

THE NEWSLETTER

Weekly Journal of the Socialist Labour League

Vol. 3, No 124

Threepence

October 31 1959

TUC SUPPORTS TORY ANTI-STRIKE PLOT CARRON, WILLIAMSON, COUSINS, GREENE PREPARE A SELL-OUT

The Right-wing Labour and trade union leaders are now almost openly assisting the Tories to weaken the shop stewards' movement.

That is the real meaning behind the screaming headlines of the capitalist Press demanding action against so-called 'wildcat strikes'. The atmosphere is being prepared for anti-trade-union legislation. Meanwhile two Tory MPs are demanding a Royal Commission to inquire into trade union law, and the TUC meets.

Hit Back at the Right Wing

The Executive Committee of the Socialist Labour League appeals to all members of the League, trade unionists, co-operators, Labour Party members and members of peace organizations to rally in support of the National Assembly of Labour at St Pancras Town Hall on Sunday, November 15.

The Tory offensive is under way and the retreat of Right-wing Labour has now become a rout. Unemployment is once again on the increase and the Tories are considering an attack on the living standards of those who are at present unemployed. Right-wing Labour councillors follow the Tory lead and put up rents.

A halt must be called now. Unity in action of all sections of the Labour movement can turn the tide against the Tories and their Right-wing supporters.

Into action! Elect your delegates, appoint your observers, and fill the St Pancras Town Hall to overflowing with all your workmates as visitors (see page 304).

Gaitskell and Bevan are drawing up plans to gag the special Labour Party conference which is to be held in Blackpool on November 28 and 29. There is to be a general discussion only around the result of the election and no resolutions or decisions can be taken: just the same type of conference as that which prepared Labour's defeat at the general election. Mr Gaitskell is to open and Mr Bevan is to close.

With the Tories firmly in power for five years, the working class must now take the road that leads to a combination of industrial and political action. This is the real reason for the gang-up.

Reynolds News has disclosed that 125 million working days were lost last year owing to unemployment, whilst only 3½ million days were lost in strikes, official and unofficial. Yet the trade union bosses shout about strikes and do nothing about the unemployed.

Labour's rank and file were not responsible for the policy which lost the election. They were denied the right to change this policy. Now they are to get the same treatment.

Here we have the real face of the conspiracy which has as its aim the immobilization of the working class in the face of a Tory offensive. This is the urgent reason why the rank and file of the Labour and trade union movement must get together at once and organize to meet this offensive.

Liverpool Tugmen Show Their Strength

By Our Industrial Correspondent

'Who pays your wages? Us or the union?' a representative of the Alexander Towing Company is reported to have said to Liverpool tugmen who had obeyed a union rule and taken a meal hour during an eight-hour shift.

The fourteen men were suspended indefinitely by the tugowners last Friday and told if they dropped their demand for a mealbreak the suspension would be reconsidered in a week.

But the owners could not have reckoned with the response to the suspension from crews on the other Mersey tugs. They walked off one boat after another as they tied up. By Monday afternoon all but twenty or thirty of the seven hundred tugboatmen who work on the river Mersey had stopped work.

Several of the crews who are demanding the right to take an hour's break stopped work over another issue—the demotion of tugboat skipper, Sydney Lees. Last week he was reduced to mate for smoking on his tug while near a tanker.

These men feel the skipper was victimized as he has been outspoken in favour of militant policies in the past.

The main grievance which has paralysed shipping on the Mersey, however, is the refusal of the tug companies to allow the men to take an hour off for a meal.

As Mr P. J. O'Hare, district secretary of the docks section of the Transport and General Workers' Union, told the Press last Monday, the break was agreed between the employers and the union some time ago but has never been put into practice.

On the same day O'Hare reported to a meeting of about five hundred strikers that the tugowners flatly refused to meet the demand and that they declared it impracticable. He was met with repeated demands from the floor to make the strike official.

Tugmen reminded the platform that officials had said only a few days earlier that they would 'stop the port' if any men were victimized as a result of carrying out union rules. When O'Hare advised the strikers to go to arbitration, there were shouts of 'That's what the dockers did last week and got a measly few bob. We want it on paper.' (This was a reference to the 'decolite' strike on Liverpool docks a fortnight ago).

Clearly there was strong feeling among the majority of men that the strike should be fought through to victory.

With the support of dockgatemens, dockers and other workers no shipping will be able to move or unload.

But the strike is in the hands of officials who are anxious to get the men back to work irrespective of what is won or lost.

that Campbell performs his greatest feat of distortion.

He claims that the Socialist Labour League stands for the idea of new unions. This is a lie. We were opposed to the Red trade union policies of the Stalinists in the period from 1930-1933 when Campbell was supporting them, and we are opposed to anything of this description now.

Our conception of rank-and-file committees is based upon the shop stewards' organization that already exists in individual industries. What we say is that these shop stewards' organizations should be linked up into regional and national bodies to fight the employers' offensive.

The National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers was not a new union but one which had existed on the docks long before the formation of the Transport and General Workers' Union. It was a recognized trade union and when dockers in the Northern ports fought for a principle to join the union of their choice they were not engaged in forming a new union, but using a democratic right. This democratic right has been violated by the Bridlington agreement which protects the monopoly of the big bureaucratic trade union chiefs.

Anyone familiar with the history of the TGWU on the docks, knows that in the early 1930s, before the Bridlington agreement, it was one of the worst unions for poaching members in the whole country. After they gained certain strategic positions in industry, they were then, of course, all in favour of a monopoly agreement.

Every militant trade unionist knows that the Bridlington agreement should be revised and that a re-examination of the trade union structure in Britain is on the order of the day.

The docker members of the TGWU in 1955 wanted to join another old-established union on the docks. We believe that they had every right to do this and we support them on this question today. Campbell simply evades the question of dockers' rights.

Socialist Labour League stands for unity

We think that many members of the Communist Party will not support this attack by Campbell. They know that the employers' Press are constantly attacking both Trotskyists and Communists. The employers do not bother to find out what our differences are, they know that in struggle rank-and-file members of both movements will oftentimes find themselves fighting on the same questions.

This applies in particular to the present situation inside the Electrical Trades Union. The Socialist Labour League is absolutely opposed to the Catholic Action attacks on the present leadership of that union. Despite our disagreements politically with Haxell and Foulkes we will continue to oppose the witch-hunt against them, which has been strengthened by Right-wing elements in the TUC and people who were formerly members of the Communist Party and who have deserted to the camp of the Right.

By all means, Mr Campbell, have your disagreements with the Socialist Labour League and the National Assembly of Labour, but let these be discussed honestly and seriously. That is what the Labour movement and the rank and file of the Communist Party want.

INDUSTRY

SHEFFIELD BUS WORKERS FIRM ON 'NO-STANDING' BAN

By Bob Pennington

Sheffield

Sunday

LOCKED out by the Labour controlled Transport Committee, Sheffield's 2,300 busworkers are determined not to accept the ultimatum issued to them on October 19.

The lock-out follows the decision of the busworkers not to carry standing passengers on the new 78, 76 and 69 seater buses. Busworkers were then curtly informed by the Transport

Committee that 'only those employees will be signed on duty who are prepared to work strictly in accordance with the national agreement that eight standing passengers shall be carried.'

Brother Amcliffe, a member of the Transport and General Workers' Union local branch committee and formerly a delegate to the union's national passenger group committee, told me: 'Staff reporting for duty on Monday October 19 were handed the Transport Committee's ultimatum.

'They were told to accept it or they wouldn't be allowed to sign on.

'No prior indication had been given to either the men or the union.

'I consider the Corporation were gambling on the early crews signing on as they hadn't got any instructions from the union.

'They were wrong, however. Not one crew took a bus out. We have five depots spread all over the city. All stood firm. Men, women, white and coloured workers—at Town Head Garage, the first two men to report were coloured lads, both refused to sign on—all stood together.'

I asked about the tram men. 'They didn't get an ultimatum' he replied.

'We asked them to support us and they did, 100 per cent! Last year the tubes 'licked' the London men. We had no intention of the trams 'licking' us.

Brother Amcliffe went on to explain how, ever since February the Transport Committee had adamantly refused to discuss the elimination of standing passengers on the big new buses.

'In October, they introduced the 78 seaters on the busy central routes. These replaced trams. Although the routes were extended we were only given the same running times.

'Despite all the efforts of the union locally, the Transport Committee refused to negotiate on mileage or running time.

'Finally, on October 4, at a mass meeting we decided to ban standing passengers on all vehicles.'

The strike, although not official—Townsend, national trade group secretary has advised the men to return to work—certainly has the backing of the rank and file.

Busmen's offer

At a mass meeting on Sunday morning, attended by 1,300 strikers, they offered to return to work providing the Transport Committee accepted that there would be no standing passengers on the new vehicles. Speaker after speaker—24 bus and tram men spoke from the floor—reiterated their intention of staying out until the ultimatum was withdrawn.

Sydney Dyson the chairman of the Transport Committee and leader of the Labour Group on Sheffield City Council came in for some scathing comments.

One speaker suggested that Dyson and Moore—the Transport Managers—should try their hand at working a 78 seater with eight standing passengers. 'Maybe they wouldn't be so keen on trying to force us to do it then' he said.

On Sunday evening, Dyson announced that he had turned down the meeting's offer. Boasting to the national Press that he had the public behind him, the Right-wing Labour Alderman said: 'I have had dozens of people pull me up in the street and say "Whatever happens stand firm".'

Dyson's latest firm stand has ensured that over 700 buses and 100 trams will remain idle in their sheds, thereby depriving his admiring public of a transport service. The acceptance of the men's offer would have meant that an almost normal service would have been running the next day.

The outcome of the dispute is being watched by busworkers in Manchester, Liverpool and Nottingham where very soon their local authorities plan to introduce the larger buses.

This would appear to be an opportune time for all the Sheffield men to convene a rank-and-file Conference of all bus men. A victory in Sheffield now would make it harder for other local authorities to impose similar conditions on their busworkers at a later date.

The experience in Sheffield demonstrates, as does the

Birmingham one, where another Labour controlled Corporation has rejected their busworkers' demand for a 40-hour week, that busworkers can only rely on their own strength to defend working conditions.

BUS STRIKERS STAND FIRM

By G. Gale

Sheffield

Tuesday

SIXTEEN hundred striking bus workers have just met at the City Hall to consider the offer of the Transport Committee for a return to work with 8 standing passengers on all buses except 76 and 78 seaters: these to take five standing passengers. This was to be dependent upon later agreement by the employers' organization and the NJIC.

The proposal was turned down unanimously. Speaker after speaker laughed it out of court. One man pointed out that they could return on these terms and then a week later, if the employers did not agree to them, the busmen would be back where they started.

Another speaker was cheered when he said that: 'to accept these conditions would let down those workers in Manchester, Nottingham, Liverpool and elsewhere, who are fighting similar struggles.'

Loudest applause of all followed a reference to the solidarity with which coloured and white workers were standing together.

Militant workers were determined that 69-seater buses should be included in a non-standing ban and felt that the committee should have been firmer on this.

Finally, a resolution was passed rejecting outright the Transport Committee's offer and instructing the branch committee to stand by their original position of no standing passengers on 69, 76 and 78-seater buses.

Every worker I spoke to was adamant that there should be no backing down on the 69-seater bus and was anxious that the committee should stand firm on this.

The general feeling amongst the rank and file was that the Transport Committee was beginning to crack and that a firm stand now could bring complete victory.

LIVERPOOL BUSMEN SUPPORT SHEFFIELD STRIKERS

by Bill Hunter

'NINETY per cent of the bus crews working for Liverpool Corporation are solidly in support of the Sheffield busmen'—this is the verdict of two Liverpool conductors, both active trade unionists.

Last Monday afternoon, drivers and conductors standing beside their buses on Liverpool's Pier Head—terminus for a large number of bus routes—confirmed this estimate. All were definite and most were vigorous in opposition to allowing standing passengers on the big buses.

Several made hostile comments on the way the Press had attempted to blacken the Sheffield strikers.

At present there are two of the big 76-seater buses running in Liverpool. One was put on last Monday.

Several weeks ago, under pressure of the rank and file, the unions declared their opposition to standing passengers on this type of bus.

The Transport Committee has said that it expects standing passengers to be carried but will take no action as yet if crews refuse to carry them.

Busmen declare that at the time the national agreement covering standing passengers was made the biggest bus was a fifty-six seater.

In any case, they say, they only accepted standing passengers as an emergency measure owing to a shortage of buses.

'Now we're told there's a shortage of passengers. So they cut the services and try to cram the public in,'—that type of

comment was frequent on the Pier Head.

A further point which struck these Liverpool busmen was that if the Sheffield strikers lost then it would be more difficult elsewhere to resist the demand that standing passengers be carried on the bigger buses.

The feeling in the garages appeared to be summed up by a driver of a 30 bus. He ended our conversation by leaning out of his cab to say:

'It only needs someone here to say the word and we'd be out on strike ourselves. And I'm not a strike man, I'm for arbitration.'

DINING CAR STRIKE

by Brian Arundel

RAILWAY workers can draw important lessons from the strike started early this week by B.R. dining car staff in Manchester.

Bro Ken Wiggett, Chairman of the Restaurant Cars L.D.C. (Local Department Committee) summed up the strike by saying 'we are not striking for or against anything but in support of official policy as decided by the Annual General Meeting of the NUR earlier this year.'

This policy stated the Union's total opposition to the introduction of Pullman Car Services on BR. The basis of this objection lay in the fact that the Pullman Car Co. was a semi-private concern and lucrative profits to be made from the type of service it operates would fall into the laps of preference shareholders. It also stated that the Pullman Car staff should be integrated into BR.

Bro Oliver Bates, Secretary of the LDC, speaking on this point, said 'we have no fight with the Pullman car lads and we say, if the BTC want to introduce luxury trains then we will work them alongside the Pullman lads who should, in our opinion, be working for the BTC.'

Earlier this month the NUR NEC decided to change this policy, decided at the AGM, after the Pullman Car Co. had refused to bring the conditions and pay of their workers into line with BR staff unless objections to their trains were removed. Last Friday it was announced that these pay increases had been granted and would cost the Pullman Car Co. £25,000. This is the price they are prepared to pay to buy off union opposition.

The price the NUR, NEC will have to pay could well be much greater. Railway workers are sick of being fobbed off with the excuses and delays in getting claims settled and dissatisfaction is spreading through lack of leadership. It has taken the strike of the dining car staff to expose the bankruptcy of this leadership. They are determined and will use every possible means to ensure the NEC are brought to heel on this question.

The most significant factor in the strike is the speedy support given by the newly formed Rank and File C/W and Shops Committee in Manchester. Railway workers must learn that the real strength of the union lies in their hands and to leave their futures in the hands of such leaders will be a luxury they cannot afford.

The only safeguard against recurrences of such betrayals on a much wider scale, is the building of real unity on the railways around a programme which will defend jobs and improve conditions.

The task of building such unity lies with the rank and file of the railway unions.

The October-November LABOUR REVIEW includes:

The Full Story of the Shell Mex Strike

(*'The Politics of South Bank'* by R. PENNINGTON)

Socialists and the Summit

Marxism in Britain—1881-1920

Special eight-page autumn book supplement

price 2s. 5d. post paid. Order from New Park Publications, 186 Clapham High Street, London, S.W.4.

cadres it supplies to militant Toryism in the rural and suburban constituencies of the South of England—all those ex-officers of the armed forces, former colonial officials, retired planters and so forth, whose social position, and in many cases whose current income and resultant leisure, are based upon the exploitation of the Empire in one fashion or another.

J. A. Hobson, the radical whose book 'Imperialism' (1902) was used by Lenin in writing his own work of the same title, wrote: 'As the despotic portion of our Empire has grown in area, a larger and larger number of men, trained in the temper and methods of autocracy as soldiers and civil officials in our Crown colonies, protectorates and Indian Empire, reinforced by numbers of merchants, planters, engineers and overseers, whose lives have been those of a superior caste living an artificial life removed from all the healthy restraints of ordinary European society, have returned to this country bringing back the character, sentiments and ideas imposed by this foreign environment.'

'The South and South-West of England is richly sprinkled with these men, many of them wealthy, most of them endowed with leisure, men openly contemptuous of democracy, devoted to material luxury, social display and the shallower arts of intellectual life. The wealthier among them discover political ambitions . . . The South of England is full of men of local influence in politics and society whose character has been formed in our despotic Empire and whose incomes are chiefly derived from the maintenance and furtherance of this despotic rule . . . Everywhere they stand for coercion and for resistance to reform.'

The shrinking of the 'despotic' part of the Empire with the achievement of self-government by one dependency after another makes these people only the more viciously determined to hang on to what's left, for their own and their families' sakes. These are the men—and women, for their womenfolk are often even deadlier than they—for whom 'Suez' and 'HOLA' were words of hope, pride and encouragement during the election campaign, and who will support with enthusiasm every terrorist act by the Tory government against a colonial people—and every attack on the workers here in Britain, too.

The liberal 'come-back'

Many Labour Party members must be asking themselves how the Liberals, not so long ago regarded as of little account, have managed to take Labour's place as the second party in a number of constituencies.

In the elections following the first world war, Labour for the first time outdistanced the Liberals, and by 1925 it looked to most observers as though a straight Tory-versus-Labour confrontation would from then on form the pattern of British politics, with the Liberals more or less rapidly withering away to vanishing point.

That did not happen, however. In spite of internal dissensions and splits, the Liberals remained in being. They proved able to keep their boat afloat, even if becalmed, until, in the late 1950s, a favourable wind at last came their way.

The turning-point for Liberal fortunes in the 1920s, as for so much, was the general strike of 1926. The readiness of the 'leaders' of the working-class movement to do a deal with the capitalists, provided they were approached in the right way, offered a splendid opportunity for Liberal 'statesmen' to show what they could do as go-betweens, and so recover some of their lost prestige—sufficient to survive and fight another day.

The Liberal Sir Herbert (later Lord) Samuel carried on the open negotiations, on behalf of the government, with the Trades Union Congress General Council. Behind the scenes, important confidential talks between J. H. Thomas and the representatives of the other side, including Lord Londonderry, the big coal-owner, were arranged by the Liberal Lord Wimborne at a luncheon party at his town house. Smooth-talking, 'broad-minded', these Liberals helped to find the formulas and arrive at the procedures required to bring about the great betrayal.

Osbert Sitwell, who played a part in this intrigue, gives an account of the meetings at Wimborne House in the volume of

his autobiography called 'Laughter in the Next Room' (1949).

They know not what they did

Editor Gerry Healy found at a recent public meeting that a remark of his about General de Gaulle having been supported by the French Communist Party, with British Communist approval, as head of the French Provisional Government in 1944, was received with noises of disbelief by some Communist Party members present. They were not saying: 'And a good thing, too!' but denying that it had ever happened.

Ignorance of their own (even recent) history is, of course, systematically maintained in Communist Parties by their Stalinist officials. The contribution made by Stalinist policy in the last years of the war and the immediate post-war years to preparing the present situation in which the Right is well dug into power in Western Europe is therefore little known in those circles.

Let me quote on this de Gaulle question, from the volume for 1944 of the Communist Party weekly World News and Views. In the issue of October 14 we find a policy statement by the French Communist Party, ending with a reference to 'the unconditional support which it agrees to give to the government of de Gaulle until the elections.' In the same issue, Sam Russell gives the General a boost in the following paragraph: 'All parties in France now seem agreed that a large measure of nationalization of the key industries will have to take place to carry out even a minimum of reconstruction. The justice of this demand was recognized by General de Gaulle in the course of one of his recent speeches when he visited his home town of Lille.'

And in the issue of December 23 Harry Pollitt begins his list of 'very positive developments to be noted in estimating the whole international position' with 'the consolidation of the French government, and its agreement with the Soviet Union.'

The workers' committees and militia were broken up by the Communists throughout France immediately after de Gaulle had signed on the dotted line with Stalin. In this way a course of capitalist development was ensured for post-war France which led in due time to the reappearance of de Gaulle

'One nation' and all that

'I think the only way to try to bring him up is as an ordinary little boy, sending him to private school, public school and Oxford. Don't keep him aloof from ordinary life.'

—Sir Harold Nicholson, October 20, on the education of Prince Charles.

'If this boy had been at a public school he would have been handled intelligently and would not have been within 100 miles of a dock.'

—Mr Justice Elwes, same day, on the suicide of a 17-year-old boy in Durham Prison.

LETTER

Re your remarks on the disciplinary clauses of the Dock Labour scheme which have been accepted by our gallant Mr Byrne and others, I dread the future when any one individual can suspend a man for a period of 14 days. He would become a little Hitler, in no time flat.

It means a man who is courageous enough to stand up for his rights can be severely penalised by a cranky PLA or local manager.

In the matter of dock employers attempting to organize weekly gangs and so transfer these gangs from ship to ship and dock to dock at will, I can only say that we in Glasgow have had some, just prior to the war, and we will not tolerate the same again. This is not only my opinion, by any means.

Unfortunately we have the usual vermin who want to please the boss. The Yanks have a very expressive word covering these. It begins with a c and ends with r, but a better appellation for these gentry could not be coined.

Glasgow

Old Timer