

THE NEWSLETTER

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POS.

CHRIS.

28 AFRICANS GET RID OF 'MY TURN NOW' CAPTAIN

By Our Industrial Correspondent

TWENTY-EIGHT Nigerian seamen who walked off the M.V. Kindat, spent two days and nights on the quayside at Tilbury and were fined £5 each, have won their fight against 36-year-old Captain Tom Hood. The 5,530-ton Kindat is now on the high seas with her African crew on board—and Captain Hood is 'on sick leave'.

I interviewed the men at Liverpool to get the story behind the headline 'Walk-off by Ship's Crew'. I found a group of dignified men who quietly but firmly expressed their determination not to be pushed around and not to tolerate racial discrimination.

The new captain, they said, joined the ship—she is owned by the Henderson Line—at Rotterdam on October 23. Two

The Rail Disaster

Before public horror about the London train disaster has had time to abate, these two demands should go forth insistently from every organization of the Labour movement:

- 1) Systematic research, with no expense spared, into the causes and prevention of smog, and all questions of smoke abatement. Resources earmarked for the British hydrogen bomb to be diverted to this purpose.
- 2) Railwaymen to be paid a wage fitting the grave responsibilities of their arduous and honourable calling.

days later, after a ship inspection, he accused the crew of not cleaning a galley used solely by shore labour.

They explained that they could not clean it because they were not given the key. Their spokesman, a small vivacious man, went on:

"When we tried to tell the captain he informed us: 'I am master, what I say is final. I have no interest in Africans at all and I can treat you people in the way I like. Anyone who does not like my treatment can —off from my ship.' We were surprised to hear such talk from the captain."

They were instructed to clean the galley. 'But the next day,' said one of the stewards, 'when we should have been cleaning it, we had to stand by to serve two special visitors.'

The captain sent for the head greaser, the head steward and the chief cook, together with the crew.

No trouble in three years

'He said he had brought the men to see how he would punish the head men,' declared the bosun. He logged them one day's pay.

'The chief cook said to him "We have been here a long time, some of us for three years. There has been no trouble. Now you make it very hard in two days."

'The captain replied by telling us again that he had no interest in Africans—and telling us again what we could do if we did not like his treatment. And then he told us: "When ever you people have got your ships you can do what you like. Now it is my turn."

One of the crew broke in with some words in his own language. He was reminding them of another incident.

'Yes,' said another seaman, 'soon after this captain came on the ship the head greaser came up from the fo'c's'le. It

(Continued overleaf)

LONDON ELECTRICIANS FIGHT SACKINGS

By Our Industrial Correspondent

ABOUT 240 electricians employed by Higgins and Cattle (London) are on strike because the management refuses to recognize their fight to negotiate on questions of redundancy.

On November 19 the Electrical Trades Union steward on the Lloyds new building site, Leadenhall Street, was informed that forty men would be sacked that evening.

The shop committee protested and proposed that the principle of 'Last on first off' should apply and that the redundant workers should stay four days to give them a chance of looking for other jobs.

The management rejected these proposals, and the shop committee offered to discuss redundancy on any terms offered by the management. This was rejected, the management claiming the right to hire and fire as they chose.

The 150 men employed on the site downed tools, and 90 other electricians employed by the same firm elsewhere came out in support.

'We are prepared to return to work when the management agrees to the status quo and the negotiations then take place,' says the senior shop steward, Mr. J. Kerr. 'The shop maintains the right to negotiate on this question because of the desire for security and the right to know where they stand in relation to work.'

900 MINERS BACK MILITANT AND WIN

By a Lancashire Mineworker

JUST over three months ago Walter Stringfellow was dismissed from Chisnall Hall (Lancs.) colliery on the ground of 'insubordination'—because he was a militant who stuck up for his rights.

In strict accordance with trade union procedure Stringfellow placed his case in the hands of the local trade union officials, Oswald Turner, secretary, and Ike Mason, president, of the Chisnall Hall branch of the National Union of Mineworkers.

These two officials told him there was nothing that could be done to help him. Without giving any reason they refused to hand the case over to their immediate superior, Richard Crossley, miners' agent for the area.

When Crossley happened to meet Stringfellow at the pithead he told him nothing could be done for him—though Crossley had never handled the case officially.

Stringfellow sought an interview with Edwin Hall, general secretary of the NUM's Lancashire area. Stringfellow says that at the interview he was offered the choice of work at five different collieries, but not Chisnall Hall.

Stringfellow went back to the colliery determined to fight it out. Over 900 men came out on strike in support of his claim for reinstatement. Stringfellow was reinstated.

Now the branch elections are coming off, and Stringfellow is contesting Turner for the secretaryship. Other militants are opposing the president and other members of the branch committee.

COMMENTARY

STRUGGLE AND LEADERSHIP

IN a number of recent commentaries¹ we have discussed the Tory offensive against wages, jobs and trade union organization. Busmen, building workers and railwaymen are in the industrial front line, and the New Year may well put them to a critical test. There is now a need to advance more systematically and in some detail, over several weeks, our views on the state of affairs in British industry, with the aim of promoting discussion on how Marxists can best help the workers to smash the Tory offensive and the Tory Government. The efforts of Marxists in industry are a vital part of a broader task: that of forging a Marxist leadership, so that the economic, political and ideological struggles against capitalism can be co-ordinated and consciously fought as three aspects of one and the same class struggle.

As the only Marxist weekly in Britain THE NEWSLETTER is aware of its growing responsibility to provide a forum for militant workers to exchange experiences and opinions. Wherever battle is joined we shall strive to report the fight in as lively a way as possible and draw the lessons from it. The industrial scene is now more important than any other. This paper's Marxism would be sterile and academic, its opposition to Stalinism and social-democracy negative and nugatory, if it did not make the industrial fight that is now opening its chief preoccupation. Capitalism is the main enemy. A Marxist weekly must write primarily about the workers' lives, conditions and problems, their victories and defeats. To the extent that we can build a team of worker-correspondents in the localities—and this has begun—our columns will increasingly reflect all aspects of the living struggle, from the tiniest skirmish to the showdown which, as it seems to us, is approaching, and which the ruling class is consciously preparing.

But this paper bears another responsibility, no less serious: to bring before its readers the problem of leadership in all its gravity. A new period in the post-war history of British capitalism is beginning. Industrial conflicts are in many respects different from what they have been in the past twelve years. No longer is it possible to fight against sackings or for higher wages without the struggle assuming from the outset a political character. Where a Tory government openly intervenes to aid and carry forward the employers' offensive, then every act of resistance is, if only in embryo, a political challenge. Sooner or later the State is obliged to intervene; as in the recent transport strike and Covent Garden dispute the workers soon find themselves in conflict with it. In struggles of this kind the workers learn quickly about the nature of the capitalist State. Exceptionally favourable possibilities are now arising for the spread of Marxist ideas in the trade union movement, and for the solution of the British Labour movement's major internal problem, the problem of leadership. Whether these possibilities are grasped depends in large measure on the work that is done now.

¹Call a Halt', Aug. 24; 'Over to the Offensive', Sept. 28; 'Labour Must Lead', Oct. 5; 'The Employers' Challenge', Nov. 16; 'Eve of Battle', Nov. 23.

AFRICANS (Continued from front page)

was his leisure time and he was in African dress, smoking a cigarette.

'The captain saw him and knocked the cigarette out of his mouth, saying, "Don't smoke in front of me".'

On November 2 the crew wrote to the managing director of the Elder-Dempster Line, the shipping agents; to a director of the owners; to the shipping masters in London and Lagos; and to the National Union of Seamen in London.

They gave their complaints against the captain and said they did not wish to work with him. They gave the captain a copy of their letters.

A representative of the owners visited the ship. He told them the captain could not be sent away and if they refused to sail they would be jailed.

'We answered him in this way,' said the bosun, 'We are not refusing to sail with the ship but with the captain. If we have to go to jail, then we are all ready.'

On November 15 five of them went to the police station. 'We said to the policeman: "You are supposed to be peace-makers." The policemen pushed us outside telling us: "You go back to your ship. Never make trouble on board ship, otherwise you will be inside here tomorrow."'

The Nigerians then told the owners that they were coming off the ship when the captain came aboard. On November 20 the ship prepared to sail and the whole crew walked off. They stacked their baggage on the quayside and remained there for two days and nights—the second night in the rain.

Dockers brought them bread and coffee. Other African seamen took a collection for them. They visited the 'Niger Palm' when her crew threatened to walk off if the officers stopped them.

At Grays magistrates' court, each with a luggage label tied to his wrist with his name on it, the Nigerians were found guilty of 'combining together to impede the voyage' and fined £5 apiece.

When I first saw them they were waiting outside a Board of Trade building in Liverpool, where they were sent to be paid off. They had been told to report there at 10 a.m.

'It was a quarter to three when the shipping master arrived,' they told me the following day. 'He declared he couldn't pay us off in Liverpool and we must leave tonight to be paid off in London. But we told him we are not children and we refused to move.'

The following evening officialdom gave in. The crew were told the head men would be paid full wages and that the bad discharge mark would be taken off their books. They were asked if they would like to go back to their ship, which was still in London: the captain was ill and would not be sailing. They answered, yes they would sail.

'And if the captain is there, we will come off again,' they told me. But the captain was not there. The Nigerians had won their fight.

TWO MORE CP EXPULSIONS IN LEEDS

Two more prominent members of Leeds Communist Party have been expelled for signing a circular inviting fellow-members and others to a meeting of the Leeds Socialist Workers' Forum to hear a delegate's report on the Labour Party conference.

They are Gertie Roche, a clothing worker and a well-known trade unionist, who was Yorkshire women's organizer for the party until this year; and John Wolstencroft, a scientist, formerly education secretary for the Leeds area, and a former member of the Leeds area committee.

There have been four protest resignations in Leeds: Mick Dean, leading furniture worker and member of the area committee; Joe Wheatley, engineer, a former Communist Party municipal candidate, and his wife; and Ron Florey, clothing worker, member of the area committee and until recently Pudsey branch secretary.

PROTEST MOVEMENT GROWS IN KENT

Beckenham (Kent) borough committee of the Communist Party is calling a borough aggregate meeting to which the expelled members of the Bromley branch will be invited to submit written statements.

LABOUR

A TALE OF TWO LABOUR COUNCILLORS

By Ursula Verity

AS every active Labour Party worker knows, this is the season of selection conferences, when we select our candidates for the municipal elections next May.

In safe wards the conference is usually a re-adoption one, the retiring councillor being almost automatically chosen again to serve another term.

But last year one of our safe wards put the cat among the pigeons by refusing to adopt its retiring councillor and asserting its right to invite other would-be candidates to a selection conference.

For some time there had been a good deal of resentment against Coun. Dogsboddy—whose name, of course, was nothing of the sort—because he had not been holding his 'surgeries', attending his ward meetings, or doing his Labour Party work.

In fact, before the Town Fathers tumbled to the mutiny in their midst, the selection conference had been held, and an up-and-coming, Leftish-talking young man chosen for candidate. We will call him Billy the Kid.

On hearing of the ward's action, the party leaders flew into panic. It should be understood that our Labour Council is a good, progressive one, but many of its members had grown lazy in their seats, and lethargic on the sweets of office.

This sort of thing, they decided, could not be allowed. If one ward were to assert its rights, others might follow, and many civic dignitaries could see their proud prestige and luxurious banquets fading away.

The matter came to a head at the delegate management committee meeting for the whole town. Challenged to say why they did not want Coun. Dogsboddy the ward representatives were soft-hearted, as the working class so often is.

There was nothing against him, they said; the ward just wanted a change.

This gave the E.C. the chance to weep crocodile tears at the perfidy of people who would so treat a faithful servant.

It would blacken the poor man's character, we were told. All sorts of scandal would be whispered about him. People would say he had embezzled funds, or made love to someone else's wife. He might even lose his job.

As Mr Dogsboddy is a very safe commercial executive in a small, dull office, this was clearly absurd.

Through all this sat the Councillor, burly, well dressed and bewildered, his eyes gleaming behind thick glasses like inert pebbles washed by a cruel sea.

Why should this happen to him? Poor man, he had the bad luck to sit for an active ward, whose members expected him to work as hard as they did.

No one had told him that a safe seat meant anything but civic dinners, respectful greetings from the police and the approval of his socially ambitious wife. At the moment he felt, and looked, a proper Charlie.

Several councillors, dripping eloquence, pleaded for him, but one felt that they were really defending themselves and the divine right of Councillors to hold their seats until death did them part.

The platform sob-stuff proved a strong weapon, for many felt that a man was being unfairly treated, with no offence stated.

Also, of course, the E.C. had played the favourite trick of so many E.C.s, and called in to the joint meeting many delegates whose credentials came from heaven knew where, and who were never seen except when the E.C. needed reinforcement.

The debate ended with the rebel ward being found out of order. The ward was, however, quite adamant. It would only work for Billy the Kid, and Coun. Dogsboddy had had it.

Things seemed to be at a deadlock, but the wily eyes of an E.C. member had seen that Billy the Kid was becoming uncomfortable.

Billy had a good, militant past—so good that he did not want it all over again. His first child had just born, and he wanted the boy to be able to say, 'My dad's a Councillor,'

but this seat was a little hot. So when he was approached by the wily E.C. member, he was easy.

'Be good, Billy Boy. You might lose this ward, because the members are split. They won't all work for you if you cause trouble.'

This was a lie. The members were united as they had never been before, but poor Billy had lost confidence. Now he was Billy the Kidded.

At the next joint meeting, the delegates were told that the rebels had repented. Billy the Kid had withdrawn, and because it was nearly election time, and too late to choose another candidate, Coun. Dogsboddy was in again.

Of course there were some cynical types who murmured 'Been offered a safe seat, you can bet,' but Billy was starry-eyed, and it might be pure coincidence that this year he has dropped into our snuggest ward, on the elevation to alderman of one of our most decrepit Town Grandfathers.

Was this a defeat for the rebels? Not entirely, I think. The working class is never defeated if it learns the lesson in every struggle. The lesson here was that if fault is to be found it should be found openly and in a principled, honest way. The ward's delicacy was used against it by the unscrupulous elements in the Council.

A big result was that Coun. Dogsboddy is now as attentive to his duties as anyone could wish, and many other dignitaries are more active than before the salutary shock they got last year.

No doubt there are other wards in the country which do not want to re-elect a retiring councillor, but which are frustrated by the flaccid hand of tradition and assumed privilege.

It is the proud boast of our Labour Party that we are democratic and have freedom of speech and opinion. But we live to fight for our democracy—all the time.

STRIKE THREAT WINS FIVE JOBS BACK

Threat of strike action by about 170 building workers employed by the Alderton Construction Co. on the Great West Road flyover this week forced the reinstatement of five labourers, including well-known militants Brian Behan and Paddy Healy.

The decision to take strike action yesterday morning had been unanimous.

WHAT'S HOXHA GOT THAT TITO HASN'T?

Pravda of November 29 published side by side messages of greeting to Albania and to Yugoslavia on their respective National Days.

The message to Albania occupies nearly half of two columns, is written in enthusiastic language ('The international prestige of the Albanian People's Republic is steadily growing') and is signed by Voroshilov, Bulganin and Khrushchev.

The message to Yugoslavia is a formal affair of a few lines, signed by Voroshilov only.

FRENCH COMMUNISTS' HISTORY COMMISSION

Latest issue of France Nouvelle, French communist weekly, contains an article by François Billoux on the work of the commission appointed to prepare a history of the French Communist Party.

There is still no sound from the similar commission which was set up by the British Communist Party last year.

WHICH PARAGRAPH DO YOU READ?

'The national bourgeoisie . . . consider the Egyptian communists as the best defenders of our national Government led by the valiant President Gamal Abdel Nasser . . .'

'We do not see why our people should be deprived of a legal Communist Party . . . We rise up against the holding of our comrades in the prisons and desert concentration camps . . .'

(Both passages from documents of the illegal Egyptian Communist Party, printed in World News, November 23)

BOOKS BOUGHT FOR CASH. Especially standard works of History, Literary Criticism, Economics and serious books of all kinds. **Alan Kemp, Albion Bookshop, Broadstairs, Kent.**

LETTERS | Readers Write from Australia and America

NOBLE ANGER WITHOUT HUMOUR IS UNREAL

I HAVE just read Howard Fast's article in THE NEWSLETTER, No 26 [November 2]. In this article, just as in most of his books, I am conscious of an attitude of unreality, a tendency to make too much or too little of life and events.

'Freedom Road' is in places magnificently full of inspiration and hope, but then it ends with massacre at Carwell. The afterword is significant. Why was it necessary to explain why this tale had never been told before?

'Not only were material things wiped out . . . but the very memory was expunged.' If that were quite true how come that Howard Fast could write about it?

'Freedom Road' brings only a feeling of lost illusions. I would not deny there were people like Gideon in the Government. There are today people like Howard Fast in the Soviet Communist Party. But in both cases they are an ineffective minority which only show the remainder up by contrast.

Now for the article. Fast tells how the leaders were silent: 'From their mental dugouts not a shot was fired.' He goes on to say how he and his friends successfully fought the Federal men when they tried to close up the paper.

Is it unkind to suggest that this passage has the same touch and atmosphere as the Parliament of Gideons in 'Freedom Road'. The same air of invincibility? And, alas, the same anti-climax!

Because if things were so good how come that Howard Fast and his friends did not seal the leadership up in their silent funk-holes and taking things over, run them in a free and democratic way? Was this silent leadership more powerful than the Federal men?

Howard Fast and his friends have openly defied the American Government, one of the most powerful governments of the world. Prison has not weakened their defiance.

The American Government cannot whip them, but the half-witted functionaries of a semi-legal ten cent organization apparently can! Integrity I have no doubt of. Intelligence . . .? The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in the functionaries but in ourselves that we are whipped.

Of course the rottenness should be shown up. But life isn't only unadulterated noble anger at suffering and wrong; it is equally composed of laughter at our own and others' short-comings and stupidity.

Humour and humanism are closely allied. That is something we all have to learn.

Melbourne (Victoria)

R. Hartkopf

U.S. SOCIALISTS PRAISE 1917-1957 ISSUE

Have just received the Fortieth Anniversary issue—simply superb. All of us in Minneapolis who are fortunate enough to receive The Newsletter were deeply impressed and pleased with the high calibre of the contents.

I wish you great and continued success with The Newsletter.

Minneapolis 5 (Minnesota)

Arthur Hopkins

BEHAN IS RIGHT TO CALL FOR JOBS FIGHT

A RECENT development in the building and civil engineering industry is the 'fixed price' tender.

Contracts have for many years included a 'rise and fall' clause enabling the contractor to recover any increases in costs due to rises in prices or wage rates.

Recently however, as a result of Ministerial pressure, contractors' federations have agreed to quote for 'public works' projects on a 'fixed price' basis, i.e., no 'rise and fall'.

Such a change of policy by the contractors can only mean that they are confident of their ability to hold wage rates steady. So confident, in fact, that they are prepared to gamble on it. They are banking on getting sufficient unemployed to use as a weapon against the men on the sites.

With the reduction of factory building and an apparent intention to continue with motorways, sewage works etc., this type of contract will become an important factor. Firms with

such contracts will be bound to get tough with their workers.

All this adds weight to Brian Behan's argument for a campaign against unemployment [The Newsletter, November 23, p. 237]. The employers are in no doubt about the shape of things to come. We also must be prepared for battle.

London

Roy Preston

RUSSIA IS NOW AN 'ADVANCED COUNTRY'

READER Hillman has missed the point, and begs the question.

When Lenin and Trotsky insisted that socialism required world revolution they not did mean that it must wait till the workers had triumphed in, say, Patagonia.

It was 'the advanced countries' of their day that they saw as the key to the problem. While Russia did not have the productivity necessary to create the plenty which alone could provide the basis for socialism, Russia plus Germany would be a different matter.

Hence the special importance they attributed to the revolution in Germany.

Now, Russia today has the same level of productivity as Germany. It has become one of 'the advanced countries' in its own right.

The objective obstacles to socialism have gone. Doubtless the bureaucracy which arose on the former basis of backwardness will not wish to 'go quietly' in the new situation—but that's another argument.

London, W.

V. Frank

DE-REHABILITATION? HERE'S THE EVIDENCE

FURTHER proof, if any were needed, that the communist movement here is in full process of re-Stalinization, is given in the latest circular issued by Collets, the booksellers.

Last year Klugmann's 'From Trotsky to Tito' was withdrawn, but now a new edition is announced of 'The Great Conspiracy against Russia', by Sayers and Kahn.

This book, first published in 1946, is devoted to 'popularizing' the notorious Stalin purge trials of 1936-38. All the victims who have since 1953 been rehabilitated, openly or by implication, are here vilified as spies, fascists, wreckers and all the rest of it.

If Collets are again pushing such a book as this, nobody should be surprised if 'From Trotsky to Tito' reappears soon among the approved devotional readings of the Stalinist church.

Witney (Oxon.)

D. Desmond

KEEP THAT REPUTATION FOR HONESTY

A.V.P. states, in his obituary of Diego Rivera, that he 'joined the Mexican Communist Party and edited its paper, but later broke with the Stalinists.'

Is it not a fact that Rivera still later rejoined the Stalinists? If so, it is a pity that this was not also mentioned.

The Newsletter has a reputation for honesty, where this sort of thing is concerned, which ought to be maintained, in contrast to the practices of Stalinist publications.

London, N.

B.P.

[It is quite true that Rivera rejoined the Communist Party, and this was in the article as I wrote it. Unfortunately the article was cut in a hurry at the last minute because of space difficulties.—A.V.P.]

POST EARLY FOR . . . THE NEWSLETTER

Correspondents and contributors should note that the normal deadline for the receipt of Newsletter copy is first post Tuesday morning.

Only the most urgent material received after that can be published in the same week's issue.

There will be no issue of The Newsletter on December 28.