

Workers' Fight

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no. 13 - May/ June 1973

National Committee minutes, May 1973. (March NC minutes will be in the next IB)

Militants and the Communist Party - JC

Monthly Political Letter

What is wrong with 'After May Day' - RR

~~On Work in the Trade Unions - Lutte Ouvriere.~~

Docks perspectives. SC

Present: SC, AH, RL, SM, DS, PS, MT, JW

1. Documents

It was noted that several documents for the conference were not ready. It was decided to hold another NC meeting in Manchester on the weekend of the trade union school. If documents not ready by that date then they will not be submitted to conference.

2. Manchester Resolution

- "A) That a regular monthly political letter is producee and circulated to all members.
- B) That to the IB is added news from the localities as to work being done, recruits, etc.,
- C) That the NC considers the re-allocation of the production of the IB to one of the provinces to alleviate the Centre's work-load and to ensure regular production of the IB."

SM Proposed fortnightly (rather than monthly) political letter, which would summarise the political situation and also include news.

MT Against this - this is the function of branch circulars.

AH Noted that the NC had in fact passed a previous decision about monthly political letters - this had been kept to for a time and then lapsed.

DS Proposes that the IB should contain NC minutes, political letter, branch circulars and should come out regularly.

RL Branch circulars coming out in the IB defeats the whole object of branch circulars.

DS Withdrew branch circulars.

JW Supports DS. Internal Bulletin should provide a platform for training inexperienced writers who would not at first write for open publications. By including NC minutes and political letter we provide a regular framework.

SM Disagrees with idea that IB should be a place for 'badly researched articles'. Much material written for IB could and should go in magazine, which is a priority.

MT Regular IB not possible. IS with its size and resources has only recently had a regular IB. Articles come in not as single spies but in battalions - i.e. they come in for conferences etc.

DS Comparison with IS invalid. If there isn't controversy within the group to spark articles than this is unhealthy.

SM Not necessarily so. If there is controversy then it is unhealthy to stifle it, but there is a conflict of resources. If the group can function without excessive internal controversy then there's nothing wrong with that.

JW Resources argument invalid. Resourceswise all that is proposed is less staples. Point is to provide regular framework. Editor should also commission articles.

AH If that's all it is then OK. But don't imagine that it commits anyone to write articles.

PS Regular IB doesn't invalidate sending out urgent documents immediately. Can't see what the objections are.

- Vote
- A) PM's amendment that political letter should be fortnightly was lost. Resolution was carried.
 - B) Was carried with proviso from MT that information should be restricted for security reasons.
 - C) MT's amendment that work should be farmed out more, with overall responsibility residing with the centre was carried.
 - D) Monthly IB with NC minutes and political letter as defined by DS, was carried.

3. 'May Day' document

MT Introduced document. After the miners strike there was a tremendous upsurge in working class militancy with only a very limited turn towards the LP. Now we have seen the first major defeats over phase II. The miners were defeated without a battle. We have to evaluate the significance of this and May Day gives us the possibility of doing so. May Day was amazingly solid if you take into account the the activities of the union bureaucracy which amounted to sabotage. The miners who voted against a sectional strike were out very solidly on May Day. The class has shown that it has not been broken. The problem with the freeze is that it affects workers sectionally - ideologically dependent on 'fairness' and thus the special case sectionalism. GS strike to smash the IRA is still valid - it cannot be ruled out that the Tories will try to use it again. GS strike to smash the act fuses with the struggle against freeze - i.e. solidarity actions against the freeze could lead to a GS. But GS slogan at the moment does not answer the question of class wide action against the freeze. The demand for a sliding scale of wages does - it cuts across the the sectional special case ideology and would give the struggle against the freeze a general orientation which is lacking at the moment.

Therefore two proposals:

1. To maintain the GS perspective but with less immediate emphasis.
2. To put forward the demand for a S.S. of W. as a general strategy against phase II.

SM The defeats have been limited - they are not decisive. Given this and given the pressure of the freeze a new upsurge of the class is being prepared. S.S. of W. - we should not use this slogan. The content of a slogan can be inverted by the situation. When S.S. of W. was first proposed it had transitional content; this is not so now. On the IRA, effectively the Tories have dropped it but they might well use it in the future. But the content of the GS slogan has become muted and we will have to alter the emphasis - i.e. it not now an effective call to action. Rather we should emphasise as our main political orientation general struggle against Tory government - i.e. we need a governmental slogan. Councils of Action - here we have been guilty of some leftism - we need to turn more towards the traditional Labour movement.

PS Defeats were of the weakest sections of workers. Disagreed with MT - didn't think miners voted against strike because of 'fair days wage for fair days work' ideology. Rather there was a 'wait and see' feeling. The miners realised that the Tory government would put up a tough fight and decided not to take them on now. At the same time there was a tendency to generalise about the class struggle which has not been seen for a long time. On the GS slogan we shouldn't delude ourselves that the slogan was principally agitational for us anyway. Doesn't like 'Kick the Tories Out' as a governmental slogan - it has no concrete meaning as far as action is concerned, it only expresses a mood. As regards C. of A. Teeside Trades Council had formed a committee. Obviously WF didn't counterpose to this a C. of A. Couldn't see that C. of A. were incompatible with turn towards traditional organisations of the class - it depended on the situation.

JW The significant victories of class - miners and dockers - had been won by the audacity of advanced sections bringing in tow the rest. Defeats over freeze were accidental in as much as it was weaker sections who came first. Those who most need solidarity most don't necessarily get it. Gas workers and Hospital workers didn't and were defeated. More advanced workers saw this and hung back from immediate struggle. This is at least in part due to a heightening of consciousness - i.e. generalisation of the struggle. E.g. In Scotland pit that voted for strike didn't come out on May Day, while those which voted against were out. On S.S. of W. - only made sense if real living standards were being cut which they are probably not for the class as a whole. Situation where wages and prices are static relative to each other would suit capitalist class fine - productivity goes up then so do profits.

DS Was it true that it was accidental that weakest sections came up against freeze first. Freeze hits worse paid sections hardest. MF said union leaders sabotaged May Day but this was not so obvious to those who came out. How will the freeze affect workers action?

AH Didn't agree with statements about IRA being 'on ice'. You don't measure the success of a law against stealing by the number of people who steal, but rather by the extent to which the law becomes the norm. The Act is functioning in as much as it has become the norm of 'industrial relations' and provides an alibi for union leaders. It was never intended that blood should flow in the streets rather than the structure should be altered. Thus we should retain the GS perspective.

Disagreed agree with S.S. of W. for reasons given. Agreed with those who said miners vote against strike was not due to 'special case' ideology but rather to wait and see attitude. Some union leaders are now taking advantage of this and posturing by calling for struggle when they know full well it will not happen - e.g. Moss Evans in the car industry. Also it should be remembered that for many high paid workers £1 + 4% isn't peanuts - if the steel workers get it then it will be more than they've ever had before. On C. of A. we need to emphasise again the lessons of the Minority Movement. In the situation today this would take the form of a joint committee of genuine rank and file bodies - i.e. National Post Shop Stewards Committee, Building Workers Charter and Steel Action Committee.

RL Agrees with AH about IRA. The fact that AUEW lawyers appeared in court (re. 20 engineers who wanted May Day strike made illegal) was a victory for the Act - i.e. it functioned normally. The idea of a GS is widespread amongst the class. 'Kick the Tories Out' slogan (KITO) suffers from the same disability as 'No to the Common Market' - what isn't there is assumed - i.e. elect Labour to power. 'Smash the Tories' is better - doesn't imply electoralism.

SM The threat of sanctions by the state was essential to the IRA. The Tories tried this and got their noses bloodied. It's significant that the North Wales 24 weren't charged under the IRA. (Information from RL - since IRA replaces old Trades Disputes Act, there is nothing left to charge miscreants with apart from archaic laws) The feeling for a general strike is wide spread but the urgency is not there. There is danger of the GS slogan becoming a WF panacea - a cure for all ills. GS slogan is an alternative to a governmental slogan. If a GS is not an immediate possibility then it follows that we must have a governmental slogan. WF has shown sectarianism. We need to relate to society wide issues which affect the class - not just the TV struggle. This can only be done by a governmental slogan. Should raise 'Smash the Tory Government' (STIG) - relates to the feeling of the class. S.S. of W. - in a period of the class being pushed back then a par is an aim for workers. In a period of class pushing up then a par is an aim for bosses.

PS We need to relate to the working class cost of living rather than government statistical norms. We can do this by printing articles about family spending, interviews etc.

JW On the IRA - Taking AH's analogy then situation is that EUists who have been

	For	Against	Abstentions
6) Re-emphasise the lessons of the Minority Movement - specifically attempt to unite R+F committees.	8	0	
7) A general re-orientation away from the exclusive emphasis on trade union struggle of the class - i.e. much wider political approach covering all aspects of the class struggle - in particular the question of the government.	8	0	

4. Parts 1 & 2 of main perspectives document

PS Summarised part 2 (written by PS). Main conclusion was that internationally capitalism was heading for recession within '2 or 3 years'. Has disagreements with part 1 (written by RR). RR says that overproduction risen sharply in recent years but in fact there has been overproduction of capital since the war. RR somewhat one-sided on rate of profit falling as well - this has not only been a tendency since the sixties. On industrial cycle doesn't take into account modern developments. Therefore doesn't think RR had proved his case that capitalism is heading for massive recession.

SM Thought PS & RR were both too cataclysmic. Read out article from Workers' Press about Watergate scandal causing dollar devaluation causing international capitalist strife causing end of world etc. This should act as a dire warning to us. Specifically asked PS about effects of increased trade with China and the American withdrawal from Vietnam.

PS Didn't think that these would be major factors. Trade with China would be limited to certain capital goods - major problem was one of consumer markets.

SC On trade with Russia noted how grain exports from America had lessened competition in container business and stimulated railway production. Example of what increased trade with 'Communist' bloc could do.

Agreed That PS should arrange to meet RR and (if possible) sort out disagreements. Should also jointly prepare a set of theses setting out clearly and in brief their main conclusions.

5. NC Report back.

MT Introduced document. Main conclusions were for a focus on developing a leading core of cadres and drive to root every member in a field of political work.

SM Had written but not circulated points which he wanted included in the report back. These included 1) Orientation towards the LPYS.
2) Restructuring of the NC
3) Proposals concerning the roles of magazine and paper.

Agreed That NC should now discuss differences resulting from the document already circulated and should integrate SM proposals into report back and present for discussion at next NC.

DS Proposed amendments:

- "1. Taking SM's main point at the last NC, from the aggregate on the FI - i.e. need to develop out educational, theoretical and polemical work; this must be a main priority in the next period.
 - a) Monthly theoretical magazine to be first printing priority. This to include economic, political, international reviews and start discussions on issues - not to give definitive solutions.
 - b) Education programmes to be developed nationally;
 - I) for each branch to go through - involving contacts where appropriate;
 - II) to be used as a basis for one to one education;
 - III) to lead up to a) weekend schools; b) cadre schools; or c) aggregate i.e. preparation and purpose are vital.
 - c) Aggregates, cadre schools and education generally to take cognisance of

new methods evolved in education, e.g. 9am to 9pm too long, lecture-audience-discussion method inappropriate.

2. Pamphlets are essential for the making of contacts and 'processing them' through the education programme and/or group activity.

3. Rank and file papers must be produced regularly and of good quality. The leaflets we are producing on occasions should be shorter and used for the backs of industrial bulletins.

All branches should be involved on a routine, nationally organised basis in (a) selling our own rank and file papers; (b) IS/CP R&F organisations; production of (at least monthly) factory bulletins.

WF paper will in my view have to change its function, if, on past record, what I have suggested so far is to be done efficiently. I suggest it be used for agitational specials, e.g. mobilising for and sale on a national demonstraion (AIL, Clay Cross, May Day) or on a major topical issue. This would mean probably once a month issue, but far more attention to (a) planning ahead as far as the group is concerned; (b) readability; (c) lay-out.

To those who say this last point is heresy and retreat, I would argue: (a) the Group would be far more efficiently run, therefore we would gain more members and money and be in a better position to run a paper; (b) it would be temporary measure, until such time as all the previous points were done properly and a regular paper was on the cards."

DS We need national education programmes to create the initiative for education in the branches. This should have been the case with the discussion on the FI. Paper will conflict with the plans for the magazine as far as resources are concerned.

MF Opposed part of the resolution concerning the paper. The paper is an essential weapon. The 'specials' idea means that we would be unable to give a rounded political face to the issues of the day.

SM It will be possible to produce both paper and magazine, by simplifying the paper and farming out the typing work on the magazine. The paper represents the link between the group and the class - it is fundamental to the centralisation of our work.

RM The paper also reflects our activity - it highlights what we are doing.

AH Re education programmes - education doesn't need to stop because they haven't appeared. We still have the paper, one issue of magazine and standard works etc. Proposed the deletion of "to be first printing priority. This" and from "WF paper will" to the end.

Vote AH's ammendment was carried (DS opposing) and the rest of the resolution to be integrated into NC report back.

6. Machine Tool perspectives.

DS There is a sharp decline in the Machine Tool Industry - Germany and Japan are increasingly providing machine tools for British industry. The signs are that the major firms are either going to merge with foreign firms or get out altogether. Perhaps some specialist firms will expand, otherwise the major firms will go to the wall. The consciousness of workers in the industry is very parochial - i.e. no industry-wide identity. Proposes that WF produce MEW at three monthly intervals interspersed with regular factory bulletins at most important factories.

SC Suggests alternatively a pamphlet and factory bulletins.

AH Doubted whether MTW had gained a sufficient base.

RL Taking into account DS's description of the industry was it worth making it a major area of work?

DS Thought that there would be very important struggles coming up soon because of the pressures being built up, therefore work should continue. In answer to a question about the numbers of MEW sold, reported that in Coventry they went into 9 factories and at least 200 were sold.

SM Thought that MTW had been set up arbitrarily and not considered sufficiently by the NC when first started. 'IO type' bulletins were the best means of gaining an

initial base:

- PS Thought that there was a good political case for continuing with MTW. RSN in effect hadn't built up a base through bulletins before aiming at a national paper.
- JW Why were old type IS factory bulletins being described as new type IO bulletins? Thought that in this particular situation there was a case for going straight to a paper. Some issues of MTW which were bad in political content shouldn't invalidate having a paper as such.
- MT Problem is that of a small group trying to gain the ear of a mass of workers. IS had been able to start out with a GEC paper because of the number of members they have in GEC. We are not in the same position - we need to build up a cadre within the industry first, otherwise the pressures will lead to opportunism.
- SC In the docks the possibility of a national paper rests on a national awareness amongst dockers. This isn't so with Machine Tools, therefore MTW will have to rely on local reports for selling and bulletins are a much better medium for local reports.
- DS Re. criticisms that MTW had been set up arbitrarily, reminded cdes. that it was passed by the NC on the initiative of the Coventry cdes. Accepted criticisms of the second issue, these had resulted from a lack of knowledge of the industry and general inexperience. Re. bulletins to replace the paper altogether - it just was not possible to produce bulletins for 9 factories.
- Agreed - to accept DS's proposal of three monthly paper together with bulletins and review after six months.

MILITANTS & THE COMMUNIST PARTY -- SOME PROBLEMS

(This article is intended as a guide for other comrades but primarily it is a look at the problems involved in recruitment and integration of workers who are in almost continual contact with the CP. The problems we encountered in Bolton with one particular comrade (referred to as 'D') a building worker - secretary of the local Charter and member of the editorial board of charter - we hope will give some pointers to further work in the building industry, where the Stalinists are very strong, and also perhaps to other related problems.)

* * * * *

D was first contacted at a Forum (most Charter groups meet monthly; their meetings are called Forums) just before the building workers' strike last year. As an indication of his political position at the time, he urged all those present at the meeting to buy the Morning Star as the best paper there was around for building workers. In conversation with D during the strike he said he was thinking about joining the CP but wasn't sure yet.

During the course of the dispute he was seen regularly by Bolton comrades who went out on the picket lines, attended meetings, sold papers etc. WF at this time knew only two building workers, D and the secretary of the action committee who was later found to be somewhat unreliable. Our work was necessarily of a low key - our only contact being very close to the CP and other channels, such as printing leaflets being cornered by the IMG (who had known the Charter longer than we had). The IMG did their usual Social Security work.

Gradually however the ^{influence} of the CP on D seemed to slip and of course we tactfully helped this along. The Charter was criticised (in private conversation) for not getting a paper out and local CP'ers were criticised, though this was often on a personal basis, nevertheless it was a break.

After the strike was over the Bolton Charter held a forum which 2 comrades attended. D was by now very friendly, taking the paper regularly and giving information whenever he had any. At the Forum meeting the Charter was criticised for not coming out by a number of the workers present. D, despite his privately voiced criticisms defended the Charter's record and sided with the Chairman, a relatively hard line Stalinist. This problem was to crop up again. It certainly appeared to us at the time that though he had made quite a major break with the CP he would still defend them or identify with them when they were attacked. This we believed was almost certainly due to personal friendships (he works with the chairman on the same site) and feelings of (misplaced) loyalty.

Around this time Bolton Workers' Fight started a series of fortnightly educationals (see ID number 8). D was invited and on two occasions brought along the chairman of Charter mentioned previously. Another workmate attended a number of meetings, he was an ex-CPer, politically one of the best building workers in the Bolton area. Here we attempted to use the CPer to turn D even further from the CP. At later meetings D and his friend told us they were "working on him" (the CPer). We saw this as a great advance and it was around this time that we considered asking him to join as a probationary member. We saw this as a great advance because it was the first time he openly advocated WF policies and argued for them.

Early in the new year D was invited to the branch to discuss probationary membership. The discussion preceding this invitation was on reflection not adequate, etc. RR visited him once at home and had a three hour discussion with him and the other contacting was mainly done by CC and JC who saw him in the local and at Charter meetings. In retrospect we were at fault on two main points, one which is relevant particularly to building workers and the other which could apply to many married workers (male & female). On the first point. We knew D was on the editorial board of Charter but we at no time attempted to find out the balance of forces on the board. We imagined it would be Stalinist dominated (and it is) but there was little work done to arm B for what we ought to have known would happen and that is that the CP finding that D had joined the 'Trots' would

isolate him, try to kick him off the board and off the sites. Also at work he was in more or less the same position; again nothing really was done to help him to fight in ^{his} place of work (here there is a problem in that he worked in Manchester so we were unable to contact him or see him during the day).

On the second point there was a general assumption that everything was OK with his personal relationship and this was not the case. As soon as he had joined and we asked him to attend meetings it became obvious that in fact things were very bad. Again and again he had to back down from even going to branch meetings due to pressure from his wife. The point is, I think, that we should have tried to bring his wife into discussions on some level. As it turned out this probably wouldn't have done much good anyway (typical comments of his wife are "Ireland? - send in the tanks?" She is also a rabid racist, so perhaps there wasn't much we could have done to try to get her to understand what D was doing by joining us. Nevertheless we should have tried.) This is such a basic point but so vital that I think no harm can be done by repeating it.

The sad sequel to this is that a few weeks ago D tendered his resignation after a period of leave of absence. We were in no other position but to accept it. The strength of the Stalinists in the building industry can be gauged by the fact that he was effectively starved of any information at all; increasing pressure was put on him, not just by CP members in the Bolton and Manchester area but also by such important people as Bill Jones in Liverpool. As an example of the tactics the CP get up to, in the space of three days D had no less than three phone calls from Bert Smith, Dennis Dugen and Bill Jones - all three at the very top of the CP/Charter ladder. D became utterly demoralised and also frightened that he would be thrown off the sites in Manchester. There is a rumour that this had happened before to IS members who opposed the CP. With 4 kids to support (and Manchester the only place where there is good money to be made) this was obviously very worrying.

So there are a number of lessons we can all learn from our mistakes in Bolton:

- 1) With regard to the building industry pay special attention to the Stalinists. Remember the Charter is almost totally CP dominated and before doing any work in that field try to assess the strength of their influence and particularly their influence on any individual with whom you may be working with. Try to arm contacts with a knowledge of Stalinism, even many very good contacts admire the work done by the Stalinists in the Charter (and they've done a lot), so tread carefully at first.
- 2) When considering recruiting take into account the family commitments and try to bring the wife or husband in on discussions at some level or other. If this isn't done it can cause resentment for the other partner and hardship for the possible recruit. Again this seems so obvious that we shouldn't need to repeat it - but we failed to do it in this particular case and our failure should serve as a reminder to other comrades.

There are a number of other minor considerations, like the fact that in Bolton we are the only group on the left, so we have a virtual monopoly, but nationally we are very small indeed. This raises the question of should we recruit on the basis of our viability in Bolton when nationally we are so puny? Obviously we should attempt to recruit on as a political basis as possible but such considerations as local viability do enter in.

We made a number of very bad errors with regard to D and because of this we have lost a potentially good revolutionary who could have widened our scope of work immensely, let us now learn the lessons and make sure that they are not repeated. Comrades are invited to make any comments or recount any experience which may be relevant to the issues discussed.

JC

PS. It would probably be best if this matter was not raised outside the membership of the group, particularly with building contacts, unless of course you are quite sure where they stand - it may then be useful as an illustration of CP tactics.

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Workers Fight have over the last several months, been the group which has consistently argued the case 'For a General Strike to Smash the Act'. In this we have been, and still are, correct. However, unless comrades appreciate the theory behind this, there is danger of 'General Strike' becoming our semi-syndicalist shibboleth.

A number of points underlie the slogan:

(i) At no time have we thought that we, WF, or even WF and the other left groups, could call a general strike. The slogan is used to arm the militants in their work in the trade union and labour movement - to prepare the ground, by the popularisation of what could and still can become a reality in the conditions of the class-wide Tory-employer offensive of which the Act is the central focus.

(ii) That we were correct is borne out by the class response to the jailing of the Pentonville 5. A mass strike wave erupted spontaneously, and undoubtedly would have escalated to a partial or total general strike in the event of the Tories pressing on with the charges. The TUC called a one-day general strike, having first consulted with the Tories, as a concession to this movement and to head it off. Significantly, the Tories backed down a few hours after the TUC announcement.

In the circumstances, the General Strike propaganda, and our use of it directly as an agitational slogan during the Pentonville 5 period, has been our 'Governmental Slogan'. It has been the way to focus on the societal question of who has political power.

Put, in a sense, this has been extraordinary. In governmental terms, the concrete alternative to the Tories is Labour: and, in 'normal' election, we would vote Labour.

To the mass of workers who feel that Labour can do something, is a better alternative to the Tories, we would openly explain, insofar as the loudness of our voice permits, the objective role of Labour - explain that we vote Labour not because it is somehow 'better' than the Tories, but because we want to show in practice, by returning a Labour Government, that we are right. In that sense, we go through the experience with the class, without any mechanical, pseudo-Trotskyist notions that the class, in its disappointments, will automatically place WF at the top of the heap.

Also, to relate to the mass anti-Tory gut reactions, we would openly say that Labour can only begin to solve the problems of workers by adopting certain measures (repeal Industrial Relations Act, etc etc)

The reasons for not adopting 'General Strike to kick the Tories out and elect a Labour Government on Socialist Policies', or 'Kick out the Tories', or 'General Strike to bring down the Tories' are the following:

The first, the SLL catchphrase, is inherently reformist in every way. Apart from the fact that very few workers expect socialist policies from the LP, if the SLL, assuming their wildest fantasies were borne out, were to conquer the masses with this slogan, they would be calling into being a movement which, by its inherent logic, threatens to go beyond 'normal' capitalist boundaries, to pose the questions of who controls at industrial and societal level; they would be channelling the movement back into bourgeois constitutional channels. The Tories would be only too glad to get the workers back to everyday working conditions, to call an election. The post-May 1968 experience in France certainly shows that there is no guarantee whatever that Labour would, anyway, be returned in such an event.

'Kick out the Tories', interspersed with faint murmurings for a General Strike during Pentonville 5 days, has been the main credo of IS. Apart from the fact that it sows illusions in Labour, it is the slogan least calculated to give direction in the fight against the Industrial Relations Act and other Tory measures now. How can one 'kick out the Tories'? By workers setting up ballot stations around the country to call elections ??

Political Letter/2.

By general strike? - but that comes to the SLL slogan. Or what? Perhaps by making abstract propaganda for the election of a Labour Government - and that is precisely the tack adopted by the CP, the TUC leadership, and the LP leaders to avoid fighting here and now. Wait for elections, elect Labour, and everything will be OK

The last slogan is the latest IMG new-think. They say they avoid the pitfalls of the SLL slogan by speculating that the alternative to the Tories may be Labour (elected) but it may be workers' power !!!

Unfortunately, workers, not having these brilliant talents for speculative logic, read the IMG slogan to mean 'vote Labour'.

Now clearly we have related to the anti-Tory feeling of the mass of workers, on general issues (Housing Finance Act, etc), while doing this on the central issue which, potentially, united workers in a class-wide counter-offensive. If general strike resulted in the Tories being brought down and Labour being elected, we would of course support this. But we don't pre-empt the movement by limiting, in advance, its aims to parliamentary objectives.

After May Day. As will be clear by now, a number of minor defeats have been suffered by the class over Phase 2. But let us be clear on the significance of this. The major battalions of the class are undefeated. They are biding their time to renew their attack on the continuing galloping inflation. The fact that probably something like 1½ million came out on May Day, (including those coalfields who voted to accept the Phase 2 offer) in spite of the TUC, and general TU leadership's, half-heartedness, attests to this fact. Many sectors did not come out, not because they weren't against the Freeze, but because they couldn't see the point of what they knew would be a token stoppage.

However, the minor victories for the Tories in using the Act as a framework during Phase 2 do raise the question as to whether the general strike slogan should be dropped. If the Act were thoroughly institutionalised, accepted day-to-day practice, then the slogan would be a mere shibboleth. Thus the question was raised again at the last National Committee.

One possible alternative was to raise the slogan of 'A Sliding Scale of Wages'. This was defeated because it was felt that that slogan is appropriate only when the class has suffered major defeats, in which living standards have been generally cut back. It was felt that the Tories and employers would welcome such a slogan to hold down wages to a nil norm, which they haven't been able to do even during Phase 2.

However, whereas the Tories continue to use the Industrial Relations Act, whereas the Act has not become institutionalised, whereas the real possibility of a general strike movement developing in response to the Act being used is there, nevertheless, it was felt that the 'General Strike to smash the Act' call should be featured in a much more propaganda way; i.e. the possibilities to use it as a direct agitational call are much diminished.

But this posed the question of whether or not one should orient directly to Labour as the electoral possibility. The slogan 'Smash the Tory Government' was debated, yet was narrowly defeated for similar reasons as above. In the event of mass industrial defeat for the class, and a turn to the LP through the wards and in general consciousness, we would clearly have to orient our forces and propaganda to the LP as the electoral alternative.

So, it was felt that work for councils of action, relating the building of these to a general rank and file movement of a Minority Movement type, should be a group priority. At the same time, this must be coupled with a deeper implantation in the trades councils, trades unions, and the official workers' movement generally. The May Day turnout should have demonstrated to anyone who may have felt differently that the official leadership machine has tremendous power over the class. We must be in it, not of it, in order best to fight it. Hence, councils of Action could, conceivably, be set up by Trades Councils. There is no a-priori form for these. We have to be sensitive to the possible variations.

Political Letter 3

Finally, given the need for revolutionaries to fight capitalist ideology on all fronts, it was agreed that we should counter the bourgeois con of some abstract 'cost of living' index with concrete analysis of what is entailed in the rise in the workers' cost of living. Comrades are urged to submit articles, however short, on this question. Interviews with working class women on how their family budget has been altered in the past months would be a very useful contribution.

PS.

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Comments on JC's article.

1) JC takes the blame for himself and the Bolton branch. I think some blame must lie at the feet of the Steering Committee and particularly myself as National Secretary. As soon as we heard that the Bolton branch was near recruiting an influential building worker, we should have made precise enquiries about D's precise position; collaborated closely with the Bolton branch; possibly even (given the importance of Charter) sent an SC member to Bolton to discuss with D and the branch; maintained close contact with the preparations for the Charter conference.

2) It is important to realise that for a militant worker to agree with our political positions is one thing; to agree to fight for them is quite another. The idea of ideological struggle is not one that is spontaneous in the working class. Comrades will often have heard it: 'You're quite right, but there's no use telling that to these lads..!'

To win comrades as political cadres - and to win anyone in an influential position in the labour movement (like D) on any other basis is to prepare disaster - we must actually be able to 'distance' them in a sense from the class; to prepare them so that they are willing to (if necessary) stand alone. To be prepared to stand alone, against, probably, tremendous pressure, in an important workers' meeting, is quite different from passing an opinion in a pub conversation. I was at one miners' meeting where the Wilberforce settlement was to be voted on. The branch secretary had been closeted in discussion with some IS members, who argued for a vote against the settlement. Finally he agreed. He is a honest militant and a determined class fighter, who has often risked the loss of his job for the sake of his principles. Yet on opening the meeting he stated that, though the settlement might not be all it was made out to be in the press, he would make no recommendation for the vote... which was, naturally, overwhelmingly for the settlement.

Thus, when recruiting militants, it is not just a matter of convincing them of our politics, but of convincing them of the necessity and possibility of fighting for our politics.

MT.

What's wrong with 'After May Day'

I believe that the latter section of MT's 'After May Day' falls into the type of trap he so eloquently outlines previously. From section 8 he raises the slogan of a sliding scale of wages. In his general case for the slogan he cites that it provides a way of overcoming 'the sectional drive for self-improvement' (sub-section a). His reason for seeking such a slogan is quite correctly given as our duty to provide a means other than will power to achieve the required solidarity. But does such a slogan really do this? I believe that it is an attempt to provide a panacea for the complicated situation that we are in when there is no such simple answer.

The 'sectional drive for self-improvement' has been the main driving force in the working class since the 2nd World War. It is this drive which has led to the broadening of the rank and file base and the main reason for the attacks upon the trade union movement at the present time. The establishment of 175,000 shop stewards in factories and industries is the power which the Tories must attack (before?) they can get along with the Trade Union Tops. We must not raise a slogan which cuts across the power of the rank and file. 'A sliding scale of wages' is :

- a) Too close to 'Threshold agreements' to be instantly recognisable as something different in Nature rather than just in name.
- b) It is just what the Tories want (in the form of thresholds) or rather are prepared to grant for a period while the TU leaders regain the initiative.
- c) It cannot be negotiated at local level.
- d) It pulls the TU leaders into the 'Arena' and pins hopes on them.
- e) It takes the focus off the Defence of Picketing which is the real issue at the moment.

Are we really to say to the thousands of shop stewards who have seen the corruptness of their leaders and their lack of fight, that they should put effort into raising a call for threshold agreements which will place the initiative with those they already distrust?

Phase 1 was economically no good to the capitalist class as a whole due to the influence of factors of an external nature.

Phase 2 is being accompanied by a mini-boom which will suck in imports and worsen the balance of trade and will ultimately have to be stopped. During the boom the scramble for production from some employers will ensure that earnings will go up even if the direct form of wage levels is prevented by the Phase 2 restrictions. The other forms will probably be overtime working (already some employers are complaining of Labour shortage), job regrading, settling on groups of not more than 100 (the rise can be paid and then the Pay Board notified), increases in sick pay, pensions, shift allowance, and the general bending of rules, as Gas men. In this way, Phase 2 is likely to be rendered useless to the capitalist class. It can only be claimed as a psychological victory for the Tories even though they will claim it as a 'real' victory. But is the mood of the class one of being defeated even psychologically? One must really doubt this. The mood of the class is undoubtedly one of frustration at not being allowed to do battle with the Tories mixed with an uncertain feeling that there is some truth in that some of them are relatively better off than others, and perhaps they should ease off in favour of others. That was not transmitted into fighting for others precisely because of the past history of only fighting for themselves. The mass solidarity achieved over the 'Five' was defensive struggle not offensive struggle. Before workers begin to struggle for wage rises together there will have to be no other way, and it will be in defence of standards of living, initially not in offensives to raise it.

The problem for the Tories in relation to the working class is that the past period has led to the strengthening of rank and file power which they cannot control. Threshold agreements tie in with the Tories requirements of attacking the base of the workers movement (picketing) whilst negotiating with the TU tops. Militant workers will be thus caught in a neat trap, on the one side the repression of the state which will frighten the timid, and the seeming success of the 'negotiations' of the TU leaders. In this way all initiative will be manouvred away from the rank and file and the TU leaders will regain a measure of control.

If the past period saw the growth and consolidation of shop floor power the present crisis period has seen a see-sawing of initiative between rank and file and bureaucracy. The high point of the rank and file initiative was the freeing of the 'Five' and the low point was the engineers and May Day. The high point for the leaders was the talks with the Tories which broke down, and they have not regained the initiative since. The low point for TU leaders was their defeat at the opening of the special TUC conference. New Govt talks with a threshold sop thrown in will give the 'tops' the initiative. It is our duty to therefore point out the Dangers of Threshold Agreements not point to something which looks the same. We must see to it that any slogan or campaign lies firmly with the rank and file for its execution

and at the same time demand that the Trade Union leaders fight for its implementation.

We must demand:

No secret talks.

No behind the scenes 'Deals'.

No agreements without rank and file approval
A national minimum wage for all regardless of sex or race (to be decided by a National TUC delegate Conference).

A regular yearly increase in REAL terms to be awarded automatically.

A 35 hour week.

Nationalisation of all those industries (without compensation) who claim they cannot grant above conditions.

In short the present period requires not a single slogan a 'panacea' but a programme for action by the Rank and File & shop stewards movement. The programme will of course naturally include the removal of the Industrial Relations Act and an end to the attacks on the right to picket. The Trade Union school should work out such a programme to be fought for nationally as part of our drive to the militants.

R.R.

DOCKS REPORT:

1. The 'shipping-port-road haulage' industry is now over half-way through its technological revolution. A sum of over £4,500,000,000 has been spent, in a period of 5-6 years, the world over in the container revolution. This sum has been invested in new ships, boxes, equipment, installations and land transport alterations to meet the new pace and needs of this revolution. The rise of consortiums (ie coming together of different interests) has been one of the most obvious changes in the traditional relations of shippers to lorry owners; another feature, but less advertised, is the failure of the system to be able to handle the new innovations. There has been a rate war on the N. Atlantic run from the first days the Americans were challenged by the European consortiums. World-wide there has not been sufficient return on capital to justify investment, but the rate of spending has hardly fallen.
2. The system of cargo handling has always been built on the use of large numbers of workers. But the impact of containerisation, allied to a general increase in productivity, has seen the number of dockers falling since 1945. (This is not a straight decline tho'.) The introduction of Devlin Phases I and II was in part meant to pave the way to higher productivity, but also increase the control of the employers over the docker so as to make the container box more easily acceptable. As a side effect it led to the concentration of the employers into a smaller, but more powerful, group of employers. These men were to also involve themselves in all aspects of the industry eg Lord Vestey controls cattle herds and the men who unload carcasses in London docks! Since Devlin over 30,000 dockers have been forced, or rather sweated out. The employers perspective is something like 5-10,000 dockers, to be highly paid and highly disciplined.
3. It is the existence of the NDLS which has given a national framework to all dockers struggles. The NDLS has always been a base from which a national fight could be fought. Without this, the localised and incestuous nature of the docker in the large ports like London, Hull, and Liverpool, would have seen local and fragmented struggles. The dockers local communities have always, uptill some years ago, been a source of communal strength; but even this fighting spirit would have got nowhere in the face of a Government united with employers ~~in a xxxxxxxx~~ through a national strategy.
4. Even though the dockers have had the framework of the NDLS around them since 1947 it was only under the spur of Devlin that a solid national link came into being with a chance of success. In 1967 in Salford, H. Youd founded the NPSSC. But it was only in 1971 that the NPSSC had a programme (thanks mainly to the determination of Liverpool stewards). The 9 points however have never been used as a guide to action. They have been a source of rhetorical words, and inter-port friction, but never a guide. Until 1972 when 4 demands were 'selected' for usage.
5. When the impact of Devlin II and containerisation, plus the impact of the consortiums' short term strategy, bit home in late 71, and early 72, the dockers response was magnificent but inadequate. In Hull, London, and Liverpool a strong campaign was led against the use of container depots doing 'dockers' work'. In Hull the issue was complicated by the fact that non-Scheme ports were also part of the depots doing dockers' work. The campaign could solve nothing by itself with the perspectives it then had, since the basic drive towards making dockers redundant would not be diverted or overcome by getting a few extra jobs in some container depots. The magnificence of the struggle led to the upsurge in mid 1972. Thus ironically a lack of a direction saw 5 dockers inside jail, with a mini-general strike outside. The national docks strike was carried through on the same lines, and 4 points were used from the 9 point charter. After 3 weeks the union and the employers together outflanked the militants by granting in effect the 4 points, but still keeping the reins of control. Jones-Aldington was 'the mixture as before' with a bit of money

with a bit of money/
thrown in to buy off the anger of the dockers. It solves nothing for the dockworkers." (WF No.13)
The promise of the NPC report was again a postponement of the important decisions mainly to cool down dockers, in particular to isolate those who saw a threat to the NDLS in any compromise.
Thus the employers won 2 victories: 1st the TUR was abolished at no cost to themselves and also a number of dockers were sweated out. 2nd the small ports problem was shelved when the employers increased their investment into the port of Hull, mainly to anticipate the EEC-UK trade increase. The Hull investment was part of a larger pattern of investment over the whole of the East coast from Teesside to Maplin. The victory of the national docks strike gave a lot of cards to the employers; the investment gave them a number of trump cards.

6. Thus began the war of attrition. First a number of small ports were asked to accept casuals all did so. The militant port of Preston was forced to do so due to over 50% of dockers taking severance money. In London an attack was begun over productivity, and came to a head in the 'meat trade dispute' where Lord Vestey forced concessions out of the dockers! The biggest employers' victory in this war came when Liverpool stewards accepted 500 casuals. Thus the war of attrition has the lines of attack well laid out; and the aim of the attack is the NDLS.
So where do dockers stand? First there is little authority left in the NPSSC. Secondly the union leaders of both the MASDU and the T&G have gained a lot of control over their members since last summer. Thirdly there is utter confusion amongst the CP, IS and the SLL on what is happening and how to meet it. We are in a certain position to take some action, to mount a counter-offensive. We are not in the position to control or guide what happens. Our political record is adequate (See WF 12,13,16,17,24,25,26,27), and it is only in the last 6 months we have improved organisation ally.

7. OUR REPLY

The question of casuals cannot be solved by throwing them out of the dock gate. To open the register for permanent recruitment would be a way of fusing the ports who have accepted casuals and those who have not.

That is we argue that dockers must reject any idea that it is the employers who determine the number of men recruited. To do so is to accept the basis for having no-one. But to short cut this the struggle for the 30 hour week is integral. By this we mean that the blow to the employers of an offensive on a question which cannot be undercut by inflation etc also keeps the decision making power in the hands of the dockers re: the question of how many? Of course the 30 hour struggle if it achieved momentum would echo through other industries, mainly steel at the present time, if we co-ordinate with steelworkers. The question of the non-NDLS ports will be solved not by calling them scabs but by organising to give them the perspective of a 30 hour week.

We have to take the question of nationalisation under workers' control as the next step. It may be necessary to have some preliminary steps, but only if they will not divert the dockers fight.

Certainly the call for nationalisation will fall on willing ears. But we must combine such a call with a detailed explanation of the nature of such nationalisation showing from the BTDB, BSC, NCB, CEEB etc what is the effect on workers.

That is why for us the question of workers' control cannot be a phrase, nor can we put it forward without some breakdown of what it means.

(On a personal note I think the NC, or the Conference, should give some guidelines on this question. Maybe MT's study will be the starting place?)

STEPHEN CORBISHLEY 25/5/73.