

LONDON BUILDERS GIVE STRIKE NOTICE

BY RON BLAKE

"That we the 4,500 building workers of Lewisham demand an opening up of negotiations for a minimum of 3/- per hour to meet a higher cost of living and falling this, we are prepared to down tools on May 16th."

In such words the overwhelming majority of some 500 building workers at a Ladywell Road open-air meeting over-rode the twists and bureaucratic manoeuvres of their union leaders.

As readers of the "Socialist Appeal" will remember, these workers, many of whom have been brought hundreds of miles from their homes, have had to struggle against unbearably bad conditions.

The rate of pay is low: 2s. 2½d. per hour for a tradesman, and 1s. 9½d. for a labourer, and no bonus is payable on these rates. In addition they have to cope with the lack of washing facilities, the prevalence of skin diseases caught from demolishing parts of bombed houses, the lack of protective eye-shields and other clothing, bad transport to and from the job, and hostel conditions which could reasonably be much improved, as well as the need to maintain two homes on an extra allowance of 26/6.

The increasing discontent came to a head at the Shop Stewards meeting held at 12 o'clock on Friday, May 4th. Stewards representative of all the sites in Lewisham came armed with the same resolution:—

In view of the impending reduction to a 54 hour week 3/- per hour, or strike on May 16th.

The progress committee, completely controlled by the Stalinists took charge and called an open air meeting for 12.30 on Saturday.

Despite a steady soaking drizzle, about 500 men gathered to hear the report back.

The committee was bound to communicate the Shop Stewards' ideas to the meeting and put forward a composite resolution, including the 3/- wage demand and the strike threat. But they immediately followed this

with a strong recommendation to delete the strike notice and replace it by a demand for payment retrospective from May 14th.

In their efforts to avoid a vote on the strike motion, every kind of reactionary argument was used by the platform.

Bro. Pimm, secretary to the operative representatives said that to threaten strike might be a mistake since the building workers weren't 100% organised! He was unable to placate the just anger of the workers at the press statement of Bro. Coppock, General Secretary of the N.F.B.T.O. that there were 50,000 men too many on the job.

"It's a lie!" shouted some London workers.

"Why can't we go home then?" shouted men from the provinces.

Bro. Light, secretary of the Lewisham Site Progress Committee, tried another tactic, raising the fear that since the transport workers strike was "against public opinion" a builders' strike would not receive sympathy.

In response to a clamour from the workers, Bro. Milligan, a well-known militant of the N.S.H.S.P. took the platform and moved the resolution.

"Mr. Light", he said, "had urged them to use every weapon in their power. . . . Look at the lessons of the past. Substantial gains had never been obtained around the table. The workers had always had to fight for their needs. They had always been forced to resort to strike action. (Hear, Hear!) Building workers were prepared to do this again if necessary. It had been said that they must struggle for 100% trade-unionism. That was quite true, but they must not postpone struggles against bad conditions and low wages until that was obtained. It was the duty of Trade-Unionists to give a lead to non-unionists on such matters and in this way recruit to the Union. It was more and more clear that the workers were having to fight not only the bosses but their Union leaders too!" At this there was loud applause.

The resolution was then put to the vote and carried overwhelmingly

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19th April, 1945.

Dear Comrade,

On Thursday, 19th April at a re-call Conference at Hammersmith Town Hall, Mr. D. N. Pritt reaffirmed his intention to contest the seat at present held by him at North Hammersmith as an "Independent".

During his speech at the April 1945 Conference, Mr. Pritt consistently implied that the N.E.C.'s continual refusal to readmit him to membership of the Labour Party was due to his outlook being more left than that of official Labour. A questioner from an A.E.U. branch in Mr. Pritt's constituency contested this assertion and brought to the attention of the meeting the fact that there was essentially no difference between the programme of the Labour Party and those of either Mr. Pritt or the Communist Party. The questioner suggested that if anything, in view of the fact that the Labour Party had expressed the intention of achieving its programme on an independent party basis, while Mr. Pritt wished his to go into operation in collaboration with "Progressive" Liberals—the Labour Party might be said to be more left wing than either Mr. Pritt or the Communist Party. Mr. Pritt denied that he had stated he was more left wing than the L.P. but admitted that it could have been inferred that he intended his remarks to have the construction the questioner had put upon them. He admitted that there was no difference between the reformist programme of the Labour Party and with his own or that of the Communist Party.

In the Credentials Report it was brought out that in the whole Conference only 7 Trade Union Branches from Hammersmith were represented, and according to Mr. Pritt, probably more were from his own constituency of North Hammersmith. The reason he gave for this last was that, as far as he knew, there were no comfortable pubs in N. Hammersmith and therefore no branches met there. This can be taken as a good gauge of Mr. Pritt's opinion of organised Labour in his own constituency.

A resolution in support of Mr. Pritt's candidature was moved and passed with two abstentions.

W. Coleman.

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with only some 15 or 20 including the platform voting against.

It is clear that the Lewisham building union leaders, like other fakery at the present time, have no enthusiasm for leading their members in a militant struggle. They want to lead the fight into "safe" channels.

Lewisham building workers must be on their guard against this misleadership. They must develop fresh leaders who will fight for their demands.

BUILDING WORKERS! SOLIDARITY WITH THE LEWISHAM SITE WORKERS! SUPPORT THEIR STRUGGLE WITH RESOLUTIONS, PROPAGANDA AND EVERY OTHER MEANS IN YOUR POWER.

SUPPORT FOR GERMAN WORKERS IN A.E.U. SHOP STEWARDS MEETING

AT THE GLASGOW DISTRICT A.E.U. SHOP STEWARDS' QUARTERLY MEETING THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION RECEIVED 110 VOTES AGAINST 112. THIS IS A CLEAR INDICATION THAT THE WORKING-CLASS DOES NOT ACCEPT THE VANSITTART HATE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GERMAN WORKERS, DESPITE THE LABOUR AND STALINIST LEADERS WHO ACTED AS ATTORNEYS FOR THE CAPITALISTS' VICIOUS ANTI-WORKING CLASS CAMPAIGN.

THE FACT THAT THE RESOLUTION WAS ONLY DEFEATED BY 2 VOTES UNDER LABOUR AND STALINIST PRESSURE, SHOWS THAT A STRONG FEELING OF INTERNATIONAL WORKING CLASS SOLIDARITY EXISTS ON THE CLYDE.

This Committee condemns the attitude taken up by the World T.U.C., and particularly that of the British delegation, in relation to the treatment of the German working class after the war.

It considers that this is a betrayal of the German working class and can only serve to strengthen the hand of Hitler and Goebbels when it is shown that Vansittart and the capitalists have the full support of the "leaders" of the working class organisations in the "Allied" camp.

We further consider that the German working class are no more responsible for the deeds of Hitler and the Gestapo in Europe than are the British working class for the deeds

of the British Imperialists in India and the colonies.

This Committee emphatically calls upon the T.U.C. and Labour leaders to abandon this shameful policy expounded at the World T.U.C., and to extend a hand of international class solidarity to the German workers. Such a policy could do no other than assist a revolutionary movement of the German workers against Hitler.

As the first step towards this, we demand that the Labour Party and Trade Union leadership break the coalition and industrial truce, that all Trade Union and Labour representatives are withdrawn from government posts, and that Labour wage an immediate struggle for power on a socialist programme.

SILICOSIS

The Story of a Soccer Team

We reproduce below an item from the "News Chronicle", (11/12/44). It is startling and dramatic proof of the extent to which the dread disease of Silicosis is ravaging the Welsh mining community.

This is the story of a tough young Soccer eleven who set out to sweep all before them in the Welsh mining valleys 14 years ago.

They were 11 picked men, strong, skilful, full of vim.

What happened to them is told by Margot Heinemann, a Labour research expert, in an important book, "Britain's Coal," published by Gollancz today.

The men all came from one anthracite pit in the Ammanford area, where the silicosis rate is exceptionally high.

Miss Heinemann reports how the miners' agent tried to get in touch with the team in 1943. Here is his report:

Goalkeeper (age 37). Buried in 1939 under fall of roof, injured spine and fractured pelvis. For weeks his life was in danger.

Alive today, but will never be able to work again.

Right-back (41). Total incapacity due to silicosis.

Left-back (34). Buried by fall in 1934. Fractured leg and shoulder. Able to perform only light work on surface.

Right-half (42). Partial incapacity due to silicosis.

Centre-half (42). Total incapacity due to silicosis.

Left-half (40). Total incapacity due to silicosis.

Outside-right (40). Total incapacity due to silicosis.

Inside-right. An exceptionally good workman and very strong, was always willing to work in the wettest places. At 25 contracted rheumatic fever and died.

Centre-forward (42). Total incapacity due to silicosis.

Inside-left (33). Partial incapacity due to silicosis.

Outside-left (36). Buried by fall of roof. Injured spine and will never be able to work below ground again.

Today there is another team in Ammanford. What will their fate be in 1954?

BREAK THE COALITION Labour to Power

on the following Programme

INDUSTRIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY.

1. Nationalisation of the land, mines, banks, transport and all big industry without compensation, as the prerequisite for a planned economy and the only means of ensuring full employment with adequate standards of living for the workers, and the operation of the means of production under control of workers' committees.
2. Confiscation of all war profits, all company books to be open for trade union inspection, control of production through workers' committees to end the chaos and mismanagement.
3. Distribution of food, clothes and other consumer commodities under the control of committees of workers elected from the Co-ops, distributive trades, factories, houses, and committees of small shopkeepers, and allocation of housing under the control of tenants' committees.
4. A rising scale of wages to meet the increased cost of living with a guarantee minimum; the rate for the job; and industrial rates for all members of the armed forces.

DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS

5. Repeal of the Essential Works Order, the Emergency Powers Act, and all other anti-working class and strike-breaking legislation.
6. Full electoral and democratic rights for all persons from the age of 18 years. Full democratic and political rights for the men and women in uniform.
7. Immediate freedom and unconditional independence for India, Ireland and all the colonies of Britain, immediate withdrawal of British armed forces from these countries; full economic and military assistance to the Indian and colonial peoples to maintain their independence against all imperialist attack.

MILITARY POLICY.

8. Clear out the reactionary, pro-fascist, and anti-labour officer caste in the armed forces; election of officers by the ranks.
9. Establishment of military schools by the Trade Unions at the expense of the state for the training of worker-officers; arming of the workers under the control of workers' committees elected in the factories, unions and in the streets for the defence of the democratic rights of the workers from reactionary attacks by the enemies of the working class at home and abroad.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY.

10. Against race hatred and discrimination of all forms (Vansittartism, Anti-Semitism, and the Colour Bar); for the fraternisation and co-operation of workers and soldiers of all countries.
11. Unconditional defence of the Soviet Union against all imperialist power, despatch of arms, food and essential materials to the Soviet Union under the control of the Trade Unions and factory committees.
12. A Socialist appeal to the workers of Germany, Europe, Japan, and the rest of the world, on the basis of the programme in Britain, to join the socialist struggle against Nazism, Fascism and all forms of capitalist oppression and for a Socialist United States of Europe and a Federation of Asiatic Soviet Socialist Republics.

REDUNDANCY IN BELFAST

Sir Stafford Cripps recently notified the Ulster Aircraft workers that their work is drawing to a close. He concluded his harsh message with the typical humbugging plea of the Belfast workers to accept the impending pay-off with public-spirited restraint.

Cripps received a fitting reply to his letter on Wednesday, 28th March, when 25,000 incensed workers staged a protest demonstration against redundancy. Each factory contingent was led by a band. A number of placards were carried bearing caustic comments on the broken promises of the capitalist politicians. Among them were "WORK OR FULL MAINTENANCE".

Converging on "Red Square", as the waste ground at Belfast High Street is popularly called, the demonstrators were addressed by the Trade Union officials who had placed themselves at the disposal of the meeting only because of their fear of losing control of their members. A few facts were recited exposing the Government's incompetence, and a call was made to the workers to vote Labour at the forthcoming General Election. Beyond this nothing was said.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Irish Section of the Fourth International distributed a special leaflet dealing with the crisis. The Labourites, the Stalinist "Communist" Party and the Trade Union officials were all of one mind in attributing the redundancy crisis solely to the bungling of the Stormont Cabinet. The developing redundancy crisis in Britain and the existence of mass unemployment on the European continent, were left unexplained. Nor was it pointed out that the government of the richest and strongest country in the world, the U.S.A., expects to be faced with the problem of coping with between 20 and 30 million redundant workers at the end of the war.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party alone offers the "redundant" aircraft workers a serious solution, which to be sure, won't be achieved by practising the art of parliamentary lobbying—pushing, prodding and cajoling—but only by waging a stern struggle. To maintain full employment in face of the decline in production in the aircraft industry, the Revolutionary Socialist Party advocates a reduction of hours of work sufficient to re-absorb all workers considered to be redundant. The R.S.P. demands the maintenance of the 47 hour week wage as the minimum wage, and that every increase in the cost of living should be met by a corresponding rise in wages. The entire cost of this programme must be borne by the capitalists, who have amassed huge profits out of the war. To expose concealed profits, the R.S.P. demands that Factory Committees be given full facilities to inspect Company Books.

W.W.

B.A.

Engineers Want More Pay

THERE IS ONE QUESTION WHICH EVERY MEMBER OF AN ENGINEERING UNION IS NOW ASKING. WHY IS IT THESE UNIONS, PARTICULARLY THE A.E.U. WITH ITS POWERFUL FUNDS, WITH A MEMBERSHIP OF ALMOST A MILLION ENGAGED IN A KEY INDUSTRY VITAL TO THE EMPLOYERS' WAR, PRODUCES AFTER MONTHS OF NEGOTIATION A PALTRY INCREASE OF 4s. 6d., MOST OF WHICH WILL PASS STRAIGHT INTO THE HANDS OF THE INCOME TAX COLLECTOR, LEAVING NOT ENOUGH EVEN TO MEET THE RISE IN PRICES WHICH ANDERSON PROMISED IN HIS LAST BUDGET SPEECH!

The reductions in overtime, and cuts in bonus earnings as a result both of the transfer of workers and the policy of the employers, has brought home to engineers just how inadequate their wage rates are.

It was in the light of these developments and in the face of a cost of living which has risen 54% during the war, according to the official figures, whilst fitters wages for example, have only risen 35%, that we watched carefully the progress of our unions' application for a "substantial increase" from the employers. The arbitration award has given us the "substantial increase" of 4s. 6d. a week!

A careful analysis of the negotiations between unions and employers just published shows that the whole answer is to be found in the policy of our union leadership, which is hamstringing our organisations.

The A.E.U. leadership in these negotiations used tones of gentle persuasion. They painted a beautiful picture of the post-war world, a picture of planned production, a large home market and expanding exports, plus better conditions for the workers —if only the employers would march hand in hand with their wage slaves!

"We believe," stated Tanner, on behalf of the engineering unions, "that any serious observer must now agree that the problem of securing exports for Britain in the post-war world cannot be solved by wage restrictions or by a return to international cut-throat competition."

In asking the employers to abstain from international cut-throat competition, Tanner and Co., might as well be asking the lion to shed its claws and teeth! Alexander Ramsey, who spoke on behalf of the employers must have secretly laughed loud and long to think that the leaders of one of the mightiest unions in the world could be capable of such a childlike utterance, could have such a simple faith in the employers as to believe they would put aside cut-throat competition. In any case, Ramsey's statements have more significance for workers assessing their post-war position than have the fairy tales of Tanner. Ramsey has left us no illusions that the employers of the world will amicably share out their markets after the war. He said:

"It might be, of course, that the manufacturers of the United States of America will survey the problem in a spirit of true altruism and cooperate with Britain in endeavouring to secure that the greatest good should be done to the greatest number in the shortest space of time, and that the credit worthiness of both nations should be pooled for the purpose. It is my personal view, however, that when the pressure and dangers and inspirations of war are over, the United States may endeavour to dispose of their surplus products in those markets for which they are likely to get the best and quickest return. . . . Moreover, in the larger export market it would certainly appear that new factors not entirely favourable to this country are likely to raise their heads. The development of production in all the Dominions and in India, the enormous expansion of production facilities in the United States of America, the clear intention of all these countries to protect their own manufacturing interests, but at the same time to sell as much as they can to others, are all factors we have to take into account."

Tanner, in trying to persuade the employers that they need not cut wages to maintain their exports and profits, said:

"We fully realise that if we are to get our full share of the new orders we must aim to be as efficient as other countries. But this will never be achieved by a low wage policy. We would remind you that wage rates in the United States—generally believed to be one of our most formidable competitors, if competition is once more allowed to

develop—are almost double what they are in this country."

Who is Brother Tanner kidding with this argument? He certainly is not kidding the employers. They are fully aware that the greater efficiency of American production is not due to the higher wages paid to American workers but to the dominant position of the American ruling class in world economy; to the superior productive power of their machinery and mass production methods, and the easy accessibility of raw materials. They are fully aware that if they are to compete with the American employers then it must be done principally by a greater exploitation of our labour power, which means lower, not higher wages for us. They are not blinded as to what the future holds in store for British capitalism.

Brother Tanner is not kidding the employers; he is kidding the workers! He is deluding them that under capitalism, in the post-war world, it will be possible to satisfy both our demands and those of our masters. Yet we know that it is impossible to achieve higher wages, less hours and social security for the workers; and at the same time growing exports, less competition and more profit for the employers.

It might be said, of course, that Tanner's statements were merely slick negotiation talk, that he was trying to befuddle the employers with arguments. If Tanner can smart-alec the employers into giving us a rise, then we would be foolish to refuse it. But this is not a question of one or two isolated manoeuvres in negotiation. Tanner paints a picture of bright post-war prospects not only to the employers, but also to the A.E.U. youth

conference. He tells the youth to "give no ear to the people who dimly predict that the position of youth after the war will be the same as last time. This time democratic advances have been made which are the foundations of and guarantee of a post-war world different from after the last war."

The whole strategy of the A.E.U. leadership, their preparations (or lack of!) for the post-war period are based on this prospect of a "world different from after the last war."

Every engineer knows that only after testing our strength will the employers grant us our demands, or even maintain our present standards. The future that opens out for us is not one of peace in industry, but of war, a fiercer war with the employers than any we have yet seen. In such a situation we are doomed to defeat under a leadership that is continually seeking ways and means of collaborating with the enemy; which refuses to prepare for future struggles; which covers up the real nature of the post-war capitalist world by phrases describing a brighter future; which withdraws from our armory its strongest weapon—the right to strike; which dampens our militancy and holds us back from taking offensive action against the employers now when we are strongest.

In the interests of our fight, not only for the barest means of life but also for the complete overthrow of the employers, militant engineers must campaign for an end of the industrial truce which is strangling our organisations, must campaign for a new and militant leadership with a policy capable of meeting future struggles.