LABOUR BRIEFING

20p

TRADE UNION SPECIAL

THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

Which way for Socialists in the Unions?

National Conference

The trade union movement is in the grip of New Realism after taking a battering from the Tory government and mass unemployment. There is a need to reassert the relevance of the trade union movement for the 1990s and discuss a socialist response to the changes which are taking place. Socialists have to regroup and reorganise and start to come to grips wth the political issues involved in this.

Sheffield Polytechnic Student Union

NOVEMBER 11/12th

For credentials, and to book creche places, write to The Socialist Conference (TU), PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

DON'T LET THE DOCKERS FIGHT ALONE!

MAKE THE TORIES PAY!

On Tuesday July 11th some one million workers were on strike — the largest number on a single day since the General Strike and the largest number of women ever.

Workers on British Rail and London tubes and buses, NALGO's half-million local government workers, and dockers all struck together.

After ten years of Thatcherism, rank and file militancy is throwing the Tories into crisis.

It is widely believed that the government scrapped the national dock labour scheme to provoke a docks strike and pass the blame for the huge balance of payments deficit onto striking dockers.

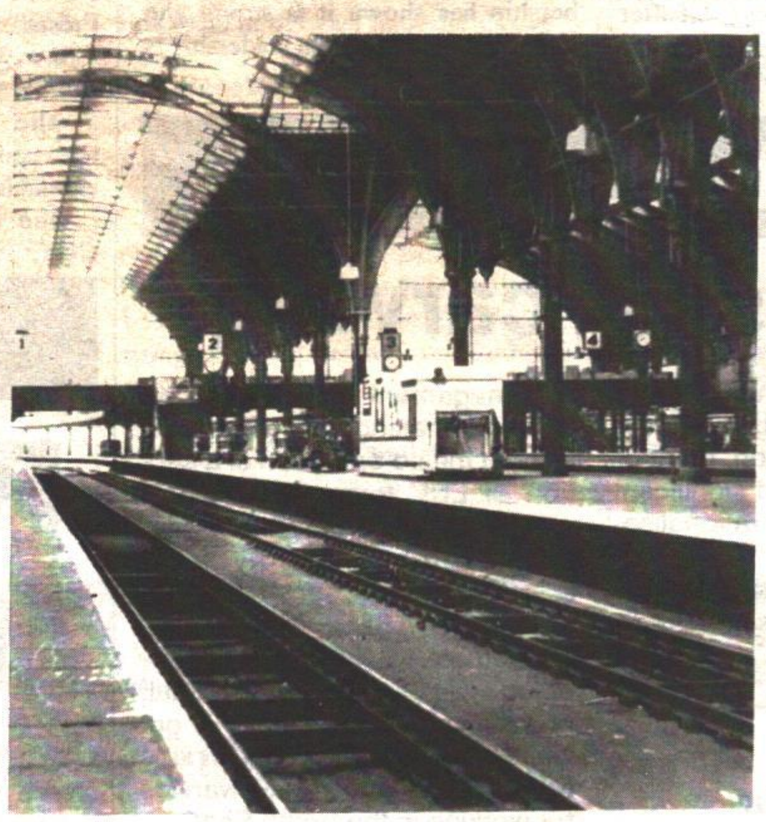
By Trade Union Briefing

What the Tories were clearly less prepared for was the response of hundreds of thousands of other workers to the worsening economic crisis.

With mortgage rates and bank loans spiralling, the organised working class has taken action to defend its living standards against the inflationary tide. Renewed pay militancy has also given workers a platform to defend threatened national conditions and bargaining machinery.

The destruction of these hard-won gains is vital for both government and employers in their desperate drive to increase "flexibility", i.e. their unlimited power to exploit workers.

For workers it is equally vital to maintain and improve nationwide conditions and bar-



Empty stations mean empty offices and businesses: workers' action will have its effect on the Tories' economic performance.

gaining, without which divisions in the workforce will multiply and the collective strength of unions will deteriorate.

These issues play a key role in the rail and local government struggles and are, of course, the core of the dock strike.

As in the miners' strike, the Tories are keen not to have more than one major dispute at any one time, lest striking workers develop a unified fightback against the bosses — and the government.

This is why Ministers told BR and the local government employers to make concessions and settle — so that they can isolate and deal with the dockers.

But strikers and those supporting them must realise that all these disputes are interconnected.

The current strike wave embraces private and public sectors, manual and white collar workers, women and men, and its effects have been felt in every part of the country.

The lesson that militancy pays is being relearned at the grass roots. Striking unions are recruiting hundreds of new members and new shop stewards and new activists are coming forward.

Meanwhile, the union leaderships have displayed their usual debilitating caution. Above all, their insistence of staying within Thatcher's anti-trade union laws has hampered and in some cases sabotaged effective strike efforts.

•In running to and from the courts, Ron Todd deliberately delayed the dock strike, allowing divisions to appear, giving the employers more time to prepare, and making victory much more difficult.

•NALGO leaders put the brake on by failing to ballot on all-out action during the initial one, two, and three-day stoppages.

•Jimmy Knapp tried to settle with BR without confronting the central issue of low pay.

Now Neil Kinnock has joined the propaganda war against the railworkers, by calling on them to accept BR's pitiful offer.

This "summer of discontent" is far from over. More than a million workers are waiting in the wings with new claims, including local government manual workers.

And the promised targeted action by the engineers for a shorter working week will give some of Britain's private sector giants a taste of the new militancy.

Continued on back page

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

British Rail

Privatisation is the name of the game

As the train drivers' union, ASLEF, caves in without a murmur, the National Union of Railwaymen seems set for a summer of industrial action.

Whatever the outcome, the stakes for both side are high.

By Toni Matthews

British Rail has been preparing the ground for privatisation over many years.

Driver-Only Operation on trains and unstaffed stations are just two of the more public features of this policy. The main thrust has been to get rid of jobs and increase productivity while maintaining extremely low wages.

Privatisation has already begun: Sealink and Travellers Fare have been sold off and Red Star Parcels is next for the chop.

The latest BR proposals over the national pay bargaining structures, if agreed, would be the final nail in the nationalised industry's coffin.

Dividing the industry into different sectors not only allows flexibility when it comes to floating BR on the Stock Exchange but, equally as important, it weakens the unions nationally.

British Rail is not everyone's idea of a good investment, but a low paid, compliant workforce with no national union voice is a good selling point.

That is why the NUR has insisted that both issues — pay and national bargaining — have to be resolved before industrial action is called off.

The NUR Executive is carrying out the decisions of its Annual General Meeting held at the end of June, decisions taken after a ballot of the membership supported industrial action.

It has been the NUR's one-day strikes, costing BR £30m each time, that have brought an increased pay offer, without strings, and some concessions on the national bargaining proposals.

ASLEF, after one week's overtime ban, accepted the pay offer of 8.8%. (It has not yet balloted its members on the bargaining issue). The NUR, despite ASLEF's sell-out, correctly decided to fight on for a decent wage for its members.

As a Labour MP said in the Commons: "Would you be pleased if after an 8.8% pay rise your gross weekly wage only came to £105?"

But ASLEF's failure to fight has been a blow to the NUR. It will further divide the two unions, already involved in a "membership war", and will open up divisions in the NUR's membership as the union is attacked from all sides.

BR, taken aback by the complete solidarity among NUR members, may well now up the ante: attempting to encourage members to return to work, to run a "ghost" service, on the promise of being paid the paltry pay rise as soon as they return.

The rail dispute has taken centre stage because the issues involved are issues affecting large parts of the public sector: national pay bargaining, low pay, and privatisation.

NUR members have shown that although they are not the "cream" of the workforce (as ASLEF like to think of themselves) they have brought the railways to a complete stop and BR to its knees.

If the NUR is forced to climb down, it will because of the combined efforts of BRB, the government, the media and the other rail unions.

Whatever the outcome, the membership has shown it is strong and united and with the right leadership is prepared to fight all the way.

London tubes

Fighting the bosses' carve-up

The struggle on London Underground has forced the real intentions of the bosses and the Tory government into the light of day.

In this pay round the bosses wanted to impose a 7% rise and lay the basis for privatisation by paying "key" workers big allowances over the "going rate" in order to undermine trade union unity and bargaining rights.

By a *Briefing* supporter on the London Underground

On Thursday July 20th, London Underground Limited management put forward a new position.

They offered an 8.75% pay rise, thus playing safe at just 0.05% below the BR offer, but way below the level required to compensate for the real inflation rate suffered by the workers.

On the fundamental issues of seniority and promotion and transfer rights — that is a degree of job protection and freedom from victimisation — management refused to budge an inch.

They have postponed imposition by three months, but that time is up in August.

In response to the train drivers' claim for compensation for loss of guards and restoration of the differential in relation to the remaining guards, management talked of raising drivers' pay to £18,000 per year.

That is the bait in the trap. In return they want... everything!

Previously they had simply asked for the ripping up of every single local and national agreement, the introduction of continental rostering, and significant moves towards depot rationalisation, i.e. closures.

Now they want a new negotiating machinery just for the traincrews.

LUL boss Denis Tunnicliffe said on television that he realised that the main grievance of the traincrews was that they weren't represented properly. He was going to do something about it.

This is the smokescreen behind which he hopes to overcome the real stumbling block of the "no strings" clause in the drivers' claim.

For it would be new depot reps elected under the new machinery who would sit down and "negotiate" the phased introduction of the pay increases and the new working arrangements.

Such "negotiations" would be a hollow farce. The deal would have already been agreed in all its fundamentals and an undertakings given by the national unions that there would be no further industrial action (clearly a first step towards a no-strike deal).

Management would have no hope of making this plan work without the co-operation of a section of LUL trade union representatives, which they are getting, unfortunately, mainly from ASLEF.

The BR-ASLEF deal made clear that ASLEF is only interested in its own grades. Over half of their national membership got well over the 8.8% on basic rates by attracting special allowances for working in the South East.

In order to guarantee the smooth passage of this gross sell-out of their fellow workers and of trade unionism in general the ASLEF representatives on LUL have been poaching NUR members.

During the unofficial phase of the tube strikes they posed as the only union doing anything for traincrews.

In this way they hope to get an overall majority of members in the train grades and thus ensure a majority in the new machinery which they had already agreed with management behind the backs of NUR and TSSA.

There were always two responses to management's pre-privatisation productivity drive: accept it and grab what you can, or fight it on the basis of protecting jobs and basic pay of all Underground workers.

ASLEF and TSSA have chosen the former. The NUR has chosen the latter — and we will win.

Pergamon 23

Maxwell, 1992, a international sol

After two months of struggle the Pergamon 23 reached a new stage in their fight for reinstatement and trade union recognition.

In the run up to September, when Maxwell will start raking in next year's subscriptions for his journals from libraries all over the world, the Chapel has initiated an international campaign seeking support from teachers', librarians', students', and above all print and journalists' unions in France, Australia, Germany, Canada, and the US.

A recent tour of French unions proved that international workers' solidarity can be achieved. It also proved that French unions, however divided and weak in certain sectors, have a better grasp of the issues at stake.

The Pergamon 23 received support from:

- the Syndicat National des Journalistes-CGT;
- the Union Syndicale des Journalistes Francais (USJF-CFDT);
- the intersyndicales (CGT, CFDT, FO and SNJ) at the Agence France Presse;
- *Le Monde*, *Liberation*, and *Politis*;
- the SURT-CFDT at TF1 television (where Maxwell hopes to extend his 12% share);
- the Syndicat des Correcteurs CGT;
- and the Filpac-CGT (main print union).

In every case there was unanimous support as well as detailed practical discussions.

These unions believe that the fight at Pergamon is their fight, not merely that of an abstract notion of solidarity but as an immediate and tangible issue.

Maxwell is perceived as the Murdoch of the French media. His links with Mitterrand, who welcomed him as "Friend of the Revolution" during the recent Bicentenary celebrations are there to serve his business interests.

His empire, while still at an embryonic stage, is shaping up to embrace all aspects of media and communication industries.

By a special reporter

If Murdoch succeeds in denying workers the right to strike and the right to be represented by trade unions in England, he will be better placed to force his way into France.

Unlike the British TUC, which keeps out of the way, hoping for better days in 1992, the French unions fear that 1992 will see England exported to Europe and workers' conditions are likely to be levelled at the bottom rather than the top.

This was one of the main factors in the tremendous response received by the Pergamon strikes wherever they

Aberdeen Rig

Pouring oil; a troubled work

On Friday July 21st the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) called off for the second time industrial action being taken by offshore construction workers.

Action had previously been called off for talks to begin after the shutdown of North Sea operations on July 6th in memory of the 167 workers killed in the Piper Alpha explosion.

By Graham Sullivan Aberdeen

The talks produced no results, and action was resumed.

The final outcome of the dispute is unclear at the time of writing. The only advance since the resumption of action has been vague talks at ACAS about organising a secret ballot on union recognition offshore.

What *is* clear is that what has been won falls far short of the original demands made by the OILC.

While wage increases of 14% to 20% were granted some weeks ago, the demand that the Offshore Construction Agreement should be applied to all construction work, was not granted.

Most construction work offshore at present is not covered by the OCA which provides wages about £2 an hour higher than work not covered by it.

There is no industry-wide agreement with the employers. There is now no mention of the application of the Health and Safety Act offshore — another major demand of the action, and no guarantee of trade union recognition.

There may be a secret ballot on recognition, but there is no firm commitment to this. Some companies have agreed grievance and disciplinary procedures with the unions.

The calling off of the action follows a period in which the stakes were being raised considerably. Employers such as Rigplast had been making dismissal and blacklising threats in an attempt to end sit-ins on platforms.

The Department of Energy, to which this was reported, found that the employers had not acted im-

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lidarity

went.

The SNJ-CGT promised to alert the Prague-based International Organisation of Journalists and co-ordinate support from Eastern Europe.

Filpac-CGT volunteered to take the issue into the International Graphical Federation, something the British NGA (also an IGF affiliate) never offered.

Instead,they asked the NUJ to go to ACAS before considering further the NUJ's request for help, and both NGA and SOGAT told their members to work normally — cross picket lines and collaborate with scabs.

Help from abroad is obviously a boost to the strike but it also highlights the support that is necessary here at home.

A crucial factor in many recent disputes has been the isolation of the workers involved and the inability of the TUC to play a significant role, as well as the lack of serious and consistency from the left (always finding something else more interesting).

For example, the Chapel managed with the help of Tony Benn to win a resolution of support from the Labour Party National Executive, despite the unfavourable balance of forces, the traditional "neutrality" of the leadership to industrial disputes, and the direct links with Maxwell.

However, support from the constituencies, the supposed bastion of the left, remains pathetic. Apart from Oxford East and West CLPs, only

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kers!

properly in making these threats.

Construction workers occupying the accomodation barge *Safe Gothia* also occupied the gangway connecting it to the Brent Charlie platform, in order to prevent employers lifting the gangway, cutting off the workers, and bringing in scabs.

Attempts by the company to obtain court autherisation for Sheriff Officers to evict 51 named workers from the barge were thrown out, on the grounds that the workers were not given an opportunity to present their views to the court.

In an important act of solidarity, 400 onshore workers at the St. Fergus terminal, where North Sea gas is landed, struck for a day.

The significance of this action should not be underestimated. In a viciously anti-union industry, thousands of workers went on strike and occupied platforms, affecting oil production — unprecedented in the industry's 25 year history.

Now catering workers, who recently gained an 11% pay rise, are considering action to "catch up" with construtions workers. The North Sea isn't calm yet...



Benn addresses Bastille-day rally — in "sans culottes" headgear!

Hendon South CLP has responded.

At the NALGO Conference, call for blacking Pergamon was referred back. Since then, there has been no attempt by NALGO activists to help the Chapel push the issue back into the heart of the union.

Apart from Oxford NALGO, the support from branches is limited to Devon County, Liverpool, and Islington.

On the print union front, the NGA and SOGAT are sitting on the fence, unwilling to use their enormous strength to help the strikers.

After eight weeks support is being built but at too slow a pace. The strikers are fighting day in, day out to mobilise that support, but they cannot fight for ever on their own if they don't see the labour movement coming to their aid.

The issues involved are of such importance that every trade union member and every activist should bear the responsibility to advance the strike.

French trade unionists have understood this. It is about time that activists here in Britain pulled out their fingers.

Messages of support, donations, requests for speakers, merchandise to: Pergamon Press NUJ Chapel, c/o 60 Cricket Road, Oxford OX4 3DQ; tel. 0865-819162.

NALGO: 12% and no strings

Keep fighting for the full claim!

NALGO's claim of £1,200 or 12% and no strings is just and reasonable.

It makes up for loss of earnings over recent years and starts to tackle low pay (40% of NALGO members earn below £7,723 — the Council of Europe's definition of low pay).

The employers' offer of 7% is a kick in the teeth for Council workers. With inflation at 8.5% and rising, this will be a pay *cut*, not a rise.

Worse yet, the strings that go with the pay offer mean the end of national agreements and bargaining on working conditions, as well as the abolition of national grades and grading appeals and the introduction of flexible working hours.

All these strings must be rejected. If they are not, the employers will be back for more next year: performance related pay, perpetuation of low pay, and further privatisation.

NALGO members have just finished their first round of industrial action. A national programme of six days strike action spread over three weeks was suppported by 90% of members in the vast majority of districts.

As NALGO has 500,000 members in local government, the recent strikes must be among the biggest in any sector for many years.

The tremendous response was the result of the efforts of stewards and branch activists who had to overcome both lack of confidence (due to a string of recent defeats) and lack of publicity.

The fight for decent pay has brought in a flood of new recruits and has strengthened union organisation in branches and shops.

The solid support for the strike has forced local employers to break ranks. Many are supporting a higher pay rise and/or no strings. Some have already reached local settlements.

Labour Authorities control the employers' side of the local government bargaining machinery.

By Fred Leplat
Islington NALGO

Although they can reasonably blame the Tory government for the cash-limits that restrict the pay rise, they have no excuse at all for an attack on terms and conditions.

NALGO needs a political campaign to press Labour Authorities to attack the Tory government, not their own workers.

Although the employers have still made no specific improved offer, the NALGO leadership is already preparing for a settlement by stepping down the action.

Proposals for the second round of industrial action were publicly released, without consulting the districts, contrary to the union's policy.

Not even the national Local Government Committee — the body responsible for the negotiations — was consulted!

Balloting is now taking place on the leadership's proposals for the second phase of industrial action: an indefinite series of national one-day strikes with a maximum of four in each month, and indefinite strike action by key groups of workers, e.g. Poll Tax, computer staff.

The one-day strikes will have little impact as staff struggle to clear the backlog. The employers will be prepared to sit out such action as NALGO members drift back to work.

Striking workers in key sections will get demoralised as they see others working normally.

Nevertheless, it is vital that the current ballots are won with clear majorities. The action may be insufficient, but a complete collapse would be far worse.

Informal talks between Nalgo and the employers have lead to a proposal to settle the claim at ACAS. Arbitration has also been suggested by John Cunningham and David Blunkett (this might well have resulted in a pay offer of 8.5% with no strings).

However, the Labour-controlled employers representatives have rejected any reference to ACAS and seem to be prepared to tough it out. In this context, Nalgo's strategy has weakened its position

The highly successful six days of national strike must not be in vain. Escalation of the action is necessary to win the claim in full without the strings.

All-out strike action would be difficult but not impossible to win in a ballot. In any case, it remains the only likely means of actually winning the full claim.

By building on the confidence gained through the recent action, with the union leadership campaigning as it did on the union's political fund, a "yes" vote *could be* obtained.

The strikes in other industries and services, and the one million local authority manual workers preparing to press their own claims, will bolster our chances of victory.

NALGO has the best chance in a long time to improve its members' pay and condtions and thereby set a bench mark for other Council workers.

Engineering Workers' Claim

For a 35-hour week and no loss of pay!

Engineering workers across the country are preparing to take action in support of demands for a 35-hour week without loss of earnings, increases in holidays and pay, and further limitations on overtime.

The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, which incorporates 14 separate unions, has targeted 12 major manufacturing companies for industrial action.

These include British Aerospace, GEC, Lucas, Plessey, Rolls Royce, and Vickers and Weir. Altogether the 12 companies operate 158 sites in Britain.

The CSEU is now consulting district officials and shop stewards to determine which sites in which companies will be balloted first. Strike action is likely to begin in September.

Meanwhile, another ballot will be held among non-striking union members to approve a levy of one hour's pay a week to support members on strike.

By MARK SEATON

With some two million workers affected by the CSEU claim, this could develop into one of the largest scale industrial struggles in recent years.

Back in 1979, engineering workers took action and reduced their working week from 40 to 39 hours, which subsequently became the norm in many other industries.

In 1987, the West German metalworkers' union IG Metall won a staged reduction of the working week from 38 and a half hours to 37 hours in engineering and from 38 hours to 36 and a half in steel.

It is estimated that this union victory has subsequently saved some 200,000 jobs in West German. IG Metall is now demanding a further reduction to 35 hours.

Overtime levels in the British engineering industry are currently at an all-time high.

Major rises in productivity and profits among engineering firms in Britain in recent years have been accompanied by a steady stream of job losses and a virtual standstill on wages.

Employers in the industry are now suffering a severe shortage of skilled labour. All of this has strengthened workers' confidence and determination.

The employers provoked the dispute in April when they rejected a union offer of flexible hours in return for a two hour cut in the working week.

Right wing AEU President Bill Jordan would have been happy to make a deal with them then, but they obviously didn't predict the wave of strikes and the gathering militancy and thought they could do better.

Now Jordan himself is under pressure to deliver substantial improvements for his members. His five-year term is coming to an end and he will soon have to face re-election.

The elaborate and time-consuming strategy — which could involve scores of separate ballots reflects Jordan's determination to stay within the law and to keep industrial militancy under a tight rein.

Nonetheless, the CSEU demands — which united manual and non-manual workers — will undoubtedly strike a chord with both female and male workers at all levels of the industry and the ballots will be handsomely won.

Whether or not the subsequent strike actions bear fruit (in the form of a reduced working week) will depend largely on the self-organisation of the workers involved and their ability to keep Jordan et al under pressure.

More women out than ever before

Women show discontent!

One of the records created by the wave of strikes during July was the number of women out — the greatest number ever.

This record could not have been set without the NALGO days of action.

More than half local government, white collar workers are women, and they are disproportionately represented at the bottom of the pay scales: 80,000 of them earn less than the £7,000 per annum set by the TUC as "low pay".

It has been noticeable, on picket lines and on NALGO demos, that women have been especially militant.

Convinced

Despite their low pay and family responsibilities, they have been convinced by the need to fight, not only for better wages, but more particularly against the break-up of the national bargaining structures.

The strikes have led to many women joining the union for the first time and others coming forward as shop stewards.

They are making themselves felt inside the union too.

NALGO now has a women's conference, with the right to send five resolutions to National Conference — something Labour Party women have yet to achieve.

Women in NALGO are still fighting for the next step: the right to make the Executive carry out Women's Conference policy.

Not that we should be surprised at the militancy of women. Ever since Thatcher's victory in 1979, women have continued to fight against Tory attacks.

Women have defended their reproductive rights against Corrie, Gillick and Alton; they have supported the miners and printers in their long battles against government attacks.

Women have played a leading role in the P&O strike, in teachers' struggles and in the fight to defend the NHS.

Black women have played a leading role in fighting deportations and in the defence of black communities.

Women have also been active in the recent transport strikes: nationally in the strikes against British Rail, and in London both on London Underground and on the buses.

Despite the smaller number of women working in these industries they have been in the forefront of action. They too are overrepresented at the bottom end of the pay scales.

Women For Socialism, along with the Trade Union Solidarity Network, are organising a series of rallies to celebrate the activities of women in this "Summer of Discontent".

Platforms

Platforms will include women in NALGO, in the NUR, women from the P&O dispute, from the NUJ Pergamon Press dispute, women fighting for reproductive rights (including, hopefully, a woman from the United States), and women fighting the Poll Tax.

The importance of the national dock strike will be recognised and where possible a docker will also speak.

Plans are underway for meetings to be held in London, Oxford, Bristol, Manchester and Sheffield.

Anyone wishing to help organise them should contact either Jane Kelly (01 703 9456), Barbara Green (01 607 9729), or Will McMahon at the Socialist Movement office (01 281 6225).

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Propaganda war on the docks

Don't fall for Tory tricks!

For the employers and the Tories victory over the dockers is crucial. They are prepared to go to great lengths to secure it.

With the aid of their friends in the media, they have been systematically exaggerating "back to work" figures and generally trying to paint the dockers' efforts as futile and ineffective.

This propaganda war, backed up by sackings of targeted activists and threats to rank and file dockers, has scored some victories.

The return to work of a minority of dockers at Tilbury, following the sacking of sixteen shop stewards there, has undoubtedly undermined morale.

But that only makes it more important than ever for socialists to put across the truth abut the docks strike — both about the costs being paid by the employers and the costs facing dockers and the docks industry if the employers win.

Some of the propaganda techniques used by the bosses have been quite crude. The National Association of Port Employers (NAPE) claimed that more (formerly) registered dockers were now at work in Great Yarmouth and Goole than actually ever existed on the Register in the first place!

Most of the scabbing which is going on actually has litle effect on the strike, because a handful of dockers alone on a strike-bound dock can do nothing: the port as a whole remains shut down.

Indeed, the vast majority of formerly registered docks currently back at work are small and insignificant ports, little more than wharves.

These cannot possibly accommodate all the trade usually dealt with by Britain's major deep water ports, Bristol, Tilbury, Southampton, and Liverpool, all of which are solidly on strike.

The major non-Scheme port is Felixstowe and much depends on the ability and determination of dockers there to support the strikers.

They are being asked not to handle any cargo re-routed from the former Scheme ports and indeed in mid-July they refused to allow a P&O cargo ship to dock there.

However, it is difficult for them to know whether or not cargo has been re-routed as it is all repackaged in containers bearing a variety of labels.

Not surprisingly, their employers offered them an 8.9% wage rise at the beginning of the strike — which they have now voted to accept.

What they must remember is that their wages and conditions have always been effectively tied to those in Scheme ports. Though the employers may need them now, if the strikers are defeated, it will not be long before their own wages and conditions deteriorate.

Meanwhile, the "back to work" drive did have some success in Immingham and Grimsby. However, most of the workers who returned to work there found themselves laid off within days.



Norman Fowler: is this a government retraining scheme?

PHOTO: Bruce C Monaghan

By MARK SEATON

The two largest port employers in Grimsby and another major one in Immingham have gone bankrupt, due to losses incurred because the uncertainties created by the strike had sent traders scurrying to make alternative arrangements.

This underlines the real economic potential of the strike. Most large shipping firms have had to alter their usual arrangements and are incurring extra costs hiring warehouse space, lorries, etc.

"Feedering" of cargo — transferring it from big ships to small ones and delivering it at the smaller non-Scheme ports — has enabled many major shipping firms to continue deliveries — but at considerably increased costs.

Hire rates for suitable vessels for strike breaking, mostly small ro-ro container ships, have skyrocketed in response to increased demand.

For the port bosses, these problems were further complicated when, in late July, the Rotterdam Port Employers Association advised its members not to accept diverted cargo.

At Ipswich employers are paying 176 non-dockers to do the work normally done by 88 registered dockers (all on strike) and have given them each an extra £3,000 a year.

That's half a million pounds in a year to break the strike at one relatively small port.

The problem for the dockers is that the employers, fully backed by the government, are clearly prepared to spend a lot of money to break this strike.

Intimidation and blackmail are also handy weapons. Sackings had already taken place at a number of strike-bound ports before the mass victimisation at Tilbury.

The famous £35,000 severance pay is being used to force workers to quit: they are told that if they stay on strike it will be withdrawn in the future and they will be left with nothing.

One of the new local contracts being imposed in place of the old Scheme stipulates that if you give evidence in any health and safety tribunal against your employer, you will be dismissed.

The thirty-page new contract sent to all Tilbury dockers does not once mention the existence of trade unions on the docks.

Clearly, the employers intend to eliminate not only any national collective agreement but along with it all basic trade union rights and indeed trade union recognition on the docks.

Privatisation of trust or municipally owned docks is now being discussed in government circles.

The employers and the Tories understand the stakes in this dispute. So must the labour movement. The dockers need our financial, political, and industrial solidarity.

MAKE THE TORIES PAY!

Contined from front page

With the Tories besieged on several fronts, many more sections of workers could press their demands. Partial victories will be possible as the government meets claims to end disputes and keep the dockers isolated.

If the dockers' strike — which is likely to be more difficult and protracted than the pay upsurge — is to be successful, then it is crucial that the involvement and experiences of trade unionists in industrial action are not lost.

Dockers will need effective mass "secondary" picketing — legal or no — to make their strike solid. But equally crucial must be the involvement of thousands of trade unionists — who are taking advantage of the government's weakness and have already taken part in action — within solidarity committees, dockers' support groups, and other ad hoc bodies.

Tremendous opportunities are opening up on the industrial front. The left has to rewrite its agenda to meet this situation.

It should:

•Raise the issue of solidarity with strikers throughout the labour movement and wherever possible build local solidarity and support committees.

•Fight to organise *active* strikes through democratic strike committees, mass meetings, and mass picketing.

•Demand that Labour leaders (at national and local Council level) support to the strikers — not the Tories' "national interest".

•Popularise the demand for a "sliding scale", i.e. automatic indexing of wages against inflation.

•Build the Socialist Movement Trade Union Conference on November 11th/12th. (See back page for details.)

•Unite the struggles. If the dockers are defeated it will be a blow to the militancy and strength of the whole working class. Don't let anyone fight alone!

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