



PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP (BRITISH SECTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL)

SHREWSBURY SMASH TORY ATTACK

By CHRIS BALFOUR

The imprisonment of three trade unionists in the recent Shrewsbury trial is a threat to every trade union militant in the country. It is an outright attack on the ability of the rank-and-file to conduct any form of struggle in defence of its interests.

This move is part-and-parcel of the offensive against the working class movement that the Tory Government has been preparing since the humiliating defeat of the Government in the last miners' strike. If the working class is to emerge from this fight victorious, it must smash every move by the Tories against the labour movement: both

the 3-day week and the Shrewsbury trials.

The trade union movement must make it clear to the Tory Government that it does not accept the right of the capitalist state to decide what forms and methods of working class struggle are 'acceptable'. That decision will be made by the labour movement according to its own needs and concerns, and every intervention by the state against workers

in struggle—whether based on conspiracy charges, other criminal charges, or the Industrial Relations Act—will be met with the full, united force of the whole movement.

The Shrewsbury decisions are being appealed. But recent events have shown beyond doubt that the courts are a willing tool of the Tory offensive—the recent ruling by the House of Lords that pickets do not have the right to stop lorries and talk to the drivers is only the latest example. There is only one way to affect the outcome of the appeal—by massive working class action of the sort that freed the five dockers leaders jailed in 1972. On that occasion the Government used the Official Solicitor to disguise the fact that they were retreating before mass action. This time they may use the court of Appeal. How they do it is their business—but they must be forced to *Free the Three—Reverse the Verdicts—Stop the Trials*.

The immediate task facing trade union militants across the country is the organisation of a massive campaign of industrial and political action to win these demands. Valuable leads have already been given by building workers in Edinburgh who understand that the key to the situation is an all-out national building workers strike. Building workers everywhere should launch all-out strikes as soon as possible in the new year as possible, and demand that the UCATT and T&GWU leaderships call an official strike.

Around this focus a campaign of protest strikes and demonstrations by other groups of workers must be organised, and preparations laid for the stepping up of the struggle if the Government refuses to back down. Representatives from the entire labour movement in every locality should meet as soon possible to plan such solidarity actions, and every trades council, union branch, and shop stewards committee in the country should send delegates to the forthcoming recall meeting of the conference convened earlier this year by the Liverpool Trades Council in defence of the Shrewsbury workers, in order to develop national coordination of the campaign. (The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions has also decided to hold a meeting in Birmingham on 19 January which will take up the Shrewsbury case along with other aspects of the Tory offensive.) The call must go up from every quarter of the movement for the TUC to give full backing to such mobilisations.

This is the only way to defeat that prong of the Tory offensive which has struck at the Shrewsbury building workers. A victory in this struggle would be a massive demonstration to the whole working class of the power of united action, and an inspiration to launch the sort of counter-offensive which could drive the Tory Government and their policies off the stage once and for all.

Independent action the way to win

By STEWART MACLENNAN

UCATT shop steward, Bardolin's Moray House site, Edinburgh; member of Edinburgh building workers' Joint Shop Stewards Committee

Edinburgh building workers, led by their Joint Shop Stewards Committee, have been to the fore throughout the campaign against the Shrewsbury show-trials.

The first major initiative was the organising of a conference by the Edinburgh and District Trades Council in response to calls from the JSSC and the Edinburgh Central and Portobello branches of UCATT. This was attended by 150 workplace and trade union branch delegates, and was preceded by an intensive campaign of leafleting and mass meetings on sites throughout the city.

An attempt by the Trades Council Executive to keep a tight rein on the campaign after the conference—by confining the Action Committee to a largely self-appointed group of Trades Council officers and representatives of the major unions—was effectively by-passed by the response of the JSSC to the call for action on the day the trial opened (3 October). On that day 3,200 men on 13 sites were pulled out thanks to the efforts of the JSSC, and 500 joined a demonstration outside the Scottish Office. Few cities elsewhere were able to boast of such a response.

Within a day of the sentences the Edinburgh stewards brought out three major sites on a 1-day strike and organised a picket with delegations from 11 sites outside the Scottish Office. A meeting of all stewards has now been called for next week to organise a massive campaign of action throughout the local labour movement.

Our record in defence of the Shrewsbury workers and the right to picket stands in stark contrast to that of those organisations which have *counterpoised* putting pressure on the trade union bureaucracy to the organisation of independent action by the mass of the working class. We are of course absolutely in



Bill Jones of national Shrewsbury Defence Committee speaking on Edinburgh site earlier this year

favour of forcing the bureaucrats to take up the campaign, but the limited moves which the UCATT and T&G leaders have made have all been forced on them precisely by the determined action of large numbers of their members and not by pleas and compromises.

The decisive factor in breaking the back of the Shrewsbury show-trials and releasing the three, will be whether or not building workers are prepared to give a clear indication to the Tories and to their fellow-workers that they are determined to free their brothers and defend their right to picket. That action must take the form of a national building workers' strike and a campaign throughout the working class to make clear the implications of the attack on picketing in relation to the battle against Phase 3.

It is by explaining the significance of this attack to their own struggles that other sections can be won to generalising the Shrewsbury campaign throughout the class, making it a focus of the mass struggle against the Tory Government.

It is clear that the line of the Communist Party—of relating action to the line of the bureaucracy—cuts right across such a campaign and is a direct threat to its development. In the present situation it is a recipe for token actions which will do nothing to free the three. Those militants who up to now have adhered to this approach must consider whether they will continue to do so, or whether instead they will continue to defend the rights of their class in struggle by fighting for national strike action.

SHREWSBURY—CLASS STRU

Three years, two years, and nine months in prison for Dennis Warren, Eric Tomlinson and John McKinsie Jones, for offences on the picket line! Nothing of this kind has happened before in Britain in living memory. Surely these men must have done something wholly unusual and outrageous to meet this fate?

A study of this remarkable trial, however, shows that they did nothing particularly unusual for trade unionists. The novelty lies not in what they did, but in the application of the law of criminal conspiracy to the activities of trade unionists in the class struggle. It is the legal chemistry which alone explains the spectacular results of the trial.

JOKER IN THE PACK

The six men in court each faced three separate charges: 'fighting and making an affray', 'unlawful assembly', and 'conspiracy to intimidate workers to abstain from work'. The joker in the pack is the conspiracy charge.

The maximum sentence the Courts can give for 'intimidation' (which generally means use of threats) is three months imprisonment. But there is no such limit on conspiracy charges. Thus conviction on conspiracy can be much more serious than conviction for the offence which it is alleged you conspired to do (but may never even have carried out). For Dennis Warren it turned out to be twelve times as serious. The importance of the Shrewsbury case is that trade unionists have been jailed for offences which previously resulted in a moderate fine at worst.

The use of a conspiracy charge so governs the course of a trial that it colours even those offences over which it is not alleged there was any conspiracy. The rules of evidence governing conspiracy cases are so loose that defendants can be character-assassinated with all manner of hearsay, suppositions and allegations about events which have nothing to do with those from which the specific charges arise. Little wonder then that by the time the trial had ended the jury found one man, John McKinsie Jones, guilty of fighting and making an affray even though the judge himself dismissed the evidence against him. He got nine months imprisonment.

The one specific allegation of violence made against Eric Tomlinson and Dennis Warren was that they pulled a lump worker off a road roller. The jury convicted them of fighting and making an affray, even though defence witnesses testified that the man got off the

vehicle without any help from anyone else. In such an instance, one might normally have expected the jury to dismiss the charge on grounds of 'reasonable doubt'. But not after the two men had been ceaselessly grilled as conspirators for nearly three months.

'AGREEMENT'

The conspiracy charge dominated the trial. According to the prosecution, these six men went to Shrewsbury to picket building sites 'with a common purpose, an agreement between them to intimidate blacklegs'. This 'agreement' constituted conspiracy.

But, as the judge pointed out, the prosecution had to *prove* to the jury that these men *actually intimidated* anybody. Nor was it necessary for the prosecution to say when or where the alleged agreement was made. 'It is not necessary for the prosecution to prove that they sat down and worked it out', said the Judge. When the defence protested that, 'some of these men met for the first time on these sites', the judge interrupted: 'You know very well it can be a conspiracy when they never met and never knew each other'. A wink and a nod is enough, it seems.

There was no evidence at all brought to show an agreement, but then evidence isn't necessary. As the judge put it: 'It can be conspiracy by inference of all the circumstances'. In other words, the jury were being asked to convict on *suspicion*.

Anything and everything can be adduced as grounds for believing a conspiracy to have occurred, including the alleged actions of *other unknown persons*. Thus a violent confrontation of some sort took place on the Kingswood site in Shrewsbury on 6 September—the identity of those taking part could not be established, only that they were part of a picket squad which had been organised by the six men in court. By virtue of the fact that these six men, all union branch secretaries or chairmen, undertook the *organisation* of flying pickets to make the strike more effective, they assumed *criminal responsibility* for the actions of each and every one of those pickets.

The same logic lies behind the charge of unlawful assembly. If more than three people are pursuing a purpose, even by legal means, which in the *opinion of the police* is likely to cause a breach of the peace, then they are guilty of unlawful assembly. Why, said the

defence, charge these particular men out of the several hundred present? Because as organisers and leaders 'by their presence they were encouraging the others'.

OFFENCE TO ORGANISE

So the jury were being asked to say that the mere act of organising a picket or demonstration can be an offence. Working class organisation *itself* becomes an offence.

Few people would agree with such a view, yet the jury voted by a majority of ten to two that it was so.

After three months of listening to a farrago of allegations from hundreds of witnesses, in a trial costing £500,000, the jury must no doubt have felt that 'maybe there's something in all this after all'. Possibly there were even some hostile anti-trade unionists among the jury. We shall never know, because the Government abolished the right of defence counsels to question the occupation of the jurors. . . . a few weeks before the Shrewsbury trial opened in October.

CLASS STRUGGLE

To make it all credible to the jury, the prosecution tried to show that there was no explanation for the events at Shrewsbury on 6 September other than a conspiracy by a small group of men to make sure that violence and intimidation occurred whatever happened. To do this, judge and prosecution tried to keep the realities of the class struggle out of the court.

The defence could only counter by continually reminding the jury what the class struggle is really like. For example, the fact that these men were leaders does not at all mean they could be held responsible for everything done by those they led. In a workers' organisation, leaders are, or should be, continually subject to the discipline of the rank and file. In a bourgeois army or a capitalist firm, the commander or the boss can order people about and can reasonably be held responsible for his subordinates' actions. But if unknown workers did commit violence, it does not follow at all that it was on the instructions of the leaders.

The large number of pickets itself would constitute intimidation, said the prosecution. Why else would hundreds of workers go to picket a site if not with the intention of fighting? Des Warren explained to the jury that the purpose of numbers was to show those still at work that if they joined the strike, they

were not joining a futile enterprise. Also, there would be safety in numbers if the employers tried to intimidate them after they had joined the strike.

The prosecution again attacked Warren: 'Wasn't it your technique to first intimidate other workers, then rope them into a meeting and get them to vote (to strike) under duress?' Apparently, according to the prosecution, this had been the 'usual pattern' for many weeks. The pickets had gone about the job of bringing thousands of lump workers into the strike on hundreds of sites by systematic intimidation. Despite the fact that there was no evidence whatsoever of this, and that the police said they saw no damage being done even on 6 September itself, the judge nevertheless accepted the prosecution line in his summing up. He told the jury that £5,000 of damage had been done by the pickets, who then 'rounded up' the remaining workers for a meeting with Warren.

JOIN THE UNION

Warren's reply to all this was very simple. 'Every worker in the building industry is a potential trade unionist and you are not going to win people round by frightening them'. The aim was to get men to renounce the well paid lump, join the union and fight for the aims of low paid strikers. Violence would not achieve this.

The judge tried to rule that all discussion of the lump was 'irrelevant' to the case. But the defence had to show that slogans like 'Kill, kill, kill the lump' were not evidence that the strikers intended to kill lumpers. The defence also had to show that lumpers were often hostile to trade unions and were not innocents or neutral witnesses.

It thus proved impossible to keep the class struggle out of the courtroom entirely. It was the evidence from these lumpers which was most revealing. For there is one truly astonishing thing about this trial which its architects forgot. The net they have tried to throw over the six defendants is so wide that—on the basis of testimonies in court—it could have been applied with equal, if not more, justice to the *other side* in the struggle.

First there were the open admissions. One lumper cheerfully recalled how he had thrown bricks at the pickets, while another remembered that they had threatened to cut off a man's head with a shovel. Most startling of all was the man who threatened pickets with a *shot-*



Workers from all across the country demonstrated their solidarity with the Shrewsbury 24 last 18 May

GGLE IN THE COURTROOM

gun! None of these people were charged with anything at all. The man with the shotgun was not even investigated by the police, although the gun was handed over to them at the time by the pickets.

CONSPIRACIES

Obsessed with conspiracies, the court hardly seemed to notice these 'minor' offences. But was there not also an actual conspiracy between employers and the State when one employer could say to Warren: 'I've been told I can have every available policeman in the area to keep this job going? Was there not some evil conspiracy between violent men when Warren could be told to get off a building site, or else an 'anti-picket squad' of 300 men would arrive from 'the syndicate' to 'forcibly remove' him and his men? Perhaps we might 'infer from all the circumstances' that it was this same syndicate of lump employers which was responsible for the anonymous bomb threats against Warren and his family?

And is there not, after all, a permanent conspiracy by lump employers to intimidate men to abstain from lawful work when lumpers are forced to work on building sites in conditions which violate the laws governing safety regulations? As a result of these conditions, hundreds of building workers die every year through accidents. As it turns out, the 'lawful work' from which the pickets are alleged to have 'intimidated men to abstain' was, as the defence pointed out, *not lawful at all!* Perhaps there was also a conspiracy between the judge and the Director of Public Prosecutions—a nod and a wink you might even say—that such 'technicalities' as this would not stand in the way of 'justice'?

The danger of the conspiracy laws are clear from the Shrewsbury trial. But there is another issue at stake here.

Should our defence of the Shrewsbury 24 be affected by the fact that three of them were found guilty of using violence? This question will become more important still in the trial

of the remaining 18, which may well not hinge around conspiracy at all, and where the prosecution may come up with better evidence.

But we must not remain as blind as the judge and the jury at Shrewsbury. The whole bizarre tale shows very clearly that even if the police and the DPP managed to overlook it, the capitalists and their allies used and even planned violence against trade unionists. They had *organised* for it. And this is quite apart from the fact that the 'legitimate' forces of violence, the police, were also on the other side. Why should workers therefore be expected to renounce violence?

TACTICS

The facts brought to light at Shrewsbury show the futility of taking any position against violent picketing. It would be foolish in the extreme to tie our hands in advance to some pacifist morality which—it is perfectly

obvious—the enemy himself doesn't respect.

It is clear that the flying picket at Shrewsbury was not some workers 'red army' sent to Shrewsbury in an act of war. The pickets went there hoping to peacefully persuade.

They were met with violence and provocation from the other side, and the prosecution might well be able to show that some violence was committed by the pickets. But the attitude of the working class movement should be the same as the enemy: as far as violence is concerned, it is a matter not of abstract morality, but only if and when to use it.

We cannot allow the ruling class to decide our tactics for us through the courts. Therefore, even if a court finds a picket guilty of using violence, our defence of that picket must be *unconditional*. The defence of all the Shrewsbury 24 remains a vital task.

DAVE BAILEY

LAW : TORIES' HIDDEN ARMOURY

We hear a great deal these days about the 'rule of law'. Everyone from Harold Wilson to Tory stalwart Lord Hailsham has been lecturing the working class on the need to stick to the rules as laid down by the Government and Parliament.

Two weeks ago the entire working class got a good look at what the 'rule' of these gentlemen's 'law' actually involves—three building workers clapped in prison for the 'crime' of organising pickets and fighting for decent conditions in their industry.

There is nothing surprising in this, for the 'law' is made by Parliament, which serves the interests of the ruling class, and is applied to ensure that capitalist rule is not threatened. The 'rule of law' is simply the rule of the capitalist class.

THE LAW—A BIG STICK

This lesson has been hammered into the working class movement from the very moment of its birth. For the first century of its existence even the simplest forms of trade union activity were suppressed under the law as 'criminal conspiracies'. Only after a long and ferocious fight were some of these legal restrictions eased up. Even then trade union activity remained penned in by an iron ring of laws.

If this basic fact of working class life has seemed less obvious in recent years, it is only because the ruling class has tried, on the basis of an expanding capitalist economy, to make a deal with the trade union leadership to underwrite the rule of the capitalist class in exchange for a few material concessions. But that day is over. Capitalist society is in crisis, and even the small material gains granted to the working class in recent years now seem to the ruling class like too high a price to pay.

The ruling class is going on the offensive and, as in the past, it can be expected to use the power of the law against the working class movement. For the law carries with it one powerful advantage—the entire leadership of the working class movement has always bowed down before the 'majesty of the law' (and this attitude has infected wide layers of the working class as a whole). Thus the law is not only a big stick in the hands of the ruling class, but a stick which the trade union bureaucrats are afraid to fight back against.

COMMON LAW

According to legend, Britain is a country in which the law and the state are 'neutral', in which there are no political laws and no political prisoners. As with so many other treasured 'principles' of the ruling class, these sometimes have to go by the board in the fight to maintain class rule. The struggle of the nationalist population in the north of Ireland has forced the British state to recognise the category of 'political prisoner' in at least one corner of its domain.

The fact does remain, however, that a flick through the various Acts of Parliament currently in force would uncover relatively few laws with an openly political purpose. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that the British state is poorly equipped to launch a legal attack on the working class

movement and deal powerful legal blows to any movement that attacks the basis of capitalist rule. Quite the opposite is true.

The various Acts of Parliament tell only half the story. Unlike most other countries—certainly as far as criminal law is concerned—a great deal of English law does not exist in the form of written 'statutes' passed by Parliament at all. Rather it is 'common law'—a body of law that has grown up as custom and tradition over the centuries and exists only in the form of the written records of the judges who have at one time or another applied these traditional rules.

The importance of the 'common law' is that it gives British judges a much bigger part in shaping the law than their counterparts in other countries. The courts always have the job of 'interpreting' written laws, but under the common law these powers are vastly multiplied—there are no clearly written rules to go by, there is no body that can be consulted as to the true intention of a particular law, and the only authority on such matters is the decisions of previous judges (and higher courts can ignore those 'precedents' set by lower courts). This gives the highest court in the land—the House of Lords—the power to make and re-make the common law virtually as it sees fit.

All this gives English law a tremendous degree of flexibility. Probably more than any other capitalist legal system, it can adjust itself quite precisely to the balance of power between the different social classes and the level of class struggle at a particular point in time. Like a conjuror's wand it can summon up new 'crimes' when the situation requires them, and just as dramatically whisk them away with the flick of a wrist when the moment of need has passed.

CONSPIRACY TO TRESPASS

Let us take just one example of this process. A few years ago, when student occupations were rife, a number of back-bench Tory MPs were roused from their slumber to demand that these unwarranted attacks on Western civilization should be dealt with under the criminal law. Students occupying college buildings were trespassing; but under English law 'trespass', while *unlawful* is not a *crime*; it is a civil wrong which the courts can issue writs to prohibit, and for which a trespasser can be sued, but not a criminal offence which the state can punish.

Thus the demand of the day was for trespass to be made a criminal offence. But such a move would have involved certain difficulties: a bill would have had to be drafted and debated in Parliament, it would have received widespread publicity, Labour MPs under pressure from various quarters would have had to take a stand on the proposed bill, and opponents would have had an opportunity to organise against the enactment of such a law. As it was, no such bill was proposed.

In 1972 a number of students from Sierra Leone occupied their Embassy in a political protest. They were promptly arrested and charged with 'conspiracy to trespass'. Now one of the peculiar features of the law of conspiracy, is that it can be a crime to *conspire* to do certain things which are not themselves crimes. However, for more than 150 years English

judges have held that 'conspiracy to trespass' does not exist as a crime under the common law. But in July 1973 the House of Lords overturned this long-established view and ruled that such an offence did exist. So the capitalist state obtained a powerful legal weapon to use against political demonstrations without all the fuss, bother and upheaval of passing a new law through Parliament.

HIDDEN ARMOURY

This example brings us directly to the law of conspiracy. 'Conspiracy' is a criminal offence under the common law. Of late it has become very popular with the ruling class, particularly in political cases. The three building workers jailed in Shrewsbury are only the latest victims.

The use of the conspiracy laws exposes most clearly the powerful legal weapons which the ruling class have hidden away in their armoury, ready for use in the class struggle. The following are just some of the tremendous advantages the law of conspiracy offers the ruling class:

1. A conspiracy charge can be used to make into a crime an action which would not be a crime by itself. An agreement by two or more people 'to do an unlawful act, or to do a lawful act by unlawful means', is a criminal conspiracy. This definition can cover three types of acts: a. those which are crimes by themselves; b. civil wrongs—such as trespass—which can be turned into crimes by the use of the conspiracy laws; c. the very broad categories of conspiracies to 'corrupt public morals' or to 'effect a public mischief'.

Almost any political action against Government policy could be declared illegal under this third heading. For example, all the big demonstrations and one-day strikes against the Industrial Relations Act could have been prosecuted as 'conspiracies to effect a public mischief' by attempting to thwart the intentions of Parliament.

A WIDE NET

2. A conspiracy charge is often easier to prove than a charge that something was *actually done*, and it can be used to cast a wide net drawing in people whose involvement in the alleged 'conspiracy' was minimal. The only basis that need exist for a conspiracy charge is that an *agreement was made* to do something: nothing need actually have been done, nor even any practical preparations made. Moreover, there need not be any evidence of a formal understanding—the 'agreement' can be implied in the actions of the alleged 'conspirators'. This aspect of the law is very valuable to the state in political cases, making almost any form of collective action into a conspiracy.

As one judge put it during a political trial in the 1860's:

'So far as proof goes conspiracy is generally a matter of inference...It may be that the alleged conspirators have never seen each other, and have never corresponded; one may never have heard the name of the other, and yet by the law they may be parties to the same common criminal agreement. Thus, in some of the Fenian cases tried in this country, it frequently happened that one of the conspirators was in Amer-

ica, the other in this country; that they had never seen each other; but that there were acts on both sides which led the jury to the inference...that they were engaged in accomplishing the same common object; and...the acts of one became evidence against the other.'

Individuals who had only remote links with any unlawful activity could be charged with a crime by arguing that they were part of an unstated 'agreement' to carry out this activity. For example, if a demonstration was broken up by the police and fighting broke out between police and demonstrators any organiser of the demonstration (even if he was not present) and anyone on the demo (even if he took no part in the fighting and was not in any position of authority) could be charged with a conspiracy on the grounds that they were part of an unspoken agreement to fight the police. Something very like this was done to the organisers of the demonstration held in London after the 'Bloody Sunday' killings in Derry in 1972.

3. A conspiracy charge can be used to impose a vicious sentence for a relatively mild offence because all common law offences can be punished by a jail sentence of any length. The most blatant example of this is the Shrewsbury case. If the defendants had actually been convicted of 'intimidating workers to abstain from work' they could only have received a maximum of three months in jail. But because they were convicted of conspiracy *to do the same thing*, the judge could hand down sentences of three years, two years, and nine months.

LAW IN 'FIGHTING SHAPE'

After the miners' strike the Home Secretary was deluged with demands for tougher laws on picketing. He replied that this wasn't necessary—the existing law was tough enough. For once he was telling the truth—all that was needed were a few favourable court decisions to get the law in 'fighting shape'.

It is this which the state has been busy tidying up over the past year or so. The massive effort and expense they put into the Shrewsbury case was part of this plan. Only the day after the Shrewsbury verdicts, another part of the plan payed off: the House of Lords ruled that the right of peaceful picketing did not include the right to stop lorries to 'peacefully persuade' the drivers not to cross the picket line. This decision (which now becomes binding on every court in the country) makes picketing into a joke.

The working class movement must understand what such cases involve—a new addition to the stock of legal weapons which the ruling class can use in its fight against the trade union movement. Each and every attack on picketing, and other trade union activities must be fought with the maximum unity and determination by the movement as a whole.

At the present moment this means fighting to reverse the Shrewsbury verdicts and free the three. If this is not done the ruling class will have won a major victory: the most elementary form of trade union struggle can be branded 'criminal', and every trade unionist threatened with imprisonment. We must not allow this to happen.

Brian Stoodok

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS RESPONSE

The announcement of the Shrewsbury sentences could not have been better timed to hinder an effective response — just two days before the Christmas holiday. But despite this careful manoeuvre on the part of the ruling class, measures to prepare a mass working class response are already under way in a number of areas. In the coming weeks every effort must be made to draw these together into an effective, co-ordinated campaign of national industrial action.

Birmingham

Full-time trade union district secretaries and organisers, together with the convenors of major factories in the area, have been asked by UCATT regional secretary Ken Barlow to attend a meeting on Wednesday 2 January to discuss action in support of the Shrewsbury workers. There will also be a meeting of all the city's building site shop stewards on Monday 7 January, and the idea of an all-city shop stewards' conference is also being mooted.

Bristol

A meeting of the Trades Council on Thursday 20 December decided to call for a demonstration and supporting strike action on Monday 7 January. It also voted to support the already established defence committee and to send delegates along to its meetings.

Edinburgh

A specially convened meeting of the building trade Joint Shop Stewards Committee on Thursday 20 December decided to call for immediate strike action on the three best organised sites in the city: Myton's Commonwealth Pool, Myton's University, and Laing's St James Centre. All three were out solid on the Friday, and together with delegations from eight other sites they took part in a 200-strong protest lobby of the Scottish Office.

The Joint Shop Stewards Committee has also decided to hold a meeting of all stewards on Monday 7 January to discuss further industrial action, and a motion was passed recalling the Trades Council Executive to discuss the issue. Telegrams were sent from the meeting to the Liverpool Trades Council asking for a recall meeting of the September conference, and to UCATT and the TUC demanding that they call a General Strike in defence of the Shrewsbury workers.

Glasgow

A meeting of building trade unionists on Saturday morning, 29 December, decided to call for a joint meeting of the Trades Council Executive, the Charter Defence Committee and UCATT shop stewards to organise industrial action on the case. This meeting took place on the Saturday afternoon, but all that has so far been decided is to hold a meeting of all shop stewards and to organise a mass rally on Saturday 12 January.

Liverpool

A joint committee uniting representatives of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, the T&GWU and UCATT has called for a one-day stoppage throughout Merseyside against both the imprisonment of the three and the imposition of a three-day week. This will be accompanied by a mass demonstration concluding with a rally in the city centre, although the exact date for this has yet to be fixed.

A meeting of Liverpool Trades Council on Thursday 20 December voted to support any industrial action in defence of the Shrewsbury workers, as well as agreeing to hold an immediate protest demonstration on 20 December, which was attended by about 200 people. The Trades Council has also agreed in principle to a recall meeting of the national Shrewsbury conference it organised in September, although the details of this have yet to be fixed.

A meeting of all Merseyside shop stewards to discuss further action has been called by the Trades Council for the evening of Thursday 3 January. Already some sites have voted for strike action, notably the corporation workers on the Dovecot urban renewal sites, who struck on Thursday 20 December and declared their intention to remain on strike after the holiday.

London

Several hundred people braved pouring rain on Friday 21 December to demonstrate in support of the Shrewsbury workers outside the Millbank Tower, where TUC leaders were engaged in talks with Heath and the employers on the energy crisis.

Last Friday, 28 December, a meeting of the recently established all-London Shrewsbury Defence Committee passed the following motion: 'In line with the call by the London Trades Council for a stoppage on 15 January around the question of the three-day week, Phase 3, inflation, etc., bearing in mind the jailing of the Shrewsbury 3 on the question of picketing, this meeting proposes that this day be the starting point for strike action escalating to general strike proportions, and further calls on the two building trade unions and the TUC to endorse this action.'

This motion will be discussed at site meetings this week, and there will also be a public meeting on Friday 4 January, at 7.30 in Shoreditch Town Hall. It is hoped that Lawrence Daly will be among the speakers.

The Barking and Dagenham Defence Committee has also swung into action, producing a bulletin on the case for distribution this week. It has also called for a picket of the TUC headquarters at Congress House on Thursday 3 January at 2.30p.m.

Manchester

Site meetings will be held throughout the city on Wednesday 2 January, the day building workers return after the holiday, and an appeal is going out to all other trade unionists in the Greater Manchester area to join a demonstration on 7 January. It is hoped that the latter will be accompanied by stoppages in at least the building industry. Building workers from Manchester will also be lobbying a meeting of the UCATT Executive on 8 January, while another deputation will visit the T&GWU headquarters in London to demand full support and national action for the fight to free the three.

The vicious sentences have also added a new urgency to the call for a conference on the Shrewsbury case and the conspiracy laws, sponsored by the Manchester Co-ordinating Committee of Trade Unionists. This will be held in the Downing Street Co-op Hall on Saturday 19 January. Delegates' credentials can be obtained from Mr. Stan Brazil, 61 Brompton Road, Manchester 14.

North Wales

More than a dozen sites and factories were closed down on Thursday 20 December when thousands of engineering, transport and building workers launched a united protest

strike in response to a call by the Defence Committee, and plans are being made to continue a campaign of industrial action after the holiday period.

Nottingham

A broad defence committee established at a meeting two days after the sentences were announced has called a demonstration through the city for Monday 7 January. It is hoped that this will be sponsored by an extended meeting of the Trades Council (including shop stewards, trade union officials, etc.) which has been called for 2 January to discuss the general crisis. Meanwhile the defence committee has already begun to mobilise for the demonstration with a picket in the city centre last Saturday. This week it plans to leaflet the major factories and pits in the area.

Oxford

Militants will be leafleting the major factories and building sites on the case in the coming week, but no major decision on co-ordinated action is expected before 18 January, when an extended Trades Council meeting on the general crisis will discuss the sentences and will hear a speaker from the national Shrewsbury Defence Committee.

Sheffield

A leaflet calling for national action and advertising a meeting on 8 January will be distributed round all the building sites and major factories this week. The leaflet has so far been signed by 11 site stewards and two site convenors, as well as by Peter Tait of the NUM Executive, Gwyn Reed of Doncaster NUM, Dennis Skinner MP, and the convenor of the British Steel Corporation works at River Don, where the shop stewards' committee recently sent £240 to the national defence fund.



Part of the Millbank demonstration outside the NEDC meeting in London on Friday 21 December

The International Marxist Group

The International Marxist Group is one of the younger and smaller organisations of the revolutionary left, but we believe that the correctness of our ideas will prove to be a more important asset in the coming struggle than the greater numbers which many other organisations possess.

The IMG now has members in every major trade union, has played an active role in many strikes, and has been an important force in bringing such struggles as the trial of the Shrewsbury 24 to the attention of the trade union movement as a whole.

We are part of an international organisation—the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938—which is increasingly able to play a major role in workers struggles throughout Europe. It is our understanding of the importance of internationalism which has placed us in the forefront of campaigns in solidarity with the fight of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism, the fight of the Irish people against British domination, and the struggle of the Chilean workers and peasants against military dictatorship.

Our views on the problems presently facing the working class in this country can be summarised as follows:

*For a general strike to kick out the Tories.

*For the formation of representative Councils of Action to lead this struggle and open the road to socialism.

*To prepare now for a general strike and Council of Action: for a miners-engineers alliance, meetings of shop stewards and workers representatives in every area to prepare the struggle, elected strike committees.

*For the organised defence of the working class against attacks from the police and other forces of the state.

*For the unity of the greatest number possible around the struggle of the organised workers' movement for an all-out effort to ensure the involvement of women, for an end to all forms of racism in the trade unions and all racist laws, for measures to organize the support of tenants and students.

The IMG fights for united action with all organisations of the working class movement on each and all of these policies.

If you agree with these policies you should find out more about the International Marxist Group with a view to joining us. This is the way in which you can most effectively contribute to a successful, socialist outcome to the coming struggles.

I would like more information about the IMG

Name

Address

I would like to subscribe to Red Weekly
(special introductory rate: 50p for 12 issues)

Name

Address

Send to: 182 Pentonville Road, London, N.1.

