

THE NEWSLETTER

180 Clapham High Street, London, S.W.4.

Registered at the G.P.O. as a newspaper

Vol. 2, No. 73

Sixpence

October 18, 1958

RANK & FILE CAN SMASH SCABS' CHARTER

By Our Industrial Correspondent

AT London Airport, on the South Bank, and at Belvedere, trade unionists are this week-end standing firm against a full-scale attack by the employers. The bosses state clearly that their aim is to smash trade union organization. And the Tory Government is fully behind them.

This is proved up to the hilt by the infamous document slapped before union leaders by the bosses of the State-owned BOAC on Wednesday. This document is a fully-fledged, unashamed scabs' charter.

The BOAC employers make no bones about what they want.

They want the workers to surrender four other precious mittee at London Airport. It is to be dissolved by joint action of the unions and employers, if you please!

They want the workers to surrender four other precious rights: the right to strike; the right to work to rule; the right to ban overtime; the right to hold mass meetings.

The Manchester Guardian said of the document on Thursday that if accepted it 'would completely destroy the power of the militant shop stewards' movement at the airport'.

Behind this attempt to smash trade unionism stands the Tory Government. And the use of police to get scabs through

More and more rank-and-file workers are realizing this. There is widespread disquiet about the attitude of such trade union leaders as Lowthian and Matthews.

Their words about the South Bank struggle have been hailed with delight by McAlpine, one of whose officials was reported in The Times on Thursday as saying: 'Statements by trade union leaders have been most helpful.'

Yet even as the employers were thanking the union leaders for services rendered on the South Bank they were snubbing them at BOAC headquarters by refusing to send proper negotiators.

To hundreds of thousands of active trade unionists throughout Britain this week-end the lessons of the last few days' events are plain: only strong rank-and-file movements, linking and co-ordinating the struggles of the different sections, can beat the employers.

The national industrial rank-and-file Conference, called by the Editorial Board of The Newsletter, at the Holborn Hall, London, on Sunday, November 16, can help to achieve this.

BELVEDERE TRAGEDY

On Tuesday afternoon, Bob Watkins, a steel erector on the Belvedere power site, was the victim of a fatal accident on the job.

All workers on the mechanical side of the job stopped work and decided to suspend work until Thursday morning.

WE FIGHT SHOULDER TO SHOULDER AGAINST THE EMPLOYERS

The following statement has been issued by the Editorial Board of The Newsletter:

'There have been suggestions in some capitalist newspapers that there is "competition" and "rivalry" between supporters of The Newsletter and members of the Communist Party in industrial activity.

'These suggestions are completely without foundation. Supporters of our paper are prepared to work—and are in fact working—shoulder to shoulder with rank-and-file members of the Communist Party in resisting the employers' offensive against trade unionism.

'We shall continue to struggle side by side with anyone who, like us, wants to see the employing class defeated.'

'Whatever political differences we may have with our comrades of the Communist Party, these can and will be discussed without the interference of the capitalist Press.'

Belvedere Steward Says: 'Hit back with United Action'

By HUGH BARR, CEU steward at Belvedere Power Station and Chairman of the joint stewards' committee

I BELIEVE the Belvedere men have been sacked because we had a four-hour strike in favour of the South Bank men. The employers are united in their efforts to smash the organized working class.

The workers must answer them by unifying their ranks. We should make an appeal to the whole trade union movement. A national protest stoppage is required against these sackings.

Every section of the trade union and Labour movement

must be mobilized. We want aid not only from the unions and the Trades Union Congress, but from every single Labour MP.

Despite the sackings at Belvedere, we still consider it necessary to help our brothers at South Bank. We are confident that no man from the Confederation will cross our picket lines, so we shall do as we have for the last few days—send pickets to South Bank.

As to the Shell job, the only basis for a return to work can be the reinstatement of all workers.

An Open Letter to Dennis Goodwin

DEAR COMRADE GOODWIN,

You feel the same as I do, I am sure, about the sacking of 1,250 men at South Bank and 280 at Belvedere, about the Daily Telegraph's boasts that the workers are being 'disciplined'. Would not both of us urge the workers to resist these attacks and do all in our power to help them, knowing what poverty unemployment brings and what havoc it can wreak in a man's life? It was therefore with surprise that in last week's World News I found an article by you, not laying into Sir Robert McAlpine, but attacking the rank-and-file Conference called by this paper's Editorial Board.

It puzzles me to know why you have chosen precisely this turning in the class struggle in Britain to launch an attack against THE NEWSLETTER. Workers are in struggle; sackings and victimization are becoming a commonplace; the unemployment figure is soaring by 30,000 a month; Right-wing trade union leaders like Lowthian and Matthews are turning their backs on the fight. Yet you can find no better target than the efforts of fellow-workers and fellow-Marxists to mobilize their workmates. Not only that. One could understand it if you wished to state political differences and thrash them out. But your article avoids any real discussion of political differences by the old and thoroughly discredited method of labelling those with whom you disagree. 'Unprincipled demagoguery . . . splitting . . . the renegade Potter . . . a fraud and a swindle . . . a bunch . . . bourgeois radicalism . . . plays into the hands of the capitalist class . . .' No, Comrade Goodwin. This is 1958, not 1938. This kind of name-calling just will not do. It is an insult to serious workers, who expect you and the leaders of the Communist Party, if you have disagreements with other trends in the working-class movement, to substantiate them with arguments, not invective. I am confident that many rank-and-file members of the Communist Party, who work shoulder to shoulder with supporters of THE NEWSLETTER in everyday industrial activity, will view this label-sticking with contempt, and will demand a serious debate and confrontation of ideas.

For our part, we should welcome a comradely debate with the many fine militants who are within the Communist Party. Nothing but good could come out of a discussion as to how the British workers can defeat the employers' attacks and win socialism. In this discussion, as in joint work on the job and on the picket-line, our policy and yours would be put to the test of analysis and of practice.

Are you ready for such a discussion, Comrade Goodwin? It would have to be conducted in a rather different tone from that of your article. Suggestions, for instance, that the News Chronicle and the Economic League Bulletin 'welcome' our industrial activity, because they regard it 'as directed mainly against the Communist Party'—suggestions such as these, which are utterly unfounded, would have to be abandoned. Both these publications refer to us, as to you, in witch-hunting accents; the logic of your 'argument' is that the publicity you have accorded us proves that you are 'behind' THE NEWSLETTER!

The use of phrases torn out of context and distorted must be abandoned, too. You write, for instance: 'Their

appeal is to those who want short cuts to socialism—a "short sharp struggle". It is this "impatience" which was characterized by Lenin as a bourgeois characteristic . . .' But you know quite well that the only reference to a 'short sharp struggle' which has appeared in THE NEWSLETTER was in relation to the bus strike. We said that if the petrol men had been called out, and the power cut off from the Underground, this would have meant a short sharp struggle crowned with victory. Would you disagree? I am bound to add that the shuffling of phrases into alien contexts is all too reminiscent of the days of Stalin and Rakosi. As far as militant workers in Britain are concerned, they want no part in polemical methods such as these.

No, there can be room only for a discussion on principles and on policies. And such a discussion, free from invective, sneers, malice or point-scoring, would be welcomed by the workers, who *need* theoretical and ideological clarity, who are thirsting for ideas, who are seeking the way forward.



I think our discussion should begin from one undoubted fact: that we in Britain have entered a new period, when the methods, recipes, formulas, slogans and forms of struggle adequate for a period of full employment no longer suffice. You tax us with rejecting partial, immediate demands. This is a travesty of our position. In our opinion the struggle to win such demands in present-day circumstances inevitably pushes the workers forward to further demands and more far-reaching struggles. Every fight for a partial demand today brings a section of the working class up against the whole employing class and its State machine. Every fight for a partial demand puts on the agenda the question of *power*, of control, of who dictates to whom. The employers as a whole are determined to smash job organization, and they will use every means in their power, including police brutality, to achieve this aim. The workers can no longer win partial demands with one hand tied behind their backs. To protect their jobs and their stewards they have to fight on as broad a front as possible. Whoever tells the workers that they can win section by section, without solidarity action, is doing them a disservice.

It is idle to pretend, as you do, that THE NEWSLETTER has 'ignored' such issues as wages, 100 per cent. trade unionism and union policy. Do you really read our paper week by week? Never a week goes by without our reporting and analysing partial, immediate fights on these issues. We put our resources unstintingly behind the busmen in their limited demand, even though we felt they should have pressed for more. We *also* strove to show that their struggle raised momentous political questions, that it had become a struggle against the Tory government. Over and over again the question of power is raised today. Ask any South Bank worker who has witnessed the part played by the police there these past few days, and for whom the question of the State and its functions has become, not an abstraction, but a living reality.

Whoever wants to build a Marxist movement in Britain has to be clear on what his aim is and on how

to get there. To us, the aim is working-class power, and the method is working-class struggle. You pour scorn on our efforts, but you neglect serious questions of principle. In recent weeks the smooth, peaceful transition to socialism advocated in your party programme 'The British Road' has been shown to be a caricature of Marxism. Who now believes that the workers can turn the present police force, courts and other parts of the State machine into instruments of working-class power? Let us get clear on what we must expect from the ruling class. Then we can *prepare* the working class for taking power. Without preparation, without drawing the lessons of victories and defeats, without showing how each partial demand is a bridge, a stepping-stone, to the conquest of power, we cannot come forward as serious socialists.

Take the key question of sackings and unemployment. You and I both know that only two things could end these scourges: socialism—or the disaster of imperialist war. Of course we fight for such demands as the nationalization of the industries affected. But you know as well as I that there is no final solution within the framework of capitalist society. And so when we of THE NEWSLETTER urge strike action in defence of jobs, we do so both because this is the only effective way to keep as many in work as possible, and also in order to raise the level of militancy of the workers and prepare them to take power, which is the only way of solving the question once and for all. Are we so very 'impatient' to believe that the time to struggle against unemployment is now, while the workers are in the factories, before they are hungry, weary and demoralized?

Here indeed is our main object in calling the rank-and-file Conference, an initiative at which you sneer. We think it is high time to get men and women together from the workshops, mills and mines to discuss the problems that touch them so deeply and to co-ordinate their attempts to solve these problems in action. Alas, no such conference has been called by the Communist Party or its Press. Is it that you are against the idea of rank-and-file movements altogether, preferring to rely on 'pressure' on the union leaders—and arrangements with them?

You accuse us of evading the problem of the Labour Party and that of mobilizing political support for workers in struggle. This is absurd. We have consistently

NOTE. Dennis Goodwin's reference to the 1954-55 dock struggle was answered in advance by William Hunter in an article in *Labour Review* last January, reprinted as a pamphlet: 'Hands off the "Blue Union"!'

VICTORY FOR BUILDING WORKERS AFTER THREE DAYS' STRUGGLE

By Our Industrial Correspondent

BUILDING workers employed by Manchester Corporation Transport Department have won their strike against the employment of four non-unionists.

Within three days the strikers' solidarity, and the threat of an extension to all departments of Manchester Corporation, led to victory—the contractors agreed to withdraw the non-union labour if the men failed to join the union.

After work was resumed a meeting of nearly 100 building trade stewards from all departments, attended by representatives of bus crews and maintenance staffs, resolved to strengthen links at shop steward level between the different sections to ensure even speedier co-ordination in future.

The workers are raising through their union branches, and through Manchester City Labour Party, the lack of co-

operation from Labour Councillors, who hid behind technicalities instead of supporting the fight to maintain 100 per cent. trade unionism in the Corporation.

advocated bringing the industrial struggle into the heart of the Labour Party. We believe our conference will encourage trade unionists to join the Labour Party and will powerfully assist the development of the Labour Left, whose greatest weakness is its lack of connexion with the factories.

You accuse us of 'ignoring' the issue of working-class unity. But you yourself ignore the real splitters of the movement: the leaders who impose niggardly increases on their members without consulting them, who agree to sackings, who issue statements selling their members out in the middle of a fight. You should be blasting away at the Right wing, Comrade Goodwin. Unity has never meant, and never will mean, silence about policy. It has never meant, and never will mean, 'keeping your mouth shut' when you think leaders—or comrades—are not acting in the interests of the working class. This kind of 'unity', enforced by trials and confessions and the murder of life-long revolutionaries, was one of the keynotes of the Stalin era. That era is over. You will never resurrect it.



I know you and many of your colleagues to be self-sacrificing and hard-working men. I bear you no ill will when I say that your article is the product of a man sick with Stalinism. Its tone corresponds neither with the needs of the workers, nor with the mood of Communist Party rank-and-file comrades. Fewer and fewer of them can stomach such methods of controversy. They have suspicions and reservations about the 'Trotskyists'; but these suspicions and reservations are being ironed out on the picket-line, in the battle against arrogant bosses and their police. It will take more than an article such as yours to reinforce them.

As an old friend and comrade, may I, without presumption, offer you a piece of advice? Stop setting up these tired old Aunt Sallies and knocking them down. It is such a waste of time. The battle is joined. The lines are being drawn. Save your hostility for McAlpine and the Tories. What the workers are clamouring for is not scaremongering and invective about 'renegades', but solid advice on how they can defeat their class enemies and advance to socialism.

Yours fraternally,

PETER FRYER

operation from Labour Councillors, who hid behind technicalities instead of supporting the fight to maintain 100 per cent. trade unionism in the Corporation.

WHY BIRMINGHAM WORKERS NEED A RANK-AND-FILE MOVEMENT

'Several weeks ago Bro. Carron presented on our behalf a water-tight case for a 6 per cent. increase. Last week he accepted 7s. 4d.—a 4 per cent. increase—without asking the members if they agreed with it.

'This,' said Amalgamated Engineering Union shop steward Alf Dawson to a meeting at the Tractors and Transmission factory, Birmingham, 'is one reason why I think the Newsletter rank-and-file Conference is necessary.'

At Nuffield Metal Products the chairman of shop stewards introduced Coun. Harry Finch with the words: 'This Conference affects all of us. We need a rank-and-file movement to combat the growing unemployment in Birmingham.'

20 YEARS' WORK, SACKED WITH WEEK'S PAY

By Our Industrial Correspondent

AFTER dismissing 103 out of some 900 workers at a Leeds factory, Rank Precision Industries have now been compelled to reinstate one of the men and to give financial compensation to some of the clerical staff.

The dismissed workers at this big engineering combine were originally given one week's pay in lieu of notice and a note in their wage packets that their services were no longer required.

They were in all types of jobs, including some high supervisory grades. The notices affected many in both factory and office who had spent more than twenty years with the firm.

Some of those dismissed had been employed there for more than thirty years; the worker who has been reinstated had spent his entire working life of 42 years there.

Although publicity given to the sackings by the local Labour Party has forced the firm to retreat, it is believed that fifty more dismissals are scheduled for the near future.

MOSLEY'S PROUD BOAST: 27 YEARS OF STRONG-ARM METHODS

By Stan Yapp

PROUD boast of Sir Oswald Mosley at the Birmingham Town Hall demonstration last Sunday was that 'we have never, in 27 years, failed to put out people from our meetings when we wished'.

Strong vocal opposition prevented him starting his speech for twenty minutes, during which time he told his strong-arm 'stewards', brought specially in coaches, what action to take against 'disrupters'.

An incident when a young student in the lower gallery was brutally handled, while police on duty inside the hall ordered people to remain in their seats and 'take no notice', shows that fascist thuggery must be counteracted by the workers themselves, as in 1934-36, and ineffective police 'protection' not relied on.

The blackshirt leader revealed that he had given instructions for three libel actions arising from recent events—one involving the Daily Herald.

He thought the 'strong and active branch' in Notting Hill had done well to hold meetings prior to the racial disorders.

'We shall not stop these meetings when people most need our help and guidance,' he declared.

The entire Birmingham Labour movement should see that this would-be Mussolini is not allowed to exploit public property in this city again for the spreading of fascist ideas abusing the right of 'free speech' in order to get power to destroy it.

APPEAL TO TRADE UNIONISTS TO RESIST EVICTIONS

Norwood (Lambeth) Labour Councillors and parliamentary candidate have advised all tenants served with eviction notices not to sign any agreement till they have got in touch with Norwood Labour Party.

'We say: do not be frightened into giving up your home, their statement declares. 'We do not recognize the right of landlords to take away the roof over the heads of working people and disrupt family life.

'We appeal to all trade unionists, Labour people and good neighbours to rally to the support of those faced with the arrival of the bailiff.'

GUARDED CRITICISM OF RIGHT WING—BUT NO CALL FOR ACTION

By Tom Kemp

AN editorial article in the New Statesman-like Political Quarterly (Oct.-Dec.) slams into the Right wing's economic policy statement.

Coming from an editorial board of elderly academics and younger intellectuals uncontaminated by Marxism, it reflects

a deep uneasiness with the present trends in Labour's policy, thinking and leadership.

The place and form of the criticism ensure that it will be seen only by a small number of party members, and by even fewer workers. And its style has the elephantine quality of a Times leader.

Describing 'Plan for Progress' as 'a fair weather document on which Labour may be unable to act', its underlying note is: 'Has socialism been abandoned?'

It sees in this programme the acceptance of 'planned capitalism' rather than 'any sort of socialism as the solution for our economic problems'. The terms 'any sort' and 'our' signalize the confusions in the writers' own thinking.

Accused of swallowing Keynes

The authors of Labour's policy are accused of trying to 'skin a live tiger claw by claw' and of having swallowed Keynes 'hook, line and sinker'.

The article suggests that the Labour Party (i.e., the Right-wing leaders) 'is not merely making up its mind to coexist with capitalist enterprise for the time being, but is prepared to come to terms with it for an indefinite future'.

It views with concern, not merely the assumption of the continued existence of capitalist enterprise for some time to come, but the desire 'for close and amicable relations between it and the government' when the party is next in power.

It discerns in the policy statement the view that 'the future rests rather with a refined and amended capitalism than its supersession by socialism as ordinarily understood'.

Note that this appears in a 'respectable' journal of an academic type; consequently no call to action follows these guarded denunciations.

There is no doubt about the validity of these criticisms. It was unfortunate that they found but a weak echo at Scarborough. But if the Political Quarterly does not know what to do, we of the Marxist Left must present the alternative in ever clearer and louder tones.

The feeble fallacies, outright contradictions and concessions to capitalism which appear in the arguments and policies of the Right wing must be exposed on every occasion.

Bring in industrial workers

Bring in industrial workers to discuss capitalism as they experience it at the point of production.

Get local parties involved in industrial questions where the class struggle cannot be concealed by fine words.

Above all, learn to grasp the issues and understand them in the light of Marxist analysis.

The thinking of the Right wing is derived from 'capitalist' sources. It takes big business at the valuation of its public relations men.

It has its eyes on the tycoons of industry and on the Press, not on the needs of the ordinary people. They are just election-fodder, for whom, in private, the Right wing has the deepest contempt.

At the same time the Right wingers are overawed by 'thinkers' who have won esteem by working out elaborate theories for explaining away and 'correcting' the abuses of capitalism.

They want to be in the fashion, and take up any new fad or catchword which happens to find favour in academic and intellectual circles.

And they run away from real argument and discussion, especially when argument is backed by experience; at that point they leave the party machine to deal with the question.

Take the way the party policy statements are put over. They emerge from the profound thought and labours of the Transport House insiders and are presented to the party in finished form before the themes are widely disseminated and discussed.

The pull of the platform and block vote ensure their overwhelming endorsement at the next annual conference.

In fact there is only a semblance of democratic participation in the working out of policy. The result is that many

party members neither understand nor approve of the policy of the party.

Loyalty to leaders has taken the place of constructive thought and creative activity.

It is time to bring the operation of the party into line with the principles which it professes. Policy changes would soon follow, and the basis would be laid for a tremendous accession of strength.

ECONOMICS

UNEMPLOYED WORKERS DO NOT HAIL THE ECONOMY'S GROWING 'STRENGTH'

By Our Economic Correspondent

HOLDINGS of gold and dollars have been increasing month by month until at 3,120 million dollars they are at their highest point for seven years.

According to the Press this shows the strength of sterling. And to some of the more irresponsible national dailies it is a measure of economic prosperity. This, of course, is absolute nonsense.

The increase in the balances is much more a measure of the stagnation of the economy than of its prosperity.

Nearly all the raw materials and foods that Britain imports have fallen considerably in price. But the prices of the manufactured and semi-manufactured goods that comprise the bulk of British exports have either not fallen in price or have fallen very little.

The result is that the outgoings have been less than the income. Part of the increase lies here.

Capital flowed into London

Furthermore during almost the whole of 1958 there was a vast difference in the level of short term interest rates between London and all other important financial centres.

The result was that a considerable amount of capital flowed into London to take advantage of those higher interest rates. The bulk of this money is still in Britain, and it is 'hot': i.e., it can be withdrawn again as fast as, or even faster than, it came in.

Such holdings of course improve the balance of gold and dollars, but they do not strengthen the economy. On the contrary they are a source of danger.

When the next balance of payments crisis arises—and there will be another probably within twelve months—the withdrawal of this hot money could quite easily accentuate the pressure on sterling and cause a panic among the holders of sterling abroad.

It must not be forgotten that the total of holdings of sterling abroad is still greater than the total holdings of gold and dollars even at their seven-year 'record'.

A panic at a time of crisis, together with the withdrawal of the short-term holdings of foreign account, could be a disaster.

The third main source of the increase in the holdings is

the fall in production since the early summer. As foreign raw materials enter largely into British manufactured goods any rise or fall in production has a consequential effect on the level of imports.

A rise in production instead of a fall might have meant a fall in the level of the balances instead of an increase, but only Fleet Street could consider that bad!

If that is so, if a rise in production even at the expense of a fall in the level of the gold and dollar balance is strength, then its converse—a fall in the level of production leading to a rise in the balance—is weakness.

Those workers thrown on to the dole through the fall in production certainly have no cause to applaud the growing 'strength' of the British economy.

Production is falling, and will fall further as the primary producer countries' income falls. The growing army of unemployed workers will not consider the increasing balance a sign of increasing strength but of increasing poverty—if indeed the balance continues to grow.

If the price of manufactured goods falls as the volume of exports falls it could easily be that the increasing poverty will be accompanied by a fall in the balance and by crises both in the field of production and in the balance of payments.

FRANCE

FRENCH STALINIST LEADERS SLUR OVER REASONS FOR REFERENDUM DEFEAT

From A Correspondent in Paris

FOR the political bureau of the French Communist Party to have sought the reasons for the referendum defeat in its own leadership and tactics over the past decade would have meant questioning the whole line of the communist parties everywhere. It was clearly incapable of attempting anything of the kind.

The pattern adopted in Servin's report was blame everyone else—the socialist leaders, the anti-communist campaign, the FLN's terrorist methods, the refusal of other groups to work with the Communist Party, weakness in applying the line.

Only a few weeks before the May crisis the same Servin explained at some length what excellent potential allies the communists were for the bourgeois democrats.

Hadn't they stopped strikes, disarmed the partisans, shored up bourgeois governments, voted special powers in Algeria and kept the workers out of the hands of 'left-wing demagogues'? Precisely the list of bewildering and contradictory moves which far from strengthening the popular roots of the party had loosened them one by one. There lie the reasons for the inability of the party to resist de Gaulle.

More and more party members will begin to draw their own conclusions, recognize how their leaders have betrayed them and seek the way to regroup and rebuild the workers' movement.

Constant Reader

More about the 1859 Builders' Lock-out

SEVERAL excellent histories of trade unions have appeared since the war, but Raymond Postgate's 'The Builders' History' (1923) retains its position among the best to date.

The account there given of the 1859-60 lock-out rings some bells for today's struggle around the Shell-Mex site.

After describing the attempt to make the workers sign a document renouncing their union membership Postgate writes:

'The masters were surprised by the reception of this precious piece of paper. They had expected that their yards would be quickly refilled by men who had signed it; instead, they

could hardly secure even any general labourers.'

The London building workers sent their representatives into the provinces 'to stop, as far as possible, the arrival of worked or raw material' for the builders' yards, and had considerable success.

'The greatest sensation, however, was caused by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which astounded the Conference [of building workers' unions] and the employers by presenting the lock-out funds with £1,000 every week for three weeks.

'Such a subscription had never been heard of before, and its moral effect in encouraging the men and flabbergasting

the employers helped very greatly in defeating the attack.'

When the 1859-60 lock-out ended, 'the impression which the struggle had made on the mind of every worker was deep. It was only a half-victory [for the builders had hoped to win the nine-hour day as well as beating the 'document'], but it had shown to the non-unionists how a very powerful, wealthy and obstinate association of employers could be defied'.

Amalgamation without democratization

THE articles in these last three months' issues of Marxism Today, the Communist Party's theoretical journal, on the current problems of the trade union movement, have concentrated on the need for further amalgamation of unions.

In the early years of the party, about 1921-24, the slogan of greater amalgamation and centralization of the trade unions (to make them potentially better fighting machines) was always coupled with the slogan of democratization and strengthening of rank-and-file control (so as to make sure the unions actually became better fighting machines).

But there is nothing of this second, vital aspect of the matter in the Marxism Today articles, which will remind older readers of the disastrous 1925-26 phase in communist trade union policy that made possible the betrayal of the General Strike.

How far Communist Party treatment of trade union questions has moved even from 1933, when the May number of the rank-and-file paper Busman's Punch could write:

'Safe positions and big wages is the great curse. If a house-dog is too well-fed he becomes fat and lazy, and is useless for the job of looking after your property. And the same thing applies to our trade union officials . . .

'If you lay down these two rules: (1) Limited time of office, (2) Wages not to exceed those of the men they represent, then you would eliminate the parasitic place-seeking official.'

Or even from 1938, when John Mahon could write, in his little book on trade unionism, regarding the lesson of the General Strike:

'The weakness of a Left which could only make propaganda and which was not so firmly organized in the factories and localities that it could take the lead in action, was exposed.'

Cushing round the Kremlin

A GROUP of doctors at Moscow's most famous hospital are quoted in the Daily Worker as stating that 'ambulances frequently bring to our hospital people who have been wounded by hooligans, and usually the victims are people who have stood up to them to protect defenceless women and girls'.

It is perhaps a sign that the editor of the Daily Worker realizes that times—and readers—are not what they were that he makes no attempt to explain this phenomenon away by references to 'survivals of capitalism in men's minds' or even to 'the legacy of the war'.

In the middle twenties, when it was fashionable in what were to become Stalinist circles to dismiss the swarms of child gangsters as a mere heritage from the past which would duly wither away, Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, wrote in Pravda of December 2, 1925:

'Most comrades, even in the party, believe that the abandoned children are the legacy of the Great War and of economic chaos.

'In reality, 75 per cent. of the abandoned children who are swarming this year in the streets of Moscow are the product, not of past shortcomings and calamities, but of present conditions, due principally to the pitiable condition of the peasant classes and to unemployment.

'Certainly the matter is connected with the war, but only by the bond that ordinarily links past and present.

'I also wrote some time ago that the abandonment of children was a consequence of the war and of economic chaos, but now, after closely examining the question, I see

that there must be an end to such talk, that the origins of the scourge must be rooted not only in the past but in the present.'

And these last words are even truer of Russia today than they were in Krupskaya's time.

BRIAN PEARCE

LETTERS

CONSTANT READER STIMULATES INTEREST IN HISTORY AND THEORY

J. M'ATEER'S letter indicates a dangerous attitude and one which could play straight into the hands of both the employing class and the Right-wing leaders of the Labour and trade union movement.

These people hope to dominate the workers' thinking. Their excuse is that workers are not really capable of thinking for themselves and, in any case, are not interested in theory.

Their aim is to be able to impose their ideas on us so that we do not struggle to overthrow the class society in which we live.

Which employer or paid trade union official would seek to remind us, as Brian Pearce has done in Constant Reader, of the 1859 building lock-out?

Yet this is a most useful and timely reminder that the South Bank men are struggling to defend their conditions in the traditional and only possible way. That is, by sticking out against the employers' offensive.

And isn't this important to remember when we are asked to be loyal to decisions of the trade union leaders rather than to our class?

How to avoid defeats

Many of us who are looking forward to very important results from the Newsletter Conference have been stimulated by Constant Reader into finding out more about the reasons for the defeat of the General Strike.

We have been provoked into thinking about how to avoid a repetition of defeat and have then seen the significance of organizing a strong rank-and-file movement.

As a constant reader of The Newsletter I cannot remember any items in its columns which do not help to enrich our understanding of how society works and what are the only effective methods of changing it.

Leeds, 15

Mary Archer

WHY NOT DISCUSS CURRENT FICTION AND FILMS, TOO?

MAY I refer reader M'Atter, who, I know, has a great respect for the Marxist classics, to two passages which he appears to have forgotten, judging by the line of his criticism of Constant Reader.

One is the section called 'Political Agitation and its Restriction by the Economists' in Lenin's 'What Is To Be Done?'

Lenin answers the demand that his paper confine itself to 'exposures of factory conditions' and directly related matters, and explains why he thinks it should deal with a very wide range of questions and the affairs of all classes.

The other is the passage in 'The Peasant War in Germany' where Engels writes of the narrow, fanatical asceticism which was characteristic of the medieval popular sects, and why it is inappropriate to the modern working-class movement.

Personally, I should like to see Constant Reader cast his net wider, discussing current fiction, films etc.

London, E.

K. Ungerson

GIVES BACKGROUND OF TODAY'S STRUGGLES

The purpose of the Constant Reader column, for this reader at any rate, is to give the historical, political setting of the 'direct' and 'immediate' topics, and to help make sense of the industrial struggle.

Glasgow

B. Posner