

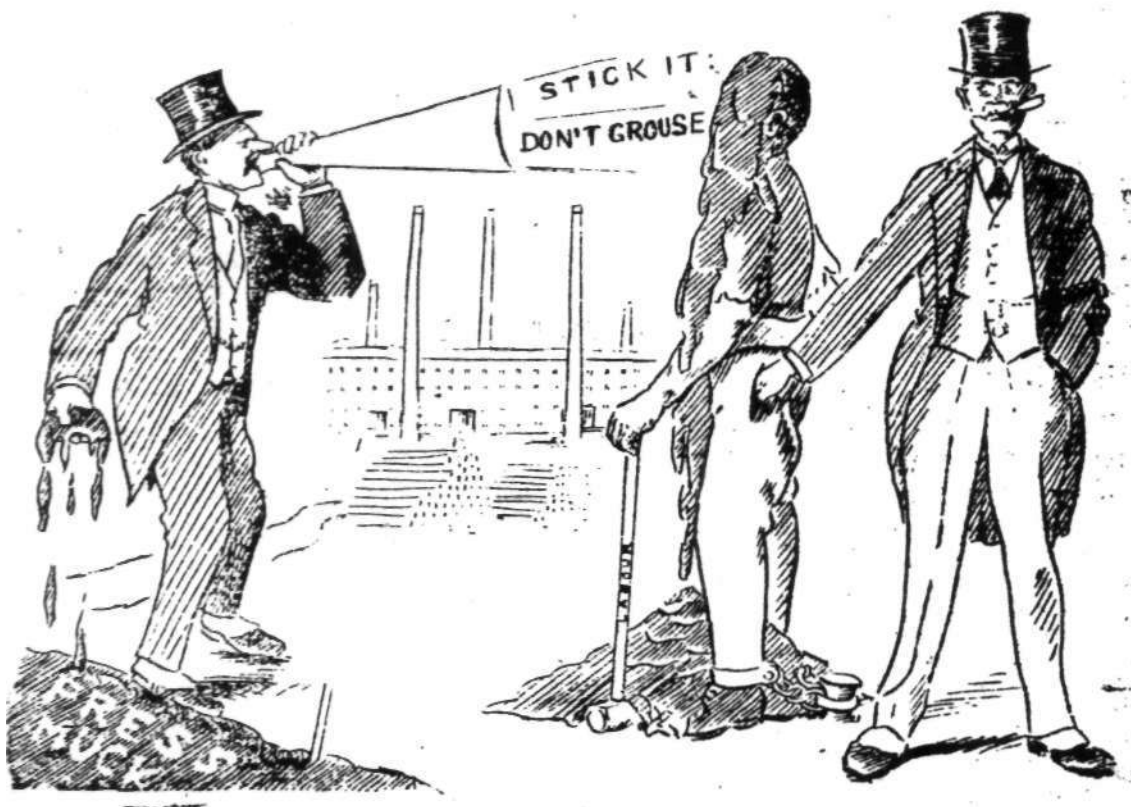
# OUR HISTORY

PAMPHLET 18

REPRINT

PRICE 30p.

## SHEFFIELD SHOP STEWARDS 1916-1918



by *BILL MOORE*

**OUR HISTORY** is published by the History Group of the Communist Party, 16 King Street, London WC2E 8HY. The Group exists to forward the study of history from a Marxist standpoint and to put its members in touch with others in the same fields. Membership is open to all members of the Communist Party. Non-members may subscribe to Our History at the above address.

The current subscription for four issues is £1.50. Trade distribution by Journeyman Press, 97 Ferme Park Road, London, N.8 9SA (01-348 9261).

The cover illustration is taken from a leaflet issued in 1918 protesting against the restrictions placed on the publication of The Firth Worker.

## Foreword

This short history of the Sheffield engineers during the war of 1914-18 will deservedly stand side by side with William Gallagher's Revolt on the Clyde on any bookshelf that has a section devoted to the long struggle of engineering workers.

Here is the authentic note of struggle struck by the grandfathers and fathers of Sheffield's present-day working class, who made it possible for us to enjoy all the advances we have made from that time.

The first world war brought suffering, hardship and death to tens of millions of people throughout the world, but it is true to say that the working class learned more in that brief period of four years and three months than in any other span of time.

The stormy growth and development of the Shop Stewards' movement, with its wide network of organisation, was the natural development of modern Trade Unionism, and was in effect the practical expression of working class unity reaching up from the factory floor, influencing the Branches and District Committees, and compelling the Government and the employers to recognise the hard fact that the workers had to be taken into consideration economically and politically.

Who can doubt that, without the organisation built up during the war, the engineers could not have achieved the 47-hour week in 1919. The emergence of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in 1920 was only possible because it was based on the war-time unity built on the shop floor by the rank and file. The lockout of 1922 was a tremendous blow to the engineering unions, and to the A.E.U. in particular, but in the light of subsequent history the storm was weathered more quickly because of the recruitments and organisation built by the shop stewards.

Many of the old-timers have gone from us now but the pages of our working class history they wrote remain an imperishable monument to their courage and tenacity. In the dark years of the 20's they formed the backbone of the struggle of the unemployed, using their knowledge of organisation in the battle for work and full maintenance. Many of them

became foundation members of the Communist Party and were the inspiration, guides, mentors and friends of my generation who took the torch of Trade Unionism and Socialism from their hands.

We remember them with affection and gratitude, for after all we are of their making, and the objectives they fought for will surely be realised in our time.

*Herbert Howarth*

To Brothers HARBINSON  
IBBOTSON  
PARSONS  
SWEETING  
WARD . •

and the other workers in the engineering industry who wrote such a glorious page in the history of our working class.

## Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the Labour Research Department and Messrs. Allen & Unwin for permission to quote from G.D.H. Cole, An Introduction to Trade Unionism.

We wish to thank the Sheffield A.E.U. for permission given in 1952 to use the minute books of the District Committee of the A.S.E. and the minute books of No.12 branch.

We also thank the above-named brothers for the time they gave in relating their personal memories of these historic events - struggles in which they were among the leadership.

We would add that while the purpose of the original investigation was to find out about anti-war developments in Sheffield during the first world war, what emerged as (in the long run) of equal importance was the organisation of the Shop Stewards' movement, with lessons for us even today,

# SHEFFIELD SHOP STEWARDS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

•  
by Bill Moore

The Sheffield Shop Stewards led the fight in Britain against the war and against the attempts by employers and Government to break down the Trade Union rights won over a long period - but not until the latter end of 1916.

Up to 1916 this struggle was led by the Clydeside workers, under the Clyde Workers' Committee, the history of which is well enough known, especially from the writings of Willie Gallagher who was its president. The organisational basis of the Clydeside workers' strength was the Shop Stewards' movement. Shop stewards had been appointed in the engineering industry (at least in the A.S.E. - Amalgamated Society of Engineers) for some years before 1914, but only as dues collectors. It was the collaboration of the trade union leadership generally (as well as the leadership of the Labour Party) with the Government for the prosecution of the war, leaving the workers virtually compelled to fight their own battles at workshop level, that brought about a transformation of the shop steward from a dues collector into a leader of the workers against employer and Government alike.

As G.D.H.Cole has written: "The new movement developed earliest upon the Clyde. Official shop-stewards were appointed at an increasing pace...But side by side with these official developments came an unofficial development. The workers themselves in many shops chose spokesmen without reference to any District Committee" and "the next step was not long in coming".

"Both official and unofficial shop stewards in many cases formed themselves into Works Committees and elected chairmen, secretaries, conveners, etc. These conveners and the other shop-stewards soon felt the need for a wider form of combination, and for contact between one shop and another, and the Clyde strike of February 1915 provided the nucleus of an unofficial organisation which could be used for this purpose. The Strike Committee developed into the Clyde Workers' Committee and as the

shop stewards' movement on the Clyde grew and extended, the Clyde Workers' Committee developed itself into a central organisation representing unofficially all the various shops in the district."\*

It was in the latter months of 1916 when the Clyde Workers' Committee, after a glorious career of struggle, had been broken and its leading members deported from the Clydeside, that the Sheffield workers came to the forefront.

They were, for the most part, still a long way behind the Scottish engineers in understanding what the war was about. On the Clyde, right from the start, there was a widespread understanding (due in great measure to the work of the indefatigable John MacLean) that side by side with its fight against the "official" enemy, the ruling class would use the war situation to cut back the hard won Trade Union rights of its own working class, and that in these circumstances the fight for the living standards of the people and the fight against war must become merged into one fight against capitalism.

The history of the Sheffield shop stewards in the first world war is a history of the development of this understanding. Beginning with a purely economic struggle on standard Trade Union lines, with the workers by and large supporting the war, the movement grew into a workshop struggle led by the shop stewards (due to the virtual defection of the national Trade Union leadership) against conscription and dilution, and ended with the shop stewards leading a mass rank and file political struggle against the continuation of the war itself.

What is outstanding about the Sheffield struggles is not just that they took over from the Clydeside but:

(a) once they got into their stride they were never defeated on any major issue, and their organisation was never broken;

(b) their shop stewards' organisation was not just a copy of the Clydeside organisation but an advance to a higher level. It was systematised, democratised to include every worker (skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, men and women, Trade Unionist and non-unionist) and was rigorously

\* G.D.H.Cole, An Introduction to Trade Unionism (1918), p.55.

fought for in every factory.\* It was undoubtedly the tightness of this organisation that made the Sheffield engineering workers invincible.

(c) On all major issues there was no conflict with the Sheffield District Committee as a whole (only with a few individual members). The ranks were not divided.

Here then is the story - as much of it as possible in the actual words of the old-timers who were there on the job.

#### DEVELOPMENTS UP TO OCTOBER 1916

The "Treasury Agreement" of March 1915 had laid down that the Unions should give up the right to strike, should relax all customs that restricted the production of munitions, and should permit dilution on war work. In return they were promised that dilution should be strictly confined to war work, that the restrictions should continue only for the duration of the war, that dilutees should get the rate for the job, and that there should be limitation of profits. All these promises by the Government were eventually broken, but even before this happened trouble had started.

The first movement was made by the day-workers in the A.S.E. Brother Jack Parsons describes it as follows:

"As a result of the demand for munitions and the agreement on dilution, men came in and were put on repetition jobs. They smashed the machinery. Nothing mattered only their huge wage at the week-end. The skilled men had to keep the machinery going and all for the weekly daywork rate. This was the trouble. We said that we were entitled to something apart from the ordinary daywork rate."

A Dayworkers' Committee was soon set up. This, continues Brother Parsons,

"was an unofficial body, but it had an interview with the Rates and Wages Committee for Munitions in London, and with the Minister of Munitions (Dr Addison), still as an unofficial body. While in London they visited the E.G. of the Union and although unofficial they were more or less smiled upon and told to go ahead."

\* As witness the discussion in No.16 of the Firth Worker (April 1918) on the deviations of the Hadfield's Plant Committee.

They went in for a daywork rise and got it in the early part of 1915. The problem remained, however, throughout the war, and we find it still causing trouble at the end of 1917.

In the middle of 1915 a step was taken by the Government which earned it the hatred of the mass of the workers. The Munitions of War Act was passed which not only gave legal force to the "Treasury Agreement" but also included an extra clause forbidding workers to leave their munitions jobs without a leaving certificate from their employers. This Act became known as the "Slavery Act". The response was immediate.

"The question of workmen denied the right to change their employment, even on advantageous terms, by firms, was considered by the Committee and the following resolution was carried: 'That our members be instructed that if they desire to change their employment, they must first leave their present employment, and then secure employment elsewhere, and ignore notices in the works to the contrary, and same to be inserted in the Monthly Journal.'"

Thus runs a resolution of the D.C. of the A.S.E., June 1, 1915. This refusal to be intimidated by the Authorities was a foretaste of the future.

Arising partly out of the experience of the unofficial Day-workers' Committee, partly from the need for immediate shop action around these constantly recurring Government attacks, the new Shop Stewards' movement was born, destined not just to collect dues but to lead and organise the struggle. An A.S.E. District Committee resolution late in 1915 called on all members to elect shop stewards. This was not quite so straightforward as it sounds. A resolution of No.12 Branch, A.S.E., on February 25, 1916, reads thus:

"That this Branch draws attention to the need for shop stewards, also the difficulty of getting members to stand for that position by reason of the fact that District Committee has not local autonomy to grant victimisation pay to our members, which must be granted before our members will take on this duty."

Nevertheless in spite of the danger of victimisation the factories in a few months were covered by a network of shop stewards inside the A.S.E. It was not long before their strength was tested over the case of Leonard Hargreaves,

who was called into the army in October 1916 despite the fact that he was a skilled fitter. The Government had given a pledge that men who volunteered for munitions work and received badges to show that they had done so would not be called up. This pledge began to be broken with increasing frequency.

Two incidents had already served to put the workers on their guard and also indicate a changing attitude to the war. The first is recorded in the District Committee minutes of August 6, 1915:

"Standing Orders were suspended and Brother (?) introduced the question of Mr Samms, Labour member of the Board of Guardians, who under the Defence of the Realm Act had been sentenced to two months, arising out of conversations with wounded soldiers at the Firvale Workhouse,\* and the following resolution was moved: 'That this D.C. of the A.S.E. appeals to the Home Secretary with a view to the squashing of sentence on Mr Samms as being both impolitic and unjust. Also with A.Henderson and W.C.Anderson.<sup>1</sup>'\*\*

Samms was a pacifist, opposed to the war, who had been doing a bit of anti-war propaganda on his own initiative.

The second incident is recorded in the minutes of the District Committee on September 14 and September 16, 1916. It concerned a turner called Bingham working at Hadfield's who was suspended for a month for leaving work without permission; "when the foreman, Mr Crowther, suspended him", runs the D.C. minute, "he was reported to have said that if he could he would send him to the trenches..." Crowther and Bingham were both brought before the D.C. on September 28, and although the matter was afterwards allowed to drop, it is clear that the D.C. was on its toes regarding any attempt to put skilled men in the army. Sympathy with pacifist propaganda, the significant use of the word 'impolitic' to indicate that there was general resentment against the sentence on Samms, and the very real fear of the army...these

\* Used as a military hospital.

\*\*Arthur Henderson, a signatory of the Treasury Agreement for the unions, had been a member of the privy council and of Asquith's coalition cabinet since 1915 (with the endorsement of the TUC and Labour Party). Will Anderson was MP for the Attercliffe Division.

are all signs that in fact the whole attitude of the people to the war was rapidly changing.

A year or so earlier, a resolution in No.12 Branch (September 10, 1915) calling for the rules about the leaving certificate to be withdrawn, could speak of these as a direct insult to the workmen "who are working loyally and consistently in truly patriotic manner towards a successful termination of the war now in progress". Now, however, on October 20, 1916, three days before the Hargreaves case broke into the news, the following resolution was passed by the same Branch:

"That this meeting of Sheffield A.S.E. No.12 Branch urges His Majesty's Government to seek the earliest opportunity of promoting negotiations with the object of securing a just and lasting peace."

Interminable trench warfare, the submarine blockade, queues for food and everything else, the daily casualty lists - all these plus the constant attacks in the shops was leading to more than war weariness.

It was in this changing atmosphere that the Hargreaves case broke.

#### THE HARGREAVES STRIKE

On October 23, 1916 Leonard Hargreaves wrote the following letter to his Branch of the A.S.E., No.14:

19, Bankfield View, Halifax.

"Dear Bro.

I left Vickers Ltd. employ on Thursday last, as I had been called up for the Army, and as I had only a badge without certificate, I was bound to go into the Army, as Vickers held my papers until it was too late to either appeal or anything else. I hope you will send all particulars to the above address, my number in the branch was one hundred and fourteen. Hoping you will make enquiries at Vickers, and see that there are no more of our members who get served like myself for I know quite well there are scores who have badges without certificates, I have joined the A.S.C. (mechanical transport).

Yours truly,  
Leonard Hargreaves

P.S. I enclose Insurance Card. Will you kindly let me know how I stand now I have joined His Majesty's forces."

This letter was immediately reported to the District Committee and to the Shop Committees throughout the city. The normal Trade Union channels of negotiation were tried - without result. The feeling soon grew among the workers that they could not afford to let the matter go past.

On November 8 the District Committee and the shop stewards called a mass meeting, to which they also invited skilled workers of all other trades. This was a significant step forward...up to this time the shop stewards movement had been confined to the A.S.E., but now it began to spread. At the mass meeting the District Committee as such retired, since it was bound by the official Trade Union line. But since most of the D.C. members were shop stewards, there was no noticeable change in the leadership when the shop stewards took over. The meeting decided they would give the Government one week in which to return Hargreaves. if he was not returned then work would stop. Zero hour was fixed at 4 p.m. on November 15. Letters to this effect were sent to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Munitions, the War Office and the various Trade Union executives. The Government did not reply, and the unions only sent formal acknowledgements of receipt, except the Patternmakers' secretary who said: "Your six-days' ultimatum to the Government is the most foolish and short-sighted action I have ever heard of."

The day after the mass meeting delegates were sent to all the main engineering centres in the country to win support from the workers there and to get them standing by for solidarity action. This was a regular feature of all strikes in order to establish reliable channels of information free from 'security' snooping and provocative agents.

On November 14, at the last minute, Brother Harbinson, District Secretary, received the following telegram from A.S.E. headquarters:

"Wire full particulars of Leonard Hargreaves case, number of years at trade, length of membership and full military address immediately.

Edifying Peck London"

A telegram and following letter were sent, the letter

receiving the following reply:

"Dear Sir and Brother,

I have to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of your letter of the 14th November re the member Bro. Leonard Hargreaves. We are taking the matter up with the Man-power Board.

Yours faithfully,  
Robert Young, Gen. Sec."

On the afternoon of November 15, 200 shop stewards were waiting at the A.S.E. Institute, Stanley Street, ready to take whatever instructions were necessary to the factories. With them were delegates on cycles and motorcycles ready to the length and breadth of the country - to Glasgow and London, Barrow and Derby, Manchester, Coventry and Birmingham - to bring out the workers everywhere in support. In addition delegates were ready to go by train to stay in the other centres in order to maintain reliable communications. Four o'clock came and no message from the Government. The delegates departed to their various destinations. The shop stewards went off to the factories and work stopped throughout the city. The battle was joined.

Late on November 15 Brother Harbinson received the following telegram from A.S.E. headquarters:

"On representation of executives and in view of proposals submitted by Ministry for dealing with enlistment of skilled men War Office have given orders for Hargreaves to be returned to civil life and therefore stoppage of work cannot be justified or permitted. Edifying"

This was taken to the mass meeting the next morning. But meantime another telegram had been received - from Hargreaves himself - to say that he had heard nothing of release. This confirmed warnings which the shop stewards had been giving the men about the sort of promises to be expected from the Government. The reaction from the mass meeting was very precise: no Hargreaves, no work! The men demanded to see Hargreaves in the flesh before they would go back. Meanwhile throughout the country mass meetings were being called in support. The workers of Barrow-in-Furness, who had already established a shop stewards organisation, pledged themselves to come out inside twenty-four hours if the Government refused to give in.

Late in the evening of November 16 Brother Harbinson received a further telegram:

"O.H.M.S. Parliament Street.

You are instructed by executive council to post telegram sent to you with reference to Hargreaves and also this message at the institute stop council are interviewing Prime Minister at earliest possible moment on behalf of today's conference on the whole question stop if members are out these must return to work immediately.

Armitage Gavigan Edifying"

Brother Gavigan, the District President, and Armitage had slipped off to London without telling anybody. It was at this moment that Sir Robert Hadfield personally took a hand in the matter. The following day, Friday November 17, he rang up the Institute and spoke to Brother Harbinson, who tells the story thus:

"'Now, Harbinson' said Sir Robert, 'I want you to pick up Hargreaves tonight. I am bringing him to the station across London; you pick him up in Sheffield at a certain time (it would be around 9 o'clock Friday night) and on no account let him go to Halifax.'

I picked him up at Sheffield. Hargreaves was adamant that he did not want to come, but I said he must. I said I would send a telegram to his wife. We went to the back entrance of the Post Office in Pond Street, and immediately I asked for a telegram to send to Mrs Hargreaves the girl was thunderstruck. Telegrams were supposed to stop at a certain time, but they let me send one to Mrs Hargreaves! Hargreaves stayed with me at my home. Nobody saw him, and I took him along to the Bramhall Lane meeting and presented him to the workers on the platform. That was the end of the strike...they returned to work."

The effect of the strike was tremendous. In the first place it showed the men what strength came from solidarity. "It was the first time", says Brother Parsons, "we could say that in Sheffield solidarity showed itself. It was fought on principle - the principle that a skilled man should not be taken into the army. For the first time we forced the employers of Sheffield to such an extent that it was either Hargreaves coming back or no munitions from Sheffield. It was the first real victory we were able to pull off." Brother Sweeting points out that it was so speedy that there

was really no time for incidents. Brother Bill Ward  
recollects a popular poem that came out of it, beginning:

You can't take me,  
I'm in the A.S.E...."

In the second place it brought tremendous prestige to the shop stewards. The value of their organisation was clear to everybody. "Immediately Hargreaves' case was settled", says Brother Ibbotson, "the shop stewards movement was built up. It broadened out and before long embraced all craft organisations."

Thirdly, there was an immediate response by the Government. The A.S.E. executive was able to sign an agreement with the Government whereby every skilled man who volunteered for munitions work was to be issued with a Trade Card by his Trade Union, which was to serve as a certificate of exemption from call-up.

The final result was the most fundamental: it was the first mass expression of feeling against the war itself, and as such marked a considerable step forward in political consciousness. There was a dread of the army behind the whole affair, a feeling that was general throughout the city. At the various meetings the attack on the engineers was described as part of the universal attempt of capitalism to hold workers in subjection. The war was denounced as an imperialist war for robbing the workers, not a war of liberation.

#### CONSOLIDATION OF SHOP STEWARDS

The Hargreaves affair was rapidly followed by the consolidation of the Shop Stewards' movement. In January 1917, another great mass meeting was called by the shop stewards to consider the next steps to be taken, and to this meeting were invited all skilled and some semi-skilled workers - a further step forward. A unanimous decision was taken to extend the organisation to include *all* workers in the factories: skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled, men and women. There were to be four levels of organisation:

1. In every department there was to be a Workshop Committee comprising delegates elected by *all* the workers in the shop. Shop stewards were to have, if possible, the endorsement of their union, but even non-unionists were not disallowed if they had the confidence of the workers.

(In fact, this led to widespread recruiting to the union.)

2. There was to be a Works or Plant Committee, made up of representatives from each Workshop Committee.
3. A Sheffield Engineering Workers Committee to comprise representatives from all the factories in the city.
4. A National Organisation - the Sheffield Workers' Committee was visualised as part of a national movement, and in fact very shortly there was formed the National Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement.

These organisational principles were fought for in every factory. They were also embodied in a pamphlet written by J.T.Murphy, The Workers' Committee: an outline of its principles and structure. This pamphlet had what an article in No.14 of the Firth Worker described as an "unprecedented sale" (at that time, March 1918, some 25,000 had been sold):

"Copies have been ordered from all parts of the United Kingdom, and even from France, South Africa and New Zealand. That it has aroused the widespread interest of all classes is shown in the enquiries from Government Officials, Trade Union Officials, Employers' Federations and social students of all classes. Dr Addison, the Minister of Reconstruction, in his first speech on the subject at Huddersfield, referred to it as showing that the workers were preparing and erecting machinery which would be powerful enough to secure for them a voice in any proposals put forward. It has already become a classic of industrial unionism literature..."

That it was necessary to fight, not just for this organisation but also for the political and economic understanding that were its basis, was shown by an interesting incident in March 1917. On March 21 the engineers in Barrow came out on strike over the premium bonus. Brother Ibbotson tells the story:

"We had a mass meeting of shop stewards and decided to support Barrow on the premium bonus strike, but the rank and file kicked up and it came unstuck. There was a big mass meeting at Bold Street (near Staniforth Road) which decided not to support Barrow. Ten days later another mass meeting, at the Coliseum, decided to support it. By this time, however, the matter had been settled."

The trouble was that the premium bonus system was not operating in Sheffield and as a result the rank and file of the workers were not interested. It took ten days' hard work on the part of the stewards to change the minds of the workers. In a matter of weeks, however, a new issue arose that provided a very considerable education for them: the great dilution strike of May 1917.

#### THE GREAT DILUTION STRIKE

The "Treasury Agreement" of 1915 had specified that dilution was to be strictly confined to war work. In March 1917, Tweedale and Smalley's of Rochdale tried to extend it to private work: the grinding of cotton spindles. The men detailed to instruct the dilutees refused and were sacked: 400 union men walked out in protest. A month was spent in fruitless trade union negotiation. In the meantime the Government had introduced a Dilution Bill into Parliament which asked for the extension of dilution to private work and at the same time would have abolished the Trade Card (only brought in after the Hargreaves strike) and - final insult - would have left workers' exemption entirely in the hands of the military tribunals in consultation with the employers. This was the last straw. Two resolutions from No.12 Branch show the general feeling:

"This meeting of Sheffield No.12 Branch A.S.E. regards with the utmost concern the proposals made by the Prime Minister to break the clear and emphatic pledges given to the Trade Union movement by responsible Ministers of State against Industrial Conscription and his expressed intention to introduce a measure of industrial conscription and thus complete the militarisation of the nation."  
(March 9, 1917)

"That our Secretary write the Lord Mayor stating that we are strongly opposed to industrial conscription and we think we have done enough without anything further."  
(March 23, 1917)

If the Government was to be defeated, it had to be on the issue that had arisen in Rochdale. On May 3, all Rochdale came out. By May 5 there were 60,000 out in Lancashire, and on the same day the Sheffield District Committed passed a resolution calling for a strike in support. On May 6 there were mass meetings throughout the country, including Sheffield. At 4.30 p.m. on May 7 the following telegram

was received at the A.S.E. Institute, addressed to Gavigan, District President:

"Informed men threaten to stop work tonight. Their attention is called to delegate meeting recommendation that no stoppage take place of our skilled men and apprentices are fully protected. Full report will be issued by delegate meeting in a day or two.

Young Edifying"

Less than two hours later Brother Gavigan received the following telegram at his private address:

"Resolutions passed at District Committee meeting held on fifth disapproved by executive council. D.C. instructed to notify members that Society can in no way be associated with any down tools policy. Instruct members to remain at work.

Edifying"

The District Committee refused to be intimidated and the strike was on. Let the old-timers give the picture of the tremendous solidarity and confidence of the workers:

Bro. Sweeting: "I was left at the Institute to answer any telephone calls. The telephone rang and I answered. It was a member at Jonas and Colver's who asked if it was definite that the D.C. had decided all must cease work at 5 o'clock. I said it was. He said he had only enquired because they had a heat in which would not be out until after then. I knew there was a possibility of the matter being settled speedily, so I told him to carry on until the heat was done, but they would have finished at 5 o'clock otherwise. I knew that if they had finished at 5 o'clock, not only would the heat have been ruined but the furnace would have had to be rebuilt, which would have meant them being out of work much longer."

Bro. Ibbotson: "About 20,000 attended a meeting at the Skating Rink (Olympia). 5,000 copies of Solidarity were sold that day. I've never seen such a meeting."

Bro. Sweeting: "We engaged the Albert Hall and asked how much the rent would be. We were told that it depended on 'how this meeting goes'. Needless to say, the rent had to be paid!"

Bro. Sweeting: "During the dilution strike we took the members out on picket. One day I advised them all to bring

a big, thick stick with them because some of the cossacks (mounted police) had rushed us in Earl Marshall Road. I went in from that day and then went to report these cossacks to the Chief Constable, Major Hall-Dallwood. He said: 'Will you tell me, Mr Sweeting, how it is that your men went out armed yesterday?' 'Is it really necessary to have to tell you?' I asked. 'Yes.' 'Well, don't you know that the best line of defence is to be prepared to attack.' They never attacked us again after that!"

Another side of police activity was related by Bro. Harbinson - the attempt to seduce the leaders and get them to take the men back:

"The Chief Constable came along to Barnes, Burgess and myself and said we could go along to Arthur Neale's (leading Sheffield solicitor) if we wanted. We went and had a talk with them. They brought out the cigarettes and later invited us to supper. The talk finished and he (the Chief Constable) said he was sorry for the way we had been treated! I tried for a taxi, but I had to walk from Manchester Road to Firth Park at two o'clock in the morning."

No doubt there would have been no problem about getting a lift if they had agreed to take the men back. A further instance of what the men had to put up with was the case of the Government spy, told by Bro. Bill Ward:

"He posed as a conscientious objector on the run and was received as such by the lads. He was working his way up to Glasgow and asked for help. There was the signature of Arthus McManus on the note but it couldn't be checked of course. There was a shop stewards' meeting at the time and Walt Hill asked him if he'd care to be present. The man heard the full story of what we were doing that evening. Walt Hill even took him home and later gave him money before he finally went to Glasgow.

"I was later able to give Dr Chandler\* a copy of John Bull which came out two years afterwards carrying the headline: 'How I Tricked The Sheffield Reds'. The man was out of the country when the story was written."

There were compensations, however, as related in the story

\* A well-known Sheffield socialist. His brother was an engineer.

by Brother Sweeting:

"We took the police on many a ramble those days. Once we had three contingents at Stanley Street. A police sergeant asked where we were going. 'What's that to you? Come along if you want to know.'<sup>1</sup> They did. We went down Attercliffe Road and another contingent met us at Staniforth Road. We went to Vickers' gates and held a meeting there. Then to Sheffield Rolling Mills. Then we marched them back through the recreation ground, ran them down the hill and all the way back to the Institute. Following that we thanked them very much for coming with us as we had enjoyed their company very much!"

The local paper, the Sheffield Telegraph, had an article on the strike that, whatever the sarcastic tone, gives a picture of the enthusiasm, confidence and increased political awareness among the workers. It speaks of the motor-cyclist couriers:

"We had these motor cyclists round our own district last week, conveying information about the progress of the strike in other places. Some of the 'young bloods' of the movement really imagined the great day of the revolution had begun, and now the hated capitalists, and the even more intensely hated Lloyd George Government were going to be swept away by the oncoming revolution. The Russian Revolution has for the moment upset the mental balance of some of these youthful social and industrial reconstructors..."

Certainly there was a marked increase in anti-militarist propaganda. The strike could only increase the disillusionment of the workers with the aims and results of the war. Especially so when the authorities, including the Trade Union leadership, now proceeded to the most high-handed action. On May 12 there was a national meeting of shop stewards at Derby, preparatory to trying to meet the Government on the 15th. Dr Addison, Minister of Munitions, refused to meet the stewards, and the E.C. of the union refused to intercede with him. The E.C. went further. A telegram was despatched to Bro. Harbinson on May 12 which read:

"Council has suspended Sheffield District Committee and can only recognise Bro. Gavigan as District Secretary, and Executive Council instruct you to at once cease

acting as alleged District Secretary.  
Edifying"

The Sheffield Telegraph printed the telegram with the comment:

"According to a document handed to us on the authority of Mr Robt. Young, Gen. Sec, and Mr Win. Gavigan, Dist. Sec, the E.C. of the A.S.E. entirely disapprove of a 'down tools' policy and notify the members of the Society that, the delegate meeting having arrived at an agreement with the Government with regard to its members and military service, the E.C. trust the members of the A.S.E. will loyally accept the same."

The response was hardly what the E.C. expected. No.12 Branch, meeting the following Friday, May 18, proceeded to pass the following resolution:

"That this meeting of Sheffield No.12 Branch regards with displeasure the suspension of the Sheffield D.C. and demands the re-instatement of the above, and also desires to censure the E.C. for using the capitalist press to defeat the aspirations of the men in the shops."

Two other resolutions were passed, for on that same day the Government tried the strong-arm tactic of arresting eight leading shop stewards at the Derby Conference, including Burgess and Hill of Sheffield:

"That Sheffield No.12 Branch of the A.S.E. pledges itself not to return to work until Bro. Burgess and Hill are released, and any other of our brothers in other districts."

"That this Branch of the A.S.E. No.12 regrets that the E.C. has not seen fit to come to Sheffield to give us their views on the critical position, through the withdrawal of exemption cards and the question of dilution of labour in private and commercial work, and also to see that the Sheffield members should hear our delegate Bro. Lee's report, seeing that Sheffield is the centre of disaffection. Also that the E.C. shall meet the National Conference Committee with a view to meeting the Minister of Munitions, with a view to bringing this dispute to a close."

The pressure from all over the country was so strong that

that in fact was what the E.C. was compelled to do. A meeting was arranged with Dr Addison. As a result the Government promised that there would be no victimisation and that the arrested men would be released, providing the shop stewards would urge the men to return to work at once. On May 23, the charges against the eight leaders were dropped and the Dilution Bill was withdrawn. On May 24, the Sheffield engineers went back to work.

The further discussions between the A.S.E. and the Government, however, resulted in the Government insisting that the clause extending dilution to private work should still stand, and though the engineers rejected these terms in a subsequent ballot by 46,851 to 8,945, nevertheless, the men were back at work with nothing apparently settled. It looked as if the strike had failed. In fact, events showed that it had achieved a great deal. The position is summarised in the history of the engineers.\*

"The news of the rejection (at the ballot) coincided with Addison's appointment to the Ministry of Reconstruction and his replacement by Winston Churchill at the Ministry of Munitions. Churchill, seriously disturbed by the industrial unrest, was not prepared to take the same risks as his predecessor, and when he introduced the Munitions Bill, 1917, in August, the extension of dilution to private work had been quietly dropped. Nor was this the only concession won. The leaving certificate - perhaps the most hated section of the 1915 Act - was withdrawn in October, leaving the men free to change their employment at will. In addition national wage advances were to apply to non-federated as well as federated firms. Employers were required to give 21 days notice of dilution and to produce a certificate from the Ministry of Munitions to prove that it was necessary. It became an offence to victimise trade unionists following a strike and more stringent provisions were made for enforcing the restoration of pre-war trade union rights and customs. In short, the Government which had started 1917 with the aim of gaining further concessions from the engineers found that as a result of the mass movement it had itself, been forced to give ground."

\* J.B. Jefferys, The Story of the Engineers (London 1946), pp.184-5.

Wage advances in July of 3s. and in October of a further 5s., together with a 12.5% bonus (the result of the long struggle that began with the Dayworkers' Committee) also showed the effect on the Government and the employers of the mass movement - though naturally they were referred to in a resolution in No.12 Branch as 'this miserable award'.

Incidentally, Bro. Gavigan was not allowed to get away with it. We find a resolution by No.12 Branch on June 1, 1917:

"That we ask the E.C. to ask Bro. Gavigan to resign as we refuse to move a resolution for a new D.C. until he does so."

There were two further resolutions on June 15:

"That this Branch pass a vote of no confidence in Bro. Gavigan and call upon the E.C. to ask him to resign, or to come and explain their reasons to a mass meeting."

"That the Secretary write Capt. Barnsley if a man named ' . . . .', working at Messrs. Burnand of Chippinghouse Road, electricians, was granted an exemption card owing to the influence of Mr Gavigan."

In the event, Mr Gavigan spent more and more time at the seaside where his wife had taken a boarding house, and indeed soon disappeared from the scene.

#### WORKERS AGAINST WAR

The Russian Revolution of March 1917, the Convention in Leeds in June 1917 to set up Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (No.12 Branch sent two delegates) and the Russian Revolution of November 1917 - these events stiffened the tremendous anti-war feeling that was openly growing. This can be seen in the consciousness of strength shown in an example given by Bro. Bill Ward:

"The owners of the Jungle and Olympia, the biggest places for a meeting, refused bookings. We saw the Chief Constable, Major Hall-Dallwood and asked him to intercede. We told him that there would be thousands out on the streets if we didn't get the meeting. The Chief Constable said: 'You'll get your meeting' and we did!"

It can be seen in the growing anti-war feeling expressed in the workers' papers, in Solidarity, the Scottish Worker and particularly the Firth Worker which was started in June 1917.

Here is a typical poem published in No.14 of the Firth Worker:

A SUGGESTION

(to our artists)

Paint two vast heaps of mildewed human skulls  
In pyramidal shape, with top depressed,  
Two islands in a blood-red lake where hulls  
Of stately ships rust-anchored rest;  
Beyond in middle distance withered trees,  
And blasted cloisters of some abbey proud  
Through which trails, ghost-like, in the hidden breeze,  
Black sulphurous smoke in semblance of a shroud.

Upon each pyramid a monarch stand,  
Garbed in imperial robes of purple hue,  
Each gripping firm the other by the hand  
And whispering, Cousin, we have seen it through.  
In distant background let fat vultures tear  
Dead flesh from bones that seem from earth to spring,  
And let your masterpiece this title bear  
In letters deathly black - God save the King!

It was such open expressions of contempt and disgust with the war, with the Government, with society itself, and the strong current of revolutionary feeling that was fed by them that compelled the Government to take measures against the workers' press. On November 30, 1917 we find No.12 Branch protesting:

"That this Branch send a resolution strongly protesting against the new regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act relating to censorship of opinions dealing with the issues of peace and war before publication."

In July 1918, the Firth Worker was suppressed, calling forth a further resolution from No.12 Branch (July 12, 1918):

"That this Branch protests against the suppression of the Firth Worker and the coercive policy adopted by the Government re freedom of speech and the press."

A few months later, still another resolution (October 18, 1918):

"That the following resolution be forwarded to the Home

Office: 'The Sheffield 12th Branch A.S.E. protests against the suppression of The Socialist Labour Press and other Labour publications and calls on the Government to rectify this matter immediately.'

Not, of course, that such suppression damped the initiative of the workers. On the contrary it only served to rouse them more. The story of the secret press is told by Bro. Ibbotson:

"In the latter part of 1917 there was a fund of £20 to £30 from the Coliseum meetings. We decided to go in for a printing press. We were licked for type at first, but Alf Barton helped us and we got it going. We issued a few leaflets (mainly anti-war). In 1918 when I was at Hadfield's, two fellows came to my house (I was on nights at the time). The wife called me up, and they told me we must dismantle the press as the police were after it. We fetched the press away on a horse and dray, up Frederick Street, past the police station, up High Street, and finished up in a back room past the Royal Hospital and installed it there. The police were on our track for printing a leaflet and for printing the Red Flag."

The demands for an immediate peace and for friendship and support to Russia were growing. At the National Shop Stewards meeting in Manchester in December 1917, "an immediate negotiated peace" was discussed. At the Joint Conference of Shop Stewards and Amalgamation Committees early in January 1918, solidarity with the Russian Revolution was expressed and a demand was registered for the acceptance of the Russian peace proposals.

In March 1918, at a Conference held in Sheffield, the National Council of Shop Stewards discussed "Peace without annexation or indemnity" - the Russian peace proposals.

The war in fact ended with the shop stewards in Sheffield on top of their form. Their spirit is admirably expressed in two resolutions passed by No.12 Branch, four days after the Armistice was signed, resolutions which express the dual struggle of the working people during these years: against war and against exploitation.

"That we request the D.C. and the E.C. to get in communication with all societies engaged in the engineering trade, with a view to an immediate demand for a 6-hour day, with no reduction in wages and the total abolition of payment by results."

"That we instruct our Secretary to write the Prime Minister and Mr Anderson demanding that we immediately withdraw all troops from Russian territory."

## OUR HISTORY

### TITLES AVAILABLE

No. 24	The Lancashire Cotton Famine (Stanley Broadbridge)	20p
No. 26/		
27	Tom Mann and his Times	25p
No. 35	Slave Society-Some Problems (R.Browning)	20p
No. 36/		
37	Prints of the Labour Movement (illustrated)	25p
No. 42	Class and Ideology in Bath, 1800-50 (R. Neale)	20p
No. 43	The Easter Rising as History (C. Desmond Greaves)	20p
No. 44/		
45	History and Social Structure on the East African Plateau	25p
No. 46	A Contemporary View of the Napoleonic Wars (Frida Knight)	20p
No. 47	The Second Reform Bill	20p
No. 48	Alexander MacDonal and the Miners (Raymond Challinor)	20p
No. 52	German Imperialism and its Influence in Great Britain 1939-45 (Andrew Rothstein)	20p
No. 54	Nations of Britain since the Industrial Revolution (Alf Jenkin)	20p
No. 56	Europe's 17th Century Crisis (David Parker)	25p
No. 58	Kilsyth Miners in the 1926 General Strike (Paul and Carol Carter)	20p
No. 59	The Social Democratic Federation and The Boer War (Bill Baker)	20p
No. 60	Time & Motion Strike Manchester 1934-7 (Mick Jenkins)	25p
No. 61	Middle-Class Opinion and the 1889 Dock Strike (Gillian Cronje)	25p
No. 62	1945-Year of Victory (George Barnsby)	25p
No. 63	The Origins of Capitalism by A. Chistozvonov	30p

### BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Lionel Munby and Ernst Wangermann (ed), Marxism and History Lawrence & Wishart 1967	75p
History Group, Bibliography of the British Labour Movement (revised 1968 edition)	20p
RED INTERNATIONAL OF LABOUR UNIONS AND THE NATIONAL MINORITY MOVEMENT: list of publications in Britain	25p
NATIONAL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS COMMITTEE MOVE- MENT AND THE NATIONAL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS MOVEMENT: list of publications	20p

*POSTAGE: 8p a single copy, add 3p for each additional copy.*

*ALL CORRESPONDENCE:*

*Secretary,  
History Group,  
CPGB,  
16 King Street,  
LONDON WC2E 8HY*