

PORT WORKERS FIGHT FOR LEISURE

LONDON portworkers have for long occupied a front line position in the working-class movement. Dockland teams with working-class action and battle from the 1890's: the "tanner" epic, Keir Hardie's election to Parliament, the refusal to load the "Jolly George" for Churchill's war of intervention, the defence of George Lansbury and the Poplar Council, are milestones on the long road.

More recently their solidarity with the Canadian seamen has kept international solidarity alive, when the right wing were weakening it by walking out of the World Federation of Trade Unions. Their challenge to the wage freeze and Order 1305 smashed the shackles on the whole movement. In many hard and bitter struggles throughout the years the dockers have learned the value of unity, militancy and solidarity.

FOR VOLUNTARY OVERTIME

Again for the past seven months the portworkers have been in battle. Far too little is known about this in the movement as a whole, though it has vital lessons for all.

The profit-hungry dock employers tried to force compulsory overtime working, even though some dockers were unemployed. They threatened the sack and suspension for refusal. Voluntary overtime is a dearly cherished principle, but what did the employers care when the Ministry and right-wing leaders were behind them.

But facing them were the portworkers, and they said NO. The members of the Stevedores' and Dockers' Union, and the Lightermen's, Tugmen's and Bargemen's Union banned overtime working. Thousands of T.G.W.U. members, despite opposition by their leaders, lined up with their mates in the other unions. The unity born of past struggles could not be broken by right-wing appeals or edicts.

During these past months much activity has taken place around dockland, with leaflets, poster parades, mass meetings, etc. This has strengthened the leaders of the smaller unions and forced more regular reporting back and consultation between the leaders and the rank-and-file. It has been a valuable lesson in trade union democracy. Only when leaders act on the wishes of the rank-and-file who pay them, can trade unionism be a real force.

Our Party work in dockland has helped a lot. For the past six years, consistent activity has been carried on through "Daily Worker" sales, leaflets, pamphlets and dock gate meetings. It has not been easy work. Indifference and opposition earlier on, has led to growing interest and recognition. But inside and outside, our Party message is being carried. Though it is often opposed, our Party is accepted because it fights, and the dockers fight. It is therefore a fine tribute that the "Daily Worker" editorial on the overtime menace has been officially reprinted as a leaflet by the leaders of the Stevedores' and Dockers' Union.

THE BAN HAS BROUGHT BENEFITS

An eight hour day is now being worked. No more 7 o'clock knock-offs, with men dragging home tired and exhausted. The portworkers can now enjoy evenings and weekends with their families. **IT COULD BE THE SAME THROUGHOUT INDUSTRY.** No wonder they are saying "at the first sign of future unemployment union official policy should be an eight-hour day with overtime banned".

Other results are that old men and those only fitted for light work through injury or ill-health are again in work and drawing a pay packet. The shorter hours have strengthened the men's bargaining position.

Two main factors have placed the workers in a strong position: first and foremost, their unity and militancy; secondly, the existence of full employment.

Of course, the employers are not taking it lying down. They are playing other cards and demanding the labour force be increased by another 2,000. They have already got agreement for 1,000. This is causing resentment as official blacklegging, to help the employers and eventually weaken the workers' position. Moreover, the employers are using the dispute as an excuse to stop negotiations on demands for increased wages, fall back guarantee and pensions for old men.

When the cards are stacked in the employers' favour they play them to the limit. Today the workers hold the ace—unity, militancy and full employment. Real class leadership can win all their demands, collaboration can throw a golden opportunity away.

THE LESSON IS FOR ALL

Portworkers have struck a powerful blow. It is a lesson and an example to all other sections and industries—engineers, railwaymen, busmen and builders. The employers have got the money, the dole queues are relatively empty, the workers have the ball at their feet. It adds up simply to this—a powerful united movement prepared to take action could fatten the wage packet, weaken the whole employing class, the Tory government, its war policy and right-wing supporters.

THE PARTY

Every leaflet, every meeting, every "Daily Worker" sale will eventually bring a harvest to the Party and working class. When it is cold and wet outside the factory gate and on the street corner pitch, and the workers appear as if they couldn't care less, it is easy to feel a bit down at the mouth. But it all eventually bears fruit, for our arguments are used and remembered. We will see the day when not only the Stevedores' and Dockers' Union leaders will reprint our leaflets but other big sections.