the New Orbits group - the Liberal New Left, or Bow Group - entitled "Controlling Interest". The pamphlet is a curious mixture. It insists on competition as a means to assess the wants of consumers - failing totally to account for the artificial market that advertising creates, for built-in obsolescence, for gluts or shortages, booms or slumps, or for the wars that competition for markets has caused. It talks glibly about democracy, ignoring the way mass circulation papers, radio and television suppress or outrightly distort news in the interests of those who control them.

Yet it shows fuller appreciation of the nature of management in modern capitalist enterprises than do the analyses usually forthcoming from the Left. Similar, though it has a curious belief that shareholders have the right to continue their privileged existence, its proposals show far greater concern with the interests of workers than do those of the Socialists Humanists. And while it assumes capitalist expansion can continue indefinitely, and that it is possible to substantially improve the position of the employed, without detracting from the interests of the employers, it still states: "We are recognising that a firm should be organised in such a way that, instead of merely tending to maximise profits, it tends both to provide satisfying work for its employees and participation in the affairs of the company and (subject to this) to maximise profits."

Such "humanitarian" capitalist concerns as Cadbury's and the John Lewis Partnership, together with the Scott Bader Commonwealth, are seen to be Paternalist, yet only three pages later the pamphlet praises the management-worker boards of the West German Iron and Coal Industry and Tito's phoney Workers'

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CONTROVERSY

Dear Comrade,

We thank you for your review of Ken Weller's pamphlet 'The BLSP Dispute - the **Story** of the Strike'. We feel it necessary however, to draw the attention of your readers to some factual inaccuracies in this review. Everyone is of course entitled to his own interpretation of events but facts are facts.

You state 'the struggle raised a revolutionary demand: shorter hours without loss of pay' and you take us to task for 'failing to stress' this demand which you describe as 'the lynch-pin of the strike'. You state that 'on reading and re-reading the pamphlet one finds no mention of it'.

This is no accident. We didn't mention it because the demand was never put forward by the Strike committee.

The resolution passed at a mass meeting on September 1, (three days before the strike started) pledged the men 'to remain on strike until the management declare "no redundancy" and start negotiations on a shorter working week, short time working or work-sharing'. No mention, please note, of 'a shorter working week without loss of pay'... although we don't doubt most of the strikers would have preferred this!

On September 28, a compromise solution was put forward by the Strike Committee. This included a proposal for 'hours of work to be worked out on a work sharing basis'. Again, please note, no mention by the Strike Committee of 'shorter hours without loss of pay'.

A perusal of the excellent pamphlet produced by the BLSP Strike Committee itself - to which your reviewer refers - will clearly show that at no time was the demand for a shorter working week without loss of pay one advocated by the Strike Committee.

We feel that reports of disputes, to be of genuine assistance to other workers, must above all be factual. The issues on which the BLSP dispute was fought were quite significant enough without seeking to embellish them. This - and this alone - accounts for our 'curious omission'.

Yours fraternally,

E. Morse, Socialism Reaffirmed.

We are confident that the original demand put forward by the BLSP Strike Committee was "4 days work or 4 days pay". Which means of course that if there is only two days work available, four days money is demanded.

In this context surely it is shorter hours without loss of pay.

Editor.

STRIKE STRATEGY Review. Continued from page 3.

worker's control inside every factory, and a proper system of communications between factories.

STRUGGLE INEVITABLE. Unless unofficial strikes are recognised as a fact of capitalist life, they will continue to be a succession of heroic but frustrated sacrifice, crushed between the millstones of capitalist boss and trade union bureaucrat. A rank and file movement must accept this inevitability, and will prepare for the clash by building up an emergency fund, establishing a special purposes committee ready to go into immediate action, with a well oiled machine to hand over to the duly elected strike committees; communications with other factories will be reported to shop meetings to ensure that workers are not called upon to make sacrifices without assured support from outside. When it becomes possible to prepare and plan strikes so that they are fought on ground chosen by the workers themselves, it will no longer be possible for the trade union bureaucrat to bleat about evil subversive elements; we shall be very much nearer the day when we can kick out not only the union bureaucrat but the capitalist boss himself.

Jim Petter - AEU

Councils, as though these were free from paternalism. As is usual from "Just Balancers", the authors talk of ending the class war, saying with delightful innocence: "The present structure is open to strong objection on the grounds that it carries the class war right into industry." Obviously it has never dawned on them that industry is the principal field on which the class war is fought, that the class war is not, like other wars, something that leaders declare on or off at their will, but the inevitable consequence of the clash between privileged and exploited. It is fought more bitterly in times of stress and the naive view held by the young authors may well be due to their having not seen in this country a full-scale manifestation of the class war. Obviously, too, it does not dawn on them that the privileged are privileged because they are the aggressors in the class war; that when they are replaced it is because someone has come who fights the war harder; and that the underprivileged were not asked if they wanted to engage in this war and would be happy to see it end - with the abolition of privilege.

These blind spots are partly redeemed by the express statement that: "Industry should provide satisfaction to those who work in it, both through suitable working conditions and rewards and through opportunities for all to participate in the making of decisions, particularly in those decisions affecting them directly".

Attention is drawn to the fact that workers are more interested in decisions concerning their work, than in more broadly political ones: "Since the worker's contact with authority is mainly at his place of work, it appears to follow that he might be expected to be more interested in the affairs of his firm than those of his local council, Parliament being a remote entity that political parties remind him of every five years. Democracy, as Aneurin Bevan once said, is more than a cross on a piece of paper, it is participation in decision at a variety of levels."

The pamphlet also has some interesting information on how the 1948 Liberal decision to make Co-Partnership compulsory got watered down to fiscal inducements. And it also acknowledges the role of Guild Socialists and Syndicalists in the Labour Movement - mentioning that a 1934 Labour Party statement said that employees in a socialist industry had a right, which should be acknowledged by law, to an effective share in the control and direction of industry. It expresses surprise that revolutionary syndicalism never became part of democratic socialism. But as the authors had earlier pointed out that the Webbs' vision was limited to being concerned with the inefficiency of having two milkmen in one street, the surprise was unnecessary.

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fully aware of the magnitude of the sentences.

The organisers of the National Civil Liberties pasted up posters advertising the meeting. On three successive occasions prior to the meeting and they were followed by what the Chairman of the meeting described as "that small section of the public driving around in black cars", who systematically ripped out the date and location of the meeting on each poster. It was indeed obvious to members of the public that somebody was busy ripping up the posters. The following morning two of the three newspapers avoided mention of the meeting despite their presence at the meeting.

Although Revolutionaries will give their complete support to the new body, we must take issue with one of the points in its preamble which reads, "Ireland is a democratic country and as such, the Government is responsible to the people for its action."

The myth that we live in a democratic free society has to be completely exploded. Ireland is only as democratic as suits the ruling class - that is the property owning class. The Government far from being responsible to the people is responsible to the major pressure group and which is the small minority of the people who control the vast majority of the wealth. It is to those people that the Government is responsible. We must agree with Noel Browne the only one of the three speakers who brought out the point clearly, that it is a gigantic fraud to imagine that we live in a free society.

The National Civil Liberties League should expose the Military Court. The threat that lies in the very existence of this machinery must be brought home to the workers. The only effective method to remove the Military Court is through strike action. Even a one-hour token strike would waken the Government to the strength of the Labour Movement. It seems very unlikely that any other method of demonstration is likely to succeed.

Pat Kelly.