Second General Strike Hits Tory Bill

Major British industries were shut down again March 18 by a second general strike protesting the 'Tory government's union-busting Industrial Relations Bill. Writing in the March 20 Christian Science Monitor, Robert Nelson put the number of strikers at 1,531,000.

The cost of the strike to the British economy was estimated at $170,000,000 by the Engineering Employers Federation.

As was also the case with the first strike, on March 1, the March 18 walkout was spearheaded by the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers [AUEW], the country's second largest union. The second strike was also backed by the Transport and General Workers Union [TGWU], which with 1,531,000 members is the biggest union in Britain.

Stephen V. Armstrong described the effect of the walkout in the March 19 Washington Post:

"Today's [March 18] strike, the second in three weeks, shut down or crippled most engineering plants, docks and automobile and aircraft factories. All national papers failed to appear after their engineers walked off the job yesterday afternoon." The movement against the Industrial Relations Bill received a setback the same day, however, at a special meeting of the Trades Union Congress [TUC] held in Croydon.

Delegates to the TUC, the federation to which some 350 unions are affiliated, voted to back General Secretary Vic Feather's opposition to strike action against the bill. The vote was 3,366,000 to 3,992,000.

Feather and other conservative union chiefs have argued that strikes only alienate the public and cannot defeat the proposed legislation. "Nobody can think that a one-day stoppage, or a series of one-day stoppages, would get rid of this bill," Feather told the meeting. "It could well arouse hostility toward the proper and legitimate use of the strike weapon..."

The TUC instead voted to advise its members not to register under the provisions of the bill when it becomes law. Under the terms of the act, unions that failed to register could be subject to severe penalties if they engaged in strikes. Nelson reported that the TUC resolution "left the way open for them [unions] to be registered if to refuse would jeopardize union well-being."

It remains to be seen whether or not the TUC's conservative position will be able to prevent further strikes against the bill. Nelson wrote:

"The TGWU's general secretary, Jack Jones, said immediately that his union would abide by the TUC mandate. The AEU's [AUEW] Hugh Scanlon said only that his council would decide in a few weeks.

"With union discipline an extremely weak point in the movement here, not even powerful union leaders can guarantee membership obedience. On this issue, with feelings running extremely high among the more leftist organizations such as TGWU and AEU, the no-more-strikes-for-political-reasons ruling may be even harder to enforce."

Hawatmeh Fears Sellout of Palestinians

Nayef Hawatmeh, leader of the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine [DPF], believes that an attempt will soon be made to force the Palestinian people to accept an imperialist "political solution" and give up their struggle for freedom. He expressed this view in an interview given in Beirut, Lebanon, and reported in the March 19 issue of the Boston daily Christian Science Monitor.

"A political solution is coming in the Middle East, of that you can be sure," Hawatmeh said. "Our people must keep out of all these negotiations because they will end by completely liquidating the Palestinian question."

Explaining the basis of his opposition to the projected peace plans, he said: "We are drawing closer to a point in the international and Arab-Israeli situations where Israel will be recognized within 'secure and recognized' boundaries."

"This is a historic concession. It means abandonment of a part of Palestinian soil in the interests of Israel and the recognition of its government. This can only be a temporary solution because there will still be a racist, expansionist state linked to imperialism."

The DPF, Hawatmeh said, is struggling for a Palestine "linked to a larger Arab anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist pan-Arab state which must be nonchauvinist."

Hawatmeh indicated that the DPF sought contacts with anti-imperialist or-
Widespread Solidarity for SWP

Rightist Bombing Stirs Up Hornet’s Nest in Houston

On March 12 the Socialist Workers party campaign headquarters in Houston, Texas, was bombed. The headquarters is located at the Pathfinder Bookstore, which sells socialist, Afro-American, feminist, and other radical literature.

The bombing touched off an immediate and angry response. Debbie Leonard, SWP candidate for mayor of Houston, said that the attack was related to the recent announcement of the SWP election campaign. "These attacks are an attempt to silence the movement for social change, but you can't stop our ideas with bombs," she said.

On March 15 a news conference was held at which all the SWP candidates and more than a dozen other individuals and organizations issued statements denouncing the bombing and demanding a full investigation.

The March 26 issue of The Militant reported that statements were presented from a professor at Rice University, seven members of the University of Houston political science department; the American Civil Liberties Union; the University of Houston student government president; Houston Mayor Louie Welch; the chairman of the Harris County Republican party; the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam; the National Peace Action Coalition [NPAC], and its local affiliate, the Houston PAC; the president of the University of Houston Young Democrats; Houston Area National Organization for Women; the University of Houston Women’s Liberation Front; the Houston Young Socialist Alliance; the University of Houston Young Socialist Campaigners; and the Houston Committee to End the War in Vietnam. A lead editorial in the Houston Chronicle also condemned the attack.

Mayor Welch claimed that "the police department is doing everything possible to put the people who did it [the bombing] out of business." But the SWP election candidates and others in the radical movement disagreed. The Houston police are well known for their cordial relations with the racist Ku Klux Klan.

Police Chief Herman Short denied that his department has "direct jurisdiction" in bombing cases. The Militant of March 26 quotes him as saying: "I don't care what this party [the SWP] thinks, we're not going to tell them what we're doing. They can read about it after we do it in the newspapers."

Leonard and SWP city council candidates Jeanette Tracy, Mareen Jasim, and Paul McKnight condemned the police for "their inadequate, sloppy and irresponsible handling of this and previous bombings. If the Houston police were nearly so dedicated to identifying the right-wing terrorists responsible for these acts of violence as they are to repressing the Black, Brown, and student communities in Houston, it is probable that our campaign headquarters would not have been bombed."

On March 19 a public meeting was held to organize a united community response to the attack. The meeting heard a panel discussion on the history of political attacks in Houston. Panelists included representatives from the National Organization for Women, the Welfare Rights Organization, Voice of Hope newspaper, Pacifica Radio, the Houston SWP, the Houston PAC, the underground newspaper Space City, and the Houston Committee to End the War in Vietnam.

The April 2 issue of The Militant reported that the meeting came to agreement on three demands: 1) the immediate removal of Police Chief Herman Short; 2) the opening of the files and records of the Houston Police Department and the arson files of the Houston Fire Department—full public scrutiny to allow citizens to see what has been done towards the solution of these crimes; 3) the holding of an open public hearing on the recent bombings.

The meeting unanimously endorsed a letter to the Houston City Council signed by the SWP candidates listing sixteen political attacks on leftist or liberal organizations during the past year, and calling on the council to meet the three demands of the meeting. Not a single person has been arrested in connection with any of the sixteen attacks.

The meeting voted to establish the Committee to Defend Democratic Rights in Houston, which will attempt to focus national attention on the situation in Houston as a means of forcing the police and city government to take action against the right-wing terrorists.

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