

Socialist Worker

FOR WORKERS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM

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Swedish iron ore miners strike

FIVE THOUSAND Swedish workers in the government-controlled iron ore mines have been on unofficial strike for more than three weeks. It is the country's biggest unofficial strike for more than 20 years. The picture shows workers at a strike meeting.

The strike action, in the north of Sweden was caused by a dispute over bonus payments, but other grievances have been building up for some time. Originally, the men's union agreed that the strike committee should take part in negotiations with LKAB,

the employers. But the company refused to negotiate until the men went back. Then the union backed down on its pledge to the strike committee.

Dock workers came out in solidarity and stopped the shipment of iron ore. Shortage of ore will quickly hit Sweden's important steel industry. Outside labour was brought in to mine the ore but strong picketing put a stop to this. Students in the area have collected more than £300 for the strikers in spite of police harassment.

Support the Young Socialists' demonstration

March against murder!

Pinkville: 500 massacred
Black Panthers: 28 shot
SUNDAY 11 JANUARY

Assemble Speakers' Corner (Marble Arch) 2 pm

March to Downing Street

THREAT TO CHILDREN'S WELFARE

THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT'S New Year greeting to the great mass of working people in Britain is: 'Tighten your belts, 1970 will see a continuation of our sustained attack on your wages and living conditions.' Experts are already predicting that unemployment will increase to around 600,000 this year.

The government starts the year the way it means to go on, by putting into operation part two of the Prices and Incomes Act. This will allow them to keep wage increases to the 4½ per cent 'norm' while prices, profits and shares continue to soar.

Labour is committed to modernising society, but it does so according to the terms laid down by big business. This means that the workers have to pay through stagnating wages and worsening conditions.

1970 will see the stepping up of the campaign to introduce productivity bargaining into every sector of industry. This is the device by which workers accept a wage increase with 'strings' that take away many hard-won improvements such as tea breaks. Productivity increases the work-rate, reduces the number of workers employed and removes local wage bargaining from shop stewards to more reliable full-time union officials.

With wage increases quickly swallowed by the escalating cost of living, workers who accept 'prod deals' soon find themselves no better off financially while the work load has intensified and shop-floor organisation is seriously weakened.

Productivity bargaining is the main prong of the employer/government offensive. Socialists must give considerable attention to ways and means of fighting it in the months ahead.

Prices run riot

But we must not ignore the other serious effects of government policy on working people's lives. Away from the factory floor, on the 'home front', conditions are also deteriorating. When wages are pegged but prices are allowed to run riot, it is clear that people on small incomes are falling further and further behind. Not just in money terms, but in the whole quality of their lives.

In London alone, working people start the year with yet another increase in bus, train and tube fares, while GLC tenants face a further 7s 6d to 10s a week more on their rents in March.

Rising prices, increased welfare contributions and prescription charges — all these add up to a substantial cut in workers' living standards. Housewives have to 'economise' and the lowering of the quality of food can have serious effects on health, particularly where children are concerned.

An alarming report has recently shown that rickets, the disease of malnutrition, is on the increase in Scotland, particularly in the poorer parts of Glasgow. And what is true of Glasgow may well be true for other parts of Britain.

In the early post-war years, very few cases of rickets were reported. Welfare milk, fortified with vitamin D, seemed to have made children immune from the disease. But now it is growing in Glasgow again. The medical journal The Lancet has commented that this may be 'only the tip of the iceberg' of vitamin D deficiency among young children in Glasgow as well as elsewhere in Britain.

Assumptions that severe poverty and malnutrition have been abolished in the 'affluent society' have hidden the real extent of such diseases of poverty as rickets. Only 10 per cent of the Glasgow cases were diagnosed before the children attended hospital.

A report produced by the Social Nutrition Research Unit at London University has

shown that in a survey of children in the East End of London, a quarter were going short of nourishment. The report says that the main cause was the withdrawal of free school milk for secondary school children as part of the government's 'economy measures' in January 1968.

The Labour Party denounced the Tories in 1961 when they introduced charges for welfare foods — but the present government has not reduced the charges. In fact, as part of the July 1967 economy package, welfare milk for children under five years increased from 4d to 6d a pint.

Low income families are supposed to get this milk free but government figures for 1967 show that, apart from families on supplementary benefit, 96 per cent of families entitled to free milk were not receiving it. No doubt it would have 'cost' the government too much to publicise the availability of the milk.

The slums remain

As well as cutting back on welfare and social services, the Labour government has also scrapped its house-building target of 500,000 new houses every year by 1970. So the festering slums remain, adding to the plight of poverty and malnutrition. There are three million houses in Britain without a bath, hot water or inside lavatory. One family in five has to live in one of these houses — that is ten million men, women and children.

Figures produced by Dr G C Arneil show that in the Bridgeton area of Glasgow, 'a poor housing area, but not the worst', only 15 per cent of families had their own inside lavatories and only 6 per cent had baths. More than half had no hot water supply and 90 per cent of the families lived in one or two rooms.

What a savage indictment these figures are of the 'progressive, thrusting, technological' society that Labour promised to create in 1964. Of course, Labour hoped to improve society. But because they only want to 'reform' it, to make it a little more fair, instead of changing it root and branch in order to build a socialist society, they inevitably end up pandering to the demands of the tiny one per cent who own private industry.

It is impossible to make any lasting changes for the benefit of the working class as long as the big businessmen make the decisions, backed by their friends who control the press and television and the products of public schools who staff the civil service and draw up government policy.

The task of socialists, on the edge of this exciting new decade, is to help forge a massive resistance throughout industry to the government and employers' attacks. But more than this. We must ram home the truth about Britain today, the truth about poverty and sickness and slums and the grip of big business.

Out of the industrial struggle and the growing political awareness of the workers it will be possible to lay the basis for a new, genuine socialist movement that will fight for workers' power and real democracy. No other section of society is so exploited and oppressed as the working class, but without them society could not function.

In the factories, the mines, the offices, the docks and the shipyards, they hold the levers of power in their hands. Aware of that power, they can transform all our lives.

INTO THE '70s



A wave of militant strikes by workers in the major Italian industrial centres was one of the high-spots of the international working-class scene in 1969. The upsurge by the workers rattled big business and the government, and several strikers were killed as the police attempted to drive them from the streets. Behind the strikes lay a struggle by rank and file industrial workers to burst through the conservative restrictions of the official trade union machine. The most important development of this new and dynamic grass-roots activity has been the creation of factory committees. Delegates from these committees are pictured at a conference in Florence last October. ALBA SACERDOTI reports . . .



Factory committees spread in Italy

IN THE LAST two years, new forms of workers' organisation have appeared in some Italian factories. They are the CUB (Unitary Base Committees), a rank and file militants' organisation.

This is the result of a general tendency for some years, which was given a new driving-force by a series of recent events.

For some time the inadequacies of the traditional organisations of the working class had been felt by the most conscious militants. But up to 1966-67, there was no attempt to give an 'organisational' form to this discontent.

The lack of politics in the trade union organisations and the attempts by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to join the coalition government demonstrated the reformist perspectives offered by the party and its union. The growth of the student movement and of a number of groups to the left of the PCI plus a new receptiveness to revolutionary ideas due to the break-up of the communist monolith through the China-Russia dispute, the Czech invasion and the French May events radically altered the situation and made possible the organisation of the rank and file committees.

The most important rank and file committees today are those of Petrolchimica in Porto Marghera, of Pirelli and AMT (Milan Transport) in Milan

and Fiat in Turin. The bitter struggles over the renewal of wage contracts in the chemical sector and engineering and the reorganisation of the Italian transport services have given the initial impetus which has allowed the rank and file committees to establish themselves and gain support.

A useful example is the rank and file committee at AMT of Milan. AMT has some 12,000 workers divided in two main sections, transport crews and maintenance staff. Until 1964 the company was run by the Milan local administration but since then, although Italian transport is still run by local councils, it receives subsidies from the central government and agreements on wages and conditions are negotiated nationally.

Militant tradition

AMT has a tradition of political and trade union militancy. In the Resistance it gave a large number of cadres to the partisan movement and throughout 1944-45 during the Nazi occupation, it organised a series of protest strikes which paralysed Milan. At the end of the war the company remained a fortress of the PCI and during the last 25 years the workers have actively taken part in all the most important political and trade union struggles.

About 70 per cent of AMT workers belong to the CGIL (Communist and

socialist trade union) and the rest are divided between the CISL (Christian Democrat) and the UIL (Social Democrat). For years the CPI and the CGIL have engaged in a policy of favouritism and corruption inside the firm which has allowed it to exercise undisputed control both at the trade union and the political level. It has controlled hiring, promotion, negotiations over the pace and hours of work, piece rates, etc. The struggle for the renewal of the wage contract in 1967 marked the first break in the CPI control.

Rank and file demands were:
An equal increase for all employees (including white-collar workers and technicians).

The elimination of a grading structure created in an artificial manner which did not correspond to the real differences in skills and jobs.

Reduction of the weekly working hours without loss of pay.

The trade union organisations did not take the demands into consideration when they put forward their claims. Instead their demands included increases which continued the existing differentials.

The conflict between the rank and file and the official union apparatus became very sharp. In the end a group of workers who had been in the PCI for a number of years left the party and started the rank and file committee. The CPI tried to prevent the development of the committee, at first by accusing them of adventurism and of splitting the working class. The party also conducted a campaign against the individuals involved, trying to discredit them in the eyes of their comrades. When all this failed, they tried to confine the committee to ATM and tried to describe it as an unimportant phenomenon.

Substantial successes

Today, however, the rank and file committees have spread to other firms and to other towns. The ATM committee publishes a paper called *Voices of the ATM* which sells more than 3000 copies and which comments and intervenes in all the most important internal trade union problems and also on national and international political events. The Communist Party is finding it increasingly difficult to dismiss the committee as a minor annoyance.

The successes of the ATM rank and file committee have been substantial. Initially they engaged in struggle to increase the direct participation of the workers in drawing up a programme of demands. This has meant setting up a structure of assemblies inside and outside the workshops and depots.

It was a novel development. Up to then in Italy all negotiations took place only through the official union machine, whether at local or national level. But today, although the contracts by law still have to be signed by union officials, the rank and file committee has won the right to put the offers to a vote before the contract is actually signed.

Rank and file committees have developed into a pressure group on the union bureaucracy. They have been able to exercise real pressure on the officials and have forced them to take much more radical positions than would otherwise have been the case.

At ATM, now that the immediate internal struggle is over, the rank and file committee is attempting to break out of its isolation. It has tried to establish links with other similar committees. It has also attempted to develop its political analysis. The initial critique of the CGIL's role within the firm has inevitably grown into a deeper and wider analysis of the PCI's politics nationally and internationally and has resulted in an attempt to find real alternatives. This process, however, is

still in its infancy.

Most of the rank and file committees are not as effective as the one at ATM. One of the positive characteristics of them all is that they draw on the experience and help of comrades from political groups outside the firm. But some, unlike ATM, are controlled by outsiders which hinders their development. However, the linking up of the various rank and file committees is becoming an essential part of the reconstruction of an Italian revolutionary left.

Europe: why the big bosses are plugging entry

THE EDITORIAL on the Common Market (11 December) was not very clear. It failed to make the point that the international corporations can adjust to being in or out of the Common Market, simply because they are international. Their investment plans can override the decisions of governments.

If Britain goes into the Common Market, they will build their factories here to take advantage of labour costs among the lowest in Europe. At the same time, the government will allow many small firms to go to the wall. Together with higher food prices, this is supposed to be the hot blast of competition that will put Britain back on its feet.

Out of the Common Market, the corporations will build their factories elsewhere and the British divisions will slowly run down. Britain will become a backwater with, again, unemployment and low wages. Much the same end result as going in, from the point of view of the working class, but it does make things easier for the big bosses if we go in and that is why they are plugging entry.

In the eight years since the British application was first rejected, ICI have increased the number of their plants in Europe to 60; Ford Motor Company have created a new firm called Ford Europe and now manufacture Capris, Escorts and Transits in Britain, Belgium and Germany; and British Leyland have announced plans to extend their Belgian production, have bought out Spain's largest car producer and maintained their connection with Innocenti who manufacture special Minis and 1100s for the Italian market. Ample proof that the largest firms can hedge their bets and plough on regardless of the success or failure of the 'European Ideal'. In or out will affect the ultimate shape of the British economy, but it will not change the logic of capitalism.

Nor will it change the logic of socialism as the only real cure for the international anarchy of today. As the editorial points out, the way ahead is through rank and file contacts within the corporations, pressure on the officials from below for real international solidarity actions, and the eventual creation of a new international working-class, political organisation. Is this prescription likely to be very different whether we enter or not?

Finally, as ever the Communist Party's nostalgic attachment to the slogans of Russian foreign policy has led them astray. NATO will continue whether or not Britain enters the Common Market, just as the Warsaw Pact has survived the failure of Comecon. We don't need to campaign against entry, but the working-class movement as a whole, including the CP, does need to work for the re-building of the industrial and political movement that will provide the answer whatever short-term tactics are adopted by the ruling class. FRED MILSON, Merton, Surrey.

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CAPITALISM has nothing to offer mankind but exploitation, crises and war. The ruling classes of the world—a tiny minority—subordinate the needs of the vast majority to the blind accumulation of capital in the interests of competitive survival.

Imperialism condemns two-thirds of mankind to famine and calls forth movements of national liberation which shake the system and expose its essential barbarism. The constant and mounting preparations for war and the development of weapons of mass destruction place the survival of humanity itself in the balance.

The increasing intensity of international competition between ever-larger units drives the ruling classes to new attacks on workers' living standards and conditions of work, to anti-trade union and anti-strike laws. All of these show capitalism in deepening crises from which it can only hope to escape at the cost of the working class and by the destruction of all its independent organisations.

The only alternative is workers' power — the democratic collective control of the working class over industry and society through a

WHERE WE STAND

state of workers' councils and workers' control of production.

Only thus can the transition be ensured to a communist society in which the unprecedented productive forces thrown up by capitalism can be used to assure an economy of abundance. Only the working class, itself the product of capitalism, has the ability to transform society in this way, and has shown its ability to do so in a series of revolutionary struggles unprecedented in the history of all previous exploited classes.

The working class gains the experience necessary to revolutionise society by constant struggle against the

ruling class through the mass organisations thrown up in the course of that struggle.

To overcome the unevenness with which this experience is gained, to draw and preserve the lessons of past struggles and transmit them for the future, to fight against the pressure of bourgeois ideas in the working class, and to bond the fragmentary struggles against capitalism into a conscious and coherent offensive, a revolutionary Marxist party of socialist militants is required, embracing the vanguard of the working class.

The struggle to build such a party is only part of the wider struggle to create a World Revolutionary Socialist International, independent of all oppressors and exploiters of the working class, whether bureaucratic or bourgeois.

International Socialists therefore fight for:

Opposition to all ruling-class policies and organisations.

Workers' control over production and a workers' state.

Opposition to imperialism and support for all movements of national liberation.

Uncompromising opposition to all forms of racialism and to all migration controls.

INTO THE SEVENTIES

by Stephen Marks

THE LAST two years of the 1960s have seen a massive revival of revolutionary politics; the Vietnam war, the youth and student revolt, and the rising of the American ghettos, the French May events and the current upsurge in Italy and the rising tide of industrial militancy not only in this country but also in Germany and America, the violent eruptions of class struggle in Ireland, Chile and Argentina, the massive and inspiring explosion of the peasants and workers of Pakistan, the encroaching tide of unrest in India.

Throughout the globe this decade ends in a manner which contrasts not only with its beginning but with what has seemed the general rule of the whole postwar period.

Can the roots of this new revival be found anywhere in the past, or is it a sudden event without explanation? And can the answer to this question give us any clue to the likely shape of the 1970s?

We believe the answer can be found in the very causes of the seeming stability with which the past two years provide so great a contrast. And this is as it should be. For it is natural that an exploiting system should meet obstacles, show contradictions; natural that labour should take collective action against capital; natural that oppressed nations should rise against their oppressors. For revolutionaries it is not revolution but its absence that needs explanation.

No basic change in the system

The growth and stability of the post-war years led many to the conclusion that capitalism had changed its nature or even that it was no longer capitalism. And compared not only with the 1930s but with the entire previous history of the system, the record looked impressive.

In the West, the economy grew twice as fast between 1950 and 1964 as between 1913 and 1950, and half as fast again as in the preceding generation. But the basis of the system remained unchanged; control of the system by competing minorities, each forced to accumulate at the expense of the working class as a condition of survival, hence production for profit and not for need and the inbuilt tendency to over-production that goes with it.

The biggest single factor in preventing this tendency reasserting itself in the usual form of recurring slumps was the continued massive expenditure on armaments. In the United States in the post-war period, arms have accounted for about 10 per cent of all production and, more significantly, about 50 per cent of all annual investible surplus. In other words, the central problem of capitalism was halved throughout this period in the major capitalist country of the world.

Shift in balance of forces

This totally new situation of apparently continuous full employment and growth had great effects on the very structure of working-class organisation and consciousness. Full employment conditions led to a shift in the balance of forces in wage bargaining as increases could more easily be won on the factory floor. Long national strikes were replaced by short local ones and workers won their reforms within the system by acting for themselves instead of relying on the national trade union machine.

But this development was two-sided. As well as the increase in workers' militancy and self-reliance, there went with this a lessening concern with wider industrial and political questions as they found that a view limited to the factory or shop could get results under boom conditions.

But as the decade ends, the slow but quickening erosion of post-war stability drives the ruling class in each country to try to smash this new localised self-reliance so that the rate of exploitation can be increased to meet growing world competition. The state intervenes more and what seemed purely economic issues in the past now become more political, requiring a political response.

What has caused the recent erosion of post-war stability? The arms race has a logic of its own. As each nation must stay ahead of the others in weapon potential, so the technology of weaponry gets more and more in advance of the rest of the economy. Battleships and tanks may use the same raw materials and types of labour as the rest of the economy but guided missiles do not.

So the stabilising impact that results from using up excess capacity lessens. Meanwhile the cost increases, confining the arms race to the super powers and giving economic advantage to countries like Germany and Japan that have not known the same arms burden. Like a drug, arms spending needs ever bigger doses to produce the same effect.

The growing role of state planning and the increasing trends to merger and monopoly flow from the emphasis on modern techniques that the arms race develops. Added to this is the boost to the 'technological revolution' which state-sponsored military research provides - a disguised state subsidy to private industry's 'research and development' budgets.

The changes in the work force that result lead to the growth of structural unemployment and worsen the position of the declining areas based on dead industries, whether our own North East, the Walloon areas of Belgium, the Appalachian area in the USA or the Italian South. And whole groups, such as the American negroes, may be condemned to be thrown on the scrap heap as the heritage of years of past oppression denies them access to the skills which are increasingly a necessity in the workforce of modern capitalism. Unevenness grows, the basic unemployment rate slowly rises, especially for young workers, and as the gap between the 'modern' and the declining sectors widens, so does the visible contrast between what is possible and what the system can provide.

The declining impact of the economic stabilisers leads to a decline in the rate of growth of world trade, at the same time as the size of new investments needed to stay in front increases. The intensity of world competition grows with it. This explains the growing effort of capital in every country to control the rate and pace of work, to bring under tighter control the degree of workers' power over the conditions on the shop floor that was won in the heyday of the boom.

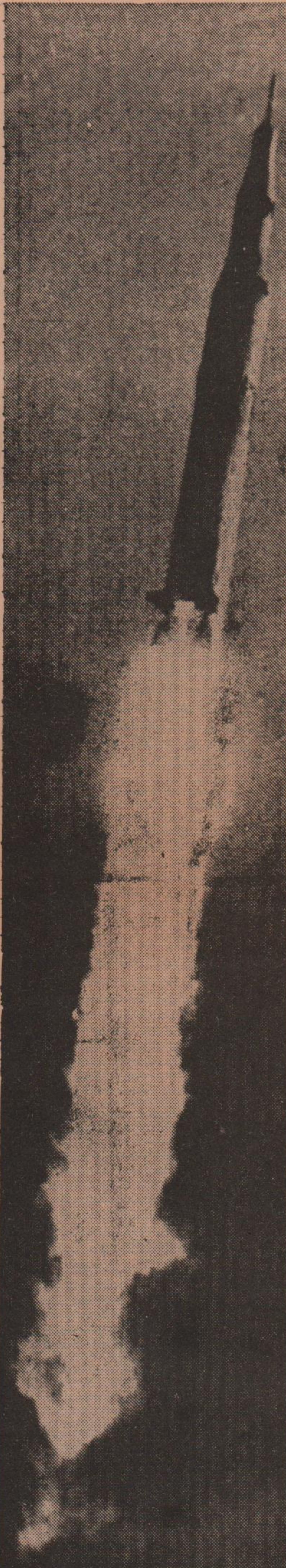
Revival of trade union politics

This leads to two linked developments. British shop floor organisation is unequalled anywhere else. But as in every country the power of the workers on the factory floor must be curbed if each ruling class is to stay ahead of the others, so unofficial organisations at rank and file level grow also, as recent developments in Italy show.

At the same time the nation-wide nature of the attack, spearheaded by governments in the name of 'efficiency', leads to a revival of trade-union politics at a national level, as has happened in Britain.

These new trends complement but do not replace the old pattern of localised militancy and integration of the trade unions with the state. As workers are increasingly isolated from the traditional organisations, parties and unions, so their reactions to the narrowing of the possibilities for the old localised reformism become more unpredictable and new methods of struggle, mass strikes and factory sit-ins, are more readily adopted, at the same time as all political loyalties are weakened and called into question.

Where these contradictions are overlaid by the specific contradictions referred to above, the situation can become explosive. The added factor of de Gaulle's



Production of missiles and rockets lessens the stabilising effect of arms production on capitalist economy.

discredited regime in France, the problem of the South and of a uniquely inefficient and corrupt state apparatus in Italy, the aspect of religious division and oppression in Ulster, the racial question in the American ghettos and the special problems and frustrations of youth mean that the place and time of explosive outbursts of opposition

to ruling-class policies will not coincide neatly with the basic economic factors.

The resulting unpredictability of the situation leaves the ruling classes themselves without a bearing as the old organisations and political loyalties become less and less reliable as pointers to the future. And so their reaction to even marginal challenges becomes increasingly uncertain, irrational and often brutal. The neurotic reaction of the British press to the Vietnam demonstration in October 1968 and the recent bomb scare in Italy are examples of this.

What are the implications of this complex and shifting pattern of growing instability for the action and organisation of socialists in the coming decade? National minorities, young people and students are the sectors where the growing contradictions of an increasingly unstable capitalism most readily take on an openly political form. And these sectors will continue to provide the most easily available sources of new revolutionaries.

Struggle for control of production

But the struggles of these sectors will lose all hope of meaning and success unless they can fuse with the movement of opposition to the basic attack on workers' conditions and organising power at the point of production, an attack to which each ruling class is driven ever more intensely by the very logic of the system. This no longer takes the old form of an attack on money wages only, but of a struggle for power over production itself.

The forms of self-reliant organisation developed during the stable boom are the workers' strength. The limited horizons and purely economic dimensions of these forms are the workers' chief weakness. The appeal of the ruling classes in the new offensive, seen very clearly in this country in the drive for 'efficiency' and 'productivity', is to ideas of 'the national interest', 'economic growth', and even, when threatened, 'the security of society itself'.

The response must counterpose other priorities: workers' control of industry and the state, production for use and not for profit, class unity not national and racial division. The workers' means of local struggle must link up to meet the offensive, covering and cutting across the divisions of combines, industries and even nations. Opposition to the united nature of the bosses' offensive can only be really effective when it is political. To fight the ruling class as a whole and its state, with ideas born of a period when gains could be won in struggle against one isolated fragment of that class, one employer by himself, is to court disaster. This means that an organisation must be built to carry that general perspective into each local struggle, to act as the 'memory bank' of the class as a whole.

'Lefts' pose no real challenge

This is particularly so if, as we have seen, the struggle will continue to be uneven and patchy, especially as the growing role of trade union organisations in the struggles ahead means that in default of a revolutionary alternative, workers will look for a lead to 'left-wing' union leaders who may fight more than the right wing, but who can pose no challenge to the system as a whole and the state which lies behind it. Events in Italy show that if the left can pose no alternative in a time of crisis, the far right will try to fill the vacuum.

In building such a revolutionary organisation, the chief weakness of the revolutionary left is lack of credibility. The socialists groups

have been too long isolated from the working class by the dead hand of reformism, only now beginning to rot away, for their message to seem relevant to workers in struggle. But the course of the fight in industry itself, as we have seen, is daily raising the basic issues of workers' power in day to day struggles.

To understand, often in painful detail, the form these issues take in each specific situation, to work out demands which bring out the content of control in each attack on workers' standards, to build factory groups around these demands, and to weld these partial actions into a conscious and unified organisation, is the main task. Socialists must also be able to intervene in the more generalised 'political' struggles and around the broader social concerns of young people, students, national and oppressed minorities and demonstrate to these sectors the necessity of a class organisation.

Finally, and as much a precondition as any other, is an international outlook. So unstable is the system that examples from any country may prove infectious in a growingly unified world. In the 'communist' countries of Eastern Europe, the bureaucracy sits on a volcano. Unable to increase productivity without producing more consumer goods and unable to do this without 'liberalising' the system in a way which threatens its stability, it postpones the problem by opting for stagnation based on mounting police repression.

And in the exploited countries of the third world the continuing struggle of unconquerable Vietnam explodes depth charges in the heartland of imperialism. The decline of Stalinism unleashes once again the independent action of the workers themselves and increases the chance of a victory over imperialism. The snapping of the chain of world capital at either of these weakest links could totally transform the perspectives that confront us in the centres of capitalism in the West.

Dangers and opportunities

The qualities of flexibility and dedication which are needed of revolutionaries in this complex situation pregnant with dangers and opportunities, are taxing and immense. But as Lenin said, 'for the bourgeoisie there are no impossible situations.' If we fail to meet the opportunity and the necessity, for building new revolutionary parties and a new revolutionary international, which our age of growing instability offers and demands, the alternative will be a new barbarism of which we can see the merest outlines in the growing poisoning of our planet and the air we breathe, in the uninhabitable social breakdown which America's chief cities offer and in the massacre of My Lai.

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The choice: workers' control and international planning or a new barbarism

Crossman puts new burden on workers

Paying for pensions: Labour lets the middle class off the hook

by Jim Kincaid

WHEN LABOUR took office in 1964 they promised fast action on a new scheme for old age pensions. There was no good reason for delay. A detailed plan for earnings related pensions had been accepted with acclaim by the Annual Conference of the Labour Party as long ago as 1957.

Once in office, however, the 1957 scheme was quietly lost in a maze of specialist committees. For 4½ years there was no sign of any progress. Then suddenly in January 1969, a revised version of the earlier plan was published by the government.

Since last January there has been much hustle and bustle on the pension front. Two more White Papers have been issued. Barring accidents, Mr Crossman hopes to rush his new National Superannuation proposals into operation early this year.

Sudden urgency

There is no great mystery about Labour's sudden urgency on pensions. A general election is in the offing. The recent by-elections indicated an anti-Labour swing big enough to put the Tories in office with 150 seats to spare. Mr Wilson needs every card he can play and clearly sees the new pension scheme as a possible electoral ace-in-the-hole.

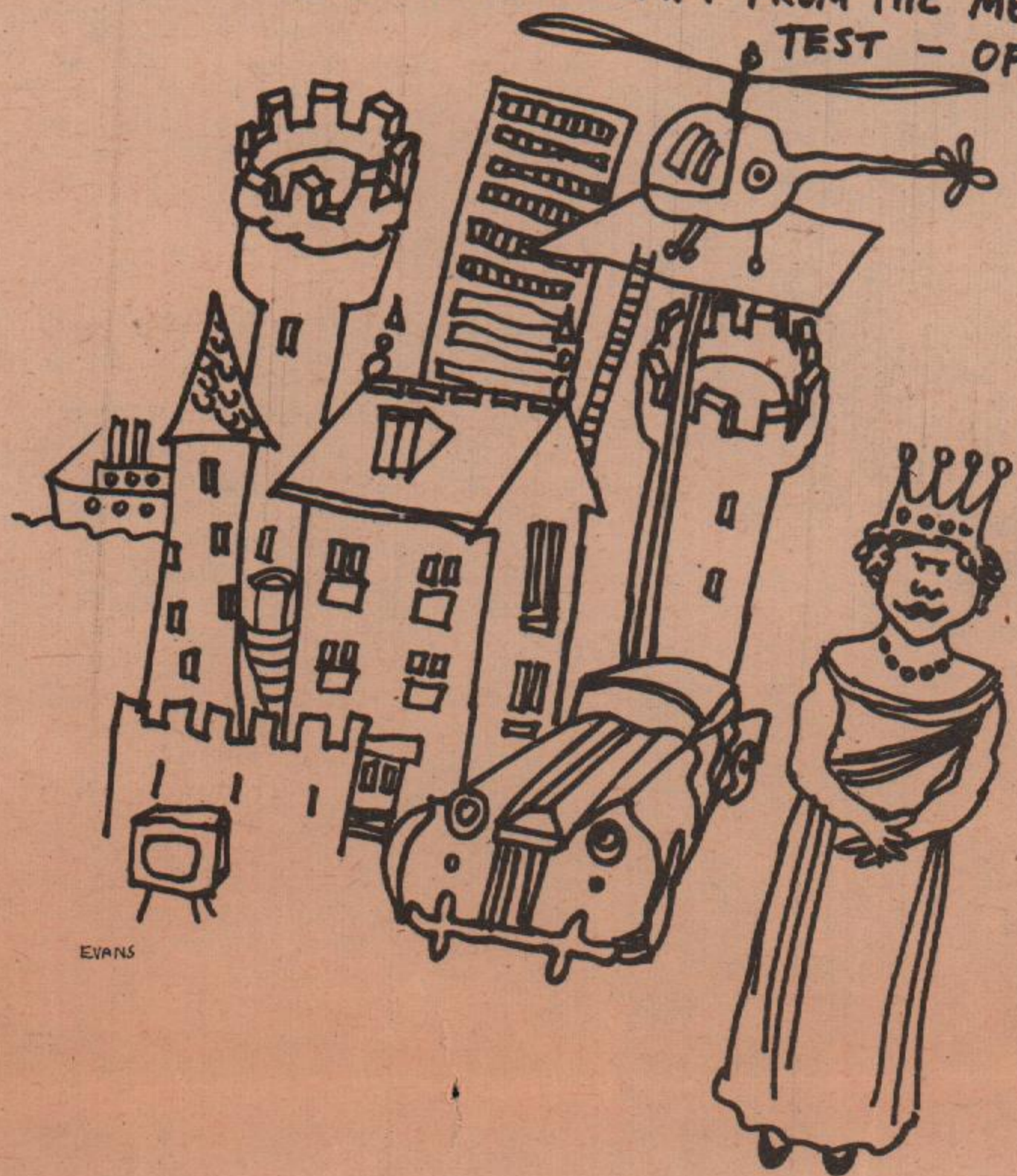
He could well be wrong. Any worker who takes a long, hard look at the proposed scheme is not likely to conclude that a fair deal for the old is about to be assured for all time.

The existing pension scheme was started in 1946. In essence it was a fairly straightforward affair. Every employed person paid a flat-rate contribution of so many shillings a week. In other words, the scheme was a gift for salaried employees with high incomes. The flat-rate national insurance stamp has always been a minor bite out of any big salary. But for 20 years or more, the steadily rising cost of the national insurance contribution has cut deep into the thinner wage packet.

In recent years, the employee's contribution has become earnings related, but only to a limited extent. For example, from November 1969 the total national health and national insurance contribution is 23s 7d for the £15 a week wage earner (if not contracted out) and 27s 10d out of a £20 wage. As in the past, the burden is especially heavy on the lower-paid worker.

A worker's weekly contribution is roughly matched by his employer. Economists have debated the question: who actually pays for the social security contributions made by employers? The one point agreed on by economists is that national insurance is not paid out of business profits. Either it is the

WHEN APPLYING FOR SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFIT MONARCHS WILL BE EXEMPT FROM THE MEANS TEST - OFFICIAL



workers themselves who foot the bill, by getting lower wages, or employers pass social security charges on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Only about 20 per cent of the cost of pensions and other insurance benefits is met by the Exchequer out of general taxation. This is a lot lower than in the inter-war schemes, when generally the Exchequer paid more than 30 per cent of social security costs.

The present old age pension is virtually flat rate - currently £5 a week for every single pensioner, paid irrespective of whether the pension is all they have to live on. Since even the government recognise that £5 is not enough to keep body and soul together, two million old people have to apply for a meagre supplementary pension. The Tories brought in an additional graduated pension scheme in 1961.

This put contributions up for millions of workers. But as yet no one retired gets more than a few bob extra a week out of the graduated scheme.

There is thus a kind of phoney equality built into the existing pension scheme. To a great extent everyone pays the same, everyone benefits the same. But highly-paid salaried groups pay a lot less than they could. Retired people without a separate private pension get a lot less than they need to live on. Currently, 16 per cent of the population is over retiring age. Yet

they dispose of only 10 per cent of total personal income.

Mr Crossman's new proposal is to change the whole pension system on to an earnings related principle. Both contributions and eventual pensions will be a percentage of lifetime earnings.

The effect on employee contribution is as follows:

Weekly earnings	Present contrib.	Contribs. in New Scheme
£12	20 9	16 2
£18	26 6	24 4
£24	30 5	32 5
£30	34 0	40 6
£36	34 0	48 7

These, by the way, are total social insurance contributions, to pay for the whole range of benefits as well as pensions.

Small bonus

Clearly from the table, contributions are to be levied in a fairer way. The man with £36 a week pays three times the contribution of the man with £12. For lower-paid workers there is even a small bonus - a contribution that is a shilling or two lower than the present penal rate.

But there is one great limitation on the fairness of the new scheme. Namely a ceiling on the earnings that are counted. If the scheme



Crossman's scheme shows how far Labour has moved from concern with social justice

were now in operation no one would pay any contribution on any earnings they had above £36 a week.

The latest figures show more than 40,000 people with incomes above £200 a week. Each of these will contribute to social insurance only a percentage of their first £36 a week. The remainder is left clear. Also, in the new scheme as now, social security contributions are levied only on earned income. There is no charge on money from investments, capital gains, or from the renting of property, or from inherited wealth.

Every year the average earnings level of industrial workers rises, though not necessarily the income of any particular group of workers. Mainly the increase in average earnings is only a paper improvement, reflecting no more than the rising cost of living. To take account of this the new social insurance scheme will have a contribution ceiling that rises if average industrial earnings increase. The ceiling is always to be 1½ times the level of average earnings in industry at any given time. Hence the current ceiling would be £36 a week, since average industrial earnings are at present £24 a week.

Low ceiling

The point to stress is that this is a fantastically low ceiling. Its effect is to minimise the amount that the richer classes in the population will be contributing to social insurance. The £36 a week limit is carefully drawn to place the heaviest burden on the better-paid section of the working class, whether they are manual or white-collar workers. Unearned income escapes untouched. The highly salaried professional and managerial groups will contribute, but only minimally. The higher their income, the lower their percentage contribution.

The overall effect of these arrangements is that working-class social insurance will continue to be financed almost exclusively out of the workers' wage packet.

In a future issue of Socialist Worker I shall discuss in detail the various pensions which will eventually be paid under the new scheme. One important feature is that workers with well under average earnings are to qualify for rather higher pensions than their contributions would strictly justify. This is to be welcomed. What is not acceptable is that improved pensions for the low-paid are to be financed not by extra taxation of the affluent middle class but at the expense of groups with not much more than average earnings.

The maximum pension to be paid under the new scheme will be £13 4s a week (or whatever will be the money equivalent at future earnings levels). This is a lot better than the current £5 a week pension for a single person. But there are a lot of snags.

For one thing, the maximum pension won't be paid to anyone retiring before the year 1992. Even then, most workers will not achieve anything near the maximum pension. To get it you would have to earn at least £36 a week (or whatever equals 1½ times average earnings in a given year). In addition a maximum pension will require £36 a week earnings every week from 1972 until retirement in or after 1992. The pension will be lower if your earnings fall below £36 a week for any longish period. Any sizeable

bout of sickness or unemployment will pull the eventual pension down still further.

The new pension scheme will be particularly unfavourable for workers with average earnings up around the £30 a week mark. It is small wonder that the white-collar unions have been roundly denouncing it. But what should be attacked are not the slightly more favourable pension conditions that are proposed for workers with exceptionally low wages. The white-collar unions should be pressing for the contribution ceiling to be raised and thus more of the financial burden shifted on to the really affluent.

Moved away

The new pensions plan provides for some redistribution of income from the higher-paid to the lower-paid section of the working class. It is the upper middle class who are let off the hook. Mr Crossman's plan illustrates vividly the extent to which the Labour Party has moved away from any concern with social justice and socialist equality.

In Labour's earlier plan for earnings related pensions - the scheme accepted by the 1957 party conference - the contribution ceiling proposed was four times national average earnings. That is, in 1969 money, contributions would be levied on income up to £96 a week. This original high ceiling has now been brought down with a bang to only 1½ times average national earnings and with not a word of explanation from the government.

It is time for socialists to raise some very simple questions about pensions. Such as, why have any ceiling whatsoever on earnings to be taxed for social security? And why not pay for pensions out of every kind of income, instead of only earned income?

Why life-long Labour man Poppa is hopping mad

AMID all the ballyhoo about new pension schemes, the following case of a lifelong Labour supporter may be of interest.

Harold Wilson isn't a Labour man, he's a Tory. And the rest of his crowd. And that red-haired Barbara what's-her-name, supposed to be left, she doesn't take me in either. 'Poppa' Baker, 76 year old machine shop inspector in Brighton had lived through the years of the Russian Revolution when I was still a twinkle in my grandmother's eye.

'What did Harold Wilson do when he got into power?' he continued, getting excited now. 'Raised his salary from £10,000 to £14,000 didn't he?'

'All the MPs got a rise,' I interrupted, to put things in perspective.

'They're all the same,' he

stormed, 'all in it for this,' rubbing his fingers together. I asked him if he would vote for the government next time.

'Well they're better than the other lot,' he replied, sidestepping the question. The thought of having to vote for Harold set him off again: 'I'll tell you how this government treats ordinary people. I've just been off sick for six weeks.' He works full time for a small engineering firm and was carried home one day after collapsing at his inspection bench.

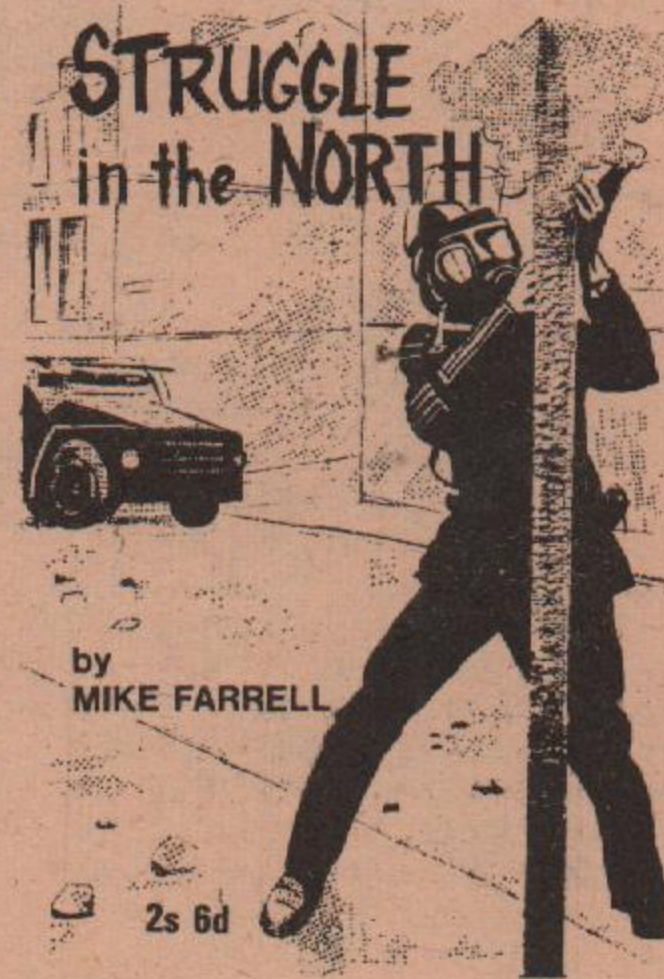
'I still haven't got a rebate - they tell me I'm not entitled to one! And they've cut the amount I can earn under the earnings rule from £7 10s to £3 10s. It's because I'm a weekly worker, not part time. And then the other week we got a 10s rise on the pension AND THEY

KNOCKED 12s EXTRA OFF MY TAX.' He shook with rage at this insult added to injury.

'I'm thinking of writing to the papers about this,' he threatened as he stomped off to check another job.

It is arguable which is the greater evil, the disgusting treatment of this old age pensioner by a 'socialist' government, or his inability to do anything about it. I haven't been able to convince Poppa of the need for a revolution to end these abuses once and for all. But the lesson of his life is clear to me; support reformist governments for half a century and all you get is a kick in the teeth.

GEOFF SHAW



An analysis by a founding member of the militant People's Democracy movement in Northern Ireland of the country divided and dominated by British imperialism and controlled, north and south, by reactionary, anti-working class regimes. The author vividly describes the struggle for civil rights in the Six Counties. 3s post paid.

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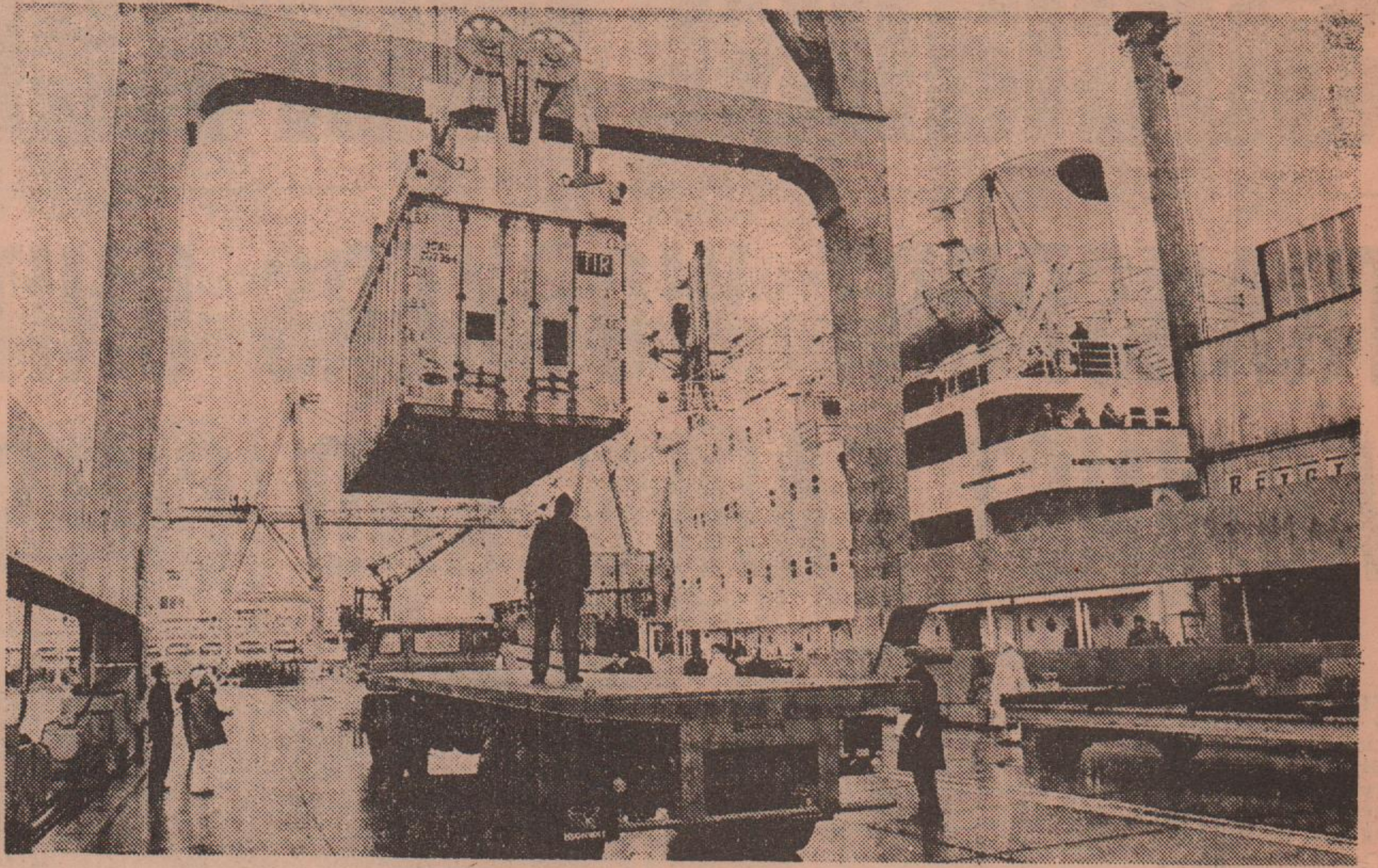
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Nigel Coward on the threat to jobs posed by the 'container revolution'

Docks bosses determined to smash militant rank and file

WITH £75 million sunk in container berths by the two giant British consortiums, ACL and OCL, the main aim of the docks employers is to smash militancy to ensure a higher rate of exploitation and a good return on the capital invested. The attack takes many forms.

A container berth in operation: bosses hope for huge cuts in labour force



Firstly, redundancy. The National Ports Council was reported by the Financial Times (16 May 1969) to be reckoning on a 25 per cent cut in the national docks register between the end of 1968 and 1972. Wilson's so-called Labour government is helping the employers to achieve this aim with a £3m loan. Perhaps the money came from the £5m they saved by cutting free school milk.

Natural wastage (retirement, changing jobs, etc) may account for much of this decline, but the dockworker is faced with the same decimation of his industry as are his brothers in the mines and on the railways.

Secondly, closure. Since 1967 alone, London has seen the closure of St Katherine's, Abbey Wharf, London Dock, Regents Canal Dock, Dundee Wharf and Mark Browns. The gurry Docks are next: The Port (the employers' paper) quotes Dudley Perkins (Port of London Authority) on 11 September as 'seriously considering their future'. As usual, today's capitalists feel no responsibility for the workers and communities centred on the older areas of production. They can be left to rot, such an irresponsible class will never change its ways.

Land is cheap

Thirdly, mobility and flexibility. Fewer men plus more throughput equals speed up. Take Tilbury, for example, the most seaward of the PLA's ports, where land is cheaper and congestion less acute. Where there are bottlenecks, new service roads like the A13 will be developed. £30m of public money is spent, but just try to get 400,000 houses a year built!

The Paccos-Vickers cranes can lift and load a unit in 2½ minutes. At the US Lines berth, 15 men can load and unload a ship in 12 hours - before it took 150-200 men a week. Some PLA shed crews are on call 24 hours a day.

As the Financial Times put it: 'The first test of the agreement was at Whitsun 1968, when the men were called out to work on Bank Holiday weekend'. Similarly on

Christmas Day last year, the commitment to work for the boss: whenever he directed was honoured, giving rise to 'praise from other countries.' We wonder whether the dockers' families joined in that praise.

Fourthly, methods of payment. In common with much of the rest of industry, the bosses are no longer pleased with piece-rates. 'Most labour troubles have concerned general cargo' (Financial Times 11 September 1969), and so there was a reason for the employers to avoid this traditional source of militancy when they introduced containerisation. Stoppages while bargaining over the rate would leave expensive equipment idle and the losses would hurt. It was this, rather than the advertised concern for the dockers' welfare, which the bosses felt.

British portworkers are not alone in facing these attacks. Technical changes like containerisation do not stop at national frontiers and the interests of employers are the same the world over. In all countries it is the workers, regardless of colour or creed, who are bearing the brunt.

The International Labour Organisation has noted that Rotterdam's labour force will be cut by 20 per cent by 1975. In its 'Social and Technical Change in the World's Ports', the ILO notes that New York has achieved a 30 per cent reduction since 1959 through natural wastage. Manning scales are being cut in Montreal, New York, Madras, Singapore, Bremen and Norway. Night shift working occurs in Rotterdam and Hamburg.

International Competition. The headlines scream: 'Future of London Jeopardised', 'Dutch dockers handle British goods', 'Britain's trade hit by dockers' veto'. What lies behind these tales of doom?

Rotterdam handled 70m tons during 1959 and 160m tons in 1968. London remains constant at around 60m. Everyone blames

the dockers. But the Dutch government has followed up its last 10 year development scheme with £42m over the next five years, (Evening Standard, 17 September 1969). Besides this sort of advantage, Rotterdam is well located on the Rhine that runs deeply inland and provides good internal communications.

Exploding some myths

Tucked away in an employers' survey where dockers would not find it, were comparisons that explode some of the myths that the press put around. The bosses' daily paper gave this information: 'A league table based on unit costs per ton and costs per port call, shows London to be three times cheaper than Australian ports and marginally more expensive than Rotterdam.' Further on in the same article (Financial Times 12 May 1969): 'And, for all the failings of its piece-work system, London can turn ships round faster with its single-shift working than Continental ports on a 2-shift system.'

So what are the facts? The divide and rule trick is the oldest one in the book. Continental dockers are told that London is a threat - to be met by more flexibility, more loyalty, more redundancy and worse conditions. London is told the same about Rotterdam.

Then each group of workers cuts each others throats. Who benefits? The 'nation'? No, for the majority of any nation are people who have only their ability to sell their labour. The buyers of labour are the ones who benefit from such competition between working people and these buyers are the owners and controllers of industry.

Only socialism, which abolishes the handful of irresponsible and privileged employers, will solve these age-old threats. And we don't mean the sort of 'socialism' of Eastern Europe, where the Polish State Line, dissatisfied with the service from London workers, takes its trade to Ipswich and causes the closure of Mark Brown's Wharf. 300 dockers and 70 staff lost their jobs.

These international threats demand international responses. As the bosses become more closely organised across national frontiers, (and this will be hastened by entry to the Common Market and the needs of the container revolution), so links, information and contact between workers of different lands become imperative. For effective joint action, regular channels need to be formed.

But an international workers' organisation demands strong national roots of its members. And in Britain we have far to go in connecting the workers in the ports scattered around the coastline. In many ways, this internal fragmentation is our major weakness.

Industry: the CP's abdication

MONTY JOHNSTONE is wrong again (18 December). I have never said that the Communist Party is not formally against productivity bargaining. My point, and I stick by it, was that the executive speakers at the recent party congress spent very little time on a subject that is of central importance to industrial militants.

In the speeches of Ramelson and McGahey it was made clear that the manoeuvring between the TUC and the government on the question of legislative or voluntary Incomes Policy was seen as the most important development of the last 12 months. The use of the Incomes Policy by the government and the union bureaucrats (both left and right varieties), to grease the slide into productivity bargaining was not mentioned.

Neither in the speeches from the platform nor the all too brief speeches from the floor was there any serious attempt to analyse the relationship between the government/TUC wage restraint policy and the productivity line of the Scanlon's and the Jones's.

The congress resolution was, of course, correct when it suggested that the result of productivity would be a decline in working-class standards and higher profits for the bosses. Very true - but why is it that so many CP members in leading positions either go along with productivity or, worse still, are ardent partisans of the system? Criticism in the party press of Scanlon and Jones, let alone of their own members who support productivity bargaining, is noticeable for its absence. The Morning Star remains silent at the quietism of Lawrence Daly in the recent miners' dispute.

The reasons for this abdication of a clear responsibility, from a party that presumes to call itself 'communist', is that like the 'lefts' in the Labour Party and the trade unions they can see no further than the confines of current organisations. To effectively fight the government-guided employers' offensive, it is necessary to fight at rank and file level; to agitate at factory and workshop level; to organise a massive campaign throughout industry and to develop shop stewards and rank and file committees. At one time the CP was capable of performing this task. It is a matter of some regret that it is now incapable of doing anything of the sort.

I have, like Monty, re-read the text of Gollan's speech to the Congress (the press release, not the article in Comment). I have searched carefully but I find no reference to mass working-class struggle, workers' power or the socialist revolution. What I did find was opportunism in relation to the 'left' bureaucrats, a wild assertion that the tendency to monopoly and the penetration of American capital in Europe was a confirmation of Lenin's classical imperialism and the notion that the highest form of struggle was the political struggle, with the clear inference that the party's electoral tomfoolery was just that political struggle.

There was no real perspective given, except more of the same. That Gollan was precluded from doing this is a function of the British Road to Socialism, with its rejection of the politics of mass working-class struggle, as much as his incapacity.

In my last letter, replying to Monty, I raised a number of questions in relation to the Czech debate. Why did the Russians invade? Why does the 'marxist' CPGB not attempt to answer this question? Why does the CP consider this to be an isolated aberration on the part of the Russians? If it does not, why hasn't the party re-examined the whole history of similar and more serious crimes, starting perhaps with the Moscow Trials?

A coming to grips with their past and its logical outcome in the present would go a long way to explain the other question I asked Monty (that he also did not reply to) - why is the CP membership and press declining at a time of growing radicalism and increasing membership of the (CP designated) 'ultra-left'? The tragedy is that the CP cannot and will not do the job. The tragedy lies not in the personal failure of the leadership or even Monty Johnstone, pleasant fellow though he is, but in the misleadership and absence of leadership to a comparatively large group of dedicated CP industrial militants.

The failure of the CP reinforces the need for a revolutionary party dedicated to genuine working-class mass struggle. As a contribution to this, the IS group is in process of formulating a programme and politics that will draw upon the experience of our own struggles and failures and the far more serious mistakes of the CPGB. - JIM

Join the International Socialists

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Socialist Worker

TRANSPORT WORKERS UNITE AGAINST FARES AND CUTS

by a London Busman

THE NEW YEAR'S DAY strike by London Transport workers marks a new-found unity between London bus and tube crews. It is the first time that they have taken action together since 1926.

The strike was called to protest at the sharp cuts in services and increases in fares being introduced by London Transport in accordance with the Tory GLC policy for public transport. The GLC took over the tubes and red buses on 1 January and has announced its intention of converting the present £10m annual loss into a £2m profit.

To do this it intends to close down 'uneconomic' tube lines, withdraw some bus routes entirely and reduce services drastically on many others.

The workers are also angry because they are not consulted about these changes. The first we know is when we get new schedules for working revised services.

Mr Maurice Holmes, Chairman of the London Transport Board (£13,500 a year) and his fellow directors take the decisions. But it is the ordinary bus and tube workers who have to face the passengers' complaints at the extortionate fares and terrible services.

Fares have gone up 50 per cent in little over a year and gaps in services are worse than ever before.

DECLINE

The justification for the cuts given by London Transport is that they face an annual decline in passengers of about 6 per cent. Yet this loss is caused largely by the very same policy of a worse service at a higher price.

In 1967 when, because of the price freeze, fares were not increased and the better staff position made services more regular, there was a slight increase in the number of passengers carried on the

buses for the first time in nearly 20 years. The motto is clear: provide a reliable service at a reasonable price and people will use it.

The policy of the GLC is in line with their plans to carve great motorways through every part of our city, destroying thousands of homes, which benefits no-one but the shareholders of Britain's motor industry. As for the millions of Londoners without private transport, they will have a choice: either use the remnants of what was once the greatest system of public transport in the world, or walk

NONSENSE

The demand that London Transport must 'pay its way', apart from flying in the face of evidence from every other major city in the world, is just nonsense. To any sane way of thinking, it is already paying for itself handsomely.

Look at that supposed £10m loss: about half of it represents the fuel tax paid to the government and, until the recent writing off of the LTB's capital debts, the rest was more than accounted for by the interest payments on those debts.

More important, the savings that result from the use of public transport are enormous: savings in reduced traffic congestion, road building and repair costs, accident and hospital costs. In fact it is estimated that it would actually save money to run public transport as a free service!

For nearly half a century, London Transport has kept its bus and tube workers divided, setting one against the other. Despite opposition from Sidney Greene of the NUR and TGWU leaders, we can now see the possibility of a new unity which will not only allow workers to win improved wages, but also make possible an effective fight against the GLC's plan to murder public transport in London.

Pay campaign call by local government militants

by Will Fancy

MORE THAN 60 London shop stewards representing local government employees in the Transport Workers Union have agreed on targets for a big campaign on pay and conditions in 1970.

The meeting, one of a series which began at the time of the strike by London dustmen and other council manual workers, accepted recommendations that a brief list of demands be made the basis of a campaign of education among their members and their fellow workers (mostly members of the Public Employees and General and Municipal Workers unions, whose officials took a much less helpful line on the strike). The demands included:

1. A substantial wage rise — and never mind TUC vetting.
2. Four weeks holiday.
3. Average pay while on holiday.
4. A better deal for council workers outside London.

During the discussion stewards added demands for equal pay for women at once and for rank and file representation at national negotiations. They asked that the demands be linked to a recruitment campaign, especially among women, where the TGWU is weakest, to ensure that their voice be heard more clearly at national level.

Frank Sulley of the London dustmen turned the demand for a 'substantial' wage rise into a precise demand for the rest of the £20 a week for the lowest paid workers and without strings. A basic of £20 was the demand of the recent strike wave. Although the strike gained more in a couple of weeks than had been achieved in several years of negotiation, it still left basic rates ranging from £13 15s (lavatory attendants outside London) to £18 15s (top grade London sewage works operator) and £17 10s (London dustmen).

Low wages

Frank Sulley also declared firmly against productivity bargaining, which has become well-established in London in particular in recent years, partly because of the unions' recognition of the unrealistically low standard wages set by national negotiation.

This trend gives added point to two of the meeting's demands. Although local council employees fought hard in a whole series of towns outside London in the autumn strike wave, the front-runners were the Londoners who eventually had strikes in 31 of the 32 London Boroughs at the same time. As a result of this solidarity, the pay differential between London and the provinces was widened.



Bernadette faces jail

BERNADETTE DEVLIN, independent MP for Mid-Ulster, seen leaving the court in Derry on 22 December, accompanied by Eamonn McCann, after being sentenced to six months' imprisonment on charges arising from the Bogside resistance to the RUC and B-Specials last autumn. An appeal will be heard against the sentence. Socialists and trade unionists should express their solidarity with Bernadette, a victim of the Ulster police state that witch-hunts civil rights fighters while the fascists and bully-boys around Ian Paisley are free to detonate bombs on both sides of the border. Messages of support to her should be sent to the House of Commons, London SW1.

Bad work conditions behind ICI absenteeism

by John Charlton

A RECENT article in The Times headed 'Increase in Absenteeism — a major worry for industry', dealt with the alleged increase in absenteeism generally and spoke of the particular fears that industry would grind to a halt over Christmas and New Year. It was prompted by a report of the ICI board on the 'problem' in their empire. The claim that absence from work is increasing, for both certificated and uncertificated sickness, is used to defend the company's rejection of a union demand to increase from two to three days the period when employees can be absent without a medical certificate.

Remedy

Mr R S Wright, ICI director of personnel, attributes the situation to 'overbenefitting'. He claims that many workers are better off financially when sick than at their jobs.

If this is the case, the remedy should be quite simple. Make a substantial increase in pay, without strings attached. With profits up already this year by more than 30 per cent and the dividend expected to be over 15 per cent, such an increase in pay should not reduce directors and shareholders to mince and tattie on Sundays.

But the problem is not as simple as that. There is a much closer connection between absence from work and working conditions. There are three main sources of increasing strain:

1. The continuous shift system and in particular the 'continental shift' (three days, 2pm to 10pm; two days 6am to 2pm; two days, 10pm to 6am; and two 'rest' days). This leads to great physical strain and the complete disruption

- of family and social life.
 2. Increasing insistence by management on the maintenance of work study standards when common sense, custom and practice have dictated a lower rate.
 3. Unpleasant and harmful working conditions — temperatures continuously in excess of 100 degrees in some departments and noise levels above the safe decibel level of 115.
- Hanging over this situation is the as yet hidden menace of a new productivity deal (WSA) that offers pay increases of up to 20 per cent but is so open-ended as to threaten the physical, mental and social health of every ICI worker

Scots stewards back action for nurses

by Steve Jefferys

A HUNDRED shop stewards, including many from the local Rootes, Rolls Royce and Babcock and Wilcox factories at the Paisley AEF district stewards' quarterly meeting last month, took up the call for industrial action in support of the nurses.

The stewards pledged themselves unanimously to support the nurses' claims. Several spoke in favour of token strike action in industry as being the only effective way of securing victory. One pointed out that the Stockport district committee of the engineering union has already called for such action.

District Secretary Calum McKay, a militant ex-convenor of Remington Rand in the Hillington industrial estate,

Power men defy union threats — strike goes ahead

by Kathie Finn

POWER STATION workers will start a week's strike on Monday unless trade union officials and the Electricity Board offer them suitable pay terms.

A national unofficial shop stewards' combine committee are demanding that a 10 per cent increase already negotiated should be regarded as an interim award only. They want the unions to reopen negotiations for a full 15 per cent wage claim.

The strike could have disastrous effects up and down the country. Out of a maximum claimed capacity of 44,000 megawatts, the Electricity Board can only produce a total of 37,000 megawatts.

Power stations producing a total of 26,000 megawatts have put in strike notice. This includes all stations in Northern Ireland which are not on the National Grid.

The foundations for the strike were laid in August when the Amalgamated Engineering Union called a delegates conference to find out what its members wanted. The conference agreed that if negotiations produced less than a 15 per cent pay increase then industrial action would be taken.

But national union officials on the industry's joint negotiating committee accepted 10 per cent.

The national shop stewards committee's demands are:

1. The unions immediately submit a further claim for a minimum increase of £3 per week on all wages and salaries.
2. The shift enhancement be raised by a further £200 minimum in line with shift workers in private industry.
3. The consolidation of incidental overtime and premium time payments into the basic salary.
4. Improved holidays for all manual workers.

Report back

5. Machinery be set up by the four unions with representatives elected from stations and depots to discuss any major claims or changes of work patterns submitted to the board, with a report-back before ratification of any agreement.

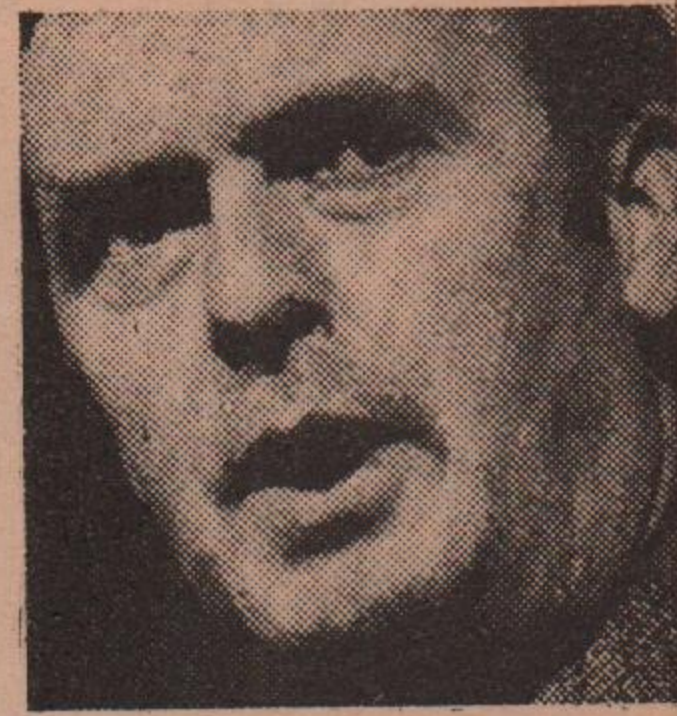
6. Rejection of all incentive bonus schemes and clause 202 of the national agreement. These constitute a danger to the safe working of the industry as well as creating bitterness and frustration among all workers in the electricity supply.

7. No victimisation of workers either by the unions or the board.

The fifth is one of the most important as it seeks power for rank and file workers. Dennis Gallagher, the chairman of the shop stewards' committee, tells me that a great deal of resentment has built up against the union officials.

There has been talk of forming a break-away Power Workers Union. The general feeling is that the officials are so busy with their 'perks' that they have lost all contact with the shop floor.

The four unions involved, the AEF, electricians, general and municipal and transport workers, are doing their best to force the workers to submit



LES CANNON, president of the electricians' union. He has led the campaign to remove union cards.

They have issued a letter to all members instructing them to ignore the shop stewards' call for strike action. The letters were handed to shop stewards who gave them back to the managers.

The unions have threatened to withdraw the union cards of shop stewards organising the strike. In a closed shop industry this virtually means the sack. But at Cockenzie Power Station, when officials tried to remove the cards from the stewards, all the workers promptly offered their cards as well. Faced with such solidarity, the officials had to withdraw.

Now the board is threatening legal action. It plans to use the Defence of the Property Act to charge the organisers with failing to supply electricity.

The workers are standing firm in the face of these threats. Only the recognition of their demands will stop the strike.

The men are fighting off a three-pronged attack: from their employers, the Electricity Board, from the press and from the union officials. They are also waging battle against the government's prices and incomes policy.

All socialists must give their support. The Board can well afford the increases as last year it managed to reduce the labour force by 10,000. The savings from this has apparently gone straight into profits.

Last year the Board made a profit of £322m. The workers must receive their long-overdue increase.

Dennis Gallagher tells me that the committee will hold a last-minute meeting to finalise plans or to consider any offer from the Board. If they decide to go ahead with their strike plans they may put out a leaflet for the public.

Glasgow South and North branches of IS have agreed to distribute this leaflet at factories. Other IS branches should contact their local power station and offer to do the same.

NOTICES

REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY in Ireland. Speaker Paddy Healy, League for a Workers' Republic. Friday 2 Jan, 8pm Old Red Lion, St John St London EC1 (tube: Angel)

REMINDER: Cliff's 'RUSSIA': Special pre-publication offer for orders with cash before 10 Jan 1970 15s single or 11s 6d each 2 or more. IS Book Service 90 Mountview Rd N4.

ICRSC Folk Concert Thursday 8 Jan, 7.30pm Ealing Town Hall, cnr Longfield Ave and Uxbridge Rd, W5 (tube: Ealing Broadway). Admission 6s. Singers: Ewan McColl, Peggy Seeger, The Heathsiders Folk Group