

The March

The story of the historic Scottish hunger march

Harry McShane

Introduction

Originally published in 1933 by the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) this story relates events seventy years ago. Massive numbers of people were out of work in those days, with attendant poverty and misery.

Readers of Three Days That Shook Edinburgh will themselves feel angry that so little has been done by the labour movement to organise and fight back against the ravages of unemployment in the present situation. The daily growing number of unemployed are not involved in organising contemporary protest marches to any great degree, and compared to the efforts, the imagination and the organisation of the NUWM in the thirties they are puny affairs.

In a situation where more than ten people are chasing every vacancy; where more than a million workers have been unemployed for more than a year; when the majority of school leavers can't find a job, and in many cases are not entitled to any benefits; and finally, when most men and women over fifty can be taken off the unemployment register to reduce the total, and they realise that they may never work again - has the time not come when we must raise the fundamental question of the very existence of the capitalist system?

Long before labour leaders became respectable, they discussed and organised on street corners and, as this pamphlet shows, fought for decent living conditions in the midst of mass unemployment. The pioneers of the working class unions did have a dream - it was called Socialism. In a world where what is on offer is only booms and slumps with the occasional war thrown in, there must be a better way.

In 1983, when he was ninety years old, Harry McShane was interviewed by the magazine Socialist Review, and had this to say:

"Last night on television Michael Foot was talking about unemployment, that it would be with us for a long time to come. For the first time he was admitting that unemployment is a permanent feature under capitalism. He had no solution to offer, and he said "we can't raise people's hopes". We have to make propaganda and say clearly there can be no solution to the problem of unemployment under capitalism. We have to argue that alongside the fight to improve the conditions of the unemployed we must fight all the time to change the system. That is the only solution..."

Les Foster

On Friday, 9th June 1938, along the main roads leading to Edinburgh, columns of men were marching; men with bands, banners, slogans, everyone equipped with knapsack and blanket, their field cookers on ahead: an army in miniature, an unemployed army, the Hunger Marchers.

In the ranks were men of all political opinions—Labour men, Communists, ILP; there were Trade Unionists and non-Unionists; there were even sections of women marchers—all marching four abreast, shoulder to shoulder, keeping step, surging along rhythmically.

Here was the United Front of the workers, one of the first fronts of the drive for Unity now being made in all parts of Britain.

Youth

An outstanding feature of the March was the predominant part played in it by the young workers. At least 50 per cent of the Marchers could be classified as young workers. Their discipline, courage and determination were of the very highest order and showed how the Youth can assist to a tremendous degree the fight of the Unemployed.

This March, with its strong Youth representation, is a living refutation of the pessimists who assert that the young workers are not interested in the struggle. It drives home the necessity of the most careful and extensive preparations being made so that in every area and locality the young workers will be drawn into the general mass activity. It reinforces a thousand times the urgent necessity of building strong Youth sections of the Unemployed Movement.

Why They Marched

The marchers were going to Edinburgh, endeavouring to secure an interview with Sir G Collins, Secretary of State for Scotland. They proposed to lay before him the steadily worsening conditions of the unemployed masses of Scotland, to demand increased relief for semi-starving men, women and children, and to put certain carefully thought out proposals for work schemes which would help to give employment to tens of thousands of the unemployed army; to demand the ending of the embargo on Russian goods which was preventing employment for 60,000 Engineering workers (including many in Scotland) because of stoppage of Soviet orders. They marched for work, for bread, and for maintenance of all unemployed.

The marching unemployed were the delegates, the representatives of their four hundred thousand unemployed comrades at home. Every trade, every industry, was present. The workers of Scotland stood behind the Marchers, stood behind their demands for work and maintenance, stood behind their Hunger 'Trek to Edinburgh.

Our Demands

- (1) Abolition of the Means Test.
- (2) That children of unemployed be granted 1s 6d per week extra, and that adult unemployed and adult dependants be granted 3s per week extra. These increases to apply to all unemployed whether in receipt of statutory or transitional payments or in receipt of Public Assistance.
- (3) That rents be reduced 25 per cent.
- (4) That the Social Service Schemes and all voluntary labour connected with the same be repudiated. In addition, the lifting of the Embargo on the Soviet Union and conclusion of a new Trade Agreement.



The Hunger March of June 1933, was a coping stone to a whole series of mass activities which had swept Scotland. In Glasgow, in Renfrewshire, in Fifeshire, Lanarkshire, Dumbartonshire, even in far north Aberdeen and Fraserburgh, the mass movement of the unemployed had developed. Despite sneers, insults, batonings, jailings, the agitation had developed, thousands of meetings held, incessant delegations and deputising, huge popular petitions containing the demands of the unemployed organised, mass demonstrations held. Clashes with the police were frequent (in Glasgow, due to plain clothes policemen provocation, a fierce fight took place on Glasgow Green and fourteen policemen were injured). A tremendous petition, containing the signatures of over 112,000 people was organised, a concession of 1s 6d per child literally torn out of the Glasgow PAC¹ by mass pressure—only to have the National Government² step in, in order to prevent a workers' victory in Glasgow.

In Fife, in Dumbartonshire, even in Ayrshire, the workers forced concessions.

County Hunger Marches in Fife, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, were organised. They were very successful. More and more workers were being brought into the struggle; hope was being given to the faint-hearted and the lukewarm. The struggle against the means Test, the Dole Cuts, the Anomalies Act was intensifying. The stage was set for an all-Scottish Hunger March to raise the fight to a still greater height. The famous Hunger March in June was the result.

Not an isolated event, not a stunt, but the logical development, the coping stone, of the mass local activities throughout the winter and spring.

The preparations for the March were more thorough and wide-spread than anything hitherto. Not simply to organise contingents of marchers, but to organise a mass working-class support for the March contingents, to bring factory workers, Trade Union branches, Co-operatives, Trades Councils into the March, to get active support in popularising the Demands.

Hunger Marchers' Councils were organised in the areas composed of delegates from as many working-class organisations as possible; hundreds of March Recruiting Meetings were held; Trade Union Branches circularised, and in some cases visited; public correspondence initiated with Sir Godfrey Collins and with Town Councils and Trades Councils on the main routes to Edinburgh; resolutions passed from a very large number of Trade Union branches and from meetings, demanding that Collins be present; Town Councils and Councillors deputised; a regular series of propagandist and agitational activities which had a tremendous result in focusing attention on the March and in breaking down the former isolation



modation guaranteed, not a single contingent entertained the slightest doubt that it would be secured. They knew that the pressure of the masses was something that no Town Council nor bureaucratic Provost could long stand against.

In Glasgow there was a tremendous send-off; thousands of people gathered at George Square; and as the March started—headed by Comrades McGovern; Heenan of the ILP; Aitken Ferguson, Communist Party; Henderson, Glasgow Organiser of the NUWM; and Harry McShane, Scottish Organiser of the NUWM and the March—there was a great send-off. All the road out to Bishopbriggs a huge demonstration accompanied the Marchers, then lined the roadside, and cheered the March contingent as it set off on its first lap (Kilsyth).

The first barrier surmounted

In this town the Provost and the Labour Town Council had refused any assistance whatever. "No use the Marchers coming here"; "Notting could be done"; "Nobody wanted them"; etc. But what a reception at Kilsyth! The entire town, almost without exception, turned out to greet the Marchers. The Town Council meeting scheduled for that night was hastily abandoned, and the Councillors and Provost disappeared. Quarters were found for the men in the Salvation Army headquarters; a gigantic meeting was held in the Park by comrades McGovern, Heenan, McShane, Ferguson; a unanimous vote of support for the Marchers was given.

The townspeople were ours—no doubt, hesitation or dubiety about where they stood in relation to the March. They, like the overwhelming mass of the workers everywhere the March touched, solidly supported the Hunger Marchers.

This story of Kilsyth is the experience of every contingent—barriers erected by the enemies, crumbling before the surge of working-class mass pressure aroused by the very appearance of the Marchers.

All along the route, in every town and village, in almost every cottage the workers came out to welcome the marching unemployed. Coppers, which could ill be spared, clinked into the boxes; women with tears in their eyes, wishing the men "good luck" and dropping their contributions into the collecting tins.

No hair-splitting arguments among the masses, no asking themselves whether the Right Honourable Ceo. Lansbury MP³ had given the March his pontifical blessing or not, no question as to whether Mr Citrine⁴ or the TUC endorsed or did not endorse the March.



of the unemployed from the employed and trade union workers.

All this time the recruiting for the March contingents was going on, the Field Kitchens were prepared, money and foodstuffs collected—a significant feature, indicating the progress made in breaking down isolation, was the very fine response from Trade Union branches and Co-operatives in sending donations and passing resolutions demanding that Collins come to Edinburgh. The Recruiting Form, as follows, enabled the best type of Marchers to be recruited, and prevented our enemies saying that anyone was misled.

SCOTTISH HUNGER MARCH

Declaration Form

May, 1933.

I

Name

Address

promise that while on the March I will observe strict discipline, as I realise that unless discipline is observed the greatest dangers will arise for the marchers.

I also undertake to stay in Edinburgh until the main body of marchers leave. I have been informed that there are no guarantees about returning on any particular day. I come on the march with that understanding, and will observe the agreement.

I understand the significance of this march and fully support the demands to the Government.

Signed.....

NOTE—No one can be allowed on the march who has not filled in this form.

The concentration against the march

Never at any time has there been such concentration against any March as against this. Capitalist Town councils, Labour leaders, Trades Union bureaucrats, with the Press, Police and Sir Godfrey Collins joining in, all united in an unholy alliance denouncing the March, refusing any assistance, trying to intimidate the workers with their refusal to grant either recognition, food or accommodation. All along the routes, at the suggested stopping places—Kilsyth, Bo'ness, Airdrie, etc.—there was an obstinate refusal to grant accommodation for the Marchers, a concentrated campaign of opposition and vilification on the part of the capitalists, the Labour and Trade Union leaders.

The situation was sharpening, the sides were becoming clearer defined. On the one hand the Unemployed Workers united with the Trade Union branches and Co-operative Guilds and factory workers organising the March; on the other the capitalist Press and Police, plus the capitalist councillors and Labour and Trade Union leaders mobilising and uniting to prevent and destroy the March.

The March Begins

Word came through on 6th June that Aberdeen and Dundee contingents had set out to link up with Fife in Kirkcaldy. The March was on! The Ayrshire contingent linked up with Lanarkshire and marched via Shotts and East Calder.

Renfrewshire and Dumbartonshire came to Glasgow and set out via Coatbridge, Airdrie, Bathgate, and Broxburn; with them marched a women's section.

The Glasgow men set out via Kilsyth and Falkirk, where they were joined by Stirlingshire, on to Bo'ness and Corstorphine.

By Friday afternoon all the contingents were under way. Along the four main highroads to Edinburgh trumped steadily the Hunger Marchers, bands playing, flags flying, cheery and determined. Not a single contingent had accom-

No! The workers realised instinctively that this was their own people who were marching, their own class, kith and kin; it was "their side", and anybody who opposed it was on the other side.

The class character of the March broke through all the flimsy arguments of the Labour and Trade Union leaders and showed, as in a lightning flash, where they stood—on the other side of the barricade.

In this pamphlet there is not one-tenth of the space required to tell of one-half of the episodes of this memorable March, of the heroism and determination that kept men plugging on with feet torn, blistered, bloody, even when their comrades and leaders wanted them to take a bus into Corstorphine; of comrade Heenan, whose feet were in a terrible condition and who wrenched his ankle six miles from Corstorphine, but who obstinately refused even to consider giving up, and kept tramping doggedly on. How can one tell of the humour, the healthy, salty humour, that refused even to consider downheartedness even when tramping along at the end of a twenty-mile march through two hours of pelting rain? How can one write of the discipline, the comradeship, the glowing loyalty of the marchers, that would have inspired a dead man!

Into Edinburgh

At 4pm, Sunday, 11th June, all the contingents reached the Central Meeting Place at Corstorphine. What a sight it was as each contingent marched in; what a cheer they got from the rest!

An especial welcome was given to the women marchers, whose spirit and determination were marvellous.

The staff work at Corstorphine was splendid. Everything worked on ball bearings. The Marchers' own Field Kitchens were in full blast, and in an incredibly short time the whole army was fed.

The whistle goes—Pheep-eep; the contingents form up; then, headed by their bands, off they go into Edinburgh—one thousand strong—in military formation and discipline.

The Edinburgh workers sent out a strong contingent to meet us and march in with us. The streets were lined all the way into Edinburgh with sympathetic workers, tremendous enthusiasm prevailing.

The result was that, seeing what was happening, the Authorities decided on a cautious policy.

We knew beforehand that we could be allowed peacefully to enter Edinburgh. Before the Glasgow contingent left, letters were sent to Sir Godfrey Collins, the Ministry of Labour, the Department of Health and the Education Department, asking them to hear a deputation on Monday 12th June. Three telegrams were received on the road—one from each Department—offering to meet a deputation on Monday at 11am at the Ministry of Labour Office, 44 Drumsheugh Gardens. We had no reply from Sir Godfrey Collins. These telegrams were the first recognition of the March; it was a breakthrough.

The marchers in Edinburgh

The marchers had now arrived at their destination, despite opposition and rumours to the effect that the March would be called off we marched to the Mound, where the formation was still maintained. About 20,000 people had assembled here. So dense was the crowd that many could not hear the speeches which were delivered. Councillor Paton gave a speech of welcome, which was replied to by McGovern, Heenan, Ferguson and McShane. The Marchers then went to the ILP Hall at Bonnington Road, where a meal was provided by the Edinburgh Reception Committee.

The first concession by the Authorities in Edinburgh was when the police agreed to lift the

ban on collections in the streets, after the Marchers had declared their intention of collecting from everyone who was prepared to assist the March.

While feeding was going on, a deputation approached the police on the question of accommodation. They came back with a report to the effect that we could have Waverley Market. The deputation had raised the question of blankets or boards being put on the stone floor. This request was refused, and the deputation turned down the offer of the Waverley Market.

The struggle had now begun! The Marchers were lined up and marched off. In reply to enquiries as to where they were going, it was stated that they were going to the police station. The suggestion was then made that we should sleep on Leith Links. We said we would sleep where we could be seen.

When the Marchers reached the Post Office, instead of going to the Police Station, they turned along Princess Street, picked a place past the Mound, took off their kits and sat down! Within a few minutes news came along that McGovern and McShane were wanted by two men in a car. Word was sent back, "We are too tired, let them come here". They came along and told us they had secured the Oddfellows Hall, which we decided to accept.

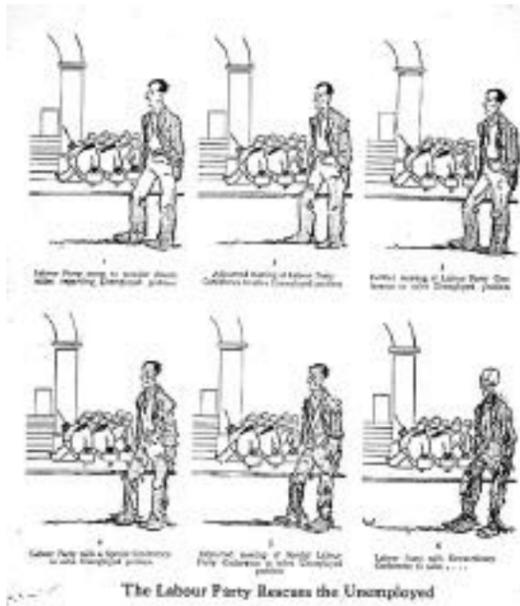
When, however, the hall was filled up, there was still a considerable number without accommodation. In order to find accommodation the Assistant Chief Constable and Aitken Ferguson went to the Melbourne Hall which is owned by the Scottish Socialist Party. The Assistant Chief Constable appealed for the hall on the grounds of humanity, and offered to pay for it, but was met with a point blank refusal. The Marchers that were left ultimately slept in the police muster rooms. It was two o'clock in the morning before all the Marchers were sheltered.

The marchers go to the Scottish Office

On Monday after breakfast (which we had at Bonnington Road) we marched to Drumsheugh Gardens where our deputation was to be heard. The Marchers sat outside while the deputation was being heard. The deputation was inside the building for two hours. It was composed of Comrades McGovern, Ross of Lanarkshire, McPherson of Fife, Harley of Greenock, Kelly of the NUR, and McShane. The deputation protested at the absence of Sir Godfrey Collins; and after much discussion, persuaded the officials to telephone through to Collins in London. He persisted in his refusal to meet the Marchers. The deputation expressed its willingness to wait in Edinburgh until he came. In the absence of Collins, the deputation proceeded to put the Marchers' demands before the permanent officials present.

The deputation

The deputation demanded the abolition of the Anomalies Act and the Means Test. They stressed the fact that women should not be compelled to go into domestic service, and that there should be an end to voluntary labour under the Social Service Schemes which, they said, was getting people to do work for nothing and the thin end of the wedge for the introduction of compulsory labour in return for Unemployment Benefit. They asked for extensive work schemes such as the construction of the Forth Road bridge and a new arterial road through Glasgow to be put in hand: all work to be paid at trade-union rates of wages and conditions. So far as the Department of Health was concerned, the deputation asked for an extension of benefits under the National Health Insurance scheme, and pressed for the removal of anomalies in the scales of relief paid in various localities. A protest was made against the interfer-



ence of the Ministry of Health last December when Glasgow Public Assistance Committee recommended an increase for children of unemployed during Christmas and New Year weeks.

In regard to education, the deputation asked for more schools and a supply of better boots and books for the children of the unemployed.

They raised the question of the treatment of the Hamilton "squatters" and stated that they should be properly housed by this time.

They also protested against the embargo on Soviet Russia, which is aggravating the unemployment problem in this country.

The deputation was told that their representations were noted and would be sent to the proper quarter. This was described by the deputation as very unsatisfactory. After further discussion, the deputation rejoined the Marchers outside.

In Parliament Square

In the meantime, while we were engaged in these activities, the cooks (in accordance with a pre-arranged plan) had removed the cooking utensils to Parliament Square. Just before two o'clock a large lorry arrived on the scene, laden with camp kitchens, dixies and canteens, large supplies of pies and other foods and trestles and boards.

The three camp-kitchens were soon belching forth large clouds of smoke. Gallons and gallons of tea were made, while boxes containing a large amount of food were unloaded. Some six or eight women assisted the Marchers' own cooks in preparing and serving the food.

The unusual sight in this historical Square attracted large crowds of passers-by, and they seemed inclined to linger to watch the proceedings; but a large body of police arrived on the scene and kept them in motion.

A striking scene

"A remarkable scene was presented when the Marchers encamped in the square in orderly lines. Within a few minutes, with packs off, they lined up in long queues at the kitchens and received tea, a sausage roll and two slices of bread, and again settled down in their places to consume their meal. Every corner of the square was



utilised, and quite a number of men sat themselves down on the steps at the west door of St. Giles Cathedral, while a score or so others, including a number of women, sat down on the step around the Buccleuch Monument. After a while, some sought shade in the far corner near the Signet Library. Some, more active, busied themselves in helping with the further distribution of tea, whilst from parts of the encampment came snatches of songs. Large numbers of the public viewed the scene, although they were not encouraged by the police to loiter. In the bright sunshine the Marchers were a colourful gathering, with red flavours very much to the fore, while the owners lay down in ranks, and the appearance of a military bivouac was enhanced when the 'flying squad' of cyclists arrived and 'stacked' machines."—Edinburgh Press

After waiting here some time, it was decided that we go to the Meadows where the men could have a rest and hear a report of the deputation.

They march through Holyrood

The Marchers' road to the Edinburgh Meadows led down that historic thoroughfare, the Royal Mile, leading to the historic Royal Palace of Holyrood.

Down go the swinging columns, down right to the gates of Holyrood. "Turn to the right", says a police official. The March leaders turn a deaf ear. "Straight On!" "Straight on" it is, right through the Palace grounds itself. The pompous official in charge at the Palace almost took an apoplectic fit. His eyes literally bulged out with mingled astonishment and horror.

In go the columns, a mile of flaming, flaunting scarlet banners, headed by the Maryhill Band playing Connolly's Rebel Song as if their lungs would burst. What a sight!!

The proletariat, the indomitable proletariat in their ragged clothes, have stepped into the most sacred precincts in all Scotland!

The walls and grounds of the Royal Palace of Holyrood—that innermost sanctuary of all the Royal parasites in Scotland's history—echo the tramp of the first legions of the masses. The walls and ground of Holyrood that heard the music of Rizzio, and Mary Queen of Scots, hear the song of that murdered Irish leader, "The Rebel Song", and then the thunderous battle cry of the world's workers, "The Internationale".

Never has Holyrood heard or witnessed anything like this. No wonder the capitalists are shocked to the marrow! Is this a herald of the approaching storm which will shatter their domination for ever? Murdered Connolly lives again; his spirit, his song, his memory inspires these Hunger Marchers as they swing through the grounds and then pass through the other gate.

On to the Meadows, where the men rested, heard a report of the deputation and a statement on the tasks now to be undertaken by Comrades McShane, McGovern and Ferguson.

It is significant that although the Marchers were able to smash the Press boycott on all other activities relating to the March, not a single capitalist Daily mentioned the March through Holyrood. Only the Daily Worker reported this event. Both during the preparations for the March then during the converging of the Marchers on Corstorphine, and finally over the historic three days and the return, the Daily Worker featured the March. We believe, however, the Holyrood Palace incident itself is sufficient commentary on the value of the workers' own Press.

Princes Street

That night another desperate attempt was made to disorganise and disperse the March. Accommodation was again refused; no hall, nothing could be found; if the Marchers cared, the Meadows were available to them.

But it didn't demoralise these Marchers. After an indignant, gigantic Protest Meeting at the Mound, another deputation returned from meet-

ing the Authorities. "Only the streets are left to us", they reported. A roar from the Marchers and the workers of Edinburgh—"All right, we'll sleep in the street; but by God, we'll pick the streets to sleep in!"

Form up! Off to—where? Direct to Princes Street directly below the flood-lit Edinburgh Castle, directly opposite the plutocratic Conservative and Liberal Clubs and the palatial hotels! The whistle goes, "Packs off! Make yourselves comfortable, boys; here's your bed for the night!"

Never in all its history has Edinburgh witnessed anything like what followed. Right along the South pavement in the most aristocratic street in Britain lay the Hunger Marchers—blankets and newspapers spread out for mattresses! The wealthy dress-suited plutocracy as they came from their clubs and banquets, goggled, absolutely goggled! Here are excerpts from the Edinburgh Press, which showed their amazement:

Press reports

"At a fairly late hour there was no sign of them dispersing, but it was a surprise to the large number of citizens remaining on Princes Street to see them spread out along the south pavement, set down their equipment, and prepare to stay there.

The spectacle was amazing. Behind the huddled marchers was the Castle, brilliantly floodlit, while on the north pavement strong forces of police patrolled and kept the crowds of bewildered theatre-goers and others on the move. Motorists stopped to survey the extraordinary scene before they were moved on, and practically all traffic—quite considerable for a time—had to use the north side of the street to avoid the equipment of the marchers.

This surprising manoeuvre suffered no interference from the police. The marchers were orderly, though several high-spirited sections were occasionally noisy.

Walking until dawn

"With banners stacked against the railings of the gardens and the last tunes played on the flute bands, some of the marchers equipped with proper sleeping bags turned in for the night, with shoes, etc., set on the kerb. Others paraded up and down amongst the sleeping forms, but after a couple of hours nearly everyone was either asleep or dozing.

The first hour or so was passed in proper camp-fire manner with, occasionally, songs and choruses, whilst remarks such as 'Let's put out the lights and go to sleep', greeted the extinguishing of the Castle floodlighting system. It was indeed the 'Lights Out', however, and the camp became quiet, patrolled at the distance of the width of the street by the police"—Edinburgh Dispatch

"Historic Princes Street has known many unusual sights, but that presented this morning when the marchers' camp, extending for over two hundred yards, from midway between Hanover and Frederick Streets to midway between Castle Street, was unique.

It had to be seen to be believed. Men and women were rising from their hard couches while citizens were passing to their work by motor car, tram and on foot.

Men shaved with their mirrors supported on the railings of West Princes Street Gardens, which were kept closed, and others washed and dried themselves at a fountain in the middle of the marchers' encampment. Policemen in twos and threes marched up and down.

One man slept in a bathing suit, with a newspaper as a mattress and a single blanket as cover. Another rose this morning and wrote a song, 'For Liberty', which he proudly showed to his leaders.

It is impossible for passers-by to walk along the area of footpath occupied by the marchers. Walking along on the carriageway one heard snatches of conversation:

'Slept well?'

'How did ye enjoy yer feather bed?'

'Did ye feel a draught coming in during the night?'



They were told promptly and straightly that there would be no such guarantee given.

The PAC bluff called

Immediately they left, the marchers formed up and set off to the PAC Office. The March was calling the bluff of Mr Douglas and the PAC. Six hundred Marchers, supported by Edinburgh workers, lined up in order to make the individual application for accommodation which Mr Douglas had boasted of being ready to receive—and the result? Complete and total collapse of the Edinburgh PAC.

A tremendous outburst of anger from the Marchers at the refusal of the PAC to do anything preceded a huge mass demonstration of Edinburgh workers who came to join the Marchers. Back to Princes Street, and then at 11pm, a terrific demonstration through the City.

Edinburgh was out to a man—roused, militant. The courage and determination of the Marchers had lit a flame of struggle among the masses of the Edinburgh workers.

Never was there such a turnout and such enthusiasm. The Marchers and workers were one, fused in a common struggle against the capitalist governors.

It was a staggering blow to the authorities—a victory thenceforth was assured. Halls were speedily secured by the workers and the Marchers were housed that night.

The final day

The next day was the question of driving home the advantages gained. The following report from the Edinburgh Evening News of 14th June explains fairly well the situation on the Wednesday morning.

"Mr McGovern MP and Mr McShane proceeded to the City Chambers in the forenoon for the purpose of making representations with regard to the position of the marchers in the city.

There was being held at the time a meeting of the Lord Provost's Committee of the Town Council, which had been specially called to consider the situation. The meeting was private, and at the close the Press representatives were informed that no statement would be made regarding the proceedings.

Mr McGovern and Mr McShane were not received by the Committee, but after the meeting, consultations took place between them and Mr Mackinnon, the Depute Chief Constable.

They left the building evidently dissatisfied with the result of their mission. Their demands were for food and accommodation for the men, or, alternatively, for free transport for the marchers to their homes.

Thanks to the citizens

Mr Aitken Ferguson, on behalf of the Marchers' Council, stated that he would like to convey his appreciation of the response which the citizens of Edinburgh had given to the appeal of the marchers, and he mentioned that plans were being considered for a much bigger march to Edinburgh in the near future.

Chalked on the causeway in Simon Square, in bold letters, was the message: 'Edinburgh Workers Solidarity Wins Scottish Hunger Marchers a Bed'—obviously an



appreciation of the local efforts made for the comfort of the marchers last night"—Edinburgh Evening News

It should be mentioned, however, that when negotiations broke down, the deputation gave the Authorities an hour to provide a meal, failing which—in view of the fact that the Public Assistance Committee had refused to accept applications for relief—we would take other steps to secure a meal. This had the effect of having the Authorities telling us to spend the £30 we had earmarked for the buses. When we said—What about the buses, then? we were told confidentially that the buses would be all right. Later a meeting of Marchers was held at which a report was given. An effigy of Sir Godfrey Collins was burnt. A further meal was provided, while a deputation went to the Ministry of Labour to raise the question of paying benefit to the Marchers for days they were on the march. No progress was made here. About 5.30 the buses arrived for the Marchers, without any guarantee being given and without any payment being made by the Marchers. The working class had broken through! A smashing victory had been obtained! At the last meeting of the Marchers in Edinburgh, when the final report was given, telegrams of support came from all quarters—Notts and Derby, Teeside, London, Glasgow. A telegram from Calton announcing reinforcements ready to leave drew a storm of cheers.

Where was the guarantee of no future Hunger March? Dropped like a hot brick in the face of the Marchers' refusal and the solidarity of the workers!

The marchers come home

And the welcome given to the returning Marchers! In Glasgow, for example, the streets were black with people waiting for the buses; meetings lasting until well after midnight were held in the presence of tremendous, cheering crowds. The very mention of Unity and the United Front invariably drew tumultuous cheers.

Edinburgh capitalists hope they have seen the last of the Hunger Marchers. Their hopes are in vain and doomed to disappointment.

Our lessons

The March has shown the tremendous militancy and feeling for Unity which exists all over Scotland. It has demonstrated deafly before the eyes of all, that while the masses of the workers are steadily coming together, the leadership and the policy of the Labour Party and Trade Unions in the main supports Capitalism.

notes

1. Public Assistance Committee—PAC's were appointed by local authorities to administer the granting of relief for the unemployed.
2. 1931, unable to deal with the economic crisis Ramsey MacDonald, the then Labour Prime Minister, dissolved the Labour Government and formed a coalition government with the Tories and Liberals—the National Government.
3. Leader of the Labour Party.
4. TUC General Secretary.
5. Being a Glaswegian McShane can be forgiven for confusing Queens Park with The Meadows. Queens Park is the name of the park beside Holyrood Palace, while The Meadows are on Edinburgh's Southside.
6. Capt JR White was an Irish Protestant, republican and socialist. He organised the Irish Citizen Army to defend strikers from attack in the 1913 Dublin lockout. This body later formed the nucleus of Connolly's Citizen Army. White fought with the Irish Republican Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, became increasingly dismayed by the manipulation of the International Brigades by the Communists and resigned his command and worked for the anarcho-syndicalist CNT.