

# THE NEWSLETTER

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## 500 MILITANTS REBUFF THE WITCH-HUNT Full Report of the Rank-and-file Conference

**O**VER 500 delegates, observers and visitors from working-class organizations filled London's Holborn Hall last Sunday at the national industrial rank-and-file Conference called by the Editorial Board of The Newsletter. They overwhelmingly adopted a Charter of Workers' Demands calling for: a militant fight against unemployment; nationalization of major industries under workers' control; the transformation of local Labour Parties into campaign centres in the industrial struggle; and the restoration of trade union democracy.

Only 2 voted against the Charter, and fewer than 12 abstained—and this vote gave a resounding reply to the employers' Press, the Stalinist leaders and those national trade union officials who had done everything in their power to smash the Conference.

The adoption of the Charter concluded a day of vigorous debate and discussion among representatives of militant workers in all the main industries and from every part of Britain.

From the moment the Conference opened it was clear that November 16, 1958, was to open a new chapter in the history of the British working class.

Half of those present were delegates from their union branches and places of work, the remainder observers and visitors—many of whom would have come as delegates had it not been for the bans and proscriptions imposed by their union leaders.

They had come from Scotland—sacrificing half a day's wages—from Birmingham, Coventry and Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield, to exchange experiences and to hammer out a common programme to meet the employers' offensive and halt rising unemployment.

There were miners and portworkers, engineers and electricians, railwaymen and busmen, young workers and Colonial workers—a true cross-section of the rank and file.

Many different points of view were aired, but on two things the speakers were united: their determination that there

should never again be a return to the hungry thirties, and their conviction that if the Right-wing leaders refuse to lead them in this struggle, then the rank and file have it in their power to show what can be done.

Welcoming delegates to the Conference, **PETER FRYER**, Editor of The Newsletter, said it had been called to discuss the situation now confronting the British working class, in particular the growth of unemployment by 38,000 a month, and to discuss what steps must be taken to defend jobs, standards and workshop organization.

The Press and certain union officials had attacked the Conference, and the paper that called it, because to them the idea of workers exchanging experiences, pooling ideas, and charting a course for helping each other in future battles, was a dangerous idea. Hence the cries of 'conspiracy' and 'plot'.

The workers were facing a greedy and ruthless employing class.

An old age pensioner, whose total income was £2 17s. 6d. a week, had been fined £1 for stealing half a pound of tea  
(Continued overleaf)

### **A Day of Debate — and Determination**

## COMMENTARY

### UNITY AND LOYALTY

THE essence of a witch-hunt is that people are punished for their ideas and associations. The present witch-hunt is no exception, and its extension is causing concern to all who value trade union principles. The executive of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers has been hauling people before it this week to explain their dangerous thoughts and their guilty associations. In the Sunday Times ex-communists in the Transport and General Workers' Union, former victims of the 1950 Scarborough resolution, are accused of associating with 'Trotskyites' as far back as 1956! The success of the national industrial rank-and-file Conference, and the London busmen's challenge to their officials on Tuesday, when they boycotted a TGWU special delegate conference, may very well lead to more of this kind of thing.

The pattern has been set in the latest statement of the AUBTW executive, entitled 'Unity and Loyalty must be Maintained'. This statement is packed with falsehoods, bluster and malevolence. Its account of the events on South Bank is a travesty of what took place there. So is its description of the origin of the building workers' conference in January. It alleges that last Sunday's Conference was called *after* 'South Bank had . . . ripened the general industrial climate'; in fact the Conference was called on August 16, six weeks *before* McAlpine locked out 1,250 men. Behind this screen of lies, and of phrases about 'unity', 'loyalty' and 'disruptive elements', the authors of this statement themselves strike a blow at the unity of their members in resisting the employers' offensive, condemn them for loyalty to trade union principles, and seek to disrupt their solidarity in future battles.

Why this witch-hunt? Because certain union officials do not want to fight the employers and, in particular, will not defend militants from the 'weeding-out' process described by the Financial Times. They would rather capitulate to a boss who is determined to wipe out trade union organization among his employees, than face the prospect of a determined struggle to bring him to his knees. They cannot bear the idea of militants' constructing a rank-and-file movement to prepare the workers for real battles against the employers' attacks. They cannot bear the idea of linking the industrial and political struggles. To them the object of the trade union movement is not to fight the bosses, but to persuade them to give concessions. And when militants come along and say: 'Stop cringing, and do the job we pay you to do'—then a howl goes up that this is an attempt to 'harm the union', to 'try and take over leadership of the trade union movement'.

It is nothing of the kind! Those who harm the union are those who egg on their members to cross a picket line. In combating the witch-hunt the militants will make it clear that they stand for real unity and real loyalty. Unity in action against sackings and victimization (without silly side-swipes at the 'Trotskyist circus'). Loyalty to the fundamental principles in furtherance of which the trade union movement was founded, including the democratic right of members to hold socialist ideas, and to associate with others of like mind.

### CONFERENCE (Continued from front page)

and a pound of sausages, worth 5s. 3d. He told the police: 'I took them because I was starving.'

Yet the Financial Times reported how City of London financiers were stuffing themselves at banquets costing anything up to £50 per head, with peacocks on the menu.

'Their class will smash us and break us and drive us back to the hungry thirties if we do not put up the most determined, solid and bitter resistance to their offensive,' Fryer declared.

'Our paper exists for one purpose only: to rally the workers to fight that employing class, and one day to sweep them away altogether.'

'Forward says this Conference is "an event which in its own small way could prove to be a landmark in the history of the Labour movement".'

### CONFIDENCE IN WORKING CLASS

'Yes, gentlemen, you are right. We of The Newsletter are Marxists. We place all our confidence in the working class. We have called this Conference because we mean business. A socialist paper would not be worth a candle if it did not seek to prepare the workers for battle.'

**BRIAN BEHAN**, a builder's labourer and member of the Editorial Board of The Newsletter, who was expelled from the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers for his association with The Newsletter, introduced the Charter of Workers' Demands.

'The aim of our Conference,' he said, 'is to produce a programme for action which can prevent a return to pre-war days.'

'The employers and their Press have vilified this Conference. Weaver and Lowthian in my own union have hounded and persecuted people for being associated with it.'

'Why is it that a conference like this should attract the hostility of men like that? It has been said in some places that we are a "circus". If this were so we could not do anyone any harm.'

'What they really fear is their own rank-and-file members' meeting and planning to take action against things they are not making the least preparation to fight.'

Behan proceeded to show how empty were the charges against The Newsletter and the Conference of disruption and splitting.

'It was Weaver and Lowthian,' he declared, 'who disrupted the movement on South Bank. What they did there drove thousands of men away from the movement, for many lost faith in trade unionism and threw away their cards.'

'The same can be said of Matthews at London Airport. People who enter into engagements to inform the employers on trade union affairs are guilty of things that can never be alleged against The Newsletter.'

### THE ACTIVITIES OF IRIS

Amid laughter he went on to ridicule newspaper stories of 'Red Clubs'.

'There are quite a lot of groups about,' he pointed out. 'Everyone here knows that there is not a single member of a union executive who is not associated with a grouping of one shade or another.'

'The Right wing calls conferences and associates itself with organizations such as IRIS.'

He described the activities of IRIS inside the AUBTW, when it circularized the entire membership in an effort to prevent votes for a Communist Party candidate for a union post.

There were charges that The Newsletter's activities constituted outside interference, Behan said.

'But the Liberal Party is now issuing a weekly trade union paper.'

'And Moral Rearmament can organize, can discuss, can put trade unionists into aeroplanes and take them to Switzerland for conferences.'

Hostility to the Conference had arisen because it proposed changes to the Left. It was quite permissible to hold meetings provided that they were designed to put forward a Right-wing point of view.

Behan made it clear that he did not object to groupings.

'We do not object to the Right wing publishing their material. On the basis of an examination of ideas in the movement, we are quite convinced that ours will win in the end.'

**'But we are not in favour of fighting ideas with expulsions. We claim that it is the right of Left-wing groupings to call a conference to discuss and thrash out a common programme.'**

To the charge of wanting industrial action for political ends, Behan said, The Newsletter pleaded guilty.

'If it were possible to convince the movement to take strike action against the Tory government, we feel we would be justified in calling such a strike,' he declared to tumultuous applause.

'And if that government could be removed and replaced by a government of the working people, that would suit us down to the ground. We would campaign for it with all our might.'

The suggestion that the industrial working class should use its strength was not really a 'Red Club' idea. Behan quoted from a book by Lord Attlee to show that extra parliamentary action for political ends had a long tradition in the modern history of Britain.

'To fail to fight politically as well as industrially,' he said, 'is to fight like a man with one arm tied behind his back.'

One of the biggest problems facing the working class was the growth of unemployment.

'It is changing the lives of millions of people,' Behan said. On the dole today 514,000 workers were receiving £4 to £6 if they were married and 50s. if they were single.

This was a reduction in living standards of over fifty per cent. It degraded workers and made them a prey to fascist ideas.

## WHIP FOR THE EMPLOYER

'At Brixton Labour Exchange where I sign on,' Behan said, '1,500 of the 2,000 on the dole there are convinced that it is the fault of the black man coming to Britain. This idea is used to draw the unemployed behind people who have nothing in common with the working class.'

But unemployment also affected those in jobs. It meant a whip for the employer.

He gave the example of a building firm in the north who had decided to abolish tea breaks and had recommended this measure to other firms in the industry.

Behan then questioned why there should be unemployment at all.

'In this era of new techniques which should be used to reduce hours and raise wages, why should working men stand idle instead of utilizing these achievements for themselves and their families?' he asked.

But full employment was not normal under capitalism. The employers welcomed unemployment.

'To them dole queues are a very satisfactory state of affairs. As unemployment rises shares rise too,' he pointed out.

He declared that the campaign against unemployment had to make it clear that a pool of unemployed was a permanent feature under capitalism. People should not be taken in by the fact that there had been a temporary phase of full employment in the years following the war.

'We are a socialist newspaper,' Behan declared. 'We believe that a socialist system would welcome new techniques, reduce prices and hours of work and raise wages and the standard of living in a way never seen before.'

The Right-wing Labour and trade union leaders had no policy on unemployment.

The only answer the Tory government had was to propose building more Labour Exchanges.

The time to fight was now.

'If you get one or two million on the dole, they are in a difficult position to fight capitalism. Those who do not recognize this are throwing our people to the wolves.'

There was a need to learn the lessons of past struggles. The identity of interests between those in work and those out of jobs must be seen. It was the duty of every worker to support the common struggle.

'Unemployed men should be paid trade union rates,' Behan declared. 'To those who say this is uneconomical we ask: how then is it practical to pay compensation to parasites?'

'Is it economical to pay compensation to colonels and brigadiers who are too old at 45? When they are made redundant they ask for £6,000 to £9,000.'

'If it is economical to pay these parasites, then it is economical to make provision for our class, for we are the ones who produce.'

This demand should be one of the slogans of the movement together with that of the organization of the unemployed.

## ORGANIZED WORKING-CLASS ACTION

'In the past the unemployed organizations have been outside the trade union movement. We should make an effort to see these organizations as the responsibility of the basic organizations of the working class.'

But unemployed organizations, demonstrations and slogans were only part of the answer.

'The only really effective method of compelling the government—whether Tory or Labour—is by the organized action of the working class.'

'A one-day national stoppage will not solve the problem, but it would show the Labour and trade union movement that they have the power and strength to solve it.'

Behan said that every trade unionist should go into the Labour Party and fight inside it for a live policy of nationalization of industry. Unless a Labour government was prepared to introduce policies which would strike at capitalism it would be no more likely than the Tories to end unemployment.

The Conference must consider measures for the protection of shop stewards, he continued. As unemployment grew so would attacks upon them.

The shop stewards' movement, Behan said, had developed over the last twenty years because it filled the vacuum created by the absence of trade union leaders who had failed to take advantage of the industrial power of the working class to raise living standards.

The shop stewards were regarded as a menace by the employers because, backed by the solidarity of the men on the job, they were often able to secure concessions over and above the national agreements reached by the union officials.

But the employers, who knew they would meet with little or no resistance from leaders of the Labour movement, feared the shop stewards' attitude to redundancy.

## THEY MUST BE DENOUNCED

This was why the employers were determined to smash the stewards, Behan said. He explained that there were two main tactics that had to be fought.

'Where the employers are confronted with a stable industry, where organization has been built up over a long period, as at BOAC and Briggs, they raise a dispute, institute a court of inquiry, and this recommends restrictions on the stewards, hamstring the convener and institutes new procedures.'

This pattern was to be repeated in industry after industry, and meant that 'we must condemn most sharply the courts of inquiry, for they are intended merely to choke and strangle the stewards.'

'We must refuse to have anything to do with them. If there are to be courts of inquiry at all, we shall conduct them ourselves. Any member of the General Council of the

TUC who sits on a court of inquiry must be denounced.'

Defence of the shop stewards was the responsibility of the entire Labour and trade union movement and the leaders must be made to recognize this.

But in industries like building a different tactic was at work.

'Even if a stable trade union organization is built, the job will eventually come to an end and the employer will black-list the militants.'

Because of this, Behan said, and because procedure in the building industry was different, the employers had no need of courts of inquiry and they acted against the stewards as they had done at Shell-Mex, at Belvedere and the Isle of Grain.

### WOULD PRESENT LEADERS LEAD?

The Conference, Behan concluded, had got to start from the standpoint: would the present leaders lead?

'If so, then we should have confidence in them. We would not need rank-and-file committees.

'But the leaders are not going to lead, because they are first and foremost reformist leaders—they really believe in the capitalist system.

'If they pretend to be socialists it is only to suggest that by gradual reforms everything can be achieved. There is no need, they say, for class power in the unions. What you need is clever men and a constitutional machine.

'Why do they believe this? They believe it because they do very well under this system.'

Any worker who wanted sane, sober leadership must look to himself and his fellow-workers for it. This was the meaning of the Charter.

The first speaker from the floor was LAWRENCE DALY (Glencraig branch, National Union of Mineworkers).

'I am an ex-member of the Communist Party,' he began. 'But the comrade with me is a member of the Communist Party and he has come despite Dennis Goodwin's articles in World News.'

'This is not say that he agrees with The Newsletter and disagrees with World News.

'But if we can get unity in action despite differences in political ideas we shall be starting to get things moving very rapidly indeed.'

Brother Daly expressed his disagreement with the wording of the Charter's appeal for industrial workers to enter the Labour Party.

'I am not yet a member of the Labour Party,' he said, 'and I have not been convinced that I should join. If this proposal means that I am appealing to other people to join I am not prepared to support it.

'If on the other hand we are simply appealing to trade union branches to send someone to represent the branch, then I can support it.'

He proposed an amendment to the draft Charter to clarify this point, and an addendum to the Charter guaranteeing freedom of discussion.

'We must begin to fight for the conception of unity in action,' he said, 'and this means we must fight against any tendency to suggest that in the interests of unity you have to shut up about views you don't agree with.'

Brother Daly went on to describe problems facing his own industry.

### PRESS FOR MILITANT POLICIES

'The mining industry,' he said, 'is confronted with problems today that had not faced it for twenty years. During and after the war there was a shortage both of coal and manpower.

'Under these circumstances the authorities were willing to grant certain improvements but even these were not as good as might have been obtained had the national leaders acted as they should have done.

'If we had wanted we could have pulled down the temple.'

'We have got to press for more militant policies,' he concluded.

(Continued on page 306)

## The Press on the Conference

THE TIMES report was headlined: 'Left-wing Meeting Well Attended: Demand for "Militant Socialist Policies"'. It said the hall was 'comfortably filled' by 'a notable array of militants who have preached their doctrines to some purpose in several unofficial strikes'

The Times also carried a leading article—'A Group in Perspective'—which said the significance of the Conference was that it had 'brought together a number of experienced unofficial strike leaders'; the leaders of the Communist Party had shown their 'annoyance and anxiety'; but The Times thought it doubtful that the militants brought together by The Newsletter would 'cohere for long'.

The MANCHESTER GUARDIAN gave a fair summary of the Charter of Workers' Demands, though its reporter found some duffel coats, beards and young women in yellow trousers to write about.

The FINANCIAL TIMES was unwilling 'to dismiss Mr Fryer and his colleagues as frivolous dilettantes in the serious business of industrial warfare'. The potentialities of the Conference 'for causing trouble should not be underestimated'.

The NEWS CHRONICLE decided to make its report just a further episode in its witch-hunting 'Red Club' series. Its reporter dwelt on the measures taken to prevent Scotland Yard marks from getting in, and did not conceal his disappointment that his own paid mark had been barred.

The DAILY TELEGRAPH found interesting the

proposal in the Charter to make local Labour Parties campaign centres in the industrial struggle, while the DAILY HERALD ran a straightforward report, leading on the proposal for a one-day general stoppage against unemployment.

The DAILY SKETCH had four sentences under a headline suggesting that the Conference had been 'plotting' such a strike!

The DAILY EXPRESS ran an extraordinary paragraph which referred to 'a communist meeting held in London yesterday'.

For sheer venom there was little to choose between the DAILY MAIL and the DAILY WORKER. The Mail spoke of 'an attempt to seize power in the trade union movement' and complained because 'voices were constantly raised and there was constant clapping' in the Conference hall. Perhaps its reporter thought it was going to be a Quaker meeting.

'Newsletter Ran into Trouble' announced the Worker headline, a trifle optimistically. It said the first two speakers criticized the draft Charter, but it forbore to print the name of 'a Scots miner'—ex-communist Lawrence Daly.

Nearly half the Worker's report was devoted to the speech of a single delegate, Electrical Trades Union member Pat O'Neil, and not one word of Hugh Cassidy's reply to his criticisms, or the replies of other building workers, was printed.

# A Charter of Workers' Demands

This is the text of the Charter as amended and adopted by the National Industrial Rank-and-file Conference called by the Editorial Board of The Newsletter in the Holborn Hall, London, on Sunday, November 16, 1958.

**WE**, the delegates to the national industrial rank-and-file conference called by the Editorial Board of The Newsletter on November 16, 1958, submit the following Charter of workers' demands for the consideration of the members and leaders of the British working-class movement.

In our opinion, only a policy such as is here outlined can solve the problems that are now arising in industry in a way which will be in the true interests of working men and women, and which will help forward the fight for a socialist reconstruction of society.



**WE** have considered the problem of *unemployment*. What sterner condemnation could there be of the capitalist system than its inability to provide work for all who need it?

Half a million are idle in this country at this moment. And many of the machines that should be enriching the lives of all of us are idle too.

There are a million families whose bread-winner is either out of a job or on short time. Millions more are seriously worried about the danger that soon they also will be out of work.

The unemployment figure is rising by 30,000 a month—and share values are rising, too.

In our opinion the time to fight unemployment is now, while the greater part of our class is still in the factories.

We must fight unemployment before it grows any more—above all, by refusing to the employer the right to hire and fire at will.

## WE DEMAND:

- 1) The sharing of all available work without loss of pay.
- 2) Solidarity action with all sections resisting sackings.
- 3) A national protest campaign led by the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, including a one-day national stoppage against unemployment.
- 4) No discrimination against coloured workers.
- 5) Solidarity between unemployed workers and those in work to prevent the use of unemployed men as black-legs.
- 6) Protection of shop stewards: all strikes against victimization to receive the full backing of the union concerned.
- 7) A campaign for a real determined fight for the 40-hour week and less hours, without loss of pay, to reduce the growing unemployment.



**B**ELIEVING that even with a militant fight against unemployment this problem cannot be solved within the framework of capitalist society, we have considered the problem of *nationalization*.

The root cause of unemployment lies in the private ownership for private profit of the means of production.

To remove an industry from the incompetent and

greedy hands of profiteers is the way to ensure jobs and decent living standards for the men who work in it.

One of the biggest lessons of the South Bank dispute is that there is no need for McAlpine.

Equally, one of the biggest lessons of the BOAC dispute is that there is no need for d'Erlanger and men of his class.

The nationalization we envisage is nationalization *under workers' control*.

## WE DEMAND:

1) The nationalization by the next Labour government of the engineering, shipbuilding, building and textile industries and of the land of the big landowners.

2) No compensation to the former owners of these industries.

3) No representatives of big business to have a say in the running of these industries.

4) Control of these industries to be in the hands of democratically elected workers' councils.



**A**NOTHER problem we have considered is that of *the Labour Party*. We state without hesitation that the main thing wrong with the Labour Party is that it lacks a militant socialist policy, and that this is largely because it is controlled by a junta of middle-class Fabians and full-time trade union officials.

The rank and file in the trade unions and local Labour Parties no longer have a say in determining the policy of the party.

We recall that the basic aim of the Labour Party, as laid down in its 1918 constitution, is to work for the social ownership of the means of production.

The Right-wing leaders have abandoned this aim. Only the rank and file can bring the party back to its original purpose and restore the socialist vision and energy of the pioneers of our movement.

The Tory Government can be defeated, and a Labour government pledged to socialist policies elected, only if the industrial workers in particular bring back a fighting spirit to the Labour Party, and turn local parties into organs of working-class struggle.

## WE APPEAL TO INDUSTRIAL WORKERS:

1) To ensure that their trade union branches are fully represented on local and Constituency Labour Parties.

2) To fight for the adoption of militant socialist policies and for the restoration of democracy within the party.

3) To make the local parties campaign centres in the industrial struggle, that will give the utmost moral and material help to all workers in dispute in their particular locality.

4) To strive for united action on agreed policies without discrimination while freely and openly thrashing out differences where these exist.

5) To recognize that the Labour Party was created by the trade unions and is founded upon them, and that major political questions should be regularly discussed in trade union branches.

**L**AST but not least, we have considered the problem of *the trade unions*. For many years the control of the unions has been passing into the hands of the full-time paid officials.

In many unions these officials have in practice replaced the elected officials, and are taking decisions that are in violation of the constitutions and policies of their unions.

There is a growing division between the mass of trade union members and the leaders.

We are firmly opposed to the creation of new trade unions or of any sort of 'breakaway' organizations whatever.

We believe, on the contrary, that the rank and file have the power, and the responsibility, to restore trade union democracy, so that the unions can be better equipped to defend their members.

We believe that the employers' offensive makes more and more urgent the development of solidarity action among trade unionists, regardless of whether a struggle is labelled 'official' or 'unofficial'.

Disputes must be judged, not by the label some full-time official attaches to them, but by the demands of the workers engaged in struggle.

We believe that the creation of links between workers, in the same and in different industries, in the form of solidarity action committees and similar rank-and-file bodies, can powerfully assist the restoration of trade union democracy.

#### **WE DEMAND:**

1) No appointment of trade union officials, but their periodical election, with the right of recall.

2) Salaries, expenses and delegation fees of union officials to be determined by the average wages of the members of that union.

3) An end to the practice of squandering union funds on large motor-cars without indication on them of who owns them. Union officials to travel in cheap, economical vans, carrying loudspeaker equipment for factory-gate and other meetings, and with the name of the union prominently displayed.

4) Annual policy-making conferences of the rank and file in all unions.

5) Direct rank-and-file representation at the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party annual conference. National full-time officials not to form part of the delegations at these gatherings.

#### **CONFERENCE (Continued from page 304)**

**P. O'NEIL** (London South-West branch, Electrical Trades Union) criticized the Editorial Board of The Newsletter and its attitude to the Right-wing leaders.

'I think we have a right to ask exactly what tactics do we consider best to change the Right wing, to fight the Tory government and to fight against unemployment,' he said.

'I cannot disagree with a lot Behan said, but I do raise serious critical questions.

'I ask Behan or Cassidy for a critical analysis of the South Bank dispute. If we make a serious claim for this Conference then we must treat the working class seriously.'

Charges had been made regarding money, Brother O'Neil said. He wanted an answer.

'The Newsletter,' he said, 'comes in to lead and wants to take things out of the hands of the men on the job.'

'When the McAlpine dispute began he could not get a handful of scabs. But the tactics on the South Bank of interference by an outside body have led to failure and the majority of the men out of work.'

He disagreed with the policy of castigating union officials

6) Fullest consultation with the membership in formulating, presenting and fighting for demands, and in the acceptance of settlements.

7) Complete opposition by the trade union movement to courts of inquiry, which are simply designed to prevent the winning of wage demands, and are now being used more and more to draw the teeth of the shop stewards' movement.

8) Prosecution of wage demands with the utmost energy, proper preparation of the membership and the broadest possible unity in action of the trade union forces against the employers.

9) A vigorous campaign for 100 per cent. trade unionism to seal up all gaps in organization.



**W**E recognize that working-class socialist ideas and purposes are meaningless unless based on real internationalism. World capitalism can only be defeated and peace ensured by the effective fraternal co-operation of the workers of the world.

This is the real answer to the H-bomb, to the military alliances of power politics, and to the threats of slump and unemployment.

We believe that we should build international working-class relations and understanding at rank-and-file level.



**O**UR demands, we are well aware, do not cover every one of the problems with which the British workers are faced today. But if the demands that we have advanced in this Charter were won, the Labour movement would be in far better shape to meet and beat back the offensive of the employing class.

Our demands are in line with the original constitutions and aims of the trade unions and of the Labour Party.

The pioneers who built our movement did so without the help of Consul cars, knighthoods or fat salaries.

They built our movement despite imprisonment and exile to Botany Bay. They made big sacrifices.

Today we need to recapture something of the spirit of the old days.

The job of the Labour movement is to fight the employers. This job cannot be done if the movement gets too 'respectable', but only if it regains its original purpose and militancy.

for possessing motor cars.

'The whole trend of The Newsletter,' he said, 'is to make out that the worst enemy is the trade union leadership.'

'I am against the Right wing, but I recognize that millions of ordinary people follow these leaders and vilification of them is a wrong tactic. It will not make for unity and damages whatever prospects we have.'

'What has been achieved over the last couple of months?' he asked.

'What has been achieved in the AUBTW? The Right wing is able to come down for the first time and expel members.'

'I would sooner see Behan as a militant worker in a position to lead the AUBTW instead of sniping from outside.'

'If The Newsletter or the rank and file want to give a lead,' he concluded, 'then it must be done in such a way as to leave no doubt as to what your policies are. It must be made clear that you are not out to split.'

'The present policy of The Newsletter—in its actions and in its accents—looks like the Left wing of the Economic League.'

A representative of the Coloured People's Progressive

Association spoke about the need to fight colour prejudice.

'We want people in this country,' he said, 'to realize that we also form opinions of our own and the opinion we form is that we are entitled to the same just deserts as you who are natives of this country.'

'Give us a chance to live among you.'

As a trade unionist he had certain points to make on the Charter.

He felt that a true balance must be drawn between Capital and Labour. Full employment and increased productivity should mean a sharing of profits. Ways and means should be found of putting pressure on the government to bring this about.

He was against a contributory pension scheme and felt that old age pensions were the right of workers who produced the wealth.

## PROTECT STEWARDS FROM VICTIMIZATION

'Shop stewards,' he said, 'should be protected from victimization by not having to depend on the employer for their pay. They should be treated as paid officers of their union.'

Speaking as a worker in a nationalized industry he felt it was necessary to point out that nationalization did not always operate in the workers' interests. He criticized the lack of facilities and bad conditions which were often worse than in privately owned industries.

'The Shell Mex dispute is the first time I can recall when a newspaper has come forward to explain what really happened,' an AUBTW member from Abbey Wood told the Conference.

'We must all admit that there is not a single paper printing the truth about the Shell Mex site apart from this paper. It has printed everything that has occurred.'

'If the employers are successful on Shell Mex,' he said, 'we shall see the same thing on every site in the country.'

'I was always aware at Abbey Wood that Shell Mex concerned me. We must on all occasions try to help the man on the other site.'

'The site over there does include you. At one time or another you will be working for that firm.'

'The men on the Shell Mex site complained about the canteen. We have complained about our canteen.'

'But due to the militancy of the men on our site we have got a good canteen and flush lavatories. You could not get these things without unity and strength against the employer.'

## WELCOMED THE NEWSLETTER'S WORK

'Before the war you had to go out in the field and you did not even get a clean cup of tea. If you don't fight you aren't going to achieve anything.'

**HARRY CONSTABLE**, leading London portworker, said he had not intended to speak, 'but Brother O'Neil asked for some explanations and I am fully qualified to give them.'

'He talks about us taking strikes out of workers' hands. As one who has been prominent in strikes on the docks, I have welcomed the work of The Newsletter and can say that this paper has done a remarkable job in the docks industry.'

'There have been people willing to help before,' he said, 'but there have always been strings attached. With The Newsletter there have been no strings.'

'All that it has meant for members of the Newsletter staff has been sacrifice and hard work with the sole purpose of building up a movement inside the country that the employers will have to reckon with.'

'The employers know that the people around The Newsletter are determined to revitalize the Labour movement. This is why there has been a campaign of vilification in the Press.'

Brother Constable went on to describe what happened to people who compromised in order to avoid expulsion.

'In the Transport and General Workers' Union,' he said, 'I was summoned by Deakin and told to turn it up.'

'Many people, members of both the Communist Party and the Labour Party, have been told to turn it up or be thrown out. They offer you compromises—trade union jobs as officials—and reform from within.'

'The TGWU has brought in many militants and tried to make them toe the line.'

'But we refused to compromise, knowing full well that we would be expelled—and not only expelled but arrested.'

'But on the docks today there are nine people who did compromise and they are effectively shut out.'

He told how, together with a member of the Communist Party, he had wanted to fight things out and had worked for four years in the docks industry without a card.

'But we are recognized by the workers as trade unionists,' he declared. 'Wherever we go we are respected. People recognize us. We were not fighting as individuals or for ourselves.'

He was not suggesting, he explained, that trade unionists should go forward and ask for expulsion, but there could be no compromise on principles.

'You must make your base and fight your case.'

With regard to abuse of trade union officials, Brother Constable said he did not know what Brother O'Neil meant by vilification.

'There have been some diabolical things done by trade union officials and they need to be exposed,' he declared.

## NO TIME FOR SHILLY-SHALLYING

'In this sense I have "abused" and "vilified" trade union officials. These people have got to be shaken out of their apathy. We have no time for shilly-shallying—if a man is a bad man, then say so. If he is a good man then try and work with him.'

'We don't judge people on their personalities,' he concluded, 'but on their policies.'

**HUGH CASSIDY** (chief steward on the South Bank site) took the floor to give the Conference a summary of what took place at Shell-Mex.

'We have not attacked trade union leaders,' he said, 'but we do criticize trade union officials who refuse to do their job.'

'We want them to put into practice the principles for which the trade union movement stands.'

With regard to the charge that The Newsletter 'took over leadership of the struggle', Brother Cassidy said that the decision to accept the paper's offer of space was taken by the thirty-two stewards on the site.

'We stated our case in The Newsletter. I stated my case. On South Bank we got a show of solidarity that had not been seen for twenty years.'

'All those who have helped in any way we have thanked repeatedly, and I don't differentiate among them.'

## FULL BALANCE-SHEET AVAILABLE

Anyone who was interested in finance, he said, could speak to Brother Maguire, the stewards' treasurer, and a full balance sheet would be forthcoming.

'At no time have these funds been used for anything other than the purpose for which they were intended,' he added.

A delegate from Park Royal branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union disagreed with those who regarded a closed shop as the final and most perfect form of trade union organization.

The rules were so complicated in a closed shop, he said, that it was often impossible to have a dispute made official.

'But it nearly always turns out,' he said, 'that if we take direct action we find ourselves on our own. We are breaking some decision or other and our district committee is unable to give us official support and therefore unofficial action becomes inevitable.'

But unofficial action could not be taken lightly.

'It is only possible if there is a strong determination to suffer sacrifices if you are to win.'

'Any body of workers,' he said, 'would support the Charter.'

But we should not be aiming merely at a Charter, but at mobilizing the whole of the working class to overthrow and remove altogether the capitalist system.

'Then there would be no need for any charter but the charter of socialism.'

But for this it was necessary to make a frontal attack on the employing class. There must be a revolutionary situation and to bring this about the differences in the Labour movement must be overcome and the whole movement transformed.

The chairman of the Westminster steelworkers' branch of the TGWU said he opposed the idea of the sharing of all available work without loss of pay.

He also opposed the demand for a one-day national stoppage led by the TUC.

## HAVE FAMILIES TO FEED

'Such a move would be in the interests of the employers. The men out of work, who have families to feed and rent to pay don't at all want to hear about things like that.

'What they want is work. And there is only one way to get it—by bringing pressure to bear on the government to release sufficient money, money which we ourselves create.

'The demand to start works that are needed should be put through our branches. This is the way to fight for full employment once again.'

'This Conference is a first-class idea,' said J. BRITZ (ETU). 'and I believe this not because I agree with all The Newsletter stands for but because this is something we have not had for years in this country.'

The ETU leaders, he said, were corrupt, although they were supposed to be Left-wing. They were once revolutionary. Today they were just as bureaucratic as the ones they had ousted.

'You can be a militant on £10 a week. At £20 a week you begin to change, but on £30 you have definitely changed,' he said amid laughter. 'And if there is a pension you don't want to lose your job at all.'

He disagreed with The Newsletter's policy on rank-and-file organizations.

'What we need in the hard times that face us are rank-and-file shop stewards' committees. They are not trade organizations. They are class organizations.

'The people on the platform think that if only they were in the leadership then things would be different.

'But we can only trust ourselves, and that is why we need a national shop stewards' movement similar to that which functioned during the first world war.

'It would unite workers regardless of trade or creed, and arising out of such a rank-and-file movement we could have the basis for organizing the overthrow of the entire system.'

## ONE IN FORTY KILLED

Brother Britz said he would support the amendments proposed by T. Cowan, calling for the building of a powerful shop stewards' rank-and-file organization as 'the main weapon for uniting the workers into a class fighting body on both the industrial and political fields,' and for 'a genuine revolutionary, socialist party' in order to achieve 'the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a socialized economy under workers' control and a workers' council government'.

'One out of forty of the spidermen at Belvedere have been killed and the job is not half finished. This means that before it is finished we can expect one in twenty to lose their lives.'

These figures were given by HUGH BARR (Constructional Engineering Union steward, Belvedere power station site).

He told the Conference about the campaign carried out for safety in the industry, and the achievements of the shop stewards on the site.

'I myself as shop stewards' convener, with the workers behind me, was able to get more money out of the bosses over and above the national agreement.

'In fact we were able to get them to double our wages as a minimum basis.

'Nor did this money mean we were putting men out of work. We got it on the basis of a five-day, 44-hour week.'

Describing the strike, he said: 'It is now the fifth week and national assistance is available only for our wives and children.

'We ourselves have had nothing. The CEU has finally blacked the job but it has still given us nothing. We are fighting on our bellies.'

Six powerful unions were involved at Belvedere. If the might of these unions could not be brought to bear in such a struggle, then it was really time to do something about it.

'I am a member of the Communist Party,' Brother Barr concluded, 'and I still call Brian Behan comrade.'

The next speaker was HARRY FINCH, a delegate from the Militant Workers' Movement in the Midlands and from his branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union.

He said that the Militant Workers' Movement had found the Draft Charter embodied most of the demands in their resolution. They were willing to withdraw and accept the

**CONFERENCE ACCEPTED** three amendments moved by A. Courtenay (Camden Town ETU) to the draft Charter of Workers' Demands. These dealt with the Labour Party's lack of a militant socialist policy; the need for regular discussion of major political questions in trade union branches; and the need for working-class internationalism.

**CONFERENCE ACCEPTED** two amendments moved by Lawrence Daly (Glencraig NUM), on trade union representation in local Labour Parties and on free discussion in the Labour movement.

**CONFERENCE ACCEPTED** an addendum moved by Harry Finch (Militant Workers' Movement) on the 40-hour week.

**CONFERENCE REJECTED** two amendments moved by T. Cowan (Charing Cross ETU) calling for a shop stewards' rank-and-file organization to unite the workers on both the industrial and political fields, and for a genuine revolutionary socialist party.

**CONFERENCE ENDORSED** the Charter of Workers' Demands as amended.

Charter if it could be amended to include a demand for the 40-hour week.

Referring to Brother O'Neil's criticism of The Newsletter's role on the South Bank, he gave several examples from the Midlands of strikes being sold out by union leaders.

'At one factory the union leaders told the men to go back to work and within a month 1,000 of them were sacked and the shop stewards were included on the redundant list.

'The union had in fact agreed to the sackings in return for the scandalous proposal of one week's wages in compensation.

'In another case the union waited for the employer to sack every worker for striking. They then made the dispute official one week after the men were sacked.

'There was no Newsletter there,' he said. 'More's the pity that these strikers had no paper in which to put forward their point of view.

'I have never been so proud of anything as I am of serving on this paper where we in the Midlands can read about London busworkers and learn the truth about their struggle,' he declared amid enthusiastic applause.

He hoped to see movements like the Militant Workers' Movement grow up all over the country linked together by The Newsletter.

JOHNNY STEWART (Glencraig branch, NUM) told the Conference that he did not support everything for which The Newsletter stood but Scottish miners were against bans



and proscriptions.

He was against splits and thought they must be avoided at all costs. Brian Behan should explain what he meant by solidarity action committees.

He hoped that irresponsible strikes would not be advocated. This did not mean he was against strikes where they were necessary.

**'I am a member of the Communist Party,' he said, 'but I will not agree to ban or proscribe anything.'**

The Labour Party must be brought back to its original basis. A fight should be waged for it to become once again a federal body to which every trend in the working-class movement could affiliate.

'We should examine the past history of the trade union and Labour movement from 1926 up to the present day,' said a member of Brixton branch of the AUBTW.

'If we go into battle today with the same type of people who led us to defeat in 1926, then there will be the same results. If you try to fight with a lifeless body you are going to die.'

'From time to time it is necessary to criticize the trade union leaders,' he said. 'This does not mean that personal abuse is a good thing.'

'Brother O'Neil should examine the history of the Irish Labour movement. Connolly and Larkin consistently criticized the leaders of the rising trade union movement in Ireland when they disagreed with them.'

'If trade union leaders aline themselves with the employers and take the same attitude to the just demands of the workers that the employers take, then we must attack them just as we attack the employers.'

'More so. The employers are there to be seen for what they are. But it is not always easy to recognize the traitor within our own ranks.'

**CLIFF SLAUGHTER**, lecturer in sociology at Leeds University, told the Conference it was a fallacy that coloured immigrants were responsible for rising unemployment.

### **BASIS OF RACIAL PREJUDICE**

'There are only 200,000 coloured people in this country, of whom some 70,000 to 80,000 are employed workers. But there are 500,000 or more unemployed and the figure is rising by 38,000 a month.'

The race riots were a clear indication that it was the intention of the employing class to use the presence of coloured workers as a diversion.

The basis of race prejudice lay in our social system. You could not send young soldiers to wage war against coloured people in Malaya, Korea and Cyprus without telling them these people were inferior. Imperialism was the root cause of race prejudice.

Only a minority of British youth, he said, succumbed to race prejudice. The second riot in Nottingham had not involved coloured people. It was a question of youngsters wanting a fight.

But the frustrated energy of youth under capitalism was always likely to be used by fascists for their own purposes unless the Labour movement acted.

As the movement grew stronger, he thought, the danger of fascism would grow.

Among the coloured people themselves more than 25 per cent. were unemployed.

'The miners have a saying: "When we get down there we're all the same colour." This is true about unemployment. On the dole everyone is the same colour.'

'In the final analysis only the defeat of imperialism will really solve this problem, and with it all the problems of the working class.'

**T. COWAN** (Charing Cross ETU), told the Conference that one of the main problems of the working-class movement was the crisis of leadership. He disagreed with the policy of The Newsletter.

There should be a national rank-and-file shop stewards'

organization linked up with other organizations and combining political and industrial aspects, and he had submitted an amendment to this effect.

'We have got to fight the trade union leaders,' he said. 'They must be exposed and the working class must throw up its own leaders and start building up real workers' organizations.'

'A new socialist workers' party that will give leadership and fight the capitalist class is needed. It should be a party based on the mass organizations of the working class.'

'A Labour government will only act as the agent of the capitalist class because the Labour Party is hand in glove with the bosses.'

**ALEX McLARTY** (AEU, Sterne's, Hillington Estate, Glasgow) told the Conference that delegates who had intended to travel to London with him had been prevented because their factory had gone on strike last Thursday.

### **UTTERLY INCAPABLE OF LEADING**

He wanted the Conference to consider whether trade unions in their present form were appropriate. The trade union leaders had proved themselves utterly incapable of leading.

It was necessary to create a national shop stewards' movement or it would be impossible to meet the growing attacks of the employers.

**JIMMY ALLEN**, a Lancashire miner, asked what the implications of the Cowan amendments were.

'Taking matters outside the unions would only serve to confuse and split. Speaking as a miner, I can say that we shall clean up our union ourselves. We may need a lot of disinfectant but we shall be able to provide it.'

He congratulated The Newsletter on its treatment of the South Bank lock-out.

'Without The Newsletter we would have known nothing about it.'

The miners were facing big struggles, he said. They worked in a nationalized industry but there was no workers' control.

'In my pit recently they sacked four juvenile workers without consultation with the union. Within an hour they were walking down the road with their cards in their hands.'

The only real solution, he concluded, was a socialist society.

'The problems we are all facing are part of the world-wide problem of capitalism.'

**KEN SNELSON** (National Union of Vehicle Builders, Salford) said that in Lancashire there were 4,000 school-leavers unemployed and unable to draw benefits because they had never paid any insurance.

'Only one section of the movement,' he said, 'can provide the answer for youth. And that is the militant section.'

'We cannot wait for the full-time officials to instruct us, to confuse us and to completely demoralize us.'

'In the coming battles youth will be in the forefront but they know they cannot rely on the trade union leaders. That is why the shop stewards must assist young workers in their struggles.'

### **IF YOUTH WERE AROUSED**

'We have a common problem. We are all, young and old, members of the working class.'

'Young apprentices doing a man's job and needing to spend the same on food and clothes, are getting 36s. a week rising to £6 at twenty years of age.'

If youth were aroused and could be made to understand what they should fight for, then they would certainly fight.

He gave the example of the Kraft factory in Liverpool where 200 teen-age girls in the course of a strike lay down in front of oncoming trucks.

They won their struggle and marched back into the canteen singing 'Who's sorry now?'

**B. BRIGHT**, a member of the National Union of Seamen, said that if the working class had bad leaders it was due to their own apathy.

He said that the biggest culprits in the immigration problem were the steamship companies who wanted to make profits.

All over the West Indies, he said, there were notices put out by the shipping companies telling the plantation workers about the wonderful opportunities in Britain. They got £78 to £112 in passage money.

'In this country they do the same thing, telling British workers of the fine opportunities in Canada. When they get there they join the dole queues.'

It made no difference what your colour was, he said, when you were looking for a job.

'Black or white, we all need food, clothing and shelter.'

**KEVIN CORLEY** (Holloway bus garage) gave the Conference a brief account of the London bus strike.

'We stood firm, but we were sold out by the TUC, with no guarantee that bus services would not be cut.'

'What are the lessons? We can have no confidence in these leaders. The only real power is that of the rank and file. We elected these people. If we are determined, we can take them down whenever we want to.'

He pointed out that the employers could not take on all the workers at the same time and intended to deal with them section by section.

This was why they had taken on the busmen and why failure by the leaders to mobilize other sections in solidarity had been a betrayal of the busmen.

'We should take a vote of no confidence in the present leaders, call for their resignation and replace them by our own delegates who will fight for the working class on the basis of the same kind of wage you and I receive.'

**JOHN CONNOR** (Liverpool building worker) said that he spoke instead of a delegate whose union had instructed him not to attend. This delegate had been prepared to defy his union but had been unable to come because of illness.

In Liverpool, he said, a committee had been formed to explain what was happening at McAlpine's on South Bank. Lunch-time meetings had taken place on building sites and at factories.

These had met with considerable success. Donations were given on the spot and over 800 copies of the broadsheet produced by The Newsletter had been sold.

He pointed out that in the course of these solidarity meetings he had not seen one single trade union official.

The final speaker from the floor was a colonial worker from West Africa.

He appealed for unity between white and coloured workers and said that many of his people came to this country to learn from the British Labour movement and to take these lessons back to their own countries to help them in their struggle.

In his reply to discussion Brian Behan said he thought the Conference had made a beginning.

'As far as Brother O'Neil's charge that we are the Left wing of the Economic League is concerned,' he said, 'we want no extension of the witch-hunt.'

'Apathy and cynicism exist because the leaders of the trade union movement have time and again betrayed the interests of the working class.'

'Here in this room we have been trying to hammer out a policy that will prepare for the struggle between Capital and Labour.'

'This is not a simple thing to do. It is something that has to be built up and fought for.'

'The TUC has no policy. Our proposals do not make for a split. We want to prepare workers in the course of struggle. One of the aims of The Newsletter has been to promote solidarity action from industry to industry.'

There must be a constant and sharp exposure of the Right-wing leaders. One of the ways of doing this was to put forward realistic proposals. In their refusal to carry such proposals out, these leaders would inevitably expose themselves.

On the question of 'official' and 'unofficial' disputes, Behan said that workers should press for official recognition, but they should not be led astray by labels.

Those who set themselves up as spokesmen of the working class must be judged not merely by what they said but by what they did.

## NO CAPITULATION ON PRINCIPLES

He recommended that in the interests of unity the Conference should accept Lawrence Daly's amendment on industrial workers and the Labour Party.

But the Labour Party went on. It had never split despite its leadership, and it retained its hold on the masses of the working class.

There was a tendency to regard trade union branches as places to put forward resolutions. Resolutions were a good thing, but it was important to make people realize the necessity for action.

With regard to avoiding expulsion Behan said he was not in favour of creating martyrs, but it must be made perfectly clear that there could be no capitulation on principles.

Behan agreed that a national shop stewards' committee should be set up but he did not think that the time was yet ripe.

'The gap between our thinking and that of many in the Labour and trade union movement has to be bridged before we are in any position to establish forms of organization,' he said.

'We must go forward from this Conference, and forms of organization will arise in keeping with the needs of the working class.'

'A whole series of questions must be raised in the Labour movement before we get to national shop stewards' organizations or a workers' socialist party.'

'The need of the moment is for trade unionists to work to transform the Labour Party and fight against bans and proscriptions.'

## Constant Reader | 'Tied to the capitalist wagon'

PERHAPS the ablest Marxist historian who still maintains allegiance to the British Communist Party is Eric Hobsbawm.

I recently reread his remarkable article in the Modern Quarterly for Autumn 1951 on 'The Taming of Parliamentary Democracy', and noted his reference to the bureaucrats of the British Labour movement.

It is worth quoting, especially now that Communist Party spokesmen are accusing The Newsletter of being caddish and provocative in our treatment of these worthies as a body.

'The imperialist era,' Hobsbawm wrote, 'has seen the rise of a social group whose function it is to keep the rank and file firmly tied to the capitalist wagon: the body of Labour leaders and officials.'

'For these the mere creation of a State-monopoly capitalism

provided new functions, new status, new jobs. With every advance in the strength of the Labour movement, the politeness with which they as individuals are treated, grew.

'Whatever the fortunes of the rank and file in the imperialist era, for them it has quite clearly brought an almost unqualified advance.'

### Locking out and locking up

'The power of the capitalists to lock out men from the means of life has very marked limitations; given actual working-class solidarity the locking-out would be done by the workers, and the locking up too if need be.'

—Tom Mann, August 1910

**BRIAN PEARCE**