

Workers power

British section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

DOCKS



special
issue

20p/10p strikers

DOCKERS MUST WIN!

The phoney war is over. Ron Todd's two weeks of attempting to avoid a ballot have ended in predictable failure. Now it is time to end the battle of wits between the lawyers and to mobilise the forces for the real battle — a national dock strike.

The employers have long hated the Dock Labour Scheme. It deprives them of total management control over hiring, firing and disciplining; it obliges them to pay workers who are temporarily without work.

But for decades they have managed to shed labour and boost productivity under the Scheme with the active collaboration of the trade union officials. For this reason Labour and Tory governments have been prepared to leave the Scheme alone. And why not, whilst container depots and other ports all grew at the expense of the Scheme ports. In addition they were fearful of provoking a militant section of workers into a long and bitter dispute.

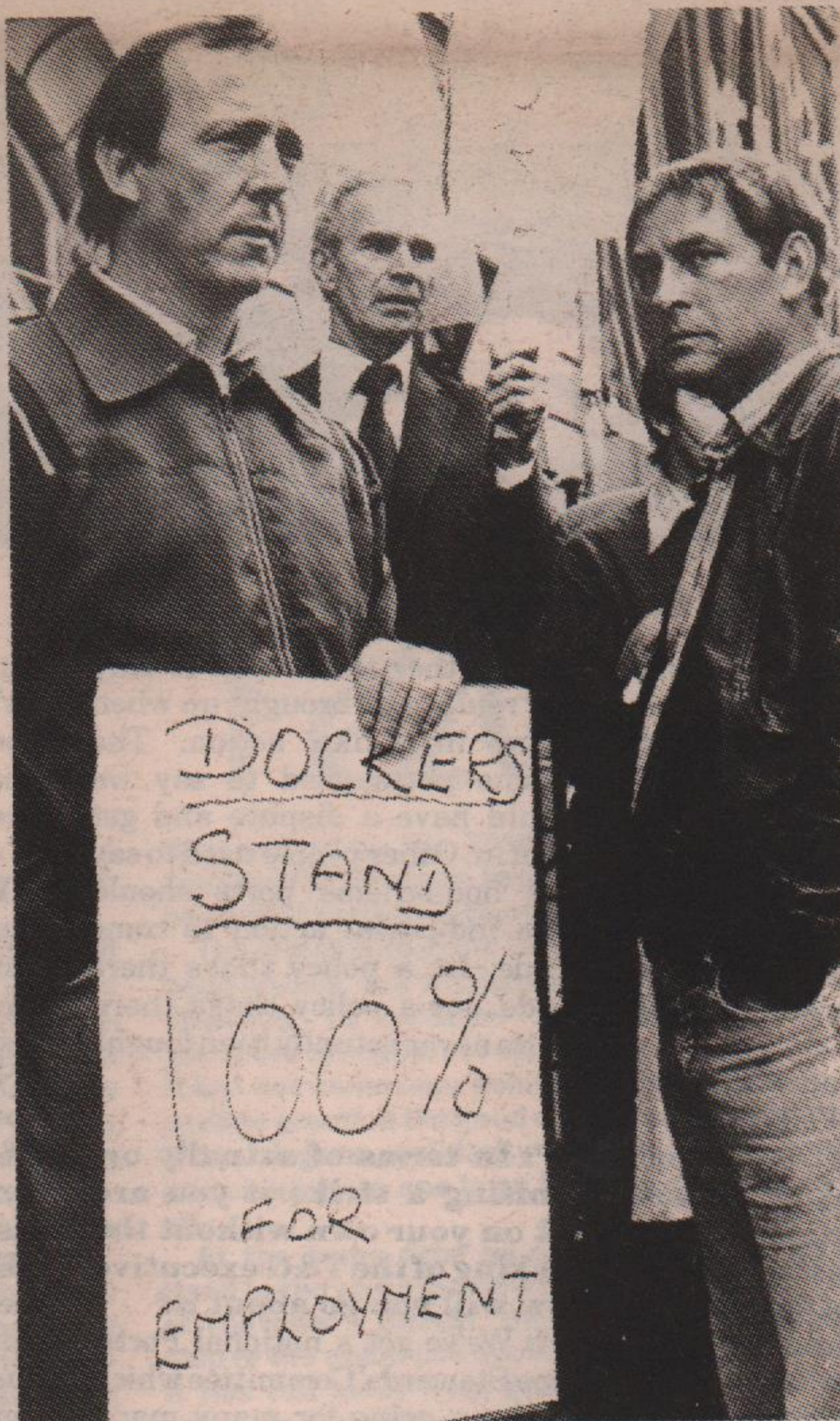
But times change. Now the Tories are in mid-term difficulties. They need to find another "enemy within" to ride roughshod over and restore their fortunes. As for the employers they have got about as far as they can within the Scheme.

They want to shed another 10% of registered jobs and implement part-time and short-term contracts, something they can't do under the Scheme. This is casualisation under another name.

They also want to reduce wage costs by 20% to give them a competitive edge over the continental ports after 1992. For this they need to break up national pay bargaining, again something that is central to the Scheme.

If they can repeal the 1946 and 1967 Acts the employers boast that they will make another £20 million a year out of dockers. This is on top of the £46.5 million profits they made last year.

Instead of implementing



John Sturrock (Report)

T&G policy to call a strike in defence of the Scheme, Todd and the executive wasted valuable time trying to out-manoeuvre the government and the port employers on legal technicalities. In fact a quickly organised national strike can hit the Tories hard while they are in economic difficulties.

With 70% of trade through the registered

ports and the likes of Felixstowe working to capacity the dockers are in a strong position. A strike that really bites will send the pound down and interest rates up, putting pressure on the Tories to beat a retreat.

But worse than the delay are the concessions on the defence of the Scheme that Todd has made in trying to keep the T&G out

of the courts. First, both Todd and Morris have publicly accepted that the Tories will get rid of the Scheme, and that the T&G is not challenging parliamentary rights. Secondly, he has made it clear that it will only be Scheme ports that will be called on to strike.

All this weakens the strike from the start. It is pure illusion to believe that Todd, Morris and Connolly can, without a strike, negotiate an agreement as good as the Scheme. The port employers have thrown down the gauntlet in stating that there is "no case for inventing a substitute or revised form of the Scheme".

Registered dockers should make it clear to the T&G officials, "what we have we hold, and we will fight to the death to defend it!". To do this it is vital to bring out the unregistered ports. The employers have made it clear they will seek to break the strike by using these ports to handle scab goods.

It is excellent that Felixstowe dockers have promised not to handle diverted cargo. But this elementary solidarity may not withstand court injunctions for unlawful secondary action. The non-Scheme ports need to be given a stake in the strike if they join it. The strike must include as one of its central aims the extension of the Scheme to all ports.

In 1982 there was a golden chance to strike to extend the Scheme but the

leadership backed out at the last minute. Yet it remains official T&G policy to get the Scheme extended. Now is the time! All dockers know that the wage levels of the non-registered ports are as high as they are because it is the Scheme ports that set the going rate.

The period of the vote is decisive. In the Scheme ports mass meetings must be held immediately before dockers fill in their ballot. Non-Scheme ports must be addressed by rank and file registered dockers and votes for strike action taken. Portsmouth have already indicated their willingness to come out.

To get a national strike, rank and file dockers—through the shop stewards' committees, mass meetings and strike committees—must control the action from day one. The last few weeks' events show that we cannot rely on the T&G leadership.

Any waverers among the port shop stewards must be replaced at mass meetings by those rank and file dockers committed to a strike that goes on at least until the Tories withdraw their planned legislation.

- For mass meetings in every port!
- Defend and Extend the Scheme!
- Call a national dock strike!
- Tie up every port—registered and unregistered!
- For rank and file control of the strike!

Kevin Hussey is a docker at the Tilbury Docks. He started working at the Royal Docks, London, in 1965. He has been a steward since 1975 and was one of the 85 delegates to the Port Shop Stewards meeting at Transport House on 15 April.

Workers Power spoke to Kevin before that meeting, which was to consider the request of

the T&G National Executive Committee to postpone a ballot for a strike and enter into negotiations with the port employers.

This was in direct opposition to the resolution of the National Docks Committee on Tuesday 11 April which reaffirmed existing policy to call a ballot for an immediate strike to defend the Dock Labour Scheme.

Facing up to the strike

WP: The non-scheme ports are represented here today as well. What do you think the response should be to the threat of legal action being taken against the T&G? Do you see it as necessary to defy the anti-union laws to in order to win?

KH: Of course you've got to defy the anti-trade union laws. This is a political strike. We've explained that to Todd. Todd knows that, but in fact whether we like it or not they've, as one paper put it, body-swerved round it. But sooner or later we're going to be tied up with it.

WP: You're fully prepared to press ahead regardless?

KH: We're prepared to defend our jobs and we believe that the National Committee resolution was best suited to do that.

WP: Obviously, Grimsby has already come out in support of Todd's position. Some ports are likely to waver, even within the scheme. If you go ahead with the strike ballot, which presumably you'd win handily, how about spreading the strike through use of flying pickets or staging rolling strikes between various ports?

KH: To be honest I don't think we've got enough members these days to be doing flying pickets. Once the men are out we don't see the need for picketing. I've got no illusions that we wouldn't be allowed within a hundred miles of Felixstowe Dock, that's for sure.

WP: But is there any other way of bringing those non-scheme ports out?

KH: Well, you've got to realise what's happened with the non-scheme ports. When we were talking about having a ballot, in our trade group there's 30,000 but only 9,500 of them are registered dock workers. We weren't prepared for all 30,000 to have a ballot on whether we should remain in the scheme, and rightly so. But if the scheme's going to go then what we would be looking for was support from them. And at the end of the day we won that.

What we didn't see was that by winning our argument that they shouldn't be allowed to vote us out of the scheme, we left them out of the strike, because they wouldn't have a vote for action



Dockers lobbying TGWU executive meeting on 14 April

John Harris/IFL

would they? But they are talking about not handling diverted cargo, and I believe, especially in the case of Felixstowe, that would be a major contribution.

WP: Do you really think that the strike can be won without bringing out the non-scheme ports?

KH: If they don't handle diverted cargo—especially Felixstowe—then there's plenty of trouble. And obviously we're making contact with continental ports. And that's why we need the assistance of the executive, because of the cost and because if we're official other trade unions will help us whereas if we're unofficial you know what it is when you go anywhere. Phone calls are made and doors are shut in your face. With Todd's assistance we think we could do even better than getting the non-scheme ports out. We believe we could get French dockers to support no cargo coming into this country for a certain period of time.

WP: Do you think it necessary to raise the call for an extension of the provisions of the existing registered scheme to the non-scheme ports?

KH: It's the policy to call for the extension but it's never really

gone further than that. It only ever really gets brought up when you're in strike action. The scheme ports used to say we should have a dispute and get them in. Other people used to say that non-scheme ports should have industrial action to come inside. Its a policy that's there but its never actually been fought for.

WP: In terms of actually organising a strike if you are left on your own without the backing of the T&G executive how will you go about it?

KH: We've got a national Ports' Shop Stewards' Committee which has been going for many many years. The links are already there. That's no problem whatsoever. We've been involved in unofficial disputes before and we know what we're doing. We've got lots of experience and there'll be no problem on that front.

WP: You feel you can bring your members out without any difficulty whatsoever?

KH: I believe so. About being unofficial. If it comes to it then obviously I imagine there'll be a call for it, but at the end of the day we're going to try to get it official and get the support. I mean, even if we get it official and we come

out, I believe sooner or later when we're out there will be injunctions and the sort and then I don't think Todd will be able to body swerve around that one!

WP: But we saw a lot of scabbing during the miners' strike amongst T&G members and amongst TNT drivers were at least notionally members of the T&G so what's to stop scabbing on a massive scale in this dispute?

KH: I should imagine that's what they'll try. But if that happens I believe it could be counter-productive for them. I believe that if that did happen then hopefully other trade groups would come in with assistance. I think it could work in our favour if they tried that.

WP: Earlier we talked about this being a political strike—which you emphasised—and you've said it would be necessary to bring down the government because they're taking on not just your union but the whole trade union movement. So how do you feel about that in terms of developing support for the necessity of bringing down the government? And should Todd have

called for a general strike when it happened?

KH: Well everyone would like to call a general strike when they are in trouble. But the point I was trying to make about bringing the government down was that if we want the scheme back then its obviously got to be without the Tories being in power and that's a fact! We accept that and we need assistance to try and do that.

As for the miners there should have been a general strike then. On two occasions during that strike the docks were out because of being involved in the dispute. And the reason for that was to try and get the ball rolling, and it never happened.

I should imagine there will be other groups when we're out who will see that. And you never know where you are—you've got trouble on the railways, you've got troubles in the Scottish mines again, you've got trouble in the NHS, we've got the water privatisation bill.

Like they say a week in politics is a long time. After a week you never know what's going to happen. People might all of a sudden come together and sometimes it's not just the Tories who worry about that. Trade union officials and Labour MPs are worried about that.

Rank and file must take control

RANK AND file dockers have a long history of conflict with the full time officials of the TGWU. The Dock Labour Scheme itself gave great power to the bureaucracy over its members on the waterfront.

Under the solidly Cold War rule of Ernest Bevin and Arthur Deakin they used this power time and again to discipline dockers who took unofficial action against the employers.

So widespread was resentment against this that it led in 1954 to the "biggest prison break in history" from the T&G when thousands of dockers from Hull, Merseyside and Manchester left the T&G and joined the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers (NASD).

In the face of this the TUC, together with T&G officials, conspired with the employers to crush this new development and prevented it being recognised under the scheme.

The 1960s was a decade of numerous deals between the port employers and the T&G officials involving selling dockers jobs. Even the Devlin Report of 1965 recognised the gulf that had opened up between the bureaucracy and the dockers! It was natural then that rank and file organisation in the docks should emerge.

The National Ports Shop Stewards Committee (NPSSC) arose

in the same period as T&G leader Jack Jones signed an agreement with the employers allowing non-registered dockers to unload containers, as long as they were TGWU members.

Once again the bureaucracy's concern for subscriptions and their own fat salaries came before dockers' jobs and conditions. Betrayal was the result.

The NPSSC suffered from this for the next few years but revived in the fight against the Tories Industrial Relations Act which was used to outlaw the dockers' blacking of containers.

The NPSSC was decisive in preventing Jones and the bureaucracy caving into the Tory judges and in gaining solidarity from other sections of workers to secure the release of the Pentonville Five.

This tradition of "with the officials where possible, against them when necessary" needs to be remembered today as dockers square up for a fight.

The fact that Todd is not popular with the bosses' press and, over defence, has been a nuisance to Kinnock should not blind rank and file dockers to the fact that in all fundamentals Todd is no different from Jones or even in the last analysis from Bevin.

In the pre-ballot manoeuvring

Todd actively resisted the wishes of the dockers for a strike, and has accepted that the scheme must go. At the same time he convinced the NPSSC to hold back because he has given a nod and a wink to them that if the strike occurs he will back them all the way.

As Sam Goldwyn once said, a verbal contract is not worth the paper it's written on! This acceptance of Todd's behind-the-scenes promises reflects the fact that today the NPSSC represents a body that is unofficial but at the same time recognised by the T&G bureaucracy. The danger is that the NPSSC could become the transmission belt of the officials' line in the dispute to the dockers.

The rank and file dockers must keep their political independence from Transport House. That does not mean that they should ignore Todd and Morris. That would be ridiculous. As a tiny minority within a union of 1.3 million, dockers have to force

Todd to make their strike official and to bring the T&G members into solidarity action.

At the moment dockers are understandably preoccupied with getting the men outside the gate. But the running of the strike itself must be the work of the dockers. To help them do this levies and other funds from the rest of the labour movement should be handed over directly to the NPSSC. Any settlement must not be imposed on them by the officials but must be agreed by the dockers at democratic mass meetings.

The NPSSC, for all its strengths, is still too narrow a body to take on all aspects of the running of a strike. It should organise elections in the docks for strike committee which can involve broader layers than the stewards themselves.

Any stewards who waver or oppose the action must be replaced by other dockers. All such elections should take place at mass meetings, meetings that can also help actively involve all dockers in the strike.

In short the rank and file must take control from day one, in sending out speakers, in formulating demands, in organising picketing.

- No trust in the officials!
- For rank and file control of the strike!



BY PICKING a fight with the dockers the Tories are hoping to hit the TGWU hard. It took a battering in the early 1980s thanks to Thatcher's slump policies. Thousands of members were lost as mass unemployment took its toll.

But loss of members has not devastated the TGWU. It still has 1,340,000 members. Just as important, it has not been hit by a major defeat in the way that the steelworkers, the printers and the miners have.

True, it suffered, particularly at shop steward level, from a number of defeats in the car industry in the early 1980s. The Ford and Rover strikes last year showed, however, that it was still intact in the major car plants.

The Tories, in attacking one of the union's strongest and best organised sections, want to

WORKERS POWER has already responded energetically to the docker's struggle—even before the strike has begun or the ballot been called!

Two different leaflets were distributed to the lobbies of the T&G executive and the NPSSC meeting on 14 and 15 April in Transport House.

A national leaflet has already been given out to dockers at Liverpool and Bristol ports. In addition, the day after the decision to ballot was announced Workers Power held a very successful public meeting in central London with three shop stewards from Tilbury Docks in London.

As well as a lively discussion on the way to win a collection of £100 for the NPSSC was raised.

Targetting the T&G

change all this. They aim to add the TGWU's scalp to their collection.

In many ways the TGWU itself has set itself up for a fall. Its strategy for dealing with membership losses has been to seek amalgamations with countless smaller unions, from the textile industry, from agriculture and from various manufacturing industries. It is even in discussions with the NUM, with a view to merger.

It has gone along with the "new realist" philosophy of presenting itself as primarily a "service" union, desperately trying to distance itself from any sort of class struggle image. It has enthusiastically gone along with single-union deals in a number of plants, joining in the bosses' despicable union "beauty contests".

This has meant that the TGWU has offset the damage done to its coffers by high unemployment. The cost though, is not only a union that is frightened of fighting. It is also the creation of a general union, almost a federation (there are 14 trade groups in the union), that cannot unite its various sections for a common fight against the bosses.

These sections, in many different industries, have not been welded together simply because

they are all in the TGWU. Their sectional differences have merely been reproduced inside one union.

The result is that the TGWU has been unable, in a whole number of disputes, to mobilise its own members in support of each other. It has not come near being able to put into practice the good old trade union slogans, solidarity forever, and an injury to one is an injury to all.

At the same time as adapting itself to the so-called new realities of Thatcher's Britain, the leadership of the union has ensured that it has run away from getting involved in any serious fight against her, or the bosses she represents.

In 1984 the leadership worked overtime to keep the two national dock strikes separate from the miners' struggle, even though many dockers were open about their willingness to link up with the miners.

During the same strike it refused to call out its haulage drivers who were transporting scab fuel. It even refused to discipline union members who were scabbing and left those drivers who did come out to support the miners open to victimisation. The story was the same during the Wapping dispute when the sweetheart deal with the TNT bosses ensured that

Rupert Murdoch's filthy rags were transported the length and breadth of the country by TGWU drivers.

These betrayals are not enough to convince Thatcher of the need for mercy. On the contrary, they have encouraged her to take the union on. In going for the dockers she is sure to get more than she bargained for. But every docker needs to face up to the real weaknesses of their own union.

On paper the TGWU is a "left" union. There is a 21 to 18 broad left majority on the executive. In the bosses' press Ron Todd is regularly painted as a "dinosaur", an old style left trade union leader who is completely incapable of adapting to the new times. The right wing docker, Brian Nicholson, was recently deposed as chairman of the TGWU.

These appearances, however, conceal a very different reality. In last year's Ford strike these left wingers tried to stop a strike taking place at all, and then sold the Ford workers short at the earliest opportunity. In the face of the Tories' attacks on the dockers they have bobbed and weaved for weeks to try and avoid a strike.

In the Labour Party, the story has been the same. Having been key to Kinnock's rise to power (the union even provided Kinnock

with chauffeur driven cars during his campaign) the TGWU leadership have supported him in his campaign to march the party ever more to the right.

Even Todd's declaration last year on defending union policy on nuclear disarmament has now been shown to be bluster. He is supporting the policy review moves to ditch Labour's position on unilateralism. His "body swerves" over the dock' dispute have been carried out in close collaboration with Kinnock.

Ron Todd, and his "left" allies on the executive have proved to be experts at making somersaults. They can say one thing and do the opposite at the drop of a hat. They must not be trusted with the running of this key battle. They will weaken the dockers' fight and help weaken the whole union. ■

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Defy the ant

They say they want a job for life as well, m'lad!



No sooner had the TGWU announced it was holding a strike ballot than the bosses announced they were going straight to the courts to try and stop it.

In their build up to the abolition of the Scheme they have made the use of the courts and anti-union laws a central part of their battle plan. We need to make the defeat of those laws a central part of ours.

TEN YEARS of Tory rule have seen trade union rights and liberties won since 1875 whittled away to almost nothing. Four acts have been passed and another is in the pipeline.

Over ten years ago Lord Denning, a top judge and a bitter enemy of the labour movement, said of the right to strike: "there is no such right known to the law". He was right. All there was, was a series of laws passed by Parliament which gave immunity



Dockers picketing at Neap House Wharf.

OUR RULERS have a long memory when it comes to a grudge. The shame, rage and humiliation which the working class subjected them to in 1972 and 1974 has never been forgotten or forgiven. Thatcher's savagery against the miners in 1984-85 was, in part, unbridled revenge for the terror the whole ruling class had experienced a decade before.

Indeed the ultra-right wing Thatcher faction owed its sudden elevation to power in the Tory party to the defeat Heath suffered. The miners' victory in 1972 started the process of the Tories' disintegration. The miners' strike of 1974 delivered the killer blow. But it was the dockers' struggle in July 1972 that humiliated the judiciary as well as the government and brought Britain to the verge of a general strike for the first time in half a century.

Heath came to power in 1970 with an early version of what we now call Thatcherism—high unemployment, anti-union laws and free market economics. The anti-union laws were all contained in an all-inclusive Industrial Relations Act (IRA). In one fell swoop it banned blacking and solidarity strikes and imposed strike ballots. These laws were all enforced through a special National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC), headed by a high court judge, Sir John Donaldson.

The TUC and the big union "barons" like Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon adopted a policy of "non-recognition" of the Act or the Court. This policy of protest and non-compliance was supported more vigorously from below than from above.

Pentonville: When dockers beat the law

The shop stewards' movement and organisations like the Communist Party led Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) mobilised against the anti-union legislation, while the official leaders sat on their hands.

Various one day actions, mobilised around the slogan "Kill the Bill" (the Industrial Relations Bill) drew workers into overtly political strike action. In December 1970 600,000 struck. In February 1971 130,000 marched against the Bill. In March 1971 two million went on strike.

In February 1972 the sections of the IRA against blacking and secondary picketing became operative. They were too late to use against the miners. The dockers, though, were already engaged in guerrilla warfare against the port employers and the wave of containerisation. Hull dockers were blacking a container firm and their shop stewards' committee chairman, Walter Cunningham, was summoned before

Donaldson and the NIRC. He defied them and refused to attend the court.

On Merseyside the St Helens firm, Heaton Transport, was being blacked too. On this latter case the TGWU was arraigned by the NIRC and fined £55,000. This provoked an undignified scramble to climb down by the top union officials.

The TGWU Executive issued a circular ordering its stewards to respect the law. Jack Jones was on the verge of withdrawing the militant stewards' credentials to prove his compliance. Vic Feather, the TUC General Secretary, announced that the TUC "had not realised" that the NIRC had the status of a high court when they decided to ignore it.

The rank and file and their shop stewards were not having any of this cowardly grovelling. Attention shifted to the Chobham Farm Container Depot that the London dockers were picketing. The NIRC acted again. On 14 June it ordered the

arrest of three shop stewards. The LCDTU, the car workers, the printers and the Scottish miners immediately threatened strike action if the arrests went ahead.

In the face of this determined resistance the Tories lost their nerve. An obscure legal functionary, the "Official Solicitor", appeared from nowhere. His kindly duty, it seemed, was to represent the unrepresented. He appealed "on behalf of" the defiant dockers and lo—the court was moved to mercy. In Shakespeare's words "the quality of mercy was not strained" that summer! The Appeals Court simultaneously let the T&G off its £55,000 fine.

Perhaps the courts and the Tories thought Jack Jones and Vic Feather would prove Christian gentlemen and proceed to obey the law in future. Left to them this would undoubtedly have happened. But the National Ports Shop Stewards' Committee—representing 42,000 dockers—was engaged in a seri-

ous struggle against the employers' containerisation offensive. They were not about to be bought off by a few "friendly" judgements.

They had a nine point charter. Its demands included the bringing of all ports, including the inland container depots, into the Dock Labour Scheme and the nationalisation of all ports under workers' control.

To win these goals the picketing and blacking was maintained. For picketing Midland Cold Storage they were pounced upon by the NIRC. On Friday 21 July five stewards—Cornelius Clancy, Anthony Merrick, Bernie Steer, Vic Turner and Derek Watkins—were incarcerated in Pentonville Prison. Sir John Donaldson thundered:

"By their conduct these men are saying that they are above the rule of law. No court could ignore such a challenge."

Reg Prentice, the Labour spokesman, said "I have no sympathy with them and I don't think they deserve the support of other workers". As

Anti-union laws!

from prosecution in civil law for certain trade union activities.

What the Tories have done is to remove, one by one, these immunities allowing the employers to seek injunctions against unions and even individual activists, and to enforce them by massive fines and the sequestration of a union's whole funds.

The civil law is basically about the defence of property. Working class people have little property beyond their houses and personal

belongings. Lawyers' fees are phenomenal. Thus the civil law is there to protect the interests of the bosses above all. The fiercely anti-working class judges are not elected but chosen for life by the Lord Chancellor (a politician) in consultation with the Prime Minister.

This totally undemocratic procedure is laughably referred to as the "independence of the judiciary". Who are they independent from? Not from the employers

with whom they went to public school and university, and who they wine and dine with in their clubs and masonic lodges.

They are only "independent" from the great majority of the population. This "independence" means they can be relied upon to use their legal powers whenever "their class" is under threat from the workers.

The Tories and the judges like to portray the unions as "privileged", as trying to set themselves

"above the law", or their actions as violating "the rule of law". They have sliced away at the practices of effective trade unionism. The 1980 Employment Act and its codes of practice have limited pickets to a token six. The 1984 Act made ballots for strikes obligatory. It ruled out as "political" any strike not immediately connected with a trade dispute, narrowly defined as a dispute between workers and their own employer "wholly or mainly" related to pay and conditions, dismissal, allocation of work etc.

In 1983 the courts ruled that the Post Office Engineers could not lawfully strike against privatisation. The judges will certainly rule in favour of the port employers when they go to court to attack the dockers. The judges will grant injunctions to the employers at the drop of a wig. The result will be massive fines and sequestration for the TGWU unless its officials "repudiate" unlawful industrial action by its members.

It is clear from their actions in the 1984-85 miners' strike, from the News International dispute 1986-87 and the seafarers' strike 1988-89, that the government and the courts are involved in a political onslaught, a class war against the unions. Yet despite this Neil Kinnock and Ron Todd demand that workers faced with the loss of hard won conditions and jobs obey these anti-working class laws. Kinnock claims that workers must do so on principle in order to use the law later to protect and advance their interests. Ron Todd says they must do so to protect the union and its assets.

Trade unions were not built to provide the Kinnocks and Todds with generous salaries and a platform to spout from. They were created to defend their members against the bosses' attacks. Now, say Todd and Kinnock they must not do this. They must obey the law. Rubbish!

If the dockers, their fathers and grandfathers had followed this sort of advice in the past our every gain would have been long since gone. After the war dockers struck again and again to win decent wages and conditions, breaking the anti-union law Atlee had introduced during the war (Order 1305) which banned strikes and imposed binding arbitration. The power of dockers, organised largely by unofficial rank and file leaders, broke these legal shackles. In 1972 the dockers' struggles did the same with the Tories' Industrial Relations Act.

But today militant dockers will say, "we know the law is bent, we know we have to fight to save our jobs but we can't expect solidarity from other workers. The miners didn't get it. Why should we?"

The truth is that the NUM, or rather its officials, did not fight for solidarity action, for strike action when the laws were invoked. They feared to challenge the TUC and the other top union leaders. Worse, other union officials—including those of the

dockers and the TGWU lorry-drivers refused to bring out their workers alongside the miners. Massive solidarity action by section after section of workers, culminating in a general strike, could have pushed the government to retreat on pit closures and would have had the potential to force it to repeal all its anti-union laws or get out.

Each time a section of workers is picked on by the Tories and the bosses this question is posed. Their attack is political, orchestrated by the state as a whole, the police, the judges, the government officials, and backed up by the press. Our response must be political and must involve the labour movement, the working class as a whole. They fight with the law at their disposal. We must fight effectively if we are to stop them winning. This will mean breaking the law, evading the law, mobilising to smash the anti-union laws altogether.

To give in is no answer. It would mean the bosses will ride roughshod over all dockers and over every section of workers that defends them.

The last ten years have seen too many heroic defeats—too many "last stands". The dockers must, and the dockers can be a rallying point to turn the tide. But to do this they must recognise the political stakes and fight back politically, openly and unashamedly. They must fight for the whole working class and call on the whole working class to fight alongside them.

The Tories are more unpopular, more hated than ever. They look invincible because every union that fought them fought alone, fought with one hand tied behind its back. Dockers must go at once to every industry—the strongest first—and agitate for action, speaking to workplace and union meetings, putting the arguments directly to other rank and file workers.

The union should not wait to have its funds seized. It must distribute as much as it can to port level fighting funds. It should ask the TUC and individual unions directly for immediate all out and indefinite strike action the moment its funds are touched. It should ask not only the top officials but the rank and file to respond even if their leaders will not.

- For an all out strike of all dock workers. Defy the injunctions, defy the bosses' law!
- Solidarity action with the dock workers, black everything moving to and from the docks!
- All out to stop legal robbery of the union and the fining of members if the TGWU or individual dockers are attacked in the courts!
- For a general strike to smash the anti-union laws!



Andrew Wiard/Report

ever Labour was more concerned to prove its loyalty to the bosses' laws than to the interests of the workers.

Up and down the country millions of workers thought differently to the learned judge and the wretched Labour lackey. Across the country dockers, lorry drivers, non-registered container depot workers, builders, car workers and miners came out. Between 21 and 26 July a rolling general strike from below began to gather force. Trades councils like Liverpool called for an all out indefinite strike until the Five were released.

At last under the enormous pressure of the rank and file the "leaders" of the labour movement stirred themselves. The General Council of the TUC on a motion from the AUEW called a one day general strike for Friday 28 July.

They may have only wanted a one day strike to let off steam but no rank and file worker doubted that it would have continued and grown

after that.

The Tories, faced with this whirlwind of mass action, collapsed totally. Again the Official Solicitor pleaded. Again the judges' hearts were miraculously softened. The Pentonville Five were carried shoulder high by tumultuous crowds from the prison. Working class political strike action on a mass scale and the threat of a general strike had overturned "the rule of the bosses' law". Such is the power of the general strike weapon—even as a threat.

Alas, the rank and file dockers, miners, car workers, printers and others once again proved to be the proverbial "lions led by donkeys". The TUC and the lefts, Scanlon and Jones, did not press on to smash the IRA, to drive the Tories to total defeat. The IRA was left on the statute book, to be used later, against the AUEW. Also, the Tories, in the following year, managed to get away with another legal attack on striking workers. In the face of a

builders' strike they used the conspiracy laws to frame 24 building workers. Two of them—the Shrewsbury Two—stayed in prison even after a Labour government was elected in 1974, and after it had repealed the IRA.

When Labour came to power in 1974 it did an enormous favour to the bosses. It set out to demobilise the working class so there would not be any more 1972s. The gains of the early 1970s in terms of shop floor organisation and trade union and political militancy were undermined in the years of the social contract. The end result was that the way was cleared for Thatcher, using salami tactics, to impose all and more of the savage measures we defeated a decade before.

But if trade union freedom is to be recovered it will be by these methods of mass direct action and the general strike, of solidarity, and by clearer awareness that every serious class struggle is a political struggle. ■

How to extend the scheme

NORMAN FOWLER called the Dock Labour Scheme a "total anachronism". It is out of step with Thatcher's cut-throat, free market economy. It is a barrier to the piling up of profits by the port bosses.

The reasons for the Tories' hatred of the Scheme are clear to see. The Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Scheme, which became law in 1947, put an end to the ugliest features of casual labour in Britain's docklands. An addition to the Scheme from Labour in 1967 abolished casual labour in the registered ports altogether.

The original principles of the Scheme—a register of dockers as a means of creating a permanent workforce—were introduced in 1940 by the former TGWU leader, turned government minister, Ernest Bevin. His aim was to provide a stable workforce to aid the war effort.

After the war a series of hard fought strikes by dockers, starting in 1945, ensured that the register was maintained through the introduction of the Scheme, and that dockers "surplus" to the bosses' requirements were paid "fall back" money. Following the 1967 legislation dockers without work from one employer were redistributed to other firms.

Improvement

After 1947 there was, as a result of the Scheme, a definite improvement in dockers' wages and working conditions. Improved safety standards were implemented and training schemes were put into operation.

The Scheme was overseen by a National Dock Labour Board (NDLB) and by a number of local boards. The NDLB kept the register and controlled employment in the docks, regulated discipline in the ports, paid wages and "fall back" money and was financed by a levy on the port employers.

The NDLB itself was made up of equal numbers of "... persons representing dock workers in the port and of persons representing the employers of such dock workers", as the original Act put it. In effect this meant that the bosses had only indirect control of hiring and firing. Their club wielding thugs were no longer able to patrol the wharves, bullying dockers in the name of work discipline.

It is these aspects of the Scheme that the bosses have always wanted to destroy. Time and again they have tried to break the Scheme by deliberately using non-registered dockers in registered ports. They started doing this in the 1950s. They continued right up to the eve of the government announcing the Scheme's abolition. Last month they tried it in Aberdeen. Before that it was in the Clyde docks. They have always resented the limitations the Scheme has placed on their right to manage.

The government's White Paper on the abolition of the Scheme echoes the sentiments the bosses

have been expressing for years. It denounces the "inability to enforce discipline", explaining:

"Between 1980 and 1986, of 122 workers whose dismissal was sought by employers 100 were reinstated on appeal to a board."

This shows just how useful the Scheme is to workers. Compare these figures to the success rate workers enjoy at industrial tribunals. In a majority of cases the tribunals uphold the dismissal of workers and in the minority of cases where they do find in favour of workers they have no power to enforce reinstatement. The Tories want to bring the docks into line and give the port bosses the right to dismiss workers at will.

The Tories argue that "the scheme rewards extremism"—a clear expression of their political motivation. Of course there was

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When we say we are for the defence and extension of the Scheme we must be clear what we mean. We want to defend job protection and the decent wages and conditions that come with the scheme. We want to extend these gains to every unregistered port. What we don't want is to defend the unaccountable power of the TGWU officials

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The hell of casual labour

PICTURE THIS. You turn up to work every morning and get put straight into a crowded pen. Before starting the job you have to have a fight with your workmates. Once you get to the front of the pen a foreman—or a "caller on" as they were called on the docks—gives you a once-over, checking your muscles and your attitudes.

If you're lucky enough to get through all of this you might get a few hours work at lousy wage rates. This was what life was like for dock workers before the Dock Labour Scheme was introduced.

Casual working was the norm on the docks for decades. It was degrading. It set worker against worker. It hampered efforts to organise workers. It kept wages down. It meant no safety or training provisions for dockers carrying out dirty, difficult and dangerous work. It provided the port bosses with huge profits.

A Liverpool docker, Peter Kerrigan, described the grim reality of dock work under this brutal system in a Newsletter pamphlet in 1958:

"Older men on the docks remember the thirties very well. The humiliation of the stands. The 'muscle feeling'. The scramble for a job. They remember the 'blue eyes' system—the whisper of 'You're staying behind' into the ear of the favoured ones. The militant was isolated. The man who refused to overload a sling on the last ship was left standing."

The Scheme put an end to many of these inhuman practices. It didn't make dock work easy. It did improve the wages, working conditions and job security of the men.

The bosses have been quick to insist that there will be no return to casualisation. Such inhuman practices are gone forever, they tell us. Don't be fooled by these

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Atlee and T&G boss Arthur Deakin (left) celebrate Labour's 1945 election victory. Three months later Atlee sent in the troops to break a dock strike

KINNOCK IS not the first Labour leader to spurn the dockers. Past Labour governments have been among the most vicious in their attacks.

The first post-war Labour government did set up the Dock Labour Scheme (DLS). But this was as a result of determination on behalf of dockers not to return to the pre-war system of casualisation. The registration of dockers, that started in 1940 as a matter of convenience for the bosses in fighting a war, had to stay.

But throughout the 1945-51 Labour government attack after attack came upon the dockers. In 1945 there were a series of wage struggles resisted by Atlee. In October 1945 he sent troops into the Liverpool docks. Labour did the same two years later in Glasgow to break a strike.

In 1949 London dockers were in the forefront of the battle to break Labour's wage freeze. Atlee and the T&G leadership conspired to use the strike to try and break the influence of the Communist Party over the rank and file.

Pursuing the Cold War in the T&G was also uppermost in Labour's mind in February 1951 when Special Branch arrested seven dockers and put them on a conspiracy trial. When 6,000 East London dockers walked out in protest the trial was abandoned.

It was the Labour governments of 1964-70 that also produced some of the most dramatic revisions of the DLS. The 1967 Act paved the way for the flexibility

and productivity agreements that led to thousands of redundancies in the wave of containerisations of the 1960s and 1970s.

So it should come as no surprise to dockers that Kinnock and his shadow cabinet should now mumble and stumble their way round the question of the Scheme itself.

Labour bows before the law

ONE AFTER another Labour spokesmen have accused the Tories of provoking a "political strike". Everybody claims that the strike will "embarrass" Neil Kinnock—including the Tories who have provoked it. One Labour front bencher told the *Financial Times* "we need a dock strike like we need a hole in the head".

Why should Labour's professional politicians be embarrassed by a strike that is political? Because a strike to defend the Dock Labour Scheme will blow Kinnock's project for Labour sky-high.

It will show that workers' action, not parliamentary bluster, holds the key to stopping Thatcher. It will pose, point-blank, the need to break the bosses' law. It will lay bare Kinnock's strategy—"supply-side socialism"—as a pale imitation of Thatcherism.

For the past six years Kinnock has been leading the Labour Party's march to the right. He has succeeded because organised workers have suffered defeat after

Labour has already promised to "review" the DLS once back in office. Before the government bill had passed its second reading Kinnock was advising the dockers to "demand an enforceable guarantee of no return to casualisation". That is, accept the abolition of the Scheme and make the best of it. Not one of the Labour leaders will give a guarantee to re-introduce the Scheme if they are elected.

This is the fundamental reason for Kinnock's hostility to any action to defend the Scheme. The DLS raises questions which go to the heart of Kinnock's economic

strategy itself.

Kinnock and his advisers have spent months putting together a new economic policy. According to this policy most of the goods in society will be distributed according to market forces. The profit motive will be the main factor in the economy. The state will intervene only where "injustice" occurs or where the profit motive does not motivate the capitalists to build enough sewers, roads and railways.

Nationalisation and planning are rejected, like workers' action, as old fashioned and irrelevant. Even the anti-union laws are to

be kept, in order that workers' organised power does not distort this vision of "market socialism".

Where does the DLS fit into all this? It doesn't.

It is hardly a shining example of market forces. The unfettered operation of market forces would see dockers once more begging at the gates for work each day.

Kinnock has spent years trying to distance Labour from the social reforms it carried out in the 1945-51 government. The DLS was one of the key measures of that government. And that's why Kinnock will run a mile from any action to defend it. ■

doing so they will show millions of workers the truth about parliament. It is not neutral. Like the police, the courts, the army and civil service it exists to defend the employing class, their property and their profits.

Once the strike goes beyond the rules laid down by the gentlemen's club in Westminster, Kinnock will be doing what comes naturally: scabbing on his fellow T&G members in the docks.

Kinnock's attitude to the law speaks volumes, not just about him but the whole Labour leadership. On every issue they side with the bosses.

For all that it was created by the unions, and is supported by the majority of workers, the Labour Party is a bosses' party. It cannot be transformed to meet the needs of workers, but must be replaced by a new revolutionary workers' party.

Workers need a party that not only rejects Kinnock's capitalist politics, but the passive, electoral methods of the Labour Party. We need a combat party that is not embarrassed by political strikes, but thrives on them, seeking to focus workers' action towards the goals of working class power and socialism.

Workers' Power is fighting to build that party. Join us! ■

defeat. Warrington, the miners' strike, Wapping and the seafarers' dispute seemed to prove that fighting back was a dead end.

Instead of a fightback against unemployment, cuts, low pay and anti union laws, Kinnock and the union leaders have told us to "wait for a Labour government".

But the truth the Labour leaders fear to speak is known only too well by the Tories. *The dockers have the power to win.* That is why the Tories have spent years plotting and planning before gambling on a dock strike.

Kinnock's "policy review" is based on the idea that the organised working class is becoming extinct. That class politics are "old fashioned"; that the miners' strike was a "last gasp" of industrial militancy. What Kinnock fears is that the dockers will breathe a new fighting spirit into the whole working class. He fears that the dockers will set an example to millions of young workers in casual jobs and poorly organised

workplaces. He fears that the dockers will show in practice that there is an alternative to the "wait for Labour" strategy.

Meanwhile Kinnock and Todd have been working overtime to convince the Tories that this "political strike" is just an ordinary trades dispute. But they're kidding nobody. Sooner rather than later, the law will be used against individual dockers and the T&G. When it is, Kinnock's position is already crystal clear.

"I'm not going to support any illegal action That's plain from everything I've said."

So if a boss goes to the bosses' courts to get a workers' strike banned and a workers' union fined, Kinnock will uphold the "rule of law". He argues that to defy the law "undermines parliament". And parliament is the only way to improve and maintain workers' rights and living standards according to Kinnock.

But to win the strike, dockers will have to break the law. And in

THE ONSLAUGHT on the British Dock Labour Scheme (DLS) is part of a general offensive by dock employers and governments against dock labour schemes around the world.

But everywhere they are meeting stiff resistance. In the Italian ports of Livorno and Genoa an indefinite strike is still in progress. In France a strike is brewing in both the northern and southern ports.

French and British employers from the Channel ports met in January to plot concerted action against their workers. Recently the French "socialist" government urged employers to follow the British bosses' lead.

There have been strikes in the giant Europort of Rotterdam. Here the employers are reported to be "awaiting the outcome" of a British dock strike.

Outside of Europe there have been major dock strikes in Japan. In New Zealand and Australia La-

bour governments are launching a deregulation offensive. In Brazil at the moment 11,000 dockers in Santos are on strike and in India 300,000 are locked in fierce battle against a state of emergency called in response to their strike.

Nearly all countries have some form of legally enshrined dock regulation—the result both of dockers' struggles and attempts to contain them "in the national interest".

But in the 1980s with the triumph of the "free market" strategy pioneered by Thatcher and Reagan, dockers world wide face an international offensive.

The answer for dockers in Britain

is to deliberately and consciously shed all notions that this is just a British dockers' struggle or that they are defending the "national interest".

Appeals to remember the dockers' loyalty in the wars, including the Falklands, are self defeating as well as self deluding.

For the bosses, patriotism is simply a cynical device to split up the workers' solidarity. Thus, they are talking openly about importing continental labour to keep the docks going during a strike.

But the response of British dockers must not be to wrap themselves in the Union Jack and shout

blue murder about the bosses' lack of patriotism.

Chauvinism and racism are deadly poisons in the working class movement. They are instant death to any effective struggle which hinges on an appeal for solidarity and active support from other workers, black as well as white, "foreign" as well as British.

That is why militants must come out fighting against any manifestation of chauvinism, no matter how trivial.

Of course, we should call on the TGWU and the International Transport Federation to approach dockers' unions, world-wide, for solidar-

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

ity action. But the shop stewards and other militants shouldn't leave it to the officials. The official movement moves slowly if it moves at all.

Shop stewards should send messages and representatives now to the equivalent bodies, official or unofficial, in all the major continental ports to call for solidarity action.

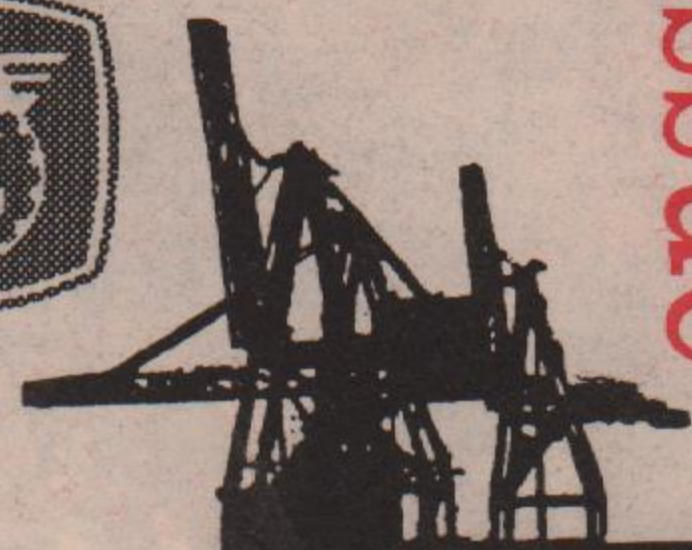
But solidarity is a two way thing. If we ask for it, we must be prepared to give it. Dock workers throughout Europe and beyond need to unite against a common offensive and campaign for a levelling up of wages and conditions to the highest rates available in Europe.

Employers and governments are all saying they must slash the legal protection of dockers because of "foreign competition". Against these appeals to the laws of the jungle, to dog eat dog, the dockers need to add to their banner the slogan, "Workers of all countries, unite!" ■

Workers power

DOCKS

special
issue



20p/10p strikers

British section of the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International

Solidarity with the dockers!

"TRADE UNIONS and workers outside the port industry are very unlikely to back the strike."

These are the words of the port employers' secret plan to beat the dock strike. For the bosses, isolating the dockers is crucial to defeating them. The employers are counting on the legacy of past defeats, the anti-union laws and the cowardice of the union leaders to prevent effective solidarity.

Every worker should be organising to prove them wrong.

For ten years Thatcher has used the "salami tactic" against the best organised sections of the working class. Pick on one section, keep it isolated from the rest of the labour movement, defeat it and move on to the next.

It started in earnest with the steelworkers in 1980. After the union leaders sold out a 14 week strike two thirds of steelworkers jobs were lost.

During the first Tory government Thatcher avoided a showdown with the strongest sections, content to let unemployment rip and introduce anti-trade union laws bit by bit.

Both were designed to demoralise and prepare the weapons for a decisive showdown. That came with the miners' strike of 1984-85.

The miners were beaten fundamentally because the TUC and the official leadership of unions like the TGWU did not organise generalised strike action alongside the miners.

During the two national docks strikes of 1984 the T&G leaders allowed themselves to be bought off with temporary concessions. They should have consciously linked their fight to that of the NUM to smash the anti-union laws and get rid of the Tories.

The opportunity was missed, the miners were defeated and the whole labour movement has been infected with "new realism" as a result.

Since then the printers and seafarers have been isolated and defeated as well. We can and must stop this cycle of defeats now.

There is a lot more at stake than just the Dock Labour Scheme. Thatcher hopes by defeating the dockers to hammer the T&G as a whole. The union organises 1.3 million workers, a massive section of the organised workforce, and has recently turned to the task of organising casual and part time workers.

In addition Todd is saddled with a broad left majority on the union executive. Thatcher wants to make sure the T&G leaders learn to love "new realism" the hard way, by rubbing their noses in the anti-union laws.

The employers' plan speaks of the need to "exploit any events likely to demoralise the rank and file, such as cargoes being handled normally in non-scheme ports, lack of disruption to industry..."

The first task of solidarity is to make sure these events do not happen. Instead we must demoralise the bosses by ensuring that all workers refuse to handle goods diverted from the strike bound ports and respect dockers picket lines wherever they appear.

Industry must be "disrupted" as quickly as possible, not just by shutting every port, but by every section of workers bringing its claims, disputes and



action forward to coincide with the dockers' action.

A lot is at stake. The working class must therefore not allow the trade union bureaucracy to keep the dockers isolated. In 1984 Scargill did not help the NUM's fight by deliberately refraining from demanding of the TUC and the officials of other unions that they organise strike action in their support.

That mistake allowed them to preach passivity. It must not happen this time.

The rest of the working class have a lot to gain by joining in the fight and a lot to lose if they don't.

Rising inflation is producing a wave of pay disputes. If Thatcher is faced with dockers, engineers, power workers, railway and London underground workers all on strike then she can be forced to back down.

Jimmy Knapp, leader of the NUR, said at the Scottish TUC (STUC) recently that "dockers may not find themselves on their own".

It's time to turn words into action! Todd must demand that the NUR brings its members out. Jordan and Laird of the AEU must organise immediate strike action in pursuit of their own claim.

The STUC has pledged support, so has Greater London Trades Council. More will follow. Dockers must ensure that they speak to all of them and get pledges of action. Every workplace should organise a levy for the dockers.

To avoid the sequestrators and assist real rank and file control of the strike, all money should be given in cash to the accredited representatives of the ports' shop stewards.

All workers must realise that if the dockers go down to defeat then it will be a green light for all employers to press ahead with another offensive in the railways and in engineering over productivity and "flexibility", another attempt to introduce part time and short term contracts.

Once Thatcher is faced with a rising tide of struggles then we should set our sights on smashing the whole battery of anti-trade union laws which have crippled effective action and kept the bosses in the saddle for a decade. ■