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THE BUILDING STRIKE

The building workers strike, which began while the dock strike was in progress has only just begun to make any impact upon the press, TV etc. No doubt it is a much more difficult issue on which to focus because of the dispersed nature of the industry and time lag in its impact. The basic demands of the building workers, given the present economic situation, are modest, i.e. £30 for a 35 hour week. As usual the press and other media have distorted the issues and attempted to drag in some 'sob' stories to stir up feeling against the strikers. The demands of the builders are presented as being 'excessive', this at a time when prices generally have been rising rapidly; and when the price of houses has been rocketing, this before the workers demands have been met. The recent rise in house prices can only be described as a racket, from which the employers and their hangers-on have been the ones to benefit, not the workers of the industry. As for some of the 'sob' stories for which the media have feverishly hunted, they are laughable in their crudity. There have been stories about hospitals, schools etc. which will be late in completion because of the strike, and of course the strikers are being blamed. What the media usually fail to mention is most of such projects have been held up for years for lack of funds, while huge office blocks have shot up in all directions, and the reason for this is that office blocks are more profitable than hospitals. An example of this was given in a Birmingham publication - Grapevine - for the last ten years there has been the 'intention' to build a new Eye Hospital; now that it will be held up for a few weeks because of the strike there is a cry of lament from the Birmingham Mail. Such tactics can only be described as sick.

UGANDAN ASIANS

The move by General Amin of Uganda to expel Asians that are holders of British passports presents socialists with a number of problems. The first and most obvious one is that the right of these people to come to Britain must be defended. This will not be an easy task, since already Enoch Powell is stirring up racial feelings on this issue, and we should not underrate the undercurrent of racialism that is manifest in many sections of the population. The fact that racialists seize upon very real problems related to housing and unemployment will have to be answered by showing that it is not the immigrants that cause these problems, but the inability of capitalism as a system to provide long term solutions. The second aspect of this question is also fairly obvious, i.e. that in the present climate of rank and file militancy a diversion of these energies into racialism will be of great benefit to the Tory Government, which at present is reeling from the blows of the last few months. Lastly, socialists should not fail to condemn Amin for his blatant racialism. It is common knowledge that the Ugandan economy is in a poor state, and there has been a simmering discontent there. The move to expel the Asians is an attempt to divert attention from the real problems, which stem from imperialist domination.

K.J.T.

BUILDING WORKERS STRIKE - THE VIEW FROM THE SITE

The following is part of a conversation with Gerry Kelly, UCATT, Birmingham Charter Group, and former shop steward at Bryants Woodgate Valley Site, Birmingham.

Question What were the unions official plans for conducting the strike initially?

G.K. Strike action was finally decided on by an overwhelming majority at the UCATT conference this year, This follows a general rise in militancy on the sites. The union leadership never really wanted to carry out the threat of strike action, they were unwilling and incapable of giving any real leadership. The leadership decided on selective strike action because they wanted a quiet strike and with only a minority of workers involved, a token gesture and then a slightly improved settlement, say £25 basic.

Question Why didn't the selective strike idea work in this instance?

G.K. It wasn't hitting the employers and on top of that it was demoralising for the men who had been called out to see lads over the road still working, also the press and television chose to ignore the selective strike action. But instead of getting a collapse the opposite happened and the feeling quickly spread that we should be all out to hit the employers as hard as possible.

Question How much consultation is there between members, stewards and officials - in formulating the claim and in conducting the strike?

G.K. One feature of the selective strike phase was the lack of rank and file involvement in the running of the strike, which is the way the officials like it so they can keep everything in hand. Just before this strike the Birmingham Shop Stewards Committee were refused the use of UCATT buildings for meetings, after a bitter struggle against the officials over the Bryant agreement. About this time a Charter group was formed in Birmingham, which gained credibility with its campaign against the official selective strike strategy. The local officials began to realise just how much a defeat would discredit them, but when they decided to escalate the strike they had to enlist the aid of the shop stewards, because they didn't know how to go about it themselves.

Question Who took the initiative in calling meetings at this point?

G.K. The Birmingham Charter Group were planning a demonstration for 26th June, the day the selective strikes started, but we postponed this because we felt there would be an opportunity to pressurise the officials into calling an official demonstration after a few days. This was done a week later when Bryant Shop Stewards Committee called for the demq to back the selective strike action. Once a couple of thousand men had been brought on to the streets and involved in the action they were eager to be involved further, and it was the men themselves who really put the pressure on the officials directly. Now that the strike has been escalated the rank and file have more or less taken control, organising everything and going round pulling out jobs themselves.

Question Why was there such a strong response from unorganised sites?

G.K. The reason why a lot of these men hadn't joined or left the union was the weakness of the union. There's not much attraction in an agreement like the last one - 9¹/₂d (old pence) an hour, over three years. Of course what these lads didn't realise is the union could never be forced to fight if nobody joined it. Now that certain people have worked to build a movement and forced the union

leadership to fight more men are being attracted to the union. There is a tremendous enthusiasm among building workers on the whole. This was already building up before the strike, and there was a strong feeling even among unorganised workers that a fight against the employers was needed. A lot of workers see this not just as a wage struggle, but also as a fight for more control in their working lives. This is the essence of this struggle and accounts for the tremendous response to the call.

Question Generally, where have the new ideas in this strike come from, and where is the centre of organisation?

G.K. One of the amazing things about this strike has been the way in which men who were previously uninvolved in union activity have come forward to help run the strike. When we decided to escalate the strike we called the most strongly organised sites out first. In Birmingham these were the Bryants sites (why didn't the officials call out the strongest sites in the first place?) The men from these jobs then started touring the city, calling out other sites. When we got men out from unorganised sites, they immediately joined the union, and elected their shop stewards, and we have given them the chance of getting to the heart of the struggle by "enlisting" them to the flying picket. This means these lads have a large amount of control over the way the strike is run, and gives each man a greater interest in the struggle.

In general we have supported other men not turning up for picket duty.

In every mass movement there is always a more conscious minority who are clear in their aims and the tactics necessary for success. We have tried to involve the mass of strikers more fully by insisting they turn up for picket duty and by regular demonstrations and mass meetings.

Question Do you think it is worth changing the UCATT leadership, and putting it on a different basis? What sort of problems would this help to solve?

G.K. I think it is not only worth changing UCATT leadership - with our predominantly right-wing leadership it is essential. They have a long history of non-leadership, hobnobbing and "sweatheart deals" with the bosses. But the main issue is not a change of leadership, but of union structure. "Left-leadership" cannot solve our problems now, we have seen what "left" leadership can do - look what Jack Jones did to the dockers. The important thing to remember is that unions are workers organisations and should be controlled by the workers themselves, without this control even the best intentioned "left" leaders get caught up in the bureaucratic apparatus and end up sitting on the bosses side of the fence.

Question These firms that are signing agreements now, are the men returning to work at these sites, and does this present a problem at this stage?

G.K. I think these agreements are wrong because they are divisive because when an agreement is concluded with say a firm which has small jobs on a number of sites the lads with that firm are encouraged to return to work. This means that lads with the main contractor on a site are out while the men on the same site with a sub-contractor are back at work. We feel that this must be fought on a national basis for a national settlement; following this there should be regional agreements because it is the declared intention of the rank and file to end the chaos and anarchy which has reigned in the building trade previously.

Dave Miller
29.8.72

POLICE-STATE REPRESSION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

We are printing below part of a text by Karel Bartosek, who alongside others was sentenced in August to several years' imprisonment in the most important of the whole series of political trials that have taken place in Czechoslovakia since July. In the dock were workers, academics, journalists, former members of the central committee of the Communist party. On the prosecutor's stand were other "communists" backed by security police, a Czech CP that with a turnover of half a million members since 1968 has reverted to being a branch of the Soviet CP, and behind these the Soviet army.

The trials took place in secret; no witnesses were called and no reporters allowed in. The defence lawyers were not allowed to see or consult the defendants. All this proves that, within the bureaucracy at least, absolutely nothing has been salvaged from the 'Prague Spring' and nothing changed since that previous act of mass brutality in Hungary, 1956.

However, outside the timeless world of the bureaucracy, a lot has changed. These are not the "show trials" of the early 1950's: there is little prefabricated evidence (and no real evidence at all), and their crimes were by no means imaginary or potential - the accused had made no secret of their opposition to Husak's clique (which is the 'crime' they have been imprisoned for). Their opposition, besides being real and explicit, was part of an active opposition which still goes on - not only there but in Poland, Hungary, even within the Soviet Union itself. Husak and the security police admitted as much when at the last minute they switched from their original plan of prosecuting dozens of people at one big political trial, and instead tried small groups in secret, in order to avoid inciting the feelings of the masses by confessing that a socialist opposition actually exists.

Clearly, things have changed: the bureaucracy's fear of the people grows as the people's fear of the bureaucracy diminishes. How has this situation come about? In early 1968, nearly a million workers were organizing and participating in workers' councils: the relations of production were changing. This was the real reason for the Soviet Union's invasion. When the invasion came the councils were a base for resistance, and this experience fuelled the continuing defiance of the people. However, the existence of large sections of the bureaucracy who were in tune with mass feelings in 1968 meant that, while this alliance could have sufficed for a real, physical resistance to Soviet troops (unlike in Hungary), in fact resistance was crippled from the beginning: by the compromises that were originally made between the workers' and the bureaucracy's concepts of "self-management", and by Dubcek's failure to mobilize the dual-power situation that was quite possible in the face of invasion. In the last analysis, the fundamental mistake of the movement was to accept the advice of its own leadership.

Bartosek's analysis, criticising 'socialism with a human face' and 'unilateral anti-Stalinism', makes this clear. Its implications show exactly how crucial is the concept of socialist self-management in the struggle against the authoritarian barbarity of the Soviet bureaucracy, and how the clarification of this concept through practice reinforces the strength and resistance of the people. Bartosek himself is no mean example of this resistance: the following passages are taken from a seminar held in Prague a year after the invasion.

"Can a new left be born in Czechoslovakia, a Marxist left (in the true sense of the word)? It can. And it has certain conditions to its advantage:

the principal means of production have already been socialized, and it has behind it two experiences which no other country in the world can claim - the experience both of an advanced bourgeois parliamentarism and that of Stalinist socialism.

In order to really open up the road to human progress, the new left will have first of all to make it clear that it is necessary to carry out a twofold historical negation: the negation of bureaucratic, centralized socialism and the negations of the bourgeois-democratic regime, or (from the point of view of the workers' movement) the negation of Stalinist and neo-Stalinist socialism, and the negation of social-democratic reformism. If such a negation (both in action and in the programme) is truly historical, it will be a creative symbiosis of all the positive elements of the past evolution of society and the workers' movement. Real negation means enrichment, not impoverishment. The anti-bureaucratic revolution continues and complements the anti-capitalist revolution.

In order for the new left to be historically new, it must learn from revolutionary strategy in advanced societies and from the strategy of Gramsci and Smeral on the war of positions, which demands the achievement of "hegemony", the conquest of enemy trenches one after the other, and an understanding of the real relationship between reform and revolution. The revolution - and that includes the anti-bureaucratic revolution - should not spend its strength in a single action, but be a succession of structural reforms. The new left should also analyse the events of '68 from the aspect of the necessity and historical function of violence, and reject the explanation of "socialism with a human face", which at the moment of "revolt" leaves its post and gives a free hand to the enemy.

A real strategy of revolution cannot be had in conditions such as ours without analysing all the currents of thought which battle to negate the centralized bureaucratic system: in the first place, it is necessary to analyse, critically, Trotsky's teaching on the political revolution against bureaucratism, to calculate exactly how much of this is still valid under our kind of conditions and how much of it is illusory, unilateral anti-Stalinist ideology.

In order for the new left to be historically new, it must work out its own strategy of revolution and its own concept of internationalism.

Our present crisis is both the crisis of contemporary civilization, deriving from the attempt to divide the world between two super-powers, and the crisis of world socialism and the world communist movement. Bureaucratic politics often assumes an internationalist attitude for tactical reasons, i.e. the needs of the dominant Soviet bureaucracy, the concept of peaceful co-existence, as the maintenance of the status quo, the aversion and inability to alter the unequal relations between countries belonging to the Soviet block. The attitude adopted towards the assassination of the Indonesian communists, or the tepid attitude towards the French workers' struggle in May 1968 - was this internationalism? Or their attitude towards People's China, in which there have recently been downright exhibitions of white racism?

In every sphere - in their relationships with contemporary capitalism, with the socialist countries and with the third world - the new left can hold out to the workers of this country an alternative to a dominant bureaucratic regime. To get mass acceptance they can employ not only political and ideological causes but elementary human ones, particularly the need for human solidarity....

...Being face to face with the power of the bureaucratic system, shouldn't we be more prudent?

We have two basic possibilities: to convince ourselves and others that the world we are given to live in is terrible (and therefore to be scared of it); or to convince ourselves and others that the world we are given to live in can be better, since we have also ourselves and our organized will, which knows that omnipotence in that world is not really omnipotent.

Frantisek Halas wrote that our language should be the betrothed bride of tomorrow. I would interpret these words further, as follows: that our language and our actions should be today's lover."

A MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY TO NORTHERN IRELANDS DETAINEES

(The following message was taken into Long Kesh internment camp and read out to the detainees, and has since been put on the notice board.)

The International Revolutionary Marxist Tendency expresses its full solidarity with all Irish political prisoners, who have courageously been fighting against the colonisation of their country by British imperialism; against the oppression of a social minority. Whitelaw's manoeuvres will not change the facts: internment still exists, Long Kesh still exists, the British Army is still here, the RUC is still here, the economic and political domination by English capitalism all over the island is still going on.

The brutalities, and even the tortures; that have been used against republican and revolutionary militants are now known all over the world. The unacceptable conditions of detention in the camps, the various attempts to break, physically and morally, the prisoners, cannot be denied. But in spite of this savage repression by the British Army the fight still goes on and has even been intensified.

The combination of armed work and political work towards the unemployed and employed workers, the women and the youth, towards the "Catholic ghettos" will be necessary to win this war. For this it will be necessary to unite, as much as possible, the various organisations and socialist groups fighting the Orange order and English imperialism. The 'free Derry', the Creggan and Bogside people, the Andersonstown people have shown the way: they want self-organisation, self management of the free areas, the factories and public services.

Because the purpose of the struggle is, as James Connolly has clearly explained himself, a 32 county socialist Republic, based on people's councils and the organisation of people in arms, with the dissolution of all military and para-military forces and the police force of the Orange-English regime. This is how the Irish liberation struggle is linked with the Vietnamese resistance against the barbarism of American imperialism, and with all the revolutionary socialist struggles all over the world.

At least on the following, immediate demands all the socialist forces in the world should unite to sustain the Irish people's fight towards its liberation:

- end internment now
- release all political prisoners
- withdraw British troops
- abolish the Special Powers Act.

TRADE UNION LEADERS AND THE RANK & FILE

It is quite safe to say that Jack Jones' deceptive role - so often presented by the media as a bad trade union boss hell bent on disrupting the economy of the country, has been exposed. It had to happen: but it took the sledge-hammer of class struggle to unmask this little narrow-minded bureaucrat of a big machine.

There is no doubt that Jones' "sell-out" on job guarantees has introduced confusion in several political quarters. The Tories, port authorities and CBI have been extremely pleased with him for breaking the docks strike, instead of agitating, like some "irresponsible militants", for a general strike to overthrow the government. (Such radical thinking, however, is not consistent with Jones' masochistic method of prostration to his superiors: the bourgeoisie.) Next, those who felt that Jack was a dangerous Bolshie were able to assuage their consciences and shed their pre-conditioned ideas (from the media) about him. The rank and file members of the T & G and perhaps the working class generally have not been confused by Jones' antics, because when "we go into struggle we go in to win". Only a few CP line hookers have been very very upset because of Jones' open departure from his left wing fellow-travelling position, which has endangered the continuation of the Jones-Scanlon axis. Now - as a result of tremors from active class struggle - things will decidedly fall into their proper places, leaving us with a clear cut polarisation between rank and file worker and trade union bureaucrat.

Of course this is not a blanket condemnation of all trade union bureaucrats; those who can readily respond to mass pressure and correctly channel it to its ultimate goal, that is to say, those leaders who can tune in to mass vibrations and immediately align themselves with the mass aspirations, are valuable people. But to be of this calibre one has to be liberated from bourgeois ideology as well as understand the mechanics of this ideology. Unfortunately the present leaders of the trade union movement are not of this calibre. Jack Jones, though courageous enough to face Franco's bullets, is still ideologically imprisoned by his bourgeoisie, like all the other union bureaucrats, whether of the Right or the Left. A notable feature of the similarity in outlook of these two Right-Left blocks is that when workers go into battle on a specific issue entailing wide-ranging repercussions (for instance job lay-offs elsewhere) these leaders do everything in their power to brake and contain the struggle within their own particular spheres. None of them, separately or collectively, has ever challenged the employers to a fight to the finish. But the rank and file are developing and experiencing new techniques of struggle, techniques transcending the traditional ones thus enriching the entire workers' movement in its struggle for self-managed socialism.

Hand in hand with these new developing battle techniques there is still the traditional conception that talks between the employers and union bureaucrats can produce 'copper-bottom guarantees'. Money-wise this is possible, but when it is a question of technological innovation causing redundancies, no amount of chatter, public enquiries or written reports can save jobs. The Jones-Aldington committee was a desperate subterfuge designed to diffuse a potentially explosive situation. Jack Jones knew that the port employers anticipated 'labour troubles' before containerisation could be implemented nationally. And he is also aware that the container revolution will reduce the docks labour force. Why then did he associate himself with Lord Aldington to con his members? Why didn't he advise them of the preachings of the Institute of Workers' Control? Well, there is no guessing whose side he is on. Anyway what is more interesting is why the CP

controlled London shop stewards committee subscribed to such manoeuvrings? That is how 'politics' hit the shop floor without some of the participants being fully aware of it.

The CP is so deeply entangled in 'Left unity' that it becomes very difficult for some of its militants to change course when events require it. For example: Jack Jones embraces Lord Aldington and both of them are pressured for the impossible - "copper bottom guarantees". The struggle is thus isolated within the realm of 'something can be gained' - pure syndicalism. Nevertheless it would be absurd to accuse the CP of outright syndicalism; the Party's policy is to bring political consciousness to the syndicalists. So by deliberately not politicising and extending the struggle the party hopes to politicise the syndicalists! Consequently the rigged up national delegate conference endorsed the Jones-Aldington report and the strike was broken. What has been achieved? Promises for the dock workers and a respite for the entire bourgeoisie. That is perhaps why the latter hasn't indulged in his characteristic red-scaring, which might have 'politicised' the workers.

But the positive features of the current struggles can also be overlooked. 'After all' says the wretched surface thinker who consoles himself with text-book answers to everything, 'it's only syndicalism... nothing to do with politics... the job is to build the revolutionary party.' This rigid, dogmatic attitude, contains an over-simplification of the historical process, of how not to build the mass revolutionary party, for it implies ready-made solutions and panaceas to every problem in the workers' movement. Hitherto the world monopoly power of the British bourgeoisie decided the socio-economic base of the Labour bureaucracy; clearly the class struggle, in its intensified form, together with the bourgeoisie's diminishing share of world plunder, is further undermining this bureaucracy out of which new differentiations will emerge: notice how the last jerk by the dockers produced the Benn-Prentice differentiation which no disagreement on nationalisation resolutions at LP conferences could have done. The political credo of the structured labour bureaucracy (making the system work) will act as a demystifying cataclyst in time of revolutionary crisis from which workers will be practically forced to reject these spiritual agents of capitalism. In this connection observe the creeping process: the bankruptcy of Wilson and the labour bureaucracy on all fundamental issues from the common market to unemployment. However, since no political party will be able to deliver the goods, which in turn will eliminate the historically illusionary social-democratic stalinist stupor, the subjective need for the construction of the mass revolutionary party will pose itself in all its nakedness, and will have to be done out of the mass struggle itself - after the class has learned from its own experiences and not by ready made sloganeering - recognising in the process the self-determination of the workers themselves for a self-managed socialist society. At the moment revolutionary marxists ought not to be sonorously repeating "crisis of leadership".... "build the revolutionary party"..... "unity of the Left", but must recognise the embryonic forms of the new power (at the base) and work towards its structuration.

Nobby Clarke

"The Leadership" Speaks

Re. the dock strike. "The National Shop Stewards' call was outmanoeuvred and fell apart. The attitude of the men is the spirit level of any struggle and this time the men proved themselves unworthy of their shop stewards." - Bob Light in Socialist Worker 26th August.

CRISES OF CAPITALISM REACH SOUTH AFRICA

The South African economy is going through a severe downturn in the coming period. The falling rate of profit in gold mining, the main pillar of the economy compels the mining companies to appeal to the government for subsidies to shore up the weaker mines in order to avoid their closure. To date six such lame ducks have been granted cash aid totalling more than £10 million. The recent rise in the price of gold to more than \$63 U.S. per fine ounce produced little improvement in export earnings due to the chronic balance of payments difficulties.

With the limited export market for manufacture, and the low purchasing power of the black majority the large amount of capital accumulated from the phenomenal expansion of manufacturing industries has not been effectively utilised where investment opportunities are shrinking noticeably, producing a slowing down in the growth rate of the economy. A sharp upward trend in commodity prices, rents and property values has developed, imposing considerable hardship particularly on the low-paid workers.

The root causes of the unfavourable economic turn lie to a large extent in the contradictions of the exploitive capitalist system in South Africa, its links with Western imperialist nations and the bedevilling effects of the complex apartheid policies of the country.

The reaction of the government to the deepening economic crisis is the intensification of political repression in the form of accelerating the establishment of ethnic Bantustans (black labour reservoirs), increased immobility of labour in order to channel it into the mining industry, police harassment and incarceration of the political opponents of the government.

Increased repression has met with stiffening resistance on the part of the Blacks. After the solid Ovambo Workers' strike in the South West Africa province, open and organised opposition erupted in the Eastern Pondoland area of the Transkei Province Bantustan in July 1972 when 87 people were killed by the S.A. police. The links between the ethnically divided black groups are being strengthened once more with the formation of a Black Peoples' Convention to unify the oppressed - a strategy which is a central part of UNITY MOVEMENT policy. Non collaboration with the oppressors has found strong support in Black consciousness movement of the Students who went on strike in protest against inferior education for blacks and the government's Bantustan policy.

The importance of these actions of resistance to ruling class tyranny lies in the oppressed people's increasing realisation that freedom cannot be found within the existing capitalist structure of South African society.

Scrape Ntshona
Unity Movement of South Africa.
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