

FOR PC INFORMATION ONLY

14 Charles Lane
New York, N. Y. 10014

September 17, 1971

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is the copy of a letter Ernest sent the IMG National Committee on their intervention in the Clydeside dockers struggle.

Originally the Red Mole had come out with the central front page demand: For a Scottish Workers Republic.

This is for the information of the Political Committee only.

Comradely,


Jack

FOR PC INFORMATION ONLYLetter from E. Germain for the attention of IMG NC Members

July 15, 1971

I want to write you on the issue of the UCS crisis I have no quarrel with the slogan of a "Scottish workers republic" as a propaganda slogan. But I doubt the wisdom to make it our central slogan, and certainly our central agitational slogan, around the UCS intended occupation. To jump to that slogan as a central agitational slogan seems to me to put the cart before the horse, and to repeat fundamentally all the mistakes which Ken Coates committed around the intended GE/EE occupation in Liverpool.

To centre our campaign around the slogan "for a Scottish workers republic" is based on the following tacit assumptions:

- 1) That the occupation will certainly take place;
- 2) That it will be a full success;
- 3) That it will last for a rather long time;
- 4) That the key problems will be neither economic nor social (lack of funds or of transport and raw materials) but political, i.e. repressive;
- 5) That the Government will send in troops to Scotland without violent reactions from the English workers;
- 6) That against this use of troops, Scottish national sentiment will be enflamed.

Of course, if all these assumptions prove to be correct, at some stage of the struggle, the slogan "for a Scottish workers republic" might well become agitationally operative. In the same way, Ken Coates' desperate searching for buyers of the equipment produced by the GE/EE workers in Liverpool would have become practical, if the occupation took place; if the occupation lasted for a long time; if there was no repression; if the key problem was economic (how to pay the workers' wages). But all these ifs proved to be hypothetical, to say the least. The key issue was 1) to make the occupation become a success; 2) to make it last more than a token 24-48 hours; to organise the solidarity, locally, regionally, sectorally and nationally. By underestimating the difficulties encountered before these foremost immediate tasks, and concentrating on what was the 5th or 6th priority, Coates equally put the cart before the horse, and finally there was nothing to "sell" to anybody, because the occupation didn't even take place.....

You are faced with a similar danger, if you concentrate at this stage on the slogan "For a Scottish Workers Republic".

In the first place the organisation of the occupation itself is and remains task no. 1. To assume that this task is already solved implies exaggerated confidence in either working class spontaneity or (what is worse) in the local TU and labour bureaucracy. As long as there is only a threat of occupation, but no actual occupation the bureaucrats, including the left wing ones, will look upon this whole business as a means to put pressure on the Tories in order to get some economic concessions (alternative jobs) and not as a means to actually organise the occupation. Occupying shipyards is, from many facets, a revolutionary act, especially in Britain, where, as opposed to France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, there is no tradition of

sit-down strikes. So this occupation is doubly revolutionary: and with regard to bourgeois property and state apparatus; and with regard to traditional forms of working class struggles.

My advice therefore is to concentrate first of all on organisation to make the occupation real, and assure full understanding of the shipbuilders involved and other workers in what it really means. Without such full preparation the whole thing becomes an adventure which could collapse as an inflated balloon -- as it did in Liverpool.

I am not familiar enough with local Glasgow TU structures and situations to advise as for the concrete organisational form of this first campaign. Something along the lines of general assemblies of all shipbuilding workers on their work places, in order to enable the shop stewards to inform and prepare them fully politically for the action, would seem the most obvious solution. Perhaps councils of action come in here too. An elected strike committee, with daily reports before the strikers, and a daily strike bulletin printed and distributed not only to the strikers but to the whole working class population locally, would also be important. It is for you to give all those observations a concrete form. But top priority is still having the occupation occur, and under the best and most democratic possible forms of organisation. It would be a tremendous step forward (a qualitative leap forward) in the radicalisation of the working class since the struggle against Wilson and Barbara Castle anti-strike draft bill.

The second priority would be to organise wide working class solidarity with the sit-down strikes all through Britain. This would have to be financial solidarity, economic solidarity and political solidarity. Here again the dangers of having the slogan of the "Scottish workers republic" as the main motivational slogan is obvious; it cuts across the key task of organising solidarity not only (and not even in the first place) in Scotland, but all over Britain, to make the sit-down strike into a strike. "Solidarity with the UCS sit-down strikers". "Their strike against redundancies is a strike for all British workers sakes" etc., that should be the key slogans and not a slogan which deliberately concentrates solidarity on a small sector of the class, the Scottish one.

To break the danger of isolation and feeling of futility, a central political slogan should be worked out. This is the third emergency. I think the most obvious solutions would be: immediate nationalisation of the whole shipbuilding industry without compensation, and run under workers control. Perhaps something more is necessary. But in any case, the problem raised (that of the economic crisis) is not particular to Scotland, and one should not assume beforehand that the English and the Welsh will remain pensive.

If the sit-down strike is a success; if financial solidarity is well organised; if working class support everywhere is solid; if a broad anti-tory campaign is sweeping throughout the whole country; and if the tories bring in the troops to chase away the workers from the shipyards (a hypothesis which is far from being proven; in most cases the bourgeoisie remains passive before a sit-down strike, i.e.

trics to wear the workers out or hound them out: e.g. Turin 1920, France 1936, France 68 etc.), then the fourth priority would be to organise a general solidarity movement among the troops and in Britain along slogans like: "refuse to break a strike"; "refuse to do scab labour"; "after the Carr Bill, the Tories bring in troops against the strikers. Soldiers don't shoot at your brothers" etc. etc.

Only if and when this campaign fails, would the slogan "For a Scottish workers republic" become agitational slogan no. 1. (As it did in Belgium after the failure of having the Flemish working class fully join the Walloon one in the general strike, (1961). But as I said before, all those "ifs" are far from being proven. They imply first spontaneous uprising, then a colossal defeat (because it would really be a colossal defeat if the English workers would stay passive when soldiers are used against strikers in Scotland!). We cannot, at this stage, centre our actions around these assumptions.

The UCS business, as opposed to the Liverpool GE/EE one, presents the IMG with a tremendous opportunity. Here we have an organisation ourselves, we are confronted with an ideal situation to apply our general strategy of transitional demands and our specific understanding of the forms which workers radicalisation is taking after the traumatic shock of the Wilson Government, the Carr bill and rising unemployment. But this opportunity also implies responsibility. If we got carried away by what still is a political perspective, and forget the most burning immediate organisational and agitational tasks; this opportunity will be lost and we shall be ourselves party to the general inadequacy of the British left in the present situation.