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Havelock Wilson Exposed

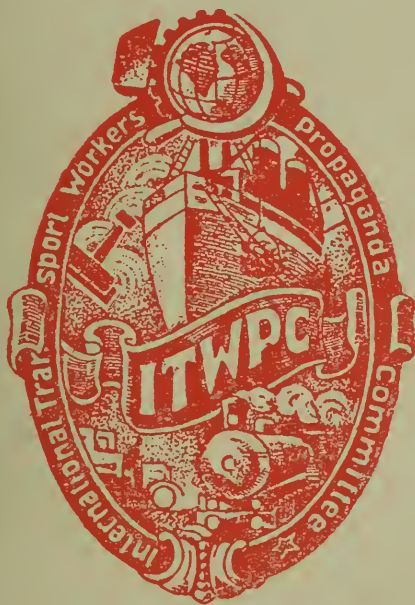


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Havelock Wilson Exposed

by

G. ATCHKANOV



Price - One Penny

Published by the Seamen's Section of Transport Workers' Minority Movement for The International Propaganda Committee of Transport Workers, 38 Great Ormond Street, London, WC1

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**Havelock Wilson
Exposed**



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Havelock Wilson Exposed

SEAMEN, struggling with the elements on the high seas, perspiring in the stuffy stokeholds, bitten by frosty winds in the polar regions, far away from their kith and kin, truly earn their "crust of bread" by the sweat of their brows.

Detached from life on shore, and scattered in small units on different vessels, they have no opportunity to gather in masses and discuss their grievances as other workers do.

This accounts for the fact that the seamen are less organised than the workers in other branches of industry. At the same time seamen, owing to the peculiar circumstances of sea life, with its constant peril and danger, become consolidated aboard their ship and a solid body in times of conflict.

Seamen—particularly those who do not care to cringe before their masters—are frequently dumped in foreign ports. The pressure of need forces them to sign on board vessels of any nationality.

Seamen, as true proletarians, have indeed no fatherland. Their circumstances prevent them developing an organisation like those on shore.

REACTIONARY LEADERSHIP

Their lack of organisation and cohesion—scattered as they are among different ships—is taken advantage of by reactionary leaders and union officials to further their personal interests.

These officials exercise dictatorial powers over the members of their union; only to betray them to please the ship-owners, and retain their positions.

Witness the case of Capt. Gingleti, the former Secretary of the Italian Seamen's Union. For eleven years he deliberately refrained from calling a conference of his union lest a conference might remove him from his job.

His case does not stand alone. The leaders of the Seamen's Union of Marseilles, under the rule of Rivelli, agreed

to the abolition of the 8-hour day—out of “patriotic consideration” for the shipowners.

Many similar cases could be cited. But no one has yet carried on such a reactionary and treacherous policy towards seamen as has for years been done by Havelock Wilson.

During the early years of the National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union the shipowners used to brand Havelock Wilson as a “trouble maker” and “rebel.” During the world war however he became the faithful servant of the imperialists, and of the Allied shipowners in particular.

SEAMEN’S HUGE DEATH ROLL

In order to speed the victory of the Allies, the imperialists agreed to considerable concessions to the seamen in the matter of wages and bonuses. Hunger drove the seamen to risk going to sea notwithstanding the almost certain danger of death.

We have no precise figures of the losses sustained by the merchant marine during the war. Neither the War Cabinet of Great Britain nor Lloyd’s Register published such figures. We, therefore have to satisfy ourselves with an approximate calculation of these losses. Their stupendous extent and their increase over normal years indicate the part played by submarine and other warfare.

According to data supplied by the War Cabinet, the comparative losses were as follows :

Years	LOSSES	
	The World	Great Britain
1914	681,363 tons	— tons
1915	1,724,720 „	1,102,479 „
1916	2,797,866 „	1,497,848 „
1917	6,623,623 „	4,009,537 „
1918		
(until November)	3,228,696 „	1,942,714 „

On the basis of these data the Labour Bureau of the League of Nations arrived at the conclusion that owing to the war the world’s tonnage was reduced by 13,000,000 tons during the period of 1914—18.

As may be seen from the foregoing table, Great Britain’s losses amounted to 60 per cent.

The crews of the vessels lost comprised at least 60,000 to 70,000 seamen. Assuming that only 50 per cent. of them

perished, we get the huge death roll of 30,000 to 35,000 seamen. The proportion for Great Britain would be from 15,000 to 17,000 seamen.

Havelock Wilson not only gave his benediction to the service of seamen in the interest of the Allies, but also exerted all his influence and power to send fresh hundreds and thousands of seamen to a possible doom.

Thousands of widows and orphans of seamen, sent to the bottom by submarines, have been left destitute, while the capitalists at the same time still share the fat dividends earned during the war. British shipowners received £104,000,000 sterling in compensation for sunken boats whose real value was £51,000,000.

SHIPOWNER'S WAR PROFITS

An idea of the British shipowners' war profits may be gained from the increase in freight charges.

During the war years freights were increased in some cases by more than 2,000 per cent. The charges for carrying one ton of coal from Cardiff to Port Said were (in shillings):—

1913	...	...	...	...	...	7
1914	...	...	...	...	...	21
1915	...	...	...	...	...	68
1916	...	...	...	...	...	80
1917	...	...	...	...	...	120
1918	...	...	...	...	...	60
1920	...	...	...	...	...	15
1921	...	...	...	...	...	14

The charges for carrying 100 lbs. of cotton from New Orleans to Liverpool (in cents) were):—

1913	...	...	...	...	...	31
1914	...	...	...	...	...	100
1917	...	...	...	...	...	625
1918	...	...	...	...	...	—
1919	...	...	...	...	...	150
1920	...	...	...	...	...	115

(Enquiry on Production, 1923, pp. 823-827.)

The immense profit made by shipping during the war is indicated also by the whirlwind growth of ship values. Below is a table of the value of a freight-steamer of 7,500 tons in the British market at different periods:—

					£
1913	...	...	...	...	48,000
1914	...	...	...	...	42,000
1915	...	...	...	...	60,000
1916	...	...	...	...	187,500
1917	...	...	...	...	165,000
1918	...	...	...	...	180,000
1919	...	...	...	...	232,000
1920	...	...	...	...	258,000
1921	...	...	...	...	60,000
1922	...	...	...	..	63,000

WILSON'S "INTERNATIONAL"

In the interests of the Allied imperialists and in order to sow national hatred among seamen during the war, Havelock Wilson organised in 1917, the International Seamen's Federation. The purpose of this step was to debar German and Austrian Seamen from serving on British or Allied ships.

The International Federation did not exist very long. The first to quit it were the seamen's unions of the Scandinavian countries. In 1922 it was deserted by the French Seamen's Union, headed by Rivelli. The cause for this withdrawal was Wilson's refusal to support the strike of the French seamen.

Wilson's Federation was also deserted by the Italian Seamen's Union, led by Giulitti. Subsequently the founder of the Federation, Wilson himself, joined the International Transport Workers' Federation together with his union, but in 1926 seceded.

Thus the Wilsonian International Seamen's Federation has actually ceased to exist, and of its existence we may learn only from the letter-heads of the Furuseth Seamen's Unions of America, which states that it is affiliated to the International Seamen's Federation.

WAR-TIME INCREASES

Without the help of the merchant marine—carrying troops, ammunition and supplies—it was impossible to organise victory over Germany. For this reason the imperialists did not grudge increases in seamen's wages, which in the first place affected the British seamen.

The cost of living was rising, and to prevent conflicts and strikes in such an essential service, the capitalists did not grudge money. Wages of British sailors and firemen increased by 100 per cent. during the war.

The shipowners however had made much more. They never reaped such huge profits as they did during this war.

Havelock Wilson, like a weather-cock, swerved around and adjusted himself to the imperialist wind, having in his hands the apparatus of the Union and the whole army of the Union's officials.

From a leader of the seamen he became transformed into a flunkey of the imperialists, and the further they went the more he cringed before his imperialist masters and the shipowners.

WILSON REDUCES SEAMEN'S WAGES

But the war came to an end.

Instead of using his influence, as the leader of the Seamen's Union, to retain the wage increase gained and to make provision for the families of the seamen who had perished, Havelock Wilson completely abandoned the interests of the seamen for those of the capitalists.

Preaching the gospel of class collaboration, he has given way to the British shipowners at every point and upon every question—consistently acting against the seamen, the members of his Union.

Upon the demand of the shipowners in 1921, he agreed to a reduction in wages for the members of his Union.

In 1922, again meeting the wishes of the shipowners, he allowed the wages of able seamen to be reduced by £2, and those of other categories by 20 to 25 per cent.

The seamen went on strike; whereupon Havelock Wilson addressed an appeal to their wives and children, urging them to persuade their husbands and fathers to call off the strike, because, as he said, "It would entail the greatest suffering to the wives and children."

Havelock Wilson's conduct in this case can only be compared with the exploits of the tzarist agents in the Russian pre-revolutionary Labour movement, such as the general Zubatov, the priest Gapon, and the agent-provocateur, Shayevitch.

The end of the war meant a slump in marine transportation, and a reduction of maritime freights.

During the war and immediately after, according to "Lloyd's Register," sea transportation increased to 64,641 million tons per annum as compared with 43,693 million tons before the war.

CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE AGAINST SEAMEN

The sudden shrinkage in freights after 1919 caused the

shipowners to lay off 30 per cent. of their tonnage. This caused, on the one hand, unemployment among the seamen, and on the other hand, a capitalist offensive on wages and working hours all along the front.

The capitalists were favoured not only by the considerable unemployment among the seamen, but also by the treacherous activity of the seamen's reactionary leaders.

In the foremost ranks of these was Havelock Wilson—accepted by the shipowners as their very best friend, and anxious to anticipate all their wishes.

Wilson, while opposing vigorously the members of his own Union when they were on strike, took quite a different attitude during the strike of German seamen in British ports in 1924.

At first sight it appeared to many as though he had become a real internationalist and an adherent of the united front of the seamen. But what was the real cause of this "radicalism"?

Wilson, faithful flunkey of the British shipowners, supported the German seamen against the German shipowners, because the latter had again become the rivals of the British shipowners.

After having organised in 1917 an International Seamen's Federation against the German seamen, he supported the German seamen on strike in 1924, guided again not by proletarian solidarity, but by servility to the British shipowners.

WILSON—ALLY OF SHIPOWNERS

Being a member and one of the chairmen of the National Maritime Board, Havelock Wilson not only did not counteract the shipowners' offensive but he was even an initiator in the reduction of the seamen's wages as from August 1st, 1925.

To this he testifies himself in his statement to the shipowners at a meeting of the National Maritime Board. In the verbatim report of that meeting we find Wilson making the following utterances:—

"Last year you were good enough to give us an advance of £1 a month. Now we come—and having taken into consideration what you did last year—we have come to say to you this morning 'We will give up that £1 at once'—without any argument, without any alarming statements about what is going to happen and so on. We do that; and I hope Mr. Chairman, and you Gentlemen, will recognise that in doing that we are doing a

manly thing; and certainly in the right spirit too—quite the right spirit.

“You might have come here and talked about 30s., or some other figure, but it is better for us to suggest the reduction, and when I say that is what we suggest I want you to understand that it is our offer, and we advise you strongly to accept it.

“There are many reasons why you should do so. I do hope you, gentlemen, will accept our proposal, although it may not satisfy the requirements of the trade.”

This reduction of wages for the seamen was arranged by Wilson to synchronise with the attack undertaken on the wages of miners and other workers.

As to the peaceful and amicable manner in which questions of the reductions of seamen's wages are settled by their “leaders,” we find clear information in the speech made by Mr. Cathery, the General Secretary of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union, at the annual meeting of the Union on July 23rd of last year.

According to the report of the meeting published in Wilson's organ, “The Seaman,” he said among other things:—

“For 25 long years they had always some dispute in one port or another, which meant a loss to the men of hundreds of thousands of pounds yearly in wages alone. During the past eight years they had avoided disputes, and for this reason the position of seamen would compare favourably with that of any other class of worker. Naturally we had not obtained all we wanted and this is due to the fact that for over five years we had passed through terrible industrial trials. The same conditions may obtain for some considerable time yet, but we shall not improve things by being on bad terms with our employers. There must be mutual co-operation and a give-and take policy. I had been one who always advocated the establishment of Conciliation Boards, so that employers and workmen could sit round a table and discuss their points of difference without resorting to the brutal system of strikes or lock-outs.”

SHIPPING COMPANIES' POST-WAR PROFITS

Apart from the excuses offered in the above-quoted speeches, Wilson offered further justification for the reduc-

tion of the seamen's wages by one pound on the plea that the British shipowners were suffering great losses. In the appeal, however, of the Strike Committee of the British seamen to the delegates of the Trades Union Congress at Scarborough we find the data which brand Wilson's statement as a brazen lie.

The profits of the Elder Dempster Co. for the four years ending in 1924 are shown to have comprised £1,803,165, with a reserve fund of £1,375,000.

The Cunard Co.'s profits for the last five years amounted to £1,678,883, apart from the 100 per cent. bonuses paid by the Company in 1918. The profits of this Company for the three years from 1920 to 1922 inclusive amounted to 7½ per cent., which means that after paying a bonus on each existing share, the Company, without investing new capital, paid dividends of 15 per cent.

The White Star Line, one of the most rapacious shipping companies of Great Britain, made profits from 1920 to 1924 inclusive to the tune of £5,666,410. This Company paid on an average over 10 per cent. dividends during these five years, having paid bonuses to shareholders to the extent of 400 per cent. in 1916 and 33⅓ per cent. in 1921, which means that dividends amounted to over 50 per cent. on the actual capital of the company.

Any number of such instances could be quoted.

WILSON'S MOVE AGAINST SEAMEN

Wilson appears to be no mean politician.

From the experiences of past years he could see that regardless of his seeming authority as President of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union, the masses of seamen would not agree to a reduction of wages, and, disbelieving his lies, would declare a strike against his will.

In order to forestall any possible support to the strikers, to isolate any British seamen discontented with the reduction, and to prevent any manifestation of international solidarity, he made haste, on the eve of signing the agreement with the shipowners, to apply for affiliation of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union to the I.T.F.

He took into consideration the fact that the place upon the Executive Board of the I.T.F. vacated by Robert Williams (appointed manager of the "Daily Herald") had been taken by Cramp, the notorious Right Wing leader of the N.U.R.

WILSON'S BLOW AT INTERNATIONAL UNITY

Thanks to this change the Right Wing in the I.T.F. was strengthened and the Left Wing weakened, and Wilson took advantage of this moment.

Having brought about a reduction of wages, he declared the seamen's strike to be a "wild" one, saying it was directed as much against the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union as against the reduction of wages. By joining the I.T.F. he isolated its Left Wing, and as part of the I.T.F., he claimed the support of the organisation against his enemies.

Wilson achieved his purpose. The strengthened Right Wing in the I.T.F. accepted into its midst the most reactionary of all transport organisations, the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union. A severe blow was dealt thereby to the international unity of transport workers and to the Left Wing of the I.T.F.

WILSON'S RECORD

Thus the sly fox, the reactionary of reactionaries, has to some extent achieved his aim :—

(1) He reduced the wages of British seamen by one pound; (2) he wrecked the strike of the British seamen; (3) he dealt a blow to the Left Wing of the I.T.F. and (4) he placed obstacles in the way of unity of the transport workers of all countries.

WILSON'S TREACHERY DURING GENERAL STRIKE

The culminating point of Havelock Wilson's treachery was his conduct during the General Strike in Britain.

When the General Strike was declared by the General Council of the trade unions, in spite of the fact that the "National Sailors' and Firemen's Union" was affiliated to the General Council, Havelock Wilson not only did not join the General Strike, but proved to be the spokesman of the British Conservatives in their aggression against it.

Many of the branches of his union, in response to the call of the General Council of the T.U.C. to which the union was affiliated, had joined the General Strike in line with the transport workers and railwaymen.

Almost simultaneously with the Liberal lawyer, Sir John Simon, Havelock Wilson came out against the general body of British workers. Sir John Simon declared in the House of Commons "that the General Strike was quite illegal because the unions had not given formal notice of their withdrawing

from the existing agreements. Every railwayman stopping work, therefore, would be personally responsible for any losses that may accrue as a result of the strike," and so on.

As indicated by Simon's declaration, the bourgeoisie was preparing for an attack upon the funds of the trade unions in order to render impossible the payment of strike benefits, with a view to upsetting the unanimity among the strikers and causing the strike to collapse.

Havelock Wilson took legal steps against officials of his own union. He applied in the High Court for an injunction restraining local branch secretaries of his union from aiding the strike until a ballot had been taken.

The decision of the Court was as follows :

"Mr. Justice Astbury said that the motion was made on two grounds: (1) that the defendants were acting in breach of the rules of the union; (2) that they were acting contrary to the common law.

"On the first point under the rules there could be no strike without the consent of two-thirds of the members voting in a ballot, and no ballot had been completed, so there could be, under the rules, no strike at present.

"As to the second point it was evident that the members of the union were in a position of doubt and difficulty. It was his duty to express his views of the general law, and the defendants wished that that should be done.

"In his opinion the so-called General Strike was illegal and contrary to law, and those inciting persons to it were not protected by the Trades Dispute Act, 1906. There was no trade dispute whatever alleged to exist, except in the case of the mining industry, and no trade dispute could exist between the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and the Government. The orders of the Council were, therefore, unlawful, and the defendants were acting illegally and ought to be restrained. Members of the union refusing to strike could not be deprived of their benefits. No member of the plaintiff union or of any other union could lose his benefits by refusing to obey illegal orders, and the orders of the Trades Union Council were illegal. The union was entitled to have this made known.

"Members striking would not be entitled during the continuance of the strike to receive strike pay. The funds of a trade union were held in a fiduciary capacity, and could not be legally used for, or depleted by, paying strike pay to those strikers who obeyed illegal orders. The

matter was beyond question. The defendants, in addition to defying the law, had broken the rules of their union. There must be an injunction until trial or further order in the terms of the notice of motion."

Thus Havelock Wilson succeeded in getting an injunction against the payment of strike benefits to members of his own union.

The decision of the High Court had a strong effect upon the further course of the General Strike, and helped the Right Wing leaders on the General Council, Thomas and others, to wage a more determined fight for its abandonment—finally surrendering to the Conservatives, betraying the struggle of the coalminers, and enabling the bourgeoisie to victimise whom it pleased.

An outstanding contributor to the colossal betrayal of the British working class was thus again—Havelock Wilson.

WILSON AND THE I.T.F.

One thing, however, he will never achieve, that is, regain his former influence among the British seamen.

Just prior to the betrayal of 1925 referred to earlier, he had applied (as we have noted) for affiliation of his union to the I.T.F. In 1926, before a twelvemonth had elapsed, the same Havelock Wilson withdrew his union from the I.T.F.

What had happened?

It happened that the I.T.F. during the British General Strike, had appealed to all its affiliated unions of seamen, transport workers and railwaymen to support the British strike, and to declare a boycott on the steamers that carried coal to England, as well as on the bunkering of English steamers in other ports.

Thus there came a clash. Havelock Wilson had embarked upon the betrayal of the British General Strike, and in this he was hindered by the I.T.F. boycott on ships manned by members of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union.

Havelock Wilson was not slow in drawing the practical conclusion; hence his withdrawal from the I.T.F.

WILSON'S JOB FOR LIFE

There is yet another question concerning Havelock Wilson which interests the seamen: why is he and his union still affiliated to the British Trades Union Congress? And why does not the General Council take steps in regard to Havelock Wilson?

How is it possible in "democratic Britain," and under the democratic policies of the British trade unions, that a chairman of a union should be elected for life?

For such in fact is the status of Havelock Wilson.

Since this is a matter outside the province of the General Council of the T.U.C., and for which the constitution of the union makes no provision, it is for the masses of British seamen to step in.

SUCCESS OF SEAMEN'S MINORITY MOVEMENT

There is no room among the ranks of organised workers for betrayers of the working class. They should be shown their place as the working class of Russia has done in regard to hundreds of provocateurs and traitors to the working class.

During the last year there has been a great increase in the numbers of adherents of the Minority Movement. By his reactionary and treacherous policy, Havelock Wilson has caused the revolutionary Minority Movement to make great headway among ever increasing masses of the British seamen.

The influence of the revolutionary minority among the British seamen is increasing day by day, while Wilson's influence, on the contrary, is waning.

Naturally Wilson is going to make use of all his connections among the shipowners to retain his power in the union with their aid. For this reason it is time for British seamen who are aware of their class interests to begin to think of getting rid of their bondage to this traitor—to whom the interests of the bosses is nearer to heart than those of the seamen.

British seamen, to improve their material and legal conditions, should follow the advice given by the Minority Movement and by continuous pressure on the Transport and General Workers' Union obtain admission of seamen into its ranks. Thereby, once and for all throwing overboard the reactionary and treacherous Havelock Wilson and all those of his union officials who help him in his treacherous work.

The first step towards the organising nationally and internationally is to strengthen the Seamen's Minority Movement. All seamen who believe it is absolutely necessary to reorganise along the foregoing lines should immediately become members.

The immediate demands agreed to by the rank and file of the Seamen's Section of the Minority Movement and the

programme of the Transport Section of the R.I.L.U. are as follows :—

THE IMMEDIATE DEMANDS :

- (1) Forty-eight-hour week at sea and forty-four-hour week in port.
- (2) Overtime at time and a half weekdays; double time, Sundays and holidays, whether at sea or in port.
- (3) Minimum rate of pay : firemen, £14; sailors, £12; stewards, £10, per 28-day month.
- (4) Weekly allotment notes to be allowed to dependents up to 75 per cent. of wages paid; seamen also to have the option of drawing balance of 25 per cent. in any port up to any amount due to them.
- (5) Flock beds and bedding to be supplied by ship-owners; also clean sheets, pillows, towels, together with eating utensils. Bath-houses and messrooms to be fitted up, apart from sleeping accommodations.
- (6) The right to form Ship Committees, representative of all departments, and a recognition of duly-elected representatives by Union officials and ship officers, and no victimisation.
- (7) Abolition of the P.C.5.
- (8) Free passage to home ports for all seamen left in foreign ports due to sickness. Wages to be paid in full up to the arrival in home ports.
- (9) Shipowners to subscribe to a Central Fund, from which all seamen can claim a pension on showing 25 years' discharge.
- (10) Wages to commence and finish from day of signing to day of paying-off.
- (11) Tobacco and cigarettes to be supplied to crew at cost price out of bond, plus insurance.
- (12) Abolition of the present Board of Trade scale of provisions.

The demands of the Seamen's Section of the International Transport Workers of the R.I.L.U. are put forward as the ultimate programme of an International Seamen's Union :

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME :

- (a) Internationalisation of wage scales for all ratings.

- (b) Standardisation of working hours : 48 hours to constitute a maximum working week with 44 hours in port and 36 hours for trimmers and firemen and engine room staffs.
- (c) Internationalisation of Manning Scales.
- (d) Standardisation of working conditions.
- (e) Abolition of all penalties for leaving ships in foreign ports.
- (f) The right to terminate employment in any port, foreign or otherwise, with payment in full up to time of termination.
- (g) Free passage to home ports for all seamen left in foreign ports due to sickness and wages to be paid in full **up to the time of arrival at the home port.**
- (h) International regulation of safety appliances on board ship.
- (i) International recognition of Ship's Committees, representative of all departments, and their duly elected representatives by ship's officers.

G. ATCHKANOV.

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