Seamen fight on for rank and file control

In June, 1961, British seamen began to “enjoy the benefits” of what was widely regarded as one of the biggest steps forward in the industry, with regard to hours and wages. (National Union of Seamen officials were noticeably more effusive than the seamen themselves about the agreements reached). The NUoS certainly claimed it as much and regarded it as proof of the worth of the then General Secretary, the late James Scott.

Certainly a big advance was made with regard to hours. The basic working week was reduced to 44 hours from 56. (Incredible as it may seem, there were men in a British industry working a 56 hour week up to a year ago). Union officials ignored, or were unaware of how severe an indenture of the Union was the fact that its members were previously working such a week.

When the agreements were published, union men came round to those ships in port to explain the new hours and wages to crews, all of whom, full of what a fellow called “Brix, Scott and that now we had a really militant union. Unfortunately for these union men, seafarers could remember when, during the seamen’s unofficial strike in the summer of 1960, these same officials were fulfilling their role as strike-breakers and vets-men to Sir Tom Yates, told seamen that they already had a 44 hour week.

It is quite nauseating to see these union officials who, when Tom Yates was Gen. Sec., leapt to his defence at the drop of a hat and then, as soon as he retired, referred to the Yates regime as “the years of miracle.”

The advances in wages were meagre, as usual, and scarcely worth calling a cost-of-living rise, for a top-rate able seaman (an AB who has had his ticket of efficiency for four years), the wage rocketed from 590.10s. to £4.23 per month—an increase of 4s. 8d. a day—while the overtime rate (and overtime must be worked where and when the Master really wants it) was fixed at 4s. 6d. an hour, which I believe is the average basic hourly rate for an unskilled labourer aboard ship, and this is not a plea for differential pay rates. The fact that seamen lost the “Saturday afternoon at sea” (an agreement that had been in existence only 12 months) whereby a seaman got half a day’s leave and pay if he was at sea for more than four hours on a Saturday afternoon) was glossed over by the catechism.

So British seamen came out of the 61 agreement with a 44-hour week and a wage, with four years’ “Seniority” pay, of 28s. 8d. per day.

But as hours and pay are in industry always, there are a long way ahead of those at sea. There conditions remained virtually the same. There are ships being built today, and have been for several years, with reasonable accommodation for seamen—one-birth cabins on the bridge, and even air-conditioned recreation spaces (of course the owners make sure that whatever the sailors have the officers have better). However, there is a colossal amount of tonnage, a lot of it post-war construction, where the conditions are appalling. Ships with dirty, cramped accommodation, inadequate toilet and heating facilities, on some lack of fresh air— in fact, floating slums.

Again, the food on ships varies from good to incredble, depending on the tightness of the owner, the ability of the cook and the extent to which the Chief Steward is fiddling. Seamen are still rationed and in any case the working theory is that owners’ bellies are different from sailor’s bellies. That they need more and better nourishment. It means that the seaman is subject to a number of indignities, many of which would scarcely occur ashore. Not least is the fact that, whereas there can be and often is instant dismissal of the seaman, he must give notice which varies anywhere between 48 hours and seven days. Ships’ officers are often abusive in their mode of address to seamen and, should the seaman reply in kind, he would find himself fired, at least. The general run of deck and engineering officers are not a very engaging bunch and the further up the ladder towards Masters and Chief Engineers they get the less engaging they become. The Senior Engineer of a ship, as direct representative of the owner, the law and God aboard, understandably often has a tendency towards megalomania, which is hardly conducive to a pleasant working or living atmosphere.

Why should conditions for British seamen be so bad and industrial progress so slow? The cause aren’t difficult to find. First and obviously, the shippers, who are a mean and grasping tribe, even the good ones (to whom I refer to the British capitalist boss class. I am sure it is no coincidence that the first man in the UK (£180-million) is Sir John Ellerman, shipowner.

These shipowners have always been able to rely on their good friend the State for the necessary repressive legislation to ensure that the seamen are satisfied with elementary rights, which have been long since been taken for granted by shore workers. The two main instruments provided by the State for the owners are the Merchant Shipping Acts of 1894 (and subsequent amendments) and the articles that a seaman is forced to sign on joining a ship.

The statutes and the articles make sure that any industrial action is virtually impossible without a seaman risking imprisonment and/or loss of livelihood. Strike action can be classed as desertion, disobeys the lawful command of the Master, or implying the lawful command of the master of a vessel, all of which carry a three-month jail sentence. If a seaman is unwise enough to strike at sea, then that is mutiny and God help him. Minor actions, such as complaints about food or conditions can, if the Master is bloody-minded enough, easily be made to appear a mutiny.

It is ridiculesly easy to victimise a militant seaman during the course of a voyage by means of fines for all manner of minor misdeeds.

How to celebrate May Day

JAPAN—Mass May Day demonstrations are to mark the climax of a campaign whose opening shots were fired on March 28. Some 34 million workers in coal, metal, shipbuilding, electrical and machinery, chemical, paper and pulp, printing, the docks and transport industries (as well as the Tokyo Stock Exchange) have taken part in token strikes of up to 24 hours in support of a demand for an all-round increase of 5,000 yen (about £4 18s.) a month and the introduction of standard minimum wages.

The “spring offensive” of the left-wing trade union federations, Soyo (General Council of Independent Trade Unions) and Chuun (the smaller Federation of Independent Trade Unions), representing between them 99 unions, has been an annual event for the past seven years, but the right-wing federation, Zenro (All-Japan Trade Unions Council), with a membership of 1,230,000, is against it, and the iron and steel workers’ union, which is affiliated to Soyo, contracted out this year.

Peruvian peasants seize land

LIMA, Peru, March 5—Indian peasants fought armed troops with slingshots and knives yesterday as they clung to four big privately owned cattle ranches high in the Andes, they claim belong to them by ancient right.

The clash over fighting near Cerro de Pasco over the week-end left 7 men dead and 18 wounded, police said, describing the situation there still as “very bad.”

Government troops tried to evict the Indian squatters after attempts to persuade them to leave peacefully had failed.

The farm workers seized the ranches several weeks ago, claiming ownership of the land was taken from their ancestors three centuries ago by Spanish conquistadors.

Cerro de Pasco, 110 miles northwest of Lima, is the capital of Pasco State and one of the world’s highest cities with an altitude of 13,390 feet, all of which carry a three-month jail sentence.

The government in the past has blamed the People’s Front for rousing the illiterate peasants to take over estates and ranches largely held by absentee landlords—some of them North Americans. Critics of the government complain that it is moving too slow on programmes to better the lot of the peasants—particularly the 6 million Indians, about half of Peru’s population.
trivial offences and, at the end of a trip, by giving him a bad discharge in his Seaman’s Book.

The Seaman’s Discharge Book, with its reports on conduct and ability, and the Shipping Federation (a sort of seamen’s labour exchange run by the shipowners) are both parts of the official blacklist system. There was also a secret blacklist circulated among shipping companies after the 1960 strike that even extended to those employed in the shore gangs.

Who can the seaman go for assistance? Certainly not the State, for the laws of the State that keep him in his unfortunate place. Not content with the considerable legislation at its disposal, the Government will resort to even further strike-breaking activities (e.g., the use of the National Service call-up for seamen under 26, as in the 1955 unofficial strike).

Surely a seaman should be able to look to his Union to further his interests? Well, he definitely cannot. He might just as well go cap-in-hand to the boss as go to the NUS. It would be difficult to find a union in British industry quite as reactionary as the NUS.

The conditions at sea and on shore have been described in detail in the NUS Review, and nothing has been omitted. Indeed, the last four strikes (1947, 1955 and two in 1960), all unofficial, have been directed against the union, as well as the owners.

Between the two strikes in 1960, dissatisfied seamen organised themselves into the National Seamen’s Reform Movement. In fact, the NSRM organised the second strike.

The NSRM is working within the rather grotesque structure of the NUS in an attempt to make the union more democratic and effective. It is proving the need for a truly unionist movement free of influence with the NUS. Indeed, the last four strikes (1947, 1955 and two in 1960), all unofficial, have been directed against the union, as well as the owners.

At the moment elections are being held for the post of General Secretary of the Union. Whether the NSRM is supporting one of the candidates or not, it has been an inspiration to the movement. The total outcome of the elections will depend on your personal choice and the choice of the already formed groups who normally share the work and expenses. This is entirely up to you.

This year’s Camp will be held at Istres (Bouches du Rhône) in Provence, a few miles from the Mediterranean and on a fine beach. The total cost will be £3. The cost of meals will be £1.25, and the cost of accommodation is £1. The cost of travel will be left up to the individual. The total cost will be £3.50.

If you like the open air life, plenty of sunshine, lively discussion and meeting young people from other countries in a friendly atmosphere, you will enjoy, the Camp. It will also give you a chance to meet and find out what your young libertarians think. For further details write to: SPANISH LIBERTARIAN YOUTH

Great Britain Committee
159 Lodbury Road, London, W.11.

The address of the National Council of International Anti-Fascist Solidarity (SIA) at Toulouse, will, from April 1, 1962, be: 35 Rue de la Colmarie, Toulouse (Hte-Gene), France.

We shall be grateful if, besides noting it, you would print it in your paper, thus making it known to all our friends in England.

J. SANJUAN.

ISRAEL.—A nine-day unofficial stoppage of postal workers ended on February 26 with victory for the strikers. It began on February 16, when 140 Tel Aviv postmen walked out to block their demand for an all-round rise of £6 a month, plus 3s. 9d. a day for delivery men, repudiating the agreement between the postal workers’ committee and the Histradrut (General Federation of Labour) for varying the rates of 6s. 6d., 6s. 2d. and 5s. 6d. a day. They were joined by delivery men in other parts of the country, and a threat by the Ministry of Posts to use temporary workers to break the strike brought out most of the other postal workers.

In addition to the above, the strength of the trade union federations, the Histradrut suffers from direct political participation by each party, being represented in proportion to its seats in the Knesset (Parliament). This means that the main government party (in other words: the most established and dominant) is always in control, while the other parties exploit the workers’ grievances for political purposes.

A 6 per cent rise in prices is expected to follow the devaluation of the Israeli pound from 4s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. sterling. Wages are linked to the cost-of-living index, but allowances are normally only adjusted in January and July, if the average monthly index has risen by at least three points. However, under pressure from the rank and file, the Histradrut has agreed to make the adjustment for the first time after eleven months, but has decided to make no payments to the workers at all.

The Rank and File Committee of the Seamen’s Union has been working with the Histradrut to see that the workers are not exploited. The workers are demanding a 10 per cent increase in wages, which is still being negotiated.

The strike ended on February 26 with the workers winning their demands for pay increases and improvements in working conditions.

Read ‘SEAMEN’S VOICE’

THE RANK AND FILE SEAMEN’S PAPER

1d postpaid from Bill Christopher, 34, Cumberland Road, London, E.17.

"Voice from the North"
RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS IN TWO TOTALITARIAN STATES

BASQUE WORKERS STRIKE

WORKERS in the highly industrial Basque Provinces are among the best paid in Spain. Whereas the official minimum wage in other parts of Spain oscillates between 35 and 50 pesetas per day, here they are nearer the 80 pesetas mark. The workers also enjoy benefits from extra in the summer and Christmas. This is not to say that the Basque workers are well off (a survey by a Catholic association found that a married couple with two children required at least a minimum of 130 pesetas daily income to make ends meet). It simply indicates what conditions must be like in other parts of Spain. Yet, despite this, discontent on a large scale has broken out and workers are demanding a minimum of 100 pesetas per day. This has been their cry in all the provinces they have staged throughout the province and it has been taken up by their wives and children (100 pesetas is about 1.3x).

On December 1, 1961, some 3,000 railway workers staged a sit-down strike at Beasain, Guipuzcoa, protesting at low wages and poor working conditions. The workers were expelled from the factories by the Guardia Civil. Later a protest march, made up mostly of the workers' wives, was brutally broken up by the police and in the process several persons were injured and there was one unconfirmed death casualty. Many other workers came out in sympathy and cinemas, theatres and bars were boycotted by the workers of Beasain. The discontent came to a head when an increase in wages and better working conditions were negotiated by the strike leaders of iron and steel works in the Basque Provinces, Altos Hornos de Bilbao, for its 12,000 workers under a collective convention signed in November.

Unrest soon spread to other factories in the provinces which had not been affected by these benefits. Altogether some 2,000 factories and 60,000 workers are involved in this dispute.

In mid-January one of the most important engineering factories of Bizcaya, La Vasconica, staged a sit-down strike and the workshops were closed by order of the authorities. At the same time it was rumoured that a collective agreement, to include all the workers not affected by the Altos Hornos convention, was being negotiated in San Sebastian. It seems that the authorities feared a chain reaction of strikes, which would involve the whole Basque Provinces. Beasain and La Vasconica are the leading factories.

Rumours of an impending collective agreement and the many assurances given by the employers helped quie things a little. Nevertheless the agreement rumoured in January has not been completed. Thirty days for a minimum of 100 pesetas daily is once again taken up by the workers and we again see strikes spreading to those factories not affected by the Altos Hornos convention, benefiting from unofficial agreements on the part of the employers. This time it was at the railway workshops of Duran and Elbarr and in a number of small arms and fledged factories. Some 500 workers of the Tarabusi motor-vehicle factory in Bilbao also came out in sympathy. Once again the workers staged sit-downs and "go slow" strikes and the Guardia Civil had to intervene. Assurances that negotiations would be speeded up confirmed that the authorities are eager to avoid further trouble in the area.

This concern of the authorities is understandable when we consider that strikes are illegal in Spain and that Franco had nothing but trouble in this area throughout last year.

Besides the latest industrial unrest, Franco's regime has had to cope with a steady rise in Basque nationalist feeling and opposition from the more liberal Basque priests. It is probably the only region where opposition to the regime is openly expressed. Franco during and after the Civil War. Many Basque priests were killed, imprisoned or fled into exile. The more liberal Basque priests have maintained this tradition and in 1960, 309 Basque priests signed a document which rejected the 1943 decision of Franco's regime. It exposed police torture, lack of freedom, the ban on Basque newspapers, censorship, and all the totalitarian aspects of the regime. The authorities, particularly the police, have never forgiven the Basque priests for this.

Nationalist Basque, or autonomist feelings have always been strong and range from the passive protest of naming their children with Basque names to acts of sabotage and flag burning. Last September numerous arrests were carried out among the illegal Basque nationalist youth movement, who were accused of being responsible for various acts of sabotage. Towards the end of October some of the arrested were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging up to 20 years. They had earlier been accused of "military rebellion" and the main charge included that of burning two Spanish flags in San Sebastian on July 18 (the anniversary of Franco's rising) and for an involvement in an unsuccessful act of sabotage on a special train returning civil war ex-servicemen from a Frantzasko celebration in San Sebastian on July 18.

Gruesome details of their torture during examination have leaked out and, apart from the Gestapo techniques in which the Spanish police are excelling, attempts were made to intimidate the clergy and intense abusive reference was made to them.

It is reassuring to find that after 23 years of fascist dictatorship and without labour unions—the only recognised unions are the official "industrial verticales", which are of Falangist inspiration and directed by the Franco regime—the workers are able to defend themselves by the traditional revolutionary methods of strike and direct action. It also indicates that the lessons of the classical French syndicalist tradition, of the CNT and UGT (and clandestine since 1939) have been understood and put to effective use by a new generation of Spanish workers. Despite his repressive regime, Franco has been unable to stamp out the spark of freedom in all these years.

What is happening in the Basque provinces is not new in the Spain of Franco. It has happened before and will continue to happen. What ought to impress us is the fact that, when we hear references made to Franco's more liberal and democratic changes in Spain, in connection with NATO or the Common Market or the International Bank, so little effort is made to remember the grim situation of the Spanish people.

S.G.

SPAIN . . . PORTUGAL . . . PRAGUE

As we go to press, 100,000 workers, including the miners of Asturias, are on strike and there have been mass arrests under a Franco-decreed State of Emergency. Madrid students have been arrested for demonstrating in support of strikers on May Day. From Portugal and Prague illegal May Day demonstration against dictatorship are reported.

Sabotage and armed struggle in Bulgaria

TWMA Congress report—continued from last issue.

Unlike Rumania, Bulgaria has never previously been subjected to the widespread pillage which is now integral to the social and political system. Examples are legion. No undertaking, industrial, commercial, agricultural or transport, has been able to survive the demands of the State at the expense of the consumers, producers, or the State, especially the consumers. In charge of undertakings involved in legal proceedings are invariably leading Communists including some with the best past records of service to their party. The more reputable leaders are worried, realising that these robberies add up to a giant flaw in the system and they sincerely want to stop them, having made several vain attempts to do so. Many trials, concerning theft of millions of leva, have been held throughout the country, involving tens of thousands of people. Long prison terms and death sentences have been imposed, all to no effect. Here are some representative cases:}

1. **Fiddling of railway ticket sales on the Sofia-Burzeno and Sofia-Varna lines, amounting to theft of some ten million leva and involving 300 prisoners, nearly all Communist officials. Several death sentences and prison terms of 1-20 years.**

2. **A series of grain thefts, implicating several farm collectives in the Vidine and Koula districts. More than 2,000 accused.**

3. **More than 700 sentenced for a chain of grocery thefts at Bourges.**

4. **Systematic theft of dairy produce at Plovdiv; 50 death sentences.**

5. **70 sentences (three capital) at Sarta-Zagora for swindling in sales of meat and oil.**

6. **54 sentenced at Sarta-Zagora for organised robbery in the "Piperka" jam factory and fruit-packing plant.**

7. **Theft of wine and spirits (a State monopoly) at Sarta-Zagora; 40 sentenced.**

In one of his many speeches, CP First Secretary Theodore Zivkov estimated thefts of currency during 1955 at 83 million leva and of goods at more than 400 million.

Naturally those in the best position to carry out these thefts are continued on page 7
SUPPORTING THE LABOUR PARTY? NO THANKS!

"Some of the sentiments expressed are good, but I still think your energies and talents are misdirected. Direct them where they can be effective." This was written by a Labour Party supporter, after reading World Labour News and so presumably the direction in which he thinks your energies and talents would be of greatest use to the Labour Party, or more generally, within any one of the Social Democratic Parties which are to be found in just about every country outside the Communist bloc.

Now the sentiments expressed in this paper are Anarcho-syndicalist sentiments. The idea that socialism must be free or not at all. That it can only be achieved by the direct action of the workers themselves. That the State is, in itself, evil and must be destroyed before we can establish a socialist society. That the workers themselves must directly control the means of production and distribution. That the wage system, which is a capitalist device to divide and enslave the working class, must be abandoned and replaced by the principle of from each according to his ability to each according to his needs. It is to the spreading of these ideas that we devote our energies and talents we possess.

Our critic must know that Labour Party and Social Democratic policies are opposed to these ideas. State control not the abolition of the State, nationalisation not workers control, parliamentary politics not direct action, negotiation procedures and wage differentials, social democratic parties these are social democratic policies and we want no part of them.

And as for our effectiveness. If numbers alone are to be the criteria, then we are unable to even approach the social democratic movement with its millions of followers. But we would dispute the idea that numbers alone are a measure of effectiveness. The only way to be effective is through parliamentary action. Most of the energies (and monies) of the social democratic movement have been spent in building up highly centralised party machines, aiming at winning the election to Parliament of enough MPs to form a government.

In an endeavour to do this, social democratic policy has steadily moved to the right in an attempt to gain the votes of the "uncommitted" amongst the electorate. The leaders of the parties have encouraged this swing, because during these times in the history of the working class political power is their main objective, while the establishment of a socialist society has become a secondary consideration.

These right wing leaders have made a mockery of such ideas as the brotherhood of man and working class solidarity. They have led millions into two world wars and appear ready to lead them into a third, rather than make any effort towards achieving a socialist society. Who, outside the Anarchist and Syndicalist movements, advocated war against the 1914-18 war? The Social Democratic and Labour leaders were patriotic, socialists second and, except for a few honourable exceptions, (Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany) were opposed to this proposal.

And yet, had they used their numerical strength effectively, they could have stopped that war. Instead they preferred to form coalition governments with the erstwhile political opponents, in order more effectively to pursue the war effort. Then again, following the 1914-18 war, the German armament workers at a congress at Erfurt (1919) passed a resolution to make no more war preparations and to compel their employers to convert their plants to other uses. This resolution was maintained for almost two years, until it was broken by the social democratic trade unions supplying scabs to replace the striking workers. How effective was this action in causing the second world war, we wonder?

Not so long ago, auto workers at Acton struck for twelve weeks against the bosses’ attempt to divide them of their demands. At one time “the right to work” was a great social democratic rallying cry. It now seems, as the TU officials (all good Labour MP’s no doubt) worked with the bosses and against their own members to break the strike.

We could fill several issues of WLN with similar cases of LP and 7U officials bending against the workers in the first years of the post-war Labour Government, for example, was to send military conscripts into the docks to scab on striking port-workers. But are these constant betrayals an effective way of achieving a socialist society? We believe not. If our critics are right in their efforts to make them a reality, instead of helping an organisation that is opposed to them.

BILLY GREENWOOD

GRAVE DELAYS — Burials at ten cemeteries in the San Francisco area were delayed by a 27-day strike of cemetery workers which ended on April 14.

WORLD LABOUR NEWS

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Rank and file conference

On Sunday, March 11, the National Rank and File Movement held its first annual conference in London, attended by workers from many trade unions, representing various political points of view.

The Secretary’s report of the year’s activities showed that the NRMF had overcome the inevitable initial difficulties and was now firmly established, with strong bases in London, Glasgow and Manchester. Individual workers throughout Britain and Ireland had enrolled and it was intended to organise groups at several industrial centres in the forthcoming year.

The movement’s declared policy of Workers’ Ownership and Direct Control of all industry, especially the activities in the course of industrial dispute, had brought it under attack from the National Press, the right-wing spies-sheets of the Economic League and IRIS, the strike-breaking “New Daily” and the trade-union bureaucracy. Members were being threatened with expulsion from their unions for distributing the Rank and File leaflet, “Unite for Industrial Action.”

Several delegates at the conference stressed the fact that the immediate aim of the movement is the establishment of a libertarian workers’ trade union, to replace the class war with a truly classless society.

"Rank and File Strategy", the first pamphlet of the NRMF, was unanimously approved by the delegates and members present. It was agreed that it should be followed by a series of pamphlets dealing with various techniques of “on the job” action, such as “working to rule” and “go slow”.

One speaker held that the outstanding success of the movement was that it had welded together these thousands of individual workers of differing political outlooks. More, he felt, must be done by the incoming committee to promote liaison between those political groupings which accept the social aims and objectives of the movement, and those of the NRMF as being a sufficient, anti-capitalist force, free from the political intrusions of the Communist Party and the various Trotskyite factions.

Discussion of the NRMF administration resulted in unanimous support for a resolution calling for the election, not of a central Executive Committee, but of a Working Committee, that would develop the democratic administration of the NRMF for the forthcoming year.

The Working Committee should avoid the dangers of centralising the movement in London by providing ample opportunity for delegates from all centres to meet regularly and by developing effective liaison between regional committees. All delegates elected directly by their own rank and file should be subject to recall. One speaker emphasised that we should never think in terms of a Central executive with power of discipline over individual members.

Rank and file delegates meeting at national level should co-ordinate rank and file activities throughout Britain. They would be mandated and subject to recall by their local organisations. Thus no committee could ever usurp the authority of the rank-and-file membership.

The Working Committee of nine members was elected. It included members of the EPU, AEU, NATSOPA, NALGO, ASW, T&G, WU, and covered such groupings as the Syndicalist Workers Federation, Solidarity Group, Communist League, Individualist Anarchist Group. Conference ended with the reading of messages of support from abroad.

M. CALLINAN

URUGUAY — The six-month-old strike by about 4,000 Uruguayan meat industry workers has been settled and all plants resumed normal work on March 19. The strike had virtually paralysed the Frigorífico Nacional and drastically reduced production at the Anglo-plant.
Fighting for the nine-hour day

WHEN LAST I visited my native city of Newcastle, I saw the
sports shop of Stan Seymour, one-time footballer and
director of a Cup-winning Newcastle United. I looked up at the heavy
stone walls and recalled that the shop was a converted dwelling
house, the house where my father was born, the home of my grand-
father. In the days of the primitive steam shovel, the site of the
factory and its nearby dwelling he had been visited by Garibaldi. Best of all, I
recalled his part in the famous Nine-Hours Strike.

Journeying along the riverside amid the clanging shipyards, I
remembered the twenty-two working hours which took place at the
beginning of 1919, one stage in a long fight. Before that there had been a
94-hour day and a 53-hour week, but unpaid meal breaks made a working day of 11 hours. Then we won the 47-hour week, after World War II the 44-hour week, then 42, but even the 53-hour, five-and-a-half day week had been a great triumph, a stage in the
long climb from the depths of the Industrial Revolution. One of the
best chapters of this saga is that of the "Nine Hours Strike."

During a great part of the 19th Century, the trade union move-
ment tried to shorten the intolerable long working day by influen-
ciating politicians to introduce "Short Hour Bills" in Parliament, as
well as by some strike action. There was some limited success through
Parliament, for it was sometimes possible to gain the support of
Conservative politicians against Liberal bills. Traditionally, the
Liberals were "land-owning aristocrats," the Liberals coal, ship and factory
owners, believers in "Liberty," the liberty to work men, women and
children to death without State interference.

The limits of this method of obtaining a shorter working day were
manifest in New South Wales in 1881. The total hours were limited to
16, a reduction of eight hours per week; but the workers soon found
that the owners of the mills did not follow the example of the politicians
would never agree with workmen on how far the day
should be shortened. Many of the former, including Lord Shaftes-
bury, were opposed to trade unionism; the Bills, such as the 10-hours
Bill, were obtained on the plea of the effects of long hours on

"DIRECT ACTION AGAIN"

THE SWF is now again publishing its original paper, "DIRECT
ACTION," which is published by "Socialist Value," fully
forthrightly, edited by Bill Christopher in duplicated form, and gives
first-hand information on all aspects of the workers' struggle against capital and State oppression. Specimen copy 5d. (plus 2d. postage)
from SWF, 25A, Amberley Road, London, W.9., or 5s. for 12 issues.

women and children—the reason why mining and textiles figure so
largely in the discussions—and workmen were beginning to resent
gaining a shorter day for men by pleading the case for women. As
aunion paper declared, "Now the veil must be lifted and the
agitation carried on under its true colours. There is no longer
must men make the sacrifices necessary for securing reduction of
working hours for men."

Cotton Factory Times, May 26, 1883.

In 1874 the Tory Government introduced, against Liberal oppo-
sition, its shorter hours bill, entitled, "Factories (Health of Women,
etc.) Bill" designed to limit the working hours of women and
women securing a 56-hour week. It should be remembered that
there was no half-holiday on Saturday until the latter part of
the 19th Century.

In 1866 the workers of Tyne-side decried a nine-hour day,
shorter working hours, the cotton mills of Leed's, in the
In 1866 the cotton mills of Leed's, in the
of a nine-hour day, but a stamp ended the discussion. In 1870 the
demand was again put forward, but the Central District Committee of
the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, now the AEU, cautiously

decided in favour of a nine-hour day.

Then, early in 1871, the engineers and shipyard men of nearby
Sunderland took up the issue, decided, prepared and acted with
remarkable speed and decisiveness. All out on April 1 and no fooling.
The workers put pressure on the employers and without the support of the Durham County authorities, with military force to
back them, soon found themselves on the losing end. After four
weeks, a short strike for those days, the workers were victorious and
reduced their working day to nine hours.

At the armistice that must follow such inspiring action, the
engineering employers of North-East England met in Newcastle
on April 8 to prepare a counter-attack. Headed by Sir W. G. Arm-
strong, of the Armstrong Whitworth Company, they obtained the
support of engineering employers throughout the British Isles, who
levied themselves a shilling a head for all men employed by them.

The employers of Newcastle and Gateshead were for strike action,
but trade union strength was low. There were many unions, craft
unions, but even one craft might have several unions in one shop.
It was the same in Gateshead, with the largest union being the
workers in the factories. The employers, with access to the
well-documented records of the strike stated that "two out of three
of the men in the engineering trade belonged to no Union what-
soever.

There was the problem —a short and weakly foe, our side
poor, divided by a multitude of unions and two-thirds of the men
non-unionists. A new, even if a temporary, single-purpose organi-
isation must be created, above craft union boundaries, to move the
extremes of trade-union brotherhood, a movement founded on
a class, in class conflict.

A Rank and File Movement was formed and named the Nine
Hours League. The League included all crafts and unions and
all men, unionists or non-unionists. It took root, temporarily, the
functions of the unions, without destroying them. Its president
was John Burnett, an Alnwick man, member of the AUE District
Committee.

The men of Newcastle and Gateshead struck, it was a hard
strike, as my grandmother often told me, for I loved to listen to her
stories over a winter's fire, with the wind howling down from the
Cheviots, or across the angry North Sea when she lived near the
Scottish Border. I have since checked the details of these stories with
the facts and works of historian. It is remarkable that the tales of the
actual events experienced by such old people always seem to stand
the test.

The national executives of the unions were lukewarm, but the
local union leaders, the "Trotsky" leaders, as they were, was, in
more than one respect a notable event in Trade Union annals," wrote
the Webbs in their dry manner. "One of the mostmemorable
strikes on record," said D. H. Cole. The strikers were mostly
non-unionists, But Charleston, said 8,000 men were
breadcrusted, whereas only 500 of them belonged to our society and
very few to any other," said the AUE Abstract Report of Council
Proceedings, June 1, 1870 to December 31, 1872, page 184.

But the League organised them—meetings, processions through
the city streets and to neighbouring towns, demonstrations on the
Moor, factory picnics, organisation of relief, everyone seemed busy.
Agents of the League went to distant towns and villages, sometimes
walking many miles, sometimes going to Hull, Leith and
London by steamer for a few shavings, for the strike funds were
guarded with misery care, "every possible pence must go for food.

Although the majority of workmen could not then read or write,
the need of printed propaganda was understood. There was a
majority who had received a rudimentary education at Church and
at day-schools and who had bought themselves a copy of the Times.
Shakespeare, Tales of the Border and poetry. This reading con-
sumed with a notorious Northumbrian love of narrative, new served
appetite well.

John Brown was deputed to seek the aid of Radical Joseph Cowan,
owner of an excellent local press, the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, to
the weekly edition (the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle) of which
Kropotkin was a regular contributor. Cowan often stayed with
Dr. Spencer Watson at Gateshead. Gripping John Brown's hand,
promised to open the pages of his papers to the strikers.

But the Chronicle had little more than a local circulation. The
worker's correspondents, aimed further afield, too. The Webs, usual-
ly loyal toward any form of university education, wrote:
"The tactical skill and literary force with which the men's case was
presented achieved the unprecedented result of securing for their
demands the support of The Times and Spectator."

History of Trade Unionism.

Armstrong (Lord) wrote a howling protest to the Times: "We
were amazed ... we really felt that, if the League themselves had
possessed the power of inspiring that article, they could scarcely
have expressed their case better, or more clearly, than in which it is expressed. The concurrent appearance in the Spectator of
an article exhibiting the same bias adds to our surprise."

Times, April 9, 17.

The poor man could not believe that some of the articles were
written by agents of his filters.
The strike lasted for five months. During the first three of which
money came in slowly, afterwards in a flood. The flood of dona-
tions from so many parts of the country heartened the men and
disabled the employers. Writers then and historians since have
attributed the financial success to the skill and eloquence of the new unknown workers.

Blacklegs were brought in from the extremes of the British Isles, then hundreds were recruited from Europe. To stop the latter source of labour, the assistance of the International Working Men's Association was called for, with some success. Then the IWMA's Danish job. European members of the IWMA came to Tyneside and persuaded many blacklegs to return to their homes in the countries.

Five months gone, the League was growing stronger, the employers afraid, and granted the nine-hour day, 34-hour week days of nine hours each, it was agreed to have live of 94 hours and one of 68 hours, finishing at 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

A later struggle knocked off one hour, blowing the factory whistle at 12 o'clock for the week-end.

The victory caused the Tynesiders' struggle to be emulated throughout England and in Scotland and Ireland. On the Clyde, the shipbuilding workers were ordered to stop work in their employ, but the employers refused to accept a 33-hour week, with the result that the depression was forced to accept a 33-hour week.

From then on, not political but direct action was the method used by the workers to secure a shorter working day and week—a fight that is yet not over.

The strike ended, the leaders of the struggle went back to the Backwell General Secretary of the ASE. The names of the old lady that was how they wanted it to be.

TOM BROWN

DAY-TO-DAY STRUGGLE IN BRITAIN

GOVERNMENT HAS THE BOSSES PUZZLED

The Government's "pay pause" has the employers at sixes and sevens. It's alright for the Government, sitting in the negotiating first hand, that they just intervene and gum up the works.

The Minister of Labour has asked the Chairmen of "Wages Councils" to reconsider their proposals for pay increases ranging from 3% to 8% for some 350,000 workers.

"Wages Councils" are the tribunal whereby the poorly organized and the worst paid workers' hours and wages are fixed. The very nature of their set-up prevents them gaining anything.

The Government is therefore warning through the government of Labour that in future Wages Councils must stick to government policy of 2%.

To quote an example, women hair and fibre workers are protected by "Wages Councils"; their present rate of pay is £4.19.9d, for a 42-hour week and the proposed increase of 7% will take their wages to the minimum sum of £5.77.6d. This is only a third of the "Blue Streak" and skimmed milk, but it is also the age of "Direct Action" and old new methods of struggle.

SITTING THINGS OUT

Some 3,000 workers at the Longbridge works of the British Motor Corporation staged a 5-day sit-down strike in an attempt to obtain a bonus increase of 36s. a week. Their claim went through the necessary negotiating machinery to national level—and was rejected by the management.

Union officials called for a return to work, so that bigger and better "chests" could be held with the management. The pay claim had been reduced 18 months before. Much at a time when they are now working to return to work, although at this stage without achieving the 36s. increase.

Several important factors emerge from the dispute. The strikers were not out on the streets, but were being blackballed. Could lower local authorities have prevented affected workers from suffering this threat? Also, the 3,000 workers became five, due to shift changes attending. A group of nurses marched into the House of Commons to lobby their MPs. This activity was not part of COHSE programme, but proved the fighting spirit of the nurses.

This section of the workers is the most difficult to organise, because in the main, religious denominations have them tied down. In other words they can work 24 hours a day so the local priest will pay the bills. Although one must recognise that nursing (as a source of humanity), society must not press on the fact, which in point of fact is that allowing nurses to be robbed of their rightful "freedom", wages and conditions are to be done. "We can't strike", say the nurses. London District councils of the Union of Post Office Workers have the only solution. Industrial Action against the Government's proposals.

THE FIGHT THE DOCKERS CAN'T WIN

Liverpool dockers (T&GWU) are struggling to operate the closed shop system. The problem is that they are operating it against another union, National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers (Blue Union). In other words it is docker against docker, with no winner.

An official strike was declared by the T&GWU (White Union) recently against non-union employment in the docks. Leaflets were sent to dockers, stating that tugboatmen and dock gatemen (T&GWU) would not handle any ships, unless the closed shop policy applied. This leaflet was signed by O'Mahony, district secretary of the T&GWU.

"Blue Union" men are classed as "dockers" by the White Union is a matter for speculation.

There is one possibility: if there is really trouble in the docks, because Blue and White rank-and-filers stand together (usually of course), the top brass either side have their prestige to consider.

One of the Blue Union meetings in Liverpool the following resolution was unanimously adopted: that "T&GWU and NASDU should work together to achieve 100% unionism in the docks, without docker fighting docker. All should accept the principle that a man could belong to the union of his choice."

It will come to pass that one day dockers will say 'palace on both your houses'. We, the rank and file, will take control and run our own affairs.

ARISTOCRATS TAKE OFF THEIR GLOVES

Nearly a fortnight ago today some 200 news agency journalists by an overwhelming majority decided to give a month's notice of strike action.

Pay talks between the union and the agency management opened last October. In February the employers offered an increase of 10%, 15% minimum and not less than £1 to all above the minimum. This was in answer to the NUJ's demands for an all-round increase of £3.10s. In March the agency management stated that they would make no further offer until new negotiations between the union and the Newspaper Proprietors Association (NPA) were concluded. (Newspaper journalists have not submitted the same demand.) Agency managers must not cut Big Daddy's throat.

On going to Press the agency management and the NUJ have settled for an all-round 2.8%. Increase is expected the NPA will settle for the same.

The aristocrats only took their gloves off. "Gawd knows" what would have happened if they had taken their coats off as well. This has been a very brief "round up", touching only the fringe of industrial strife. It is evident everywhere that the rank and file are pushing for all its worth, but only for fair and better gains. It is important, it's the standard of living—but, what is the right to the right without the shadow of death. Industrial action against Nuclear Warfare in action in support of the OAP's. This is the only weapon we have while the workers have none. The war is not for us, one lot in, another lot out, what's the odds? J O E SOAP still grafts on, still takes up to the neck. Have a think, this parliamentary democracy RACKET is played out.

BILL CHRISTOPHER

AARON FRUCHTMAN

It is with deep regret that we record the death, on April 7 at the age of 77, of our comrade Aaron Fruchman, for many years a member of the London 'Freie Arbeiter Stimm' Group and former active in the libertarian movement in Paris. The SWF expresses its sympathy to our Jewish comrades—particular to comrade Fruchman's daughter, Sophie—in their sad loss, which we share.

U.S.A.—22,000 teachers in New York City striking for higher wages were forced back to work on April 11 after a one-day stoppage by a court injunction, defiance of which would mean go to jail and severe fines on the rank and file teachers' according to leaders of the United Federation of Teachers. On the same day West Coast seamen were ordered back to work by a federal judge under America's anti-labour laws.
Pearl Russell’s Super-state
KENYA

Conveits used as blackleg gangs in Nairobi

WHILE Kenya's rival African politicians were jockeying for position at the constitutional conference in London, Nairobi was in the grip of a strike by its 4,000 City Council employees (including firemen, nurses, and midwives, and sanitary workers) for higher wages and reinstatement of two sacked workers, and the dismissal of three European officials and three Africans and one Asian accused of stealing for the council. Volunteers from the European and Asian communities to run essential services were supported by convicts and recruits from the city's vast reserve of unemployment.

Eight hundred employees of Nairobi County Council joined the strikers, and teachers in Nairobi and five other centres walked out on March 19 in the opening blow of their own campaign of two-day strikes to secure wage increases recommended by an inquiry; but a threat by 43 union officials to declare a general strike in support of the City Council workers was called off. The Kenya Federation of Labour's statement that a satisfactory settlement had been reached was disputed by James Kariuki, President of the Local Government Workers' Union, who said the terms were unacceptable.

The Union's general secretary, Gordon Nyawade, was held in custody on a charge of calling an illegal strike of essential services, but was acquitted after the 16-day stoppage had ended on March 29. An arbitration tribunal was set up by the Kenya Government to settle the dispute.

Notable advances have been made in the wages of workers in recent months. The minimum wage for house servants, for instance, was raised from 6s. 2d. to 9s. 4d. per month, excluding housing allowances. But as food alone is reckoned to cost nearly 50s. per month in the cities, they are still appallingly low. The average Mombasa food bill of nearly 24s. a month is exceptionally high. And according to the Chief Secretary to the Council of Kenya, one in three of the wage-earning population—a quarter of a million people—are unemployed.

This figure excludes landless Africans living on estates in the Reserves. Mr. P. M. Gordon, acting Minister of Agriculture, said recently that some 75,000 people were living on or below subsistence level for lack of work. Since last August 12,000 labourers on European farms have lost their jobs. The government has forced the General Agricultural Workers' Union to accept worse conditions for some of their members and to agree to the employers' demand that ten, coffee, and sugar plantation workers should be organised in separate groups.

To describe the Kenya Government's land settlement schemes as inadequate would be an absurd understatement. It was announced on January 29 that the Africans had been left with only 166,300 acres for smallholders, and 1,200 families would be settled immediately—a fantastically small percentage of the 100,000 landless families. Moreover one of the schemes consists of loans towards the purchase of medium-sized land holdings from Europeans. The Land Settlement and Development Board naively commented that progress was hampered by the small number of applicants who have both the required financial resources and the managerial experience to farm larger units.

Almost everywhere in Africa individual land ownership is repugnant to the peasant. The land belongs to the community which works it; as did in Russia before the Bolsheviks turned it into a barracks. It is the common wealth of the White man, with its property mafia, doing its best to destroy (wholly from his point of view, for it has tremendous revolutionary implications) by creating a new bourgeoisie of western-educated Africans and by the grilling of workers. But that will not stop the Black man from seeing that hisbackward state of African peasant farming is a necessary consequence of communal ownership of land.

In the land hunger and extreme poverty of its peasants, the possession of most of the best farming land in the hands of a privileged minority (the country has 1.55 million White-owned farms, including nearly 600 company plantations), and its industrial immaturity, Kenya is comparable with pre-revolutionary Russia.

In such a situation, of what use is it to create a few hundred or a few thousand African capitalist farmers alongside of or in place of White capitalists? What can it mean? To the exploited—a black instead of a white master. To the land-hungry—nothing.

WOT, NO SAMOVARS?

Working conditions in a large Russian automobile factory are described in a report of the visit of an American Engineering Union delegation as reminiscent of the 19th-century British capital.

Ungreater and poorly maintained machines, bad ventilation, overwork conditions and sanitary arrangements are specifically mentioned. Wages and conditions in Russian factories generally, in which the working week is normally 41 hours spread over six days, are said to leave much to be desired. Tea breaks are almost unknown.

MORE PRODUCTION, PLEASE

"I am disturbed that in British productivity is levelling off and I wish to point to this. It is not reversed. I cannot get high wages for my people, shareholders cannot get decent dividends, and the employers will have a much more difficult job. We may have a quarrel among ourselves afterwards as to how we share out the results of the productivity but that has nothing to do with this council."—Harry Douglass, general secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and chairman of the British Production Council.

Literature

"Direct Action" pamphlets—

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by Tom Brown 6d.

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