

The Week

A NEWS ANALYSIS FOR SOCIALISTS
Vol. 5, No. 25, 23rd June, 1966

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**Your Debt
to the
Seamen**

(PAGE 2)

UNIONS UNDER ATTACK

—SOLIDARITY THE ANSWER

54 Park Road, Lenton, Nottingham

Subscription : £2 per annum and pro rata

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24 Park Road, London, W.14
Subscription: £3 per annum and 6d per copy

CONTENTS

Page	1	Editorial notes.	Page	5	Australian L.P. and Vietnam.
"	2	Your debt to the seamen	"	6	Politics and shop stewards.
"	3	What Pearson ignored	"	7	Is a wage freeze on the way.
"	4	We can't negotiate the Vietnamese people's rights	"	8	Strike surge in Europe.

UNIONS UNDER ATTACK - SOLIDARITY THE ONLY ANSWER

The Government has virtually declared war on the trade unions. The Prices and Incomes Bill, the use of emergency powers against the seamen and now the disgraceful witch-hunting attack by Harold Wilson on the National Union of Seamen all amount to ^{the} most vicious attack made by a Government on the trade unions since Order 1305.

However, it must be said that the response to this situation has been poor. So far, the seamen have been left to struggle alone against the combined attack of the Shipping companies, the newspapers and the Government. Money, whilst it is very useful and can ^{have} the effect of helping to build the N.U.S.'s fighting ability, is not enough. In some cases it is a substitute for far more important and effective action. As we have pointed out before, it is in the interests of every union and every trade unionist in this country to fight for the victory of the seamen. As the incomes policy bites their turn is bound to come.

In the case of M.P.s there is no other course open to them but to vote against the Government's anti-union measures. Their voting against could be the basis of an appeal to whole of the movement for urgent and strong action to stay the hand of the Government. Behind the scenes opposition, no matter how vigorous, is completely useless in mobilising mass support. There is another consideration too: anyone who fails to register in a public open way his or her opposition to the anti-union measures will find it very difficult to persuade people in the future that they really opposed these measures.

The lesson is clear, being careful, being timid, being super-loyal, etc., has not moderated Mr. Wilson's rightward drift. Instead it may be said to have encouraged it. Now we need a big united front of all those who are opposed to the Government's anti-union measures to organise and inspire vigorous action in support of the seamen, who are in the vanguard of the struggle, and against the Government's policies. Those who have held back, out of the finest of motives in some cases, can do so no longer.

YOUR LAST CHANCE

By the time you receive this copy of The Week it will be almost too late to come to the Nottingham conference on workers' control; almost but not quite. There is no doubt that the effort is going to be a tremendous success. Over a hundred people have registered from outside Nottingham for the conference (many more are coming) including a good number of foreign delegates. You should not miss this chance, telephone Geoff. Coggan, Nottingham 281364 immediately. Nottingham readers should turn up at the Co-op Education Centre at 10,30 Saturday morning - with their five bobs ready if they have not already paid.

WHAT PEARSON IGNORED

The following letter was sent to the Editor of The Times on June 11th, by Ken Coates and Tony Topham.

"Dear Sir,

It is hardly surprising that Lord Pearson's Enquiry failed to win the Seamen's confidence, because it ignored one of their least publicised but most important complaints. This was summed up by the statement of the Hull seamen:

"Shipowners cry that they cannot afford it. The seamen cannot judge this, and neither can Mr. Gunter, because profits are the best kept secret of the industry ... the shipowners must prove their case by opening their books."

Mr. Hogarth is not alone in endorsing this point. So, before the strike, did Professor Fogarty, who wrote to you in February complaining that the new Companies Bill ignored the industrial relations side of companies, and failed to ensure the publication of data which is vital for negotiation and consultation.

But Professor Fogarty's reservations about company law at large apply with redoubled force to the shipping companies. Indeed the Jenkins Committee specifically urged that those exemptions which permit shipping companies to conceal their reserves, and transfers to and from reserves, were unjustified and should be withdrawn.

How can any Report which is drawn up without the basic facts be acceptable as a 'compromise'? How does so famous an empirical investigator as Mr. Clegg come to be associated with such an ill-founded document? Would it bankrupt the economy to require the shipowners to open their accounts to trade union perusal? We think not.

If the seamen insist that a precondition of further negotiations must be that the shipowners' accounts be unlocked to them, this will not only mark a great step forward in industrial democracy, but establish one of the criteria upon which a true incomes policy might develop."

MANPOWER LOSS THREATENS COAL

by an industrial correspondent

As has been pointed out many times by critics of the Government's policies towards mining, this industry has become so unattractive that skilled men are leaving in droves. Speaking on this question last week end, Mr. Richard Marsh, Minister of Power, said at the Yorkshire miners' gala: "The industry is losing far too many trained miners. The position is that the rate at which the introduction of machines can save men has fallen behind the rate at which the industry is losing men. The Financial Times of Monday, June 20th, commented: "In the past eight weeks, the industry has lost at least 7,300 trained miners - many in areas where they are most needed. Coal Board returns show that the total number of colliery workers has declined to just under 427,000 and the loss of only another 12,000 men means that the coal labour force will have slumped to a point which the National Plan did did not foresee until 1970."

Later it explained !....The overall figures appear to indicate that many of these men have decided to leave the mines for good. At the same time, miners leaving key areas (such as Yorkshire) are seriously aggravating the growing problem of maintaining economic rates of production." Instead of Mr. Marsh lecturing Yorkshire miners he ought to tell the N.C.B. that it must pay higher wages - at the expense of compensation payments, if need be.

WE CAN'T 'NEGOTIATE' THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

by Bertrand Russell.

Many people who had hopes of opposition at last within the Labour movement will be disappointed by the Vietnam Manifesto. It does not constitute a contribution to the cause of justice and peace in Vietnam, but is a different formulation of Wilson's policy of complicity.

The United States is a blatant aggressor in Vietnam and it is impossible to expect the Vietnamese to permit the aggressor to be the arbiter of a provisional government. It only promotes confusion if we slide over our moral responsibility to stand side by side with the victim against the aggressor. People should be clear that the United States' experimental war in Vietnam is in keeping with their exploitation and oppression of people in most parts of Latin America, Asia and Africa. The demand for peace in areas where people are struggling for liberation against brutal dictatorships backed by American military power is empty, because it is impossible for the people concerned to live under the old regime. They are compelled to revolt by those who suppress and torment them. The only moral position for socialists is one of solidarity with those struggling for their economic and political emancipation.

In Vietnam, the United States is using gas, chemicals and napalm. They are bombing hospitals and sanatoria. They have no more right to use their occupation of Vietnam as a basis for suggesting terms of a settlement of their own aggression than had the Nazis in Yugoslavia. The issue is as clear as the Blitz, but it is more grave. Nazi Germany did not invade Britain, nor did Nazi Germany commit war crimes against Britain involving gas, chemicals, fragmentation bombs, or the placing of sixty per cent of the rural population in concentration camps. Yet Churchill declared that Britain would fight on the beaches, fight for decades, if necessary, but would never surrender. Churchill went further, calling for the unconditional surrender of the Nazis and for a conquest of Germany. The Vietnamese do not propose occupation of Washington. Their demand is simple: that the aggressor get out.

It is unwarranted concession to the brute force of imperialism for socialists in the West to bargain with the rights of the oppressed by demanding that the Americans, who perpetrate such terrible war crimes and who have been in occupation of Vietnam for twelve years, should now determine a provisional government or set their conditions for an end to their own aggression. Britain is guilty of complicity in the use of experimental weapons and poisons. All of us have the duty to struggle for the defeat of the United States and the victory of the Vietnamese, just as we had that responsibility in support of those resisting Hitler a quarter of a century earlier.

The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign is seeking to make clear the basic issues in this struggle and to organise a series of actions in Britain supporting the NLF and the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam against the Americans. We hope people in Britain will join with us in action aimed at the defeat of the present United States Government, the exposure of their war crimes and the national liberation of the people of Vietnam.

Michael Kidron's complaints about my review of "Incomes Policy Legislation, and the Shop Stewards" is very helpful in drawing attention to certain internal inconsistencies in the book. The authors' use of the metaphor (for local shop steward activity, and trade union spheres) of 'walking on two legs' is particularly illustrative. For the whole weight of their characterisation of the trade union 'leg' is to suggest that it is so infected with gangrene that it should be cut off! The workers can then hobble on the healthy leg. Amputation is sometimes inevitable, but no-one would be grateful to the surgeon who performed the operation on the strength of an incorrect diagnosis. Even very complicated fractures can be mended!

Concerning the question of 'reforms', I agree that I should have acknowledged the use of that term by the authors, in their phrase "'do-it-yourself' reforms". It is I think clear from the context that where I took exception to their dismissal of reforms as 'reforms from above', I am dealing with their attitude to political programmes, political reforms. The Cliff/Barker "do-it-yourself" reforms are, it seems to me, confined within narrow and defensive limits. It remains incontrovertible that the defence and organisation of shop stewards is of great importance. The authors are entitled to use the word 'reforms' to describe these activities, though I think it confuses the issue. Unless the shop steward base reaches outwards and upwards towards a political programme ("working-class politics" as Reg Birch puts it in his introduction to the book - by the way is he also accused of not reading the pamphlet?) the shop floor movement will fail to engage in the building of a socialist movement - something required now, and not in some distant future. This thesis has some support in history. The shop stewards' movement during and after the last war lacked a sharply defined programme of anti-capitalist reforms, and under the influence of the revolutionary situation in Europe it moved towards a maximalist position which did not capture mass support in the British context. At the same time, building on programmatic propaganda and agitation reaching back a number of years, railwaymen and miners were confronting the Government with effective pressures for anti-capitalist reforms. Both movements had their weaknesses and strengths. With the impact of mass unemployment the opportunity for both passed away. From the terminology of the Cliff/Barker pamphlet, I am not at all sure whether they would not regard the demands of miners and railwaymen for nationalisation with joint union-state control, which occupied the government in manoeuvres against them from 1919 to 1921, as "reforms from above". I remain convinced that in today's context, there is a real need for sharp programmes (certainly with less ambiguity than the 'joint-control' formula), which are neither Fabian "reforms from above" nor simply the "do-it-yourself" defences of Cliff and Barker.

I said that a short review would hardly do for this book. Kidron's attack is useful in stimulating me to expand a bit. I intended no "disservice to your readers", nor did I read the book "in order to misconstrue it". Surely we can differ in interpreting an important piece of work, and on a vital question of socialist strategy, without these rather personalised comments on our motives creeping in.

I wish to subscribe to Vietnam Courier, enclosed is..... for.....

Name..... Address.....

(see page 2 for rates)

Please use block capitals.

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IS A WAGE FREEZE ON THE WAY ? from a Special Correspondent.

In recent weeks there has been a number of small items in the press speculating about the possibility of a wage pause (euphemism for freeze). These have been denied by government spokesmen, but none too strongly. Last week Samuel Brittan, economics editor of The Financial Times, had a long article entitled 'The Choices Before the Government' (F.T. Wed. June 10th). This was in essence a call for the Government to implement a wage freeze now. Quite correctly he pointed out that many of the measures taken so far to deflate the economy had not begun to bite because of various time lags, etc. However, the possibility of the balance of payments deficit being corrected by the end of this year looks more and more remote.

Brittan says, "But in present British circumstances a simple increase in Bank Rate could be misinterpreted abroad as a sign of panic. Memories of the unsuccessful Bank Rate increase in November 1964 are still alive. Just to raise the Bank Rate on its own would therefore be a risky proposition. ... " Further on he says, " ... most of the conventional expedients of post war economic policy have already been used with disappointing results. As the root of the present weakening of confidence lies on the wage front, it is natural to look here for action. Any kind of wage pause which looked as if it might have even a partial effect, would be very welcome to the holders of sterling" "A wage pause could theoretically be introduced in either two forms. One alternative would be to introduce legislation A more likely alternative would be to postpone, say until the end of the year, all further increases in the public sector and exert strong pressure on private industry to do the same. No doubt too, as in Selwyn Lloyd's time, companies would be asked to defer dividend increases and some gesture might also have to be made on prices."

For a cynical appraisal of the needs of capitalism this would take some beating. It will be noted that what is urged is a real wage freeze, but only a gesture on prices, and of course profits would not be touched, but the consumption of them merely deferred. What makes Brittan's article significant is that until he took up his present position, he was one of George Brown's advisers at the D.E.A. One is left wondering as to whether Brittan was inspired to write his articles to prepare the right climate of opinion among the smaller firms and investors. There is no doubt that the present strike of the seamen is presenting some problems for the Government, being bent on its present neo-capitalist policies. Being unable or unwilling to take socialist initiatives it is faced with the same difficulty of any capitalist government in this sort of crisis, how to get the workers to carry the can. Their acute problem is that the workers in this country are well aware that at the moment they don't need to accept this passively. With the labour market tightly stretched, the 'discipline' of the threat of unemployment is not present. It will be very interesting to see the reactions of those on the Left who have been urging the trade unions to adopt a more 'sophisticated' approach and not be so 'wage militant', if the wage freeze is attempted. On Brittan's advice this will mean the sane sectors that were attacked by the Tories, i.e. nurses, teachers, nationalised industries, etc. Personally I doubt if one can expect 'sophisticated' behaviour from anyone when they see the axe descending.

If any further evidence were needed of the true intent of the present Incomes Policy, the treatment of the seamen should have given it. The present policy allegedly tries to peg earnings at the present (scandalously) low level. In fact it means that earning power is steadily eroded. A wage freeze, in the context of rising prices and profits, can only be viewed as a wage cut.

STRIKES SURGE IN EUROPE

extracted from Hsinhua

HOLLAND About 10,000 organised Dutch building workers went on strike in Amsterdam on June 14th in support of their unorganised colleagues. The unorganised workers demonstrated on the evening of June 13th in protest against a deduction of 2% from their holiday bonus as "administration costs". The police opened fire on the demonstrators, wounding two, one of them seriously.

SCANDINAVIA About 1,000 pilots of the Scandinavian Airlines System (S.A.S.) began a strike on June 13th for wage increases and better working conditions. The strike was the first of the S.A.S. for 20 years. The Scandinavian Airlines is a joint venture of Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

WEST GERMANY 1,000 West German workers in the timber industry went on strike in Saarbrücken on June 13th, demanding shorter working hours and more fringe benefits.

ITALY 150,000 metal and machine-building workers employed by the state-owned enterprises began a 72-hour nation-wide strike on June 14th for wage increases. On June 15th one million building workers staged a 24-hour nation-wide strike, demanding a 12% wage increase and full employment. In several provinces the walk-out was protracted for 48 hours. Scores of meetings and demonstrations were held in various centres. This strike was similar to the one held a week ago, and is the eleventh nation-wide work stoppage undertaken by the building workers. 90,000 canned foodstuff workers and 25,000 wine and spirit workers held a 24-hour nation-wide strike in June 16th for the renewal and improvement of their collective agreements. Meanwhile, ground workers of the state-owned airline company Alitalia, who staged an 8-day nation-wide strike last month, resumed their action for better working conditions through intermittent alternating work stoppages.

THE "FINANCIAL TIMES" ON U.S. INVESTMENT IN EUROPE

The 'Financial Times' of June 29th said the growing U.S. capital investment in Western Europe is "feared as a threat for the future", especially "in the 1960's, some of the latent hostility has come to the surface". "It has done so most dramatically in France in statements by General de Gaulle himself", and public opinion in West Germany "is nearly as hostile as in France". According to the 'Transatlantic Investments' published by the Atlantic Institute recently, between 1961 and 1964 U.S. capital holdings in Italy doubled, in France it grew 2.5 times, and in West Germany 3 times. The U.S. firms have got a dominant control in a wide range of Western European industries, especially computers, oil, pharmaceuticals, electronics and aircraft, the report said. By now, U.S. firms make 40% of the cars in Britain and West Germany, nearly 15% of France's; over 40% of Britain's computers, 75% of France's, and 84% of West Germany's. The total U.S. investment in Western Europe has reached 27.9 billion dollars, with direct investments totalling 12 billion dollars.

JULY 3RD. ACTION AT THE AMERICAN BASE AT ALCONBURY

This is organised by the East Anglian C. of 100 with the support of the East Anglian CND. Present plans include: leafleting and a meeting prior to July 3rd; assemble on July 3rd at Huntingdon; a brief meeting here; march to the base (4 miles); planting of broken crosses on the perimeter; tea break (US servicemen invited); march to Alconbury village (1 mile). Contact 13, Goodwin St., London. N.4.