

LUD

TO THE FINISH NUS OR NOT

RED DUSTERS IN REVOLT

The seamen's strike starts at midnight, Sunday. It is an official strike called by the officials and the executive of the National Union of Seamen. Due to the antiquated Mercantile Laws, seamen cannot strike directly like other sections of workers, so to get round the law they have to complete the period of their contract and then refuse to sign on for further voyages. Consequently, it may take one or two weeks for the stoppage to build up. It is likely that some 2,500 ships out of a total of 4,500 will be affected, some 300 or so being rendered idle each week as they reach home ports. Expressions of solidarity have come in from seamen's unions all over the world.

UNION'S DEMAND

The rates of pay, long hours of work and general working conditions compare very unfavourably with other sections of workers. The union's demands include a reduction in working hours from 56 to 40 a week, which in effect is a demand for better rates of pay for overtime working, particularly at weekends, plus a 17 per cent pay rise.

LOW WAGES FOR TOO LONG

Seamen's wages have been too low for too long - the revolt is total. This despite nominal increase of 8 per cent in 1960, 12 per cent in 1961, 4 per cent in 1962, 6½ per cent in 1964 and 13 per cent in 1965. These modest increases still leave the seamen limping well behind the national average.

A fully qualified AB gets at basic wage of £39-10-6d a month, certificate pay of £1, Full Efficiency Service Pay of £5-10-0, Saturday afternoon £)-19-6, Saturday morning £1-19-6,

Weekend work at Sea £7-18-0, flat rate increase £1-10-0, a total of £59-7-6 a month.

A new entrant, such as a deck boy, in his first six months at sea only earns £23 per month and the same applies to the tough job for lads in the engine room.

The last rise in 1965 was miserable. Before the rise there was a basic 44 hour week. The Saturday afternoon and all Sunday was overtime. But for those on day work, overtime is at the discretion of officers. Thus the increase in 1965 was only given in return for an actual longer working week. The demand of the seamen expressed at this time was for a basic 40 hour week - but in negotiations, the union officials "in the interests of increased productivity" - conceded the increase in working hours, virtually cancelling out the pay offer and award. This caused great bitterness to rank and file seamen and should never have been negotiated.

Rates of pay and accommodation on board British ships are well below those given on U.S., and Scandinavian ships. This, and the marked contrast with the rates of pay and conditions enjoyed by the officers on board the great majority of cargo boats, has rankled for many years. This class differential is notorious.

THE KICKBACK

Another system which causes anger are the rights given to officers, to log pay for any so-called misdemeanours, such as talking to passengers, being late on watch keeping for which a day's pay can be deducted and the day has still to be worked.

Is it a wonder that the "call of the sea" is falling on deaf ears, leading to a drop in the recruitment

of new entrants and as the young lads get older they leave for better paid jobs on shore.

END OF THE TOW ROPE

How has it come about that the National Union of Seamen is belatedly calling for this "official" stoppage. The union for many years has been notoriously bureaucratic, even compared with the bureaucratic character of most unions. Under the long leadership of Bro. Tom Yates, the union was practically a 'company union'. Rank and file activity finally forced the resignation of the general secretary - but a second line of union officials moved up into position.

And in the process, took with them prominent figures in the Seamen's Reform Movement - the first rank and file movement of recent years, who were then incorporated in the new leadership.

RED DUSTERS REVOLT

However, this tactic failed to stem the red dusters revolt. New movements developed, and since the 56 hour sell-out in February 1965, has been growing apace. The new Seafarers' liaison committee movement - which was kicked off in the Bristol channel ports, - has been unceasing in its campaign both for a higher wage rate and against the sell-out and for a further cleaning up of the union. It was the development of this new movement that worried the NUS officials and rather than see the unofficial movement "take over" a national campaign of guerilla actions, it decided to behead this movement by taking up the demands and making the action demanded official.

LABOUR GOVERNMENT

It is the consciousness of the ex-

istence of this 'alternative' rank and file movement that worries the Labour government. On the one hand, in accordance with their declared aim of holding back demands for higher wages and better working conditions, so that capitalist profit-taking can go on, Harold Wilson, the prime minister, and his minister of Labour, Mr Ray Gunter, are backing the shipowners paltry offer made on March 9 of 32/6d a month and 2d an hour overtime rates. No advance on this. On the other hand they do not want to undermine the control of the union by its present leadership. The Labour government is quite aware that in its term of office ahead - with the unions officially tied to supporting the government's economic plans to save British capitalism - it can expect the growth of an unofficial movement throughout all services and industries.

This first major movement of the seamen must be dealt with firmly if the Labour government is to retain the confidence of the boss class, the shipowners, the stock exchange, the bankers at home and overseas. If the seamen were to win this struggle, then it will encourage other sections of the trades union movement to step in with their demands. To defeat the seamen's movement thus becomes an important part of the government's long-term strategy. The struggle is not only against the shipowners, the union-leaders who want to hold back the struggle but also against the Labour government which has the task of saving British capitalism from crisis.

SOLIDARITY WITH SEAMEN

Dockers and other portworkers with the Devlin Report hanging over their heads are aware of the importance of winning the seamen's strike. The same applies to the workers in nationalised industries such as the mines, power, civil aviation. To win this first round of struggle against the unholy combination of the bosses and Labour government is an urgent task facing all trade unionists and militants in the working class movement.

IN SHORT

The managing director of a firm in Crawley new town is complaining that the women working in his factory do not want to earn more than ten or twelve pounds a week during a 27 hour week. He is amazed that the best working conditions he can dream up cannot make the women give up their leisure.

In Buenos Aires, 420,000 State Department employees have gone on strike for 48 hours for wage increases of up to 40 per cent after having rejected an offer of 15 per cent.

EDITORIAL

THE SEAMEN'S STRIKE.

Any docker who still remembers the situation on the docks in 1947 will be watching the present state of affairs with interest. The NUS have announced that their fight for better pay will be fought to the finish. As we go to press it is difficult to say whether the finish will come in the form of a sell out or not. With or without the union the strike should go on, and the promise of of solidarity from the dockers gives us reason to hope for some success.

THE STOCK MODEL LIE.

The worst and commonest libel which is put about, concerning the seamen, seems to be that the sole reason for the dispute is money. But the conditions of work, and the resistance of the government, the shipowners, and their own union to more appropriate methods of union organisation, are an integral part of the seamen's case.

RANK & FILE.

The NUS has quite an outstanding record for selling out, and its pre-paradness to lead the workers in this struggle is the result of their fear of the strength of the unofficial organisations among the rank & file of the union. But for the men, the only real hope lies in the development of a strong rank & file movement which would enable them to control their conditions of work. When the crunch comes the only answer for the worker is direct control of his industry through workers' committees, and his only safeguard against corrupt & opportunistic union leaders is the delegate who represents the will of the workers. For the seaman, who has, for obvious reasons, so little contact with his fellow-workers, the immediate need for workers control is even more self-evident than it is for some other trades.

Well what about the Workers

When George Brown informed the workers that if they would not co-operate in building the new England then the Government would find ways of making them do so, it is doubtful whether even the most disillusioned worker thought of such a tool as the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation. This unholy alliance of Trade-Union bureaucrats, Bankers, Brokers and business executives with a sum of £150 million at their disposal have been brought together by a Labour Government to hasten monopoly capitalism. In spite of the occasional squeal of - "Economic rape", everybody except the worker loves it. This is hardly surprising when everybody except the worker stands to gain from it! According to George Brown the competition from the U.S.

THE MERCANTILE LAWS.

The real barrier to the formation of a rank & file movement is the continued existence of the Mercantile Laws, which the Captain of a ship can invoke in the event of strike actions at sea - under these laws strike means mutiny. And the legal problems of any form of protest make it impossible for the seaman to act when the need arises.

One thing should be made clear: a workers' committee is not just an instrument for reform - it is frowned upon by the bosses, the government, and also by anybody who is interested in climbing to power on the backs of the workers. The development of the workers' committee leads to workers' control. Not the control of an industry in which the State owns the means of production (Nationalisation), but in which the workers, at all levels, directly organise and control the affairs their industry. The bureaucrat sees the workers as a factor in the economy, it is time that the worker saw that the only justification for an economy's existence is that it meets the needs of the society.

In the present dispute the State sees the seamen as mere machine parts which are needed to implement their programme, and if, by chance, the leadership remain firm the armed forces will be brought in. The seamen will be given the same lesson the Labour government of 1947 gave the dockers namely, that the State relies on force and scabs, and its political complexion makes no difference to this.

When Harold Wilson points out to the seamen that in striking they are taking on the Government and the State he is not just talking big, he is stating the case accurately - BUT WHAT IS WRONG WITH TAKING ON THE GOVERNMENT AND STATE IF THE PRIZE IS A MORE REASONABLE SOCIETY.

and Europe is such that it will be necessary to stimulate changes in the structure of industry; the question is why? - and the answer is (as far as the workers are concerned) because! The workers are being manoeuvred into a social, economic and political position in which, as both producers and consumers, they will have no effective power of any kind.

Why a new Anarchist weekly? LUD is a news review with an Anarchist bias by the team running CUDDON'S COSMOPOLITAN REVIEW who feel that they have something to add to the libertarian press. We must admit that in LUD we are perhaps flying "a kite". If it is possible to run it successfully we may try something even more way out.....