

# Socialist Worker

WEEKLY PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

**NIRC jailings are threat to every trade unionist**

# STRIKE NOW: FREE 5

**'It could be you...'**

**THIS IS THE CRUNCH!** The jailing of five London dockers is an attack on the rights of every trade unionist in the country.

They must be freed by industrial action throughout Britain. The entire working class movement must show the Tories and the employers that we will not stand by while they try to smash the strength of our organisations.

Derek Watkins, Conny Clancy, Tony Merrick, Bernie Steer and Vic Turner are in Pentonville. But any workers prepared to stand up and defy the low wage, high unemployment policies of bosses and government could be in their place.

The lie machine of the millionaire press says the docks struggle is between different groups of workers. It isn't—it is between dockers and employers. The press attempt to divide dockers and transport workers collapsed like a ruptured balloon when the five men were jailed.

### PROFITS

The struggle is over the right to work. In the last five years the labour force in the docks has been cut by a third. Now the employers want still more dockers to join the 850,000 on the dole.

The bosses are closing down docks, selling the land at massive profits, moving the work to inland depots that employ fewer men at rates of pay which dockers would not tolerate.

The Tory judge of the Industrial Relations Court, Sir John Donaldson, has rushed to support the bosses in their scheme to boost profits at the expense of jobs. His ruling says that the traditional weapons of the trade union movement—blacking and picketing—are now illegal.

The government pushed through the Industrial Relations Act with the clear aim of breaking the resistance of trade unionists to all its policies: driving down wage increases below the rising cost of living, forcing up council rents while land profiteers make vast fortunes, hammering the social services, depriving children of school milk, boosting the dole queues.

### MOBILISE

The Act was aimed not at the official leaders of the trade unions who have confined their opposition to the government to a few protest rallies and petitions. The force that worries the government is the rank and file of the unions and their shop stewards who lead the drive for better wages and conditions.

But first the miners and then the dockers at Chobham Farm have shown that industrial militancy and solidarity and determined support from other sections of the working

class can defeat both the government's wages policy and its anti-union laws.

Now we must mobilise again to free the five. If the Tories get their way, then the law will be used against any other sections that fight to improve their standards of living.

This is the time for action, to show in deeds as well as in words that we will not allow a government that represents the interests of the 1 per cent who own 80 per cent of the industrial wealth to jail rank and file trade unionists.

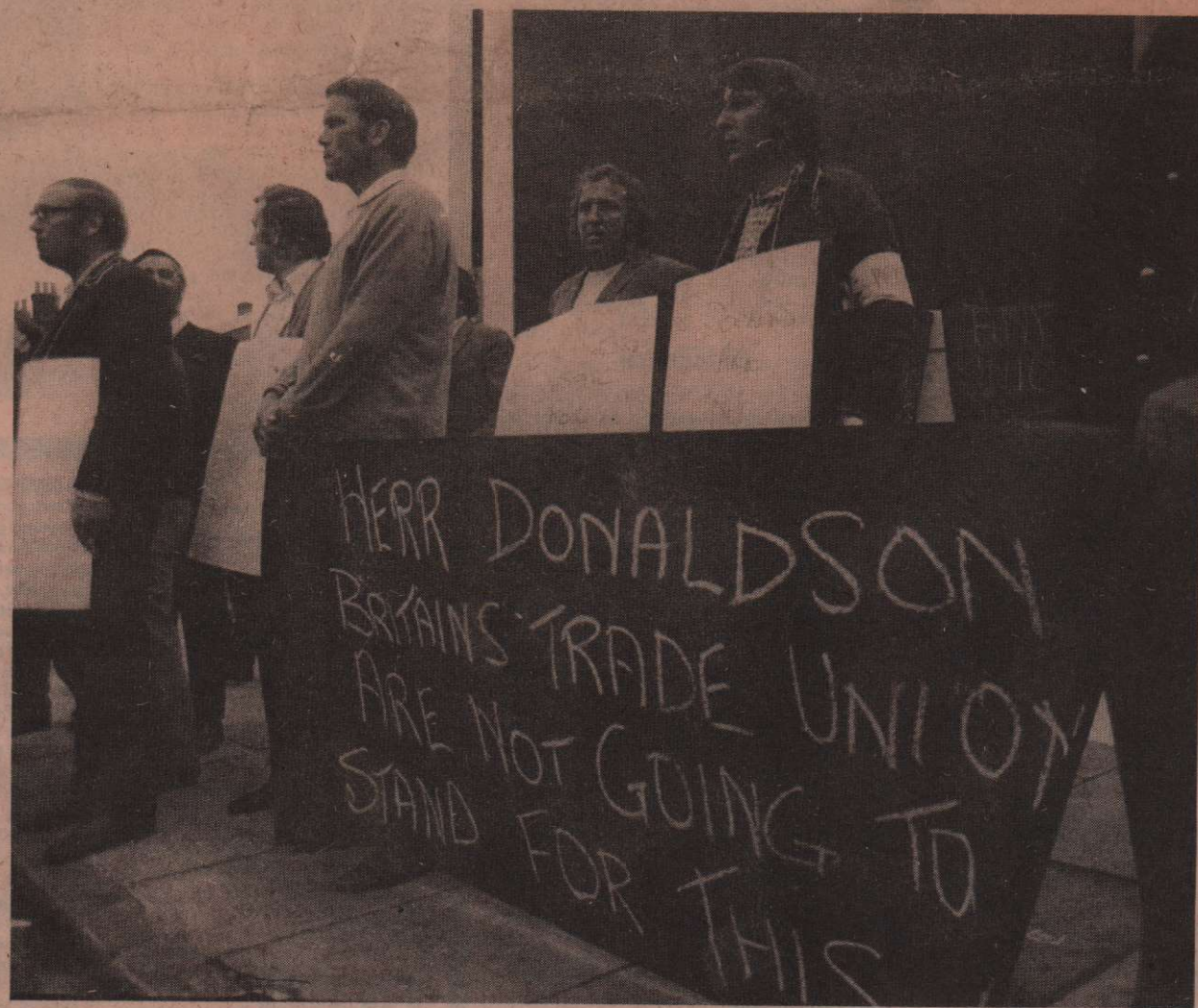
Let those union leaders who claim to be opposed to government policy organise immediate official strike action to free the dockers. Any union leader who wavers at this hour of crisis can aid only the enemies of the labour movement.

Past experience shows that we cannot rely on the official leaders to show even the most elementary solidarity. That is why it is essential for rank and file action now. Don't wait for the officials to move—set the pace for them.

Strikes and demonstrations should be called in every area in support of our brothers behind bars.

- Free the Five.
- Defeat the Industrial Relations Act.
- Demand full support for the imprisoned men from the Transport Workers Union and the TUC.
- Demand that the TUC organise general industrial action to set the dockers free.

*We have the power to beat the government and its laws. Use it—NOW.*



Dockers' solidarity picket outside Pentonville jail on Friday night. Picture: MIKE COHEN

SECONDS before Tony Merrick was put into a police van which then headed for Pentonville Prison in North London on Friday, he turned to one of his fellow dockers and said quietly to him: 'This is not for me, or even just for the dockers' struggle. This is for the whole working-class movement.'

Merrick is one of thousands of dockers who, with their way of life threatened by the port employers and the government, turned to the tried and tested methods of trade unionism to win their struggle.

But a court of law pronounced that the dockers' picketing and blacking was illegal. And when Merrick along with Conny Clancy, Derek Watkins, Vic Turner and Bernie Steer declined to comply with the orders made against them by an employers' court, they were put inside for their crime.

Shortly before Tony Merrick, Conny Clancy and Derek Watkins were taken by the forces of the state from the picket line outside Midland Cold Storage, they gave Socialist Worker an exclusive interview.

### The logic

'We've no argument with law in itself. But we do not recognise the National Industrial Relations Court. We hold with the TUC policy of total non-co-operation. The logic of our struggle with the employers for our living has forced us into blacking and picketing. And the logic of almost any other industrial struggle would do the same for any group of workers,' said Derek Watkins.

'People must be absolutely clear,' he added. 'The way we see it is that we are ordinary workers on the picket lines. It could be any five workers in any job in any industry anywhere in the country.'

'If it wasn't us, it would be someone else. If the private detectives Midland Cold Storage put on the dockers had started their spying on a different day of the week, then it would have been another random group of men,' Derek Watkins said. 'Every docker in London and throughout the country has been doing his bit. And while they may put some inside the others carry on the struggle. Other workers will just have to make up their own minds what they are going to do about the imprisonment of trade unionists for the crime of being trade unionists,' he added.

Tony Merrick had this to say: 'If I'm to go to prison for defending the dockers' rights and the right of the working class to work, I will go willingly because in all honesty such a situation cannot be right.'

'People must set aside lies and distortions in the press. They have got to realise that what has been going on in dockland is the destruction of a whole community.'

'The docks are being massacred to make way for hotels, the office blocks and the yachting marinas of the rich. But dock work is not simply disappearing. It is being moved out to back streets, empty car parks and railway land because the employers want to keep their grasping fingers in the docks' pie.'

*Continued back page*

**Solidarity march Monday 24 July 10am NIRC Chancery Lane**  
Tube: Chancery Lane. Called by London Port Shop Stewards' Committee



# DOCKLAND'S BATTLE

IT'S a disturbing experience to pick your way through London's dead docks with someone who can begin to tell the true tale of what is happening there.

In St Katharine's you will see a new hotel, yachting marina and offices going up for the rich playboys and playgirls of this society. East India too is idle, the land sold off to the Central Electricity Generating Board to build a power station, office blocks or perhaps even a nationalised yachting marina for those same playboys and girls.

In between times, some of the dead East India dockland has been rented out to a firm called TVX Transport. It quietly does dockers' work, filling containers. Except that the men who do the filling are not registered dockers.

So they do not get registered dockers' wages, nor are they covered by a whole number of other trade union agreements ranging from work practices, holidays and pensions.

TVX will stay in East India Dock until the property millionaires arrive for their piece of the action. Then TVX will move inland.

The new transport technology means that geographical positioning of container depots is relatively unimportant. What matters to the port employers, the giant shipping and stevedoring companies, is that they can be used as a weapon to break trade union wages and conditions and to reorganise a ports industry to the advantage of their balance sheets and stock exchange share quotations.

But where there was only fear and insecurity among organised dockers, there is now a deep anger born of the knowledge that the time of reckoning is to hand. For the docker knows he has been cheated by the cynical ruthlessness of the employers, by successive governments and their courts of inquiry and by the pitiful response of official trade unionism to unemployment masqueraded as 'technological progress'

## Break

In London at least, the whole issue of storage and container and transport container firms outside the docks labour scheme has been brought to a head by the recent announcement that Southern Stevedores will close in June. The closure will return another 1250 men to the unattached register. This is part of their strategy to break the dock labour scheme which through the register prevents any single employer from making dockers redundant. Instead, when not needed they are declared unattached, with a minimum wage paid from a levy on the employers' payroll.

Southern Stevedores, third largest private employer on London's waterfront, claims that trade has been driven elsewhere. In fact the three big companies which jointly own it have simply diverted their trade.

Glen Line's Far East trade has been containerised and transferred to Southampton. Furness Withy has a London licence and will be doing the trade under its own name. British and Commonwealth has transferred its

## Dockers are pawns in the profits scramble

contracts within the London docks. The firms which have picked them up will not of course be increasing their labour force.

The transfer of work from port to port has long been a favourite tactic of the employers. Recently—with the massive development of containerisation—it has been used ever more often. Now the companies are concentrating their energies on ports outside the dock labour scheme at Dover, Felixstowe and Sheerness for example.

They have also gone inland, building massive new cold storage facilities under the innocent names of subsidiary companies.

## Property

They learned all their tactics from an outfit called Hays Wharf.

Just four years ago Hays was the biggest single employer of dock labour in London with 2000 men. From 1949 onwards one of its directors, David Burnett, was scheming to build up a massive property holding on the south bank of the Thames in London. The time would come when wharfing activity would be transferred out of London and the property redeveloped with spectacular profits.

Later, as chairman of Hays, Sir David Burnett would be responsible for finding the locations for new, expanded depots out of reach of dockworkers and the money and control over their work which they had won. It took the Labour government and the implementation of the Devlin plan to make the time just right.

Bill Tonge, another Hays director, spent two years selling the Devlin productivity deal to the dockers. Dockers would have job security for the first time, a land of milk and honey, he said loud and often.

Within a year of getting Devlin phase one accepted, Hays Wharf closed down its piece of the dockers' land of milk and honey forever, swelling the new unattached pool.

While negotiating, Hays and all the other employers had promised that no man would be unattached for more than 14 days. By last year 14 per cent



mechanisation could reduce the dockers' working week to a fraction of what it is now. In the long term they and other parallel developments could help create a society where all men and women would be freed from subservience to toil.

But with the goals of containerisation laid down by the same relentless drive to accumulate profits as will decorate London's riverside with unnecessary offices, casinos and housing for the wealthy, that is not at all what is happening.

## Progress?

Instead the docker is to be sacrificed to technology. He is to retreat into history, severance pay in hand.

The policy of the National Ports Shop Stewards Committee is an affirmation that this is no longer to go unchallenged, that there is no such thing as progress, hidden hand variety. There is only progress for definite groups of people—for the employer in lower labour costs and higher profits or the worker in shorter hours, more holidays and early retirement on full pay.

The newspapers would have us believe that the stewards' fight to win back for dockers the work now done in inland container depots is causing unemployment for others. Anyone who is serious about their trade unionism and politics must decisively reject this argument.

For the inland container worker is but a pawn in the employers' game to break the dock labour scheme and get rid of the valuable gains it has won for organised labour. If they succeed, the inland worker will be cynically dumped on the scrapheap of unemployed dockers he has been used to create.

of all Britain's dockers were unattached, 2000 (nearly a third) in London.

In 1969 the 35 acres of land Hays Wharf owned right in the city of London was valued in the company's accounts at £4.6 million. Now, three years later, the Hays Wharf accounts record that £4 million a year will be earned from its interests in the Tooley Street redevelopment.

This £300 million scheme is made up of gambling halls, conference centres, a hotel, office blocks, flats for city gents, an air-conditioned shopping centre and car parks. The various parties in the deal will have invested a total of £150 million (£55 million in land and £85 million in construction costs and interest charges). For this immense contribution to the welfare of the human race they will get a profit of £160 million—107 per cent.

## Millions

Not that Hays Wharf has moved out of wharfing altogether. Far from it. They actually do more now than was ever done at Tooley Street, and even more profitably. The difference is that they do it outside the dock labour scheme.

Just a few miles away from the wharves which it closed to make millions, Hays has opened the UK Cold Storage depot at 4.8 million cubic feet already the biggest in Europe and continually expanding. Add Williams Cold Storage (Thetford), Dagenham Storage, Tees Storage, Ross Chemicals (Falkirk and Grangemouth) and four new depots at Wigtown, Warwick, Luton and Bishop's Wortford and the money is pouring in. Labour costs are significantly less, and so are the numbers of workers employed.

This and the preliminary pay-off from the flats, offices and casinos for the wealthy where dockers once grafted in Tooley Street, have tripled Hays' profits in as many years. So it is not surprising that two Hays' Wharf subsidiaries should be selected for London's first container blacking.

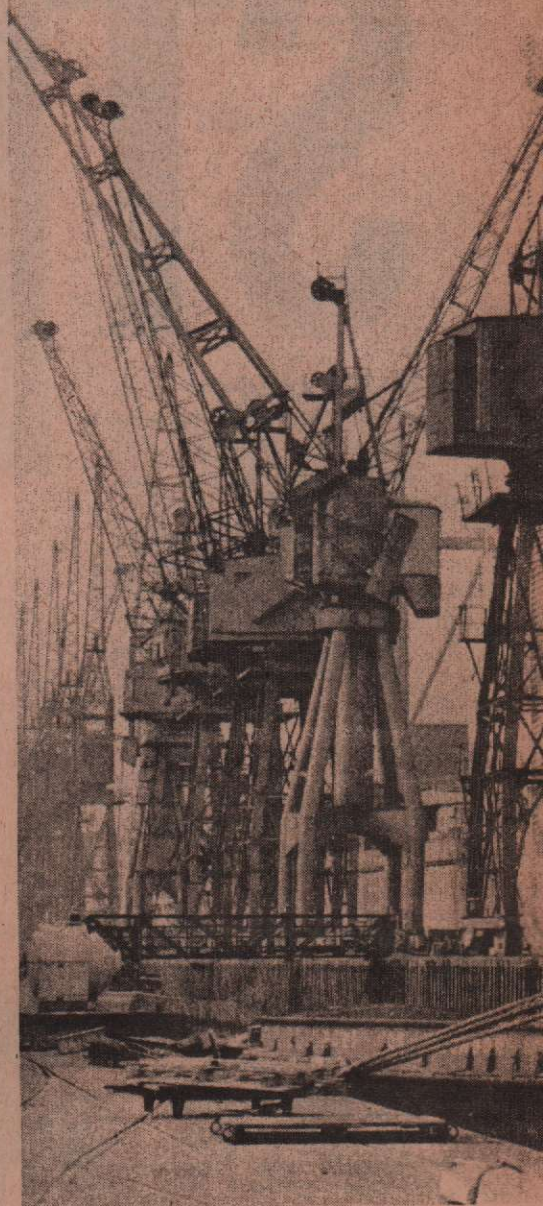
## Cowboys

This manipulation of new technology to annihilate the dockworker is happening in a hundred different ways all over the country. It involves those haulage cowboys so well backed up by the National Industrial Relations Court. It involves each and every giant firm pouring money into containers and container ships in the drive to maximise profits in a tightly competitive world market.

Under this system the dockworker is simply to disappear. Management consultants have openly talked of 90 per cent reductions in the dock labour force by the end of this decade.

The Ministry of Transport is quietly talking of four new British ports handling virtually all Britain's trade. The new one scheduled for Maplin is programmed to handle a third of the total, with only 140 dockers.

It is of course true that the new technical developments carry within them the seeds of human freedom. In the short term containerisation and



# The danger, the dirt, the cold, the wet —they earn every penny

BERNIE MORRIS is just rising sixty. Two years ago he took his severance pay and got out of the London docks. With two gammy legs and a bad back, it was an attractive proposition.

Now, two years later, he regrets taking it—for the simple reason that it's gone. 'Two thousand quid is a stack of money until you stop to work out what it is by the week,' he says. 'None of us ever do that until after it's gone. Then we can tell you how many weeks it took to get through,' he adds.

But he has other interests apart from his back and his legs, bent, bruised and finally racked by the physical strain of being a docker. One of those other interests is his chest.

Bernie writes a lot of letters about his chest. They go out to the chairmen of medical panels, to his union, to lawyers—anyone in fact who can help him construct a legal action for compensation for pneumoconiosis, another little-known fringe benefit he picked up as a docker.

Having worked on hundreds of ships for many different employers down the years, he's finding it rather difficult finding someone to sue.

## Grafting

For those who remain in the docks industry, it's all different now of course. No longer do the men have to submit to the brutal indignity of the hiring hall (or as the more polite language of this country has it, the muster point) where the employer had his pick.

No longer is the docks a by-word for premature age, a working community riddled with rheumatism and back complaints from standing around in the mist and the cold waiting to be hired, and then, if lucky, slaving, grafting and sweating deep in the hold of a ship before coming back into the cruel cold air.

Until you get behind the rhetoric, you could be forgiven for believing that paradise had recently broken out

in dockland. different.

For the men in London's River Day starts at 5. That means a journey to work rain, they will barge and hard of arrival.

Some will barges on the wharves shinned down to the barge. 12 feet away toe holds four a ladder.

So

Then they making the car. It might be so they have to really out, as cement or wood in sub-zero temperatures.

With the barge outside driver cannot it as he swings. There is, as the for error. To avoiding it lies gives silent sigh happen.

Inside the pleasures of bewildering unloaded. The back and the level, picking down. The low feet below to

At each an possibility of access chamber is the hazard always lose launch its con back into

## THE POWER GAME



by Colin Barker  
illustrations by 'rag'

Forget the fairy tales the CEBG and trade union leaders have told you about the efficiency of the electricity supply industry and the wonders of productivity deals. Here are the facts the bosses don't tell you—in a useful rank-and-file handbook in the fight for better wages and working conditions and to save jobs.  
25p, plus 3p postage

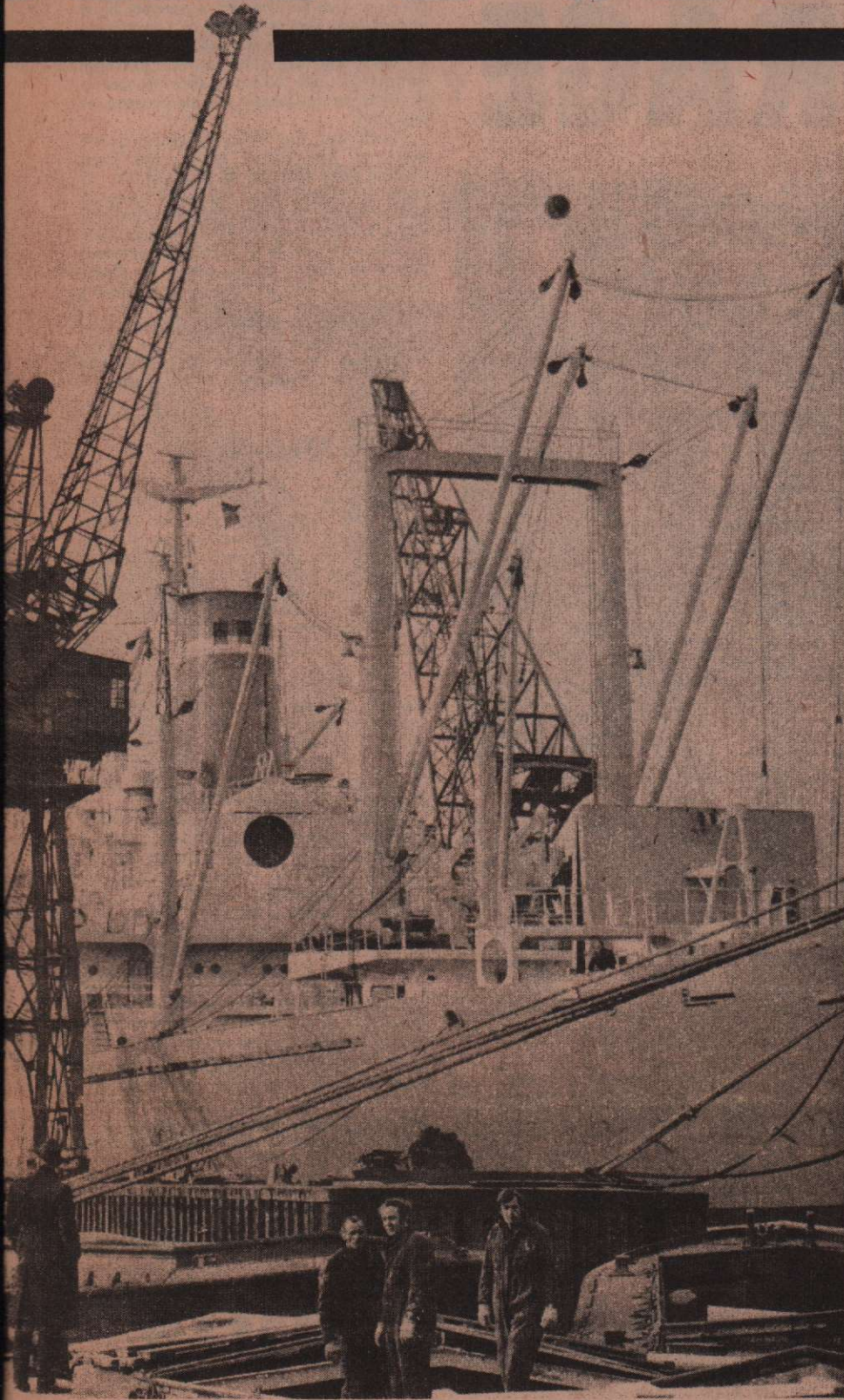


PLUTO PRESS

6 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN



# FILE FOR SURVIVAL



IN THE HEADY DAYS of 1966, Jack Jones persuaded the Labour Party executive to include a pledge to nationalise the docks in Labour's election manifesto. 'Don't let there be any illusion . . . this is complete nationalisation without any loophole whatever,' Ian Mikardo, chairman of Labour's port study group, announced enthusiastically in March of that year.

But the Labour government had set up the Devlin Committee of Inquiry into the dockers' pay claim shortly after the 1964 election victory. The Devlin inquiry was to blossom into a scheme to reorganise the docks from top to bottom. Backed by the licensing system introduced in the 1966 Docks and Harbours Act, the emergence of giant new monopolies would be encouraged and financed by the government with a whole fistful of investment grants.

So too was the financing of new ports outside the control of the National Dock Labour Board scheme, a reform granted in the post-war period to hold dockers in the jobs they were leaving for more regular and human employment.

A new technology, new methods of organisation in the world cargo trade, turning it from a labour intensive to a capital intensive industry, would complete the scenario for the assault on the dockers.

## Slashed

The Devlin dynamite, like all productivity deals, came dressed in all the clothes of progress. Not only was nothing said of consequential unemployment, the employers even gave so-called guarantees against it.

Now five years after the introduction of phase one of the scheme, registered dock labour force has been slashed by one third to 43,000 with 7000 of them claimed by the employers as 'surplus to requirements' and earmarked for redundancy.

Devlin's declared aim was to introduce factory systems and factory attitudes in dockland. Productivity deals would pave the way to flexibility and mobility of labour, the reduction of manning levels and that most desirable of all goals for big business—higher profits through wage and employment cuts.

To get to grips with the dockers, an offer to eliminate some of the

## Devlin's 'Milk and honey' leaves a bitter taste

major injustices of their working lives would have to be made. Employment security, pensions, sick pay and half-decent amenities would be phased in. Decasualisation was the key.

Top level co-operation from the trade union movement was achieved by Labour's dishonest pledges to nationalise the industry backed with the union leaders' own inability to tackle the whole question of technological progress for whom and at whose expense.

Soon Labour was claiming that before the ports could be nationalised, they should first be rationalised, a fine piece of card playing.

In September 1967 phase one of Devlin's 'land of milk and honey' scheme was brought in. For the first time in three generations of organised dock labour, there was a real measure of job security, plus sick pay, and other welfare amenities.

## Bitter

As yet no ceiling was put on earnings, nor were the fixed manning agreements of the Dock Labour Board Scheme. That would come later.

Then the softening up for the bitter end of the pill began. Trade started to be diverted round the country, new ports were developed and the inland container business expanded at a massive rate.

Implementation of phase two came first in London and Hull. Fixed manning went, a ceiling came on earnings. Dockers, just like the miners, faced cuts in their numbers and their level of earnings. In London, the nominally left-wing TGWU branch delegates who were put in after the 1967 strike played a key role in forcing through acceptance of the deal.

Once again the 'milk and honey' arguments were paraded and railroaded through. Then the shrewd workings of the Redundancy Payments Act plus the dock employers' extra enticements to leave the industry took their toll.



DEVLIN: promises



JONES: compromises



MIKARDO: illusions

But the employers were not relying on Devlin alone. In London and elsewhere they were moving to smash the Dock Labour Scheme and its crucial protective regulations against unemployment.

Containers were the key weapon and were used to the full to set up or make use of new businesses outside the ports to do what was rightfully dockers' work.

In this situation the Transport and General Workers' Union had nothing to say officially.

## Stewards

But on dockside, people started to learn the lessons, and be driven into a situation where they would have to fight for their very survival. Job insecurity, which Devlin was supposed to end, became more intense than ever before.

In Liverpool they learned from London and Hull's experiences—no unattached register and no recognition of severance payments.

Slowly a national shop stewards' leadership began to re-form, hammering out how to deal with the issues at national level in the face of official union co-operation with the destruction of their industry.

But with the present structure and policies of the TGWU it would not be long before the attempt was made to head off the jobs fight by throwing other issues into the turmoil. That came after the fines in the National Industrial Relations Court, when dockland's fight for survival became a question of 'unfair industrial practices' and compliance with someone else's law.

Now as Jack Jones talks with Employment Minister Macmillan about higher severance payments made up by a nominal levy on containers, there might be compromise—for a time.

The dockers could deal this government a blow as significant as the miners. But short of a clear victory on jobs and containers, the basic issue will still be there—whose progress, at whose expense?

ckers will tell you attached to T Wallis Docks, the working on the early shift. rise and a nice long in mist, sunshine or e into a hold or a work within minutes

awkward restricted chambers to be worked in.

Then there are the hazards of the cargoes themselves. Awkward physical customers plus acids, chemicals, fibres of the most noxious variety, anything you care to name. With the odd spillage, a docker can easily be in the way.

Little more than a fortnight ago, the men of T Wallis and Co achieved minimum protective clothing for handling drums of 'anti-knock' petrol additive. A touch of the stuff causes serious surface burning to the skin. Sustained exposure leads to leukemia. Any spillage means the ship must be cleared immediately.

In the plants where it is made, the dockers say the workers are dressed like spacemen. THEY probably say the same of the dockers.

Of course things have improved over recent years, in particular the

employers' profits as total wage costs have been dramatically reduced.

Proper lavatories, showers and canteen facilities have appeared for the first time. For a century the employers treated the men as cattle. Now that the elementary facilities have arrived, they are proudly pointed out as signs of 'progress'.

## Injustices

This is the situation that exists behind the elaborate newspaper mythology of wealthy, loafing dockworkers. Actually they earn £41.25 for 31½ hours a week at T Wallis. The days of piecework when the few could earn relatively large sums for short periods by intensive bouts of physical labour are gone forever.

The mythology is drawn from that era without any pause to think of the appalling injustices which were its

most significant characteristics. Neither is there any mention of the tremendous physical price levied on the dock community, every bit as heavily as the miners. The myth is kept oiled and ready for parade to sow confusion, to help in blunting the solidarity of other workers with dockers in struggle.

Because of their significant industrial strength, the dockers are in a position to force the Tory government to compromise. This too is reflected in press attitudes. For the moment the dockers are something of a special case, having co-operated in the run-down of their industry.

It is a tiresome category, 'special case'. A walk out of dockland into the quality of any other group of industrial workers' lives would suggest that it is an urgent task to batter down the compartments and build a movement capable of running society for the benefit of all working people.



Dockers loading a barge—work that is done in all weathers.

directed to the e of the ship away e. They will have pe ladder to get on get to the bottom e planks with three et apart double for

## zero

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# THE MEN BEHIND MIDLAND

## COLD STORAGE

'THE LAW of the jungle' was how High Court judge Megarry described the dockers' fight to win the right to work at Midland Cold Storage. By launching a crude witch-hunt against the dockers he conveniently turned a blind eye to the real jungle—the jungle of the profiteers who use the most unscrupulous methods to smash the jobs of registered dock workers in order to boost their own wealth.

A close look at the wheeling and dealing of the men behind Midland Cold Storage should convince most people—apart from High Court judges—of who the guilty men are in this dispute.

Just up river of the spectacularly valuable Hays Wharf on London's dying Thameside dockland lie the Stamford and Duchy Street wharves.

Duchy Street was closed down in March 1971. 24 registered dockworkers were returned to the unattached register. Stamford Wharf went in March this year, with the loss of another 24 jobs.

### Goldmine

Both wharves are owned by the giant Union International empire which, apart from being the biggest meat company in the world, has subsidiary interests in shipping, food processing and retailing, insurance and property.

Reason for the two closures was not, as Union International claims, disappearance of the trade and the ships that gave rise to the dockers' jobs in the first place. Rather the bosses of the Union International empire, Ronald Arthur Vestey and Lord Samuel Vestey, realised they were sitting on a goldmine. The streets of this part of London are literally paved with gold for those who by some accident of commerce hold title to the land.

Union International, to unlock the hidden bounty of its acres of shabby dockland, first had to get shot of its dockers, a process which is already well under way.

But Union International still had business to be done. Given the iron law—to operate as profitably as possible—this was now to be done outside the reach of docks trade unionism. The work would be transferred inland. But for the operation to be really successful, Union International had

to make it seem as if the trade had not been transferred.

Dockers picketing Midland Cold Storage have always maintained that the firm was in fact a Vestey subsidiary and that the work at their Stamford and Duchy Street wharves had not simply disappeared but had been brought to the new depot to be done by unregistered labour.

But the firm which took the picketing dockers to the National Industrial Relations Court, and put secret agents on them and their families to extract information and evidence, used every trick in the book to cover up its strategy.

Midland Cold Storage was registered as a company on 29 January this year, just before the closure of Stamford Wharf. A month before the new depot opened (on Vestey-owned land in Hackney) the management of the new company contacted the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and offered a closed shop agreement for the 28 workers who would be taken on to do this 'non-dock labour'.

A wages deal was also concluded paying the workers from £12 to £16 less than registered dockers would get for a working week which is five hours shorter.

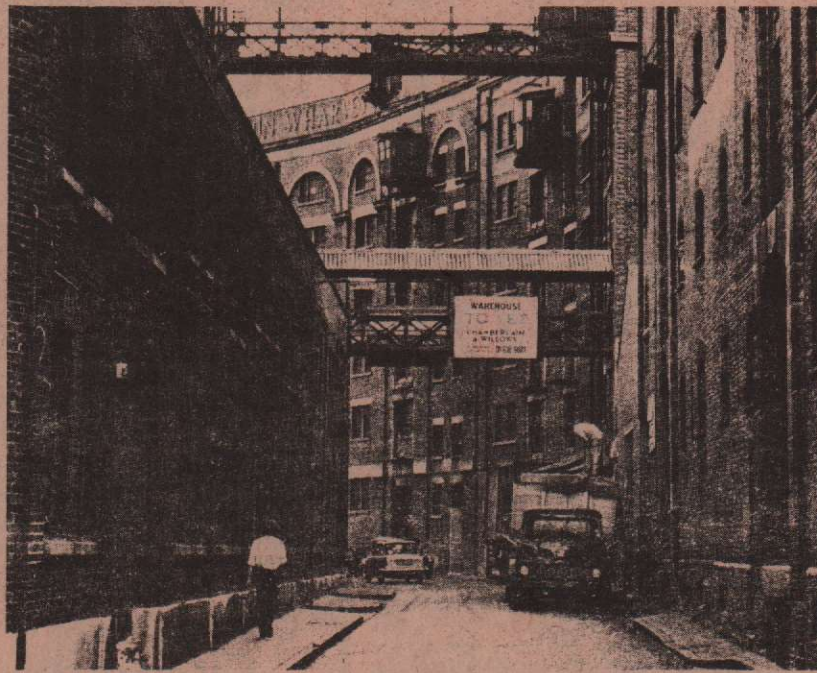
To this day Midland Cold Storage denies any connection with the Vestey empire. On the face of things this looks absolutely right. All but two of the 100,000 issued ordinary £1 shares as registered in the company accounts are owned by the Ulster Bank.

Of the odd two, one is owned by a Midland Cold Storage director, the other by the company's solicitor. There is no recorded connection with the Vestey family.

But the company's accounts are not a true statement of fact. The block of 99,998 shares stated to be owned by the Ulster Bank is actually owned by the Ulster Bank Nominees, seemingly trivial, but actually an important distinction. Nominee share holdings are the way to disguise ownership.

And the truth of the Midland Cold Storage situation—as it is widely known in the offices of the Ulster Bank—is that the 99,998 ordinary £1 shares held by the Ulster Bank Nominees are wholly owned by the Vestey family.

As the dockers maintain, the Vestey's



The 'TO LET' notices are out in Wapping High Street, heart of the dockland.

own Midland Cold Storage.

Their jobs did not simply disappear due to 'changing economic circumstance.' They were transferred inland. USDAW was brought in to enable the management to break the docks' labour scheme. And it was the Vestey family that took the dockers to the NIRC, and put labour spies after them.

### Millions

The Vestey family is one of the richest families in Britain. Their world-wide beef empire has been built up since the turn of the century into a £500 million cartel stretching from South American cattle ranches, refrigerated shipping vessels and stevedoring companies, to Dewhurst's, your local high street butchers.

Present head of the organisation is

31-year-old Lord Samuel Vestey, who inherited his first million at the age of 13 when he was a fag at Eton. He has been inheriting more millions ever since and his personal fortune is now estimated to be £50 million.

The good Lord only took over last year. Until then control of the operation lay in the hands of his ageing cousin, Ronald Arthur Vestey, who held two of the four £1 management shares in the Vestey master company, Western United Investments, in trust for Samuel.

The intricate array of interlocking companies that composes the Vestey empire was set up during the war as a way of avoiding death duties.

Ronald Vestey is not one for taking on only the dockers.

He is lord of the manor on the 150,000 acre Assynt estate in Sutherland and rules

the area with an iron fist, a practice he is undoubtedly keen to extend to a containerised dockland. He owns all the shops for 20 miles, and the only bar, and prevents competition. He refuses to allow houses to be built and generally retards progress of any kind.

Lochinvar, the village which lies at the heart of his Assynt estate, has been feuding with Ronald on and off for 15 years. In 1958 Vestey increased prices in all his mobile shops by eight per cent. (He has a total monopoly.) The villagers responded with threats to burn his forests and poison his rivers. In the event, no direct action was taken and Vestey's despotism continued.

Ronald Vestey is also boss of vast tracts of West Suffolk where he has been High Sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant. He lives in a superb period mansion in the centre of his estates.

### Minimum

Vestey is a big farmer specialising in wheat and sugar beet, plus the famous Vestey herds. A spokesman for the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers explains that Vestey is renowned for paying no more than the minimum legal wage to his agricultural workers, that is, the princely sum of £16.20 for an endless working week. The tied-cottage system reinforces his dictatorship.

In Suffolk, through his minions and tenants, Ronald Vestey is in complete control of the local Clare Rural Council. Council chairman is Keith Roberts, who farms for Vestey interests. Chairman of the Planning Committee is Sir John Mowbray, Vestey's estate manager.

Vestey is currently engaged in a speculative housebuilding venture in nearby Withersfield, where again he has his friends on the council.

The development (worth more than £100,000, with a 50 per cent profit) involves building on Withersfield's meadow, the very centrepiece of a delightful village.

Yes, Mr Justice Megarry, there is a jungle all right. It is a jungle run and controlled by a tiny minority of people like the Vestey family whose sole aim in life is to profit at the expense of workers.

The dockers are challenging the Vestey's right to treat workers as profit fodder. They believe that the interests of ordinary working people must come first. It is a basic struggle, the very backbone of what trade unionism should be.

That is why the dockers must be supported by every section of the union movement. Their victory will be ours, too.

# Collapse of divide-and-rule ploy

JUST as the port employers' strategy of playing one group of workers off against another was looking successful on Friday last week, counter-picketing transport workers dealt it a crippling blow.

The capitalist press had been busy baying about who runs the country and things looked really nice for the honest employers. Then, as soon as it was announced that five London dockers were to be imprisoned for defying the Industrial Relations Act, the counter-pickets suspended their actions in solidarity with the threatened dockers.

All along the port employers' main strategy has been to move their operations outside the valuable trade union controls enshrined in the dock labour scheme. The scheme guarantees dockworkers an approximation to a decent standard of living and good working conditions and forbids the employers to hire and fire at will.

But the employers have varied their tactics from time to time as it suited them, from straight lies about who owned what

company in an attempt to pretend that dock work had not been moved out of dockland, to the use of labour spies and NIRC orders.

The concerted attempt to set worker against worker was saved for the situation that emerged after the dockers' important victory at Chobham Farm. This not only inflicted an important defeat on the whole Tory Industrial Relations Act but forced the employers there to take on registered dock labour. Chobham Farm was a victory for all the workers involved since the employers were forced not to sack any of the depot workers it had originally hired to displace dockers at cheaper rates. The men were not sacked and were given up to £10 a week more to bring them into line with dockers.

In the face of such a breakthrough for all workers concerned, the employers really got moving. What they wanted to do at all costs was to anticipate the dockers' next move—the picketing and blacking of London's biggest container depot, the London International Freight Terminal.

As soon as Midland Cold Storage lost its civil court action against the seven

named dockers, a new organisation was launched, the Transport and Warehouse Industry Group. A leaflet was published extolling workers' and employers' right to work without intimidation or fear.

The completely phoney nature of the leaflet which was published with the names of 13 prominent container firms attached is first given away in the headline 'Say no to no go', a sordid but unsuccessful attempt to appeal to anti-Irish sentiment in this country.

But the main tack of the leaflet comes in several gems: if dockers get container work meat and food prices would rise, the country would be damaged and many jobs lost since the trade would have to go abroad where wages are cheaper.

### Purpose

This really is an amazing statement since four of the firms listed as sponsors of TWIG are parts of either the Hays Wharf or Vestey empires. Both these organisations are renowned for selling and reselling a quantity of beef up to 15 times between one arm and another of their own organisations before the beef is even unloaded by dockers.

But the real purpose of the leaflets and TWIG was not just to make propaganda. The body was to act as the organising force for counter-activity against the dockers' pickets. TWIG's leaflets asked drivers to phone in for advice as to what they could do against the dockers. And some transport workers frightened by the

employers' propaganda that they would lose their jobs, started just such counter-picketing.

In the case of Midland Cold Storage, Spurlings, Hays Transport Group, Dagenham Cold Stores and a whole number of other firms in the London International Freight Terminal, it is clear that the counter-picketing was done with something more than just employers' prompting.

Some counter-pickets outside Chobham Farm last week were being booked on and off work on the anti-docker picket lines. So neatly did the counter-picketing suit the employers' book that firms were being paid to do it.

Meanwhile the official employers' body for the road transport industry was busy too. They were having secret meetings with John Peyton, Tory Transport Minister, pressing him for massive amendments to the whole docks registration scheme.

The reason for their fevered activity is simple. They were trying to influence the contents and recommendations of the Jones-Aldington report on the container question before it was finally signed and sealed.

Jones-Aldington seems to be the summit as far as the Transport and General Workers Union is officially concerned. In the situation of the immense struggles of recent weeks, there has been no attempt to give a lead either on containers or against the Act. And in the final analysis it is the official union which must bear the heavy responsibility for allowing the ranks to be

split in front of the employer.

It is scandalous that the union should conclude agreements with the ex-dock firms for container base work without a thought for the broader implications.

That flows from lack of policies and ideas to deal with the real situation of the working class in the present period. Instead of seriously getting down to organising and fighting the government and the employers, the trade union leadership prefers business as usual even if that means dumping TUC anti-Industrial Relations Act policy with obscene haste.

But with the dockers in jail the task to unite the whole movement to fight the attack on workers' organisations in general. The Chobham Farm agreement and now the decision of the counter-pickets to withdraw their picket lines offers the beginnings of a new united fight. And the jailing of the five demands unity in action from every section of the movement.

No one should be fooled by all the gutter press talk about workers standing in the way of technological progress on the docks or elsewhere. That is a lie. The issue on the docks and in the container depots is crystal clear—who is going to benefit from technology?

Is it to be the employers with higher profits and a reduction in wage costs? Impelled by the insane logic of competition that is the road they inevitably travel.

Or are those who benefit to be the working class in shorter hours and easier jobs? As miners' leader Arthur Scargill put it at the key point in the miners' strike outside the Saltley coke depot earlier this year: 'United in militant action there is nothing the working class cannot achieve.'

## 'IT COULD BE YOU'

From page one

'They have used other workers against us as cynically as they made their empty promises about what decasualisation would mean to the dockers. And the employers have been backed to the hilt by a law and a court designed not just to fit the dockers, but to attack the heart of the whole trade union movement. It is in every worker's interest to back us to the full. If they do not they will be next.'

Representatives of the London Port Shop Stewards' Committee also issued Socialist Worker a statement of their official position just before the arrests

were made. 'We consider that this is a struggle for the whole of the working class and not just the dockers. We are faced with an anti-working class law and an employers' court. That is why our men have never appeared before the court and why we have set aside its instructions. From the first our policy has been that we would strike until any trade unionist imprisoned under this law was set free.'

'It is for these reasons that we call on all trade unionists and workers to give us maximum support including immediate industrial action to free these five men and to deal with an unjust law.'



I would like more information about the International Socialists

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: IS, 6 Cottons Gardens, London E2 8DN

### International Socialists

Public meeting—solidarity with the dockers

Speakers:

Bob Light (TGWU Royal Docks)  
Tony Cliff

Speaker from Port Shop Stewards' Cttee  
Monday 24 July 1972 8pm  
New Merlin's Cave, Margery Street,  
WC1 off Faringdon Road,  
Tube: Kings Cross