THE DEVLIN PLAN AND THE DOCKER

D DAY - OR V DAY ?

The employers have called September 15th D Day - and most dockers take this war-time language as proof that what the employers really want is not D Day but V Day: the day of their victory over the docker, when the protective practices built up over decades are scrapped and the employers get the power to discipline the docker.

WHAT - just what, is happening on the docks? What will happen when the present system ends and we all become permanent workers on September 15th and after? These are the questions in the mind of every dockworker. The Government, the employers and the T.& G.W.U. officials have put out much propaganda and given many assurances — but most dockers remain unconvinced: bitter experiences in the past have taught us to take official reassurances with at least one large pinch of salt.

Dockers who attended the T.&G.W.U. General Meeting last Saturday morning (8th July) addressed by Bro. Mahony and expected to get clear answers to these questions, were sadly disappointed. The evasive, often self-contradictory answers to questions only added to the general feeling that we are being sold a bum steer and taken for a ride. The following issues were raised.

A BASIC RATE OF £15 ??

We are told £15 will be the new basic rate, and it sounds like an improvement as far as it goes. But naturally there's a catch - quite a number of catches, in fact. The jump from the present rate of £11 is in two stages. We get £2 (1/= an hour) modernisation money, which brings it up to £13. And then if anyone fails to earn a total of £15 (i.e. another £2) the necessary amount is added to bring it up to £15.

This means that a man on bare lick who works two nights overtime will get just over £15; and a docker who works a flat week will also be entitled to £15. The first two nights overtime will be virtually unpaid!! Four nights overtime will mean that the average hourly overtime pay will work out at much less than the present double time rate: the new system therefore will amount to a cut in overtime rates. You can be sure they will try to get their money's worth for the £15 out of this cheap overtime, which is in practice still compulsory.

What happens if a docker refuses overtime? Questioned on this, Bro.Mahony said there would be no loss of money. But then why is the make-up in two stages, if not to give them a hold on us? Significantly, in his answer Bro.Mahony stressed that modernisation money was guaranteed and could not be cut for any reason. But modern-isation money alone makes it just £13!

Even when pressed, Bro. Mahony would not say definitely that the other two pounds will not be interfered with. Brothers will have to draw their own conclusions.

DISCIPLINE

Closely tied in with this issue is the question of discipline. Under the new scheme the employer has the power to discipline the docker. For a refusal to work overtime a docker can be suspended for up to 5 days, without pay of course. Dockers will have a choice: either work compulsory overtime for virtually no pay, or a little over ordinary time rate; or face a probable loss of the second £2, and a possible suspension for up to 5 days - or worse.

Clearly the new system has been designed by experts to catch the docker whichever way he turns. September 15th will see the most serious attack for many years on the dockworker.

The employer is being now given the right to "discipline" the docker, to put a whip in the hands of the foreman. It is a new departure - or rather a step backwards to the old days. But what is it that is so special about these people that they should now be given the power to penalise the docker, to send us up the road if we don't obey their orders at the double? We can't say, but a recent incident throws some light on the subject.

Last week, as a result of pressure from the T.&.G. branch, the employers' representatives reluctantly agreed to look into the possibility of better masks for protection against asbestos, which can cause stomach cancer. They agreed - on condition that dockers pay for any masks lost!! The lives of dockers are at stake and those people, who made a clear profit of almost one million pounds last year from these very same dockers, quibble over a few shillings! This is typical of port employers throughout the country. Are such people fit to have power - any power whatsoever - over any other human beings? Any docker who thinks that they are, and agrees with that part of the new scheme which increases their power, deserves what he'll get from them.

REDUNDANCY

We were assured by Bro. Mahony that there will be no redundancy, that when there is no work we will all atill be kept on at £15 a week. Is this true? But what happens when there are too many men?

Throughout last winter up to 400 men were often without work, and it was the same in the rest of the country. In London the figure was often 3,500. If not for the fact that men are on holiday, there would still be many stamping now. Next winter under the new scheme, when all dockers are permanently employed, this will mean that the private companies will be paying out £15 a week to hundreds of men who, under the present system, would be stamping at £9. HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT WILL LAST?

The new system does not really offer permanent employment. There is a clause in the New Scheme as follows:

"That after the first initial period of three months, and periodically thereafter, the employer will have the right to return to the Unattached Pool any man or men whom he, the employer, decides is not suited to, or is surplus to, his requirements."

What will happen to the men who are returned? Devlin stated: "That for any man in the Unattached Pool it will be tantamount to dismissal from the industry."

Consider who these men are likely to be: the older men, the physically weaker men, the militants. And here is an extra turn of the screw - three months after Sept. 15th takes us within a few days of Christmas. No doubt they figure that just before Christmas is not the best time for us to have to fight. We must make sure that we stand up long before that - otherwise some of us will be getting a dole card for Christmas.

A REVOLUTION IN THE PORTS

We are living through a revolution in the ports. The means of cargo handling are changing beyond recognition. It is expected that containerisation will become the rule in the next few years. Ever larger ships are being designed to take the containers. As with oil tankers and grain ships, less and less men will be needed. The reason for the new scheme is the need to mechanise the ports to keep pace with this. As it progresses, more and more of the present work force will be dispensible to the bosses.

This is the real reason why the docks are being reorganised. If in the past the industry depended on armies of men, it is now becoming an industry of machines. In the last decade the total number of dockers has fallen by 20,000. Some recent estimates put the expected cut in the docks labour force in the next few years as high as 90%.

In a situation like this, for how long are we all going to be kept on at £15 a week? Just who are they trying to kid? Are they going to give us a pension for life?! The reason they're in business is that we keep them - not the other way round. What we will have immediately is disguised redundancy, a weeding-out with sackings on flimsy excuses - even before the first three months is out.

EMPLOYMENT ON NON - DOCK WORK

Docks Bulletin No.5, "D Day on the Docks" says: "If your employer has no dock work available, you may be employed on non-dock work, if your local Board approves...." Asked what this meant, Bro.Mahony said it had no meaning, and would never be put into practice. Asked why it was then included in the scheme, Bro.Mahony said that it was because the other side (apparently for no reason!) insisted! Whatever Bro.Mahony says, it is obvious that this was included for a purpose: by its very nature, in the docks industry the amount of work varies considerably from day to day. This clause allows employers to get their money's worth by farming out temporarily surplus men on other work. If the new scheme is allowed to go through, there is a strong possibility that some of those dockers who escape the axe will find themselves digging up roads next winter.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion that must be drawn from examining the most outstanding items in the new scheme is that it has been designed as a harness for the docker. It means complete loss of freedom for a doubtful pay increase; it means disguised redundancy aimed at those least useful to the employer.

Under the banner of decasualisation and modernisation the Government, the employers and the White Union officials have united to control the dockworker. We are expected to stomach it in the sacred sause of modernising the industry. We are abused in the press as lazy, awkward, and for holding back the industry. But it's the employers who are responsible. Despite the 20,000 drop in the work force, we have doubled productivity, while they pocketed the benefits - out of roughly £3,000 million profit, they only spent £200 million on improvements. The blame is entirely theirs.

MODERNISATION - BUT IN WHOSE INTERESTS ?

The industry must be reorganised - but why should this not take place in the interests of the docker rather than the employer, especially considering the above facts? For them it is a way of raising productivity while getting rid of thousands of dockers to cut the wage bill. The Devlin plan serves their interests at our expense. We cannot oppose modernisation in principle - but we cannot possibly accept it as they propose. The real issue is who is to control modernisation and for whose benefit is this to operate? If introduced under our control and in our interests, we could all keep our jobs, work shorter hours with more pay, and let the machines do the work. INSTEAD OF THE DEVLIN PLAN OF THE BIG EMPLOYERS, WE NEED IMMEDIATE NATIONALISATION OR ALL PORTS UNDER THE DIRECT CONTROL AND SUPERVISION OF THE DOCKWORKERS.

At the T.& G.W.U. General Meeting, faced with this alternative to Devlin, Bro.Mahony argued that it was better to 'put the industry on its feet first' and then nationalise. But that is just the point at issue. With immediate nationalisation under dockers' control, reorganisation could be to suit us. Devlin's reorganisation is at our expense.

It is obvious that the Devlin plan is a full-scale attack on the docker. We are entitled to more than £15 basic, without any strings or any loss of freedom, without being bound hand and foot by the employers. Throughout the country, LONDON, LIVERPOOL, HULL, BRISTOL, there is a swelling wave of opposition, a growing determination amongst dockworkers to fight back against this attack on our conditions. THE MEN IN THESE PORTS HAVE DETERMINED TO SEND THE DECASUALISATION FORMS UNSIGNED TO THE UNION OFFICE IN A REFUSAL TO CO-OPERATE. MANCHESTER DOCKERS CAN HARDLY DO LESS THAN JOIN THIS MOVEMENT OF RESISTANCE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO DEVLIN

Devlin must be fought, and we propose the following alternative policy for reorganising the industry:

1) Immediate nationalisation of the ports under full control and supervision of dock workers. Dockers to decide at mass meetings the amount, if any, of compensation that they will pay to former owners: there must be no situation, as when the mines and railways were nationalised, with tens of millions drained away to the former exploiters. The books and accounts of all port employers, including shipping companies, to be opened for inspection by elected representatives of the workers, so that we can see all the facts and figures and not just what they choose to publish. UNTIL THESE CONDITIONS ARE MET WE MUST RESIST BY ALL MEANS NECESSARY THE PRESENT ATTEMPT TO UNDERMINE OUR STANDARDS AND CONDITIONS.

2) As partial steps on the road to full control of our industry, we must fight for the following:
   a) £17 national minimum, without strings or sonditions of any sort.
   b) No compulsory overtime. No disguised redundancy. No weed-out sackings on flimsy excuses.
   c) Work-sharing with increased wages to be paid for out of the money now wasted on profits.
   d) No disciplinary powers for either the employers or the N.D.L.B. Control of all hiring and firing to be in the hands of democratically elected workers' representatives.
   e) Complete dockers' control over all work rules and conditions.
   f) Proper safety provisions in the industry, with professional safety officers and workers' safety committees to overhaul the ports.

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