

HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL

M E M O

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The Blockade of Britain - Decisive for British Democracy

The Steel "Strike" - not a strike but an insurrection - is a major threat to democracy and the chances of a Conservative government restoring the country to economic viability. I say "insurrection", because the conflict is not basically a withholding of labour in order to gain extra pay. It is an attempt by various unions, by means of blockade against steel users, to usurp government prerogatives by forcing the government to change economic policy, i.e. use of taxpayers' money, using basically intimidation - lawful and unlawful.

For the employees of BSC could strike from now to doomsday without hurting us very much; indeed we might gain as a result. The strike is called a strike, but has in fact been transformed into a blockade, the Blockade of Britain, in which the BSC assault groups are materially assisted by Rail unions and transport workers (i.e. lorry drivers and dockers.) and foreign unions.

The Communist Party is playing an important role in this, through its strong position in the lorry drivers and dock section of the TGWU, its central coordinating function, its strong foreign links.

If the government concedes (however the concession is wrapped up and presented) this will be a considerable victory for the militants. It will indicate that the government can be forced into departures from its strategy by blockades, that the TUC Economic Committee and Communist Party Industrial Committee - insofar as they are distinguishable - can succeed where the Labour Parliamentary Party cannot. This also has implications for the balance of power between right and left in and around the Labour Party.

This holds good irrespective of the wisdom of BSC's having drifted into the strike in the first place, of the government's wisdom in letting them drift into it - viz. the KJ thesis of "non-intervention" instead of planned disengagement - and of the extent to which the sequence was foreseen or planned by any of the participants on the other side (e.g. King Street).

The question, therefore, is not: Can we win?, but: Can we lose and survive. Unless you hold that the present Prior legislation as projected can make all the difference in subsequent blockades - or can be amended to do so during the Bill's present time-table - defeat over steel would mean repeat performances over any other issue that the militants chose: BL, BSh., Post Office.

It seems to me that this conflict is more winnable for us than most of the alternative battlegrounds that might have been chosen or drifted into.

- * It does not directly inconvenience the public. (Even were tinplate shortage to affect supplies of Kit-e-Kat and mushy peas, substitute sources could be found which would be hard to "black".)
- * It will substantially affect the nationalised dynosaurs - BL, BSh. - more than the efficient steel-users.
- * It will overwhelmingly affect the unionised sector of industry; the small men with a lower degree of unionisation will manage somehow.

This provides an opportunity to create substantial inter-union dissent and pressures. The very egoism of organised labour can be used as a weapon against union-solidarity based on false class-war premises.

But this will not happen of itself. We need "operation Jason". First, the case for not paying the Steel "workers" more, based on the consideration that they are taking it out of the pockets of lower-paid workers, OAP's, etc. must be made ad nauseam from every source.

Secondly, workers in the steel-using industries must be encouraged to realise in advance that they will be hurt - no overtime, lay-offs, even closures - and thereby moved to shout before they are hurt. To this end we must mobilise all business and management organisations, including chambers of commerce and trade associations, to activate their members, many of whom have good relations with their labour-force and in some cases with local union officials and representatives, to help bring it home and catalyse responses.

No llorà, no mama.

In particular, we must put the squeeze on Moss Evans and Len Murray, both of whom are at present acting wholly on behalf of the steel unions though this is against the direct, perceived or perceivable interests of many more of their dues-paying members, who will pay twice for keeping Bill Sirs (interested in his dues, and pecking order in TUC and Labour Party) and "his" men in the style to which they have become accustomed. They will be paying once through taxes and higher prices; and again through pay-packets and jobs. The TGWU with its large industrial section, some of whose national officers are non-militant and "economic-minded", is the key.

This squeeze on the unions will take time and will have to overcome initial inertia among management and business organisations, which are not accustomed to this sort of thing. But they will have to learn, following which they will take to it. It could show first effects within a week or so.

There is a good deal of resentment among trade union professionals about the way the left - which includes Murray, Evans and Kitson - throw their weight about. But it needs a catalyst.