

A general strike can smash the Act!

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THE GREATEST POLITICAL-INDUSTRIAL CLASS BATTLE since 1926 now faces the British working class. We are at the moment of decision which will condition the state of the labour movement for years to come. The trade unions will either smash the Tory Industrial Relations Act, or they will submit to its tutelage.

The £55,000 fine on the T&GWU was the Tories' way to tell the 'left' union leaders to either "put up or shut up". They are not to be allowed to skulk in a corner boycotting the NIRC in the hope that it will go away.

Any employer can now invoke the Act and its sanctions against them. Then the Tory Star Chamber will swing into action with a series of fines which quickly escalate into astronomical — and ruinous — figures. Beyond that there is the possibility of imprisonment.

The unions' attempt to ignore the NIRC has collapsed because of the NIRC's refusal to ignore the Unions. The new law has a purpose. It has real power, and it is prepared to use that power. Boycotting it has only led to an upping of the stakes.

Jones, Scanlon and the TUC had to decide quickly — to fight or knuckle under.

The Tories will have no half-measures. As they see it, the duty of a trade union leader is to control the rank and file, and to discipline the workers, occasionally by handing down a few sops when it's all right with the employers.

Sabotage of the struggles of the rank and file by shambling and inefficiency are no longer enough for the employers. The unions must either become efficient policemen of their members, or face heavy sanctions. And when they are fined, they must either pay up or risk bigger fines.

They must make the Unions into subsidiary agencies of the state — or else come into sharp conflict with the state.

The TUC decision to participate in the NIRC 'under protest' is the beginning of a complete capitulation. Boycotting it alone — without making preparations for either a stand-up battle in industry, or even a determined campaign to bring down the Government — was never a feasible policy.

They must have expected sanctions, and should have prepared to hit back hard. Instead they grow weak at the knees at the first stiff fine.

Even the most militant Union, Scanlon's AUEW, has a policy that must lead them to ultimate scurrying to the NIRC. Saying that "the fabric of the Union must be preserved" is saying that the money of the Union must be preserved. In this situation it means that the fabric of trade unionism will go by the board.

The Unions must indeed be preserved. But as independent, fighting organs of the working class — not as house-trained and terrorised collaborators with this, the most reactionary government in decades. (Not, for that matter, with any capitalist government.)

Only a general strike can now hope to smash the Industrial Relations Act.

A generalised industrial offensive now would mean that instead of submitting meekly to the laws which the ruling class makes up as it goes along, the working class uses the strength it undoubtedly possesses to rip up these exploiters' laws.

The long term "strategy" of rel-

ying on the eventual return of a Labour Government which may (or may not — remember Castle's anti-union Bill?) repeal the Act, is a cop-out for the Union leaders. It is to shy away from a fight where the working class is strong and could win now. It is to hope for an easy victory in a distant battle, to be fought on the Government's terms, on its ground, and when it chooses.

It is a recipe for defeat and compliance with Tory emasculation of the trade union movement for the immediate period ahead.

A Labour Government firmly pledged to repeal the Act is desirable. But we must not allow trade union leaders, many of whom fly us with lies and excuses for shying away from the POSSIBLE, IMMEDIATE fight, to use it as an alibi.

ALIBI

Retreat will not help them — no matter how good the alibis. Before the Bill became law, token one day mobilisations didn't stop the Tories going ahead. They know half-hearted gestures, designed to cover retreat, when they see them.

Each retreat has encouraged the Tories to press home the attack.

Retreat now will meet with rigorous use of the law. Trapped between rank and file pressure, and pressure from the law, the TUC leaders must either fight back or else hang on the ropes as the Tory bruisers bash them out of the ring.

Their offers to work through an independent conciliation system are also useless: the ruling class needs to either beat down, or ensure adequate control of, the working class. And 'conciliation', now, won't give them that. They will only opt for it after a severe defeat by the working class.

After the miners' strike the Government is weak. The war in Ireland

continues. Troops tied up by the Republican forces there could not be used against the British workers.

A General Strike CAN rout the Tories. The very smell of it during the miners' strike, when solidarity erupted and swelled in Birmingham and forced the closure of the Salfrey Coke Depot, made them retreat before the demands of the miners.

Could they really resist the massed strength of the entire working class, determined to win?

SERIOUS

A General Strike is more serious than a sectional strike. It challenges, directly and openly, the bosses' right to make and enforce the laws. It poses the question Who is Master in the House, or at least the degree of ruling class control.

If they retain power after such a defeat on the Industrial Relations Act they will quickly counter attack, as after their rout by the miners. But that will be the round after this one. The job now is to win this round. If we do, we'll be stronger to face a counter-attack.

ELECTION?

Retreat now, to wait for a new Labour Government, is in fact a recipe for defeat in the next general election. The Tories, if they force retreat on the industrial front, will follow up with an electoral

offensive — on the issue "Who rules: Government or Unions?"

They need a full victory, to intimidate the Unions and smash rank and file militancy. They need to mobilise and galvanise middle class opinion to give them the support they so conspicuously lacked during the miners' strike.

A Union bashing election, following a Union back-down before the NIRC, would mobilise middle class reactionaries and, if the Tories won, further intimidate the Unions, throw back prospects for changing the law, and quite likely lead to stiffer laws — this time backed by the mobilised reactionaries and probably organised bodies of strikebreakers.

Union retreat now will hearten our enemies and progressively disillusion and demoralise the working class. Capitulation will push sections of the middle class now sympathetic to Labour into the arms of the Tories, particularly given the Labour Party's too-recent record in office.

It follows that an offensive now in industry, where we are immensely strong, is the only serious strategy for the working class.

The call for a General Strike must be raised on two levels: that of spreading the idea around, and that of practical preparation.

Bitter memories or 1926 are an obstacle. But today the relationship of class forces is vastly different.

To tear to raise the call for a General strike, saying "we are not ready" is to forego a struggle to make us ready.

ACTION

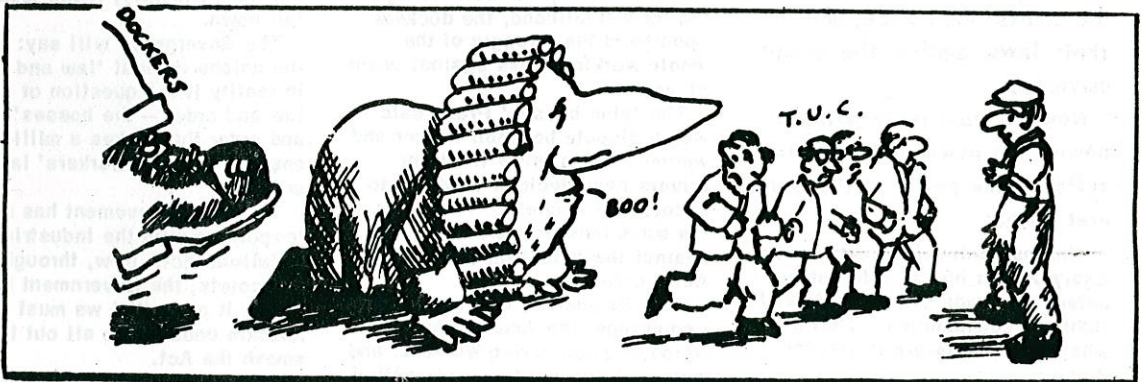
What can we actually do? Militants in a single port or factory can't call a General Strike! But we CAN do the following:

1. Argue within the Unions for an offensive against the Act, here and now, in industry where we have strength and resources, and a real chance of victory.

2. Union branches must call for a special TUC Congress to prepare a counter-attack. They must condemn TUC leaders who collaborate, on any pretext, with the NIRC.

3. Union branches and Trades Councils should call on TUC leaders to adopt the strategy of a General Strike to kill the NIRC.

4. We ourselves — the militants, the socialists — must prepare on a local level, now. A General Strike will be won by the network of workers' committees and organisations, most of which exist already as part of the routine self-defence and self-betterment of the working class. stewards' committees, combine committees, etc. We must transuse into these bodies the urgency of preparing for a head-on clash with the Tories.



DEFEND DOCKERS! SMASH THE ACT!



GENERAL STRIKE!



**THIS IS THE CRUNCH!
TRADE UNIONISTS ARE
IN JAIL, TO BE HELD
INDEFINITELY, FOR ACTING
AS TRADE UNIONISTS.**

The National Industrial Relations Court has claimed its first victims. The Tories are using their power, the power of the courts, the police, and their laws, against the labour movement.

Now we must reply with our power, the power of industrial action — the power of the General Strike.

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Every factory, every office, every building site, every pit, must stand by the Union.

And if the Union falls, the country will be in a state of anarchy.

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The issues involve every worker. Every worker has an interest in defending Trade Union rights and fighting redundancies. That's what the dockers are in jail for doing.

Every factory, every office, every building site, every pit, must stand by the dockers.

And if the leaders of the Trade Union movement really are leaders,

then it is their duty to take the initiative in organising all possible solidarity action — action, not words — with the dockers.

Where they fail, local Trades Councils or ad hoc Action Committees must do the job.

The dockers are fighting for the right to work. In the last 5 years the number of registered dockers has declined from 60,000 to 40,000 and containerisation means a threat of more jobs lost. In fighting for a livelihood, the dockers spearhead the struggle of the whole working class against unemployment.

The lying bosses' Press said it was a dispute between worker and worker. But already the lorry drivers have decided to strike to support the dockers. They say: 'As trade unionists we must fight against the Industrial Relations Act together'.

Ford Dagenham, British Leyland Longbridge, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, and miners are among those committed — already, as we write — to solidarity action.

This will be a serious struggle. The Government has detailed contingency plans for using troops

and civil servants to break strikes

In 1926 the General Strike was weakened because union leaders did not organise workers' defence militias against the strike-breakers and because they did not counter the massive Government propaganda by using printworks to produce workers' propaganda. We must demand that our leaders don't fail this time — and the rank and file must step in, organise and act independently, if the leaders fall down.

The Government will say: It's the unions against 'law and order' in reality it's a question of whose law and order — the bosses' law and order that makes a million unemployed, or the workers' law and order.

The labour movement has so far temporised with the Industrial Relations Act. Now, through the law courts, the Government itself makes it plain that we must either knuckle under or go all out to smash the Act.

**WE CANNOT SETTLE FOR ANY
THING LESS THAN THE
COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF
THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
ACT.**

WE'VE FREED THE 5 - NOW SMASH THE ACT! GENERAL STRIKE

The 5 are free! Not because they have "suffered enough" - but because the Government has sweated enough. Once again the Tories have beat a quick retreat. But even in doing so they have thrown down another challenge to the trade union movement - £55,000. They have decided they'd rather pick on the official trade union, which is more likely to knuckle under and pay up, than on stewards who stand firm and call on the industrial strength of the whole working class to defend them.

DON'T PAY!

Jones paid up the first time. Since then we've shown how easily the Tories can be beaten. Demand of Jack Jones - don't pay our money over to the Tory Court. Bring out the members, and other trade unionists, if any move is made to grab Union funds. After last week, the Tories won't dare touch them!

STAY OUT! *mobile pickets can bring out more!*

The Government has declared war on the Unions. The reimposition of the fine on the T&GWU is a demand that the Unions make war on their militant members. The last week has shown more than anything else that what is needed is not just defence, but an all-out attack. NOW IS THE TIME TO GO FORWARD AND PUT THE BOOT IN.



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