

STRIKE MOVEMENT

(In Developed Capitalist Countries 1951-1970)

A I T U C P U B L I C A T I O N

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Information Booklet

THE STRIKE is one of the most important weapons in the hands of the working class in its battles against the bourgeoisie. The strike movement in the developed capitalist countries has, during the last 20 years, shown a remarkable upswing. The strike weapon is being increasingly used not only for winning economic demands but against the social, economic and foreign policies of the bourgeois state.

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—AITUC

I

Strike Movement

(IN DEVELOPED CAPITALIST COUNTRIES 1951-1970)

THE EVENTS in the capitalist world have fully borne out the importance of the working class as the chief and strongest opponent of the rule of the monopolies, and as a centre rallying all the anti-monopoly forces.

Working-class action in developed capitalist countries has gained a truly vast scope. In recent years it was characterised by such tendencies as expansion of the socio-economic and political demands of the working class, growth of the scale and intensity of struggle against monopolies and the bourgeois state, rise of the solidarity of the proletariat and expansion of its cooperation with other strata of working people.

MARKED GROWTH OF THE STRIKE MOVEMENT

Among the most graphic and important manifestations of the upswing of the mass working-class movement, there is the marked growth of the strike movement. Throughout the entire history of capitalism, strikes were an effective method of the struggle of the working class. And such it remains to this day. Moreover, the effectiveness of strikes has increased. With the high cost of modern equipment, even a short stoppage of work costs the enterprise owners a great deal, while the close links of all production processes on the present level of specialisation and cooperation have led to an important effect viz. the strike reaches far beyond the bounds of one or other enterprise or even factory shop where it has broken out. The effectiveness of action has increased for another reason too: the working class

has gained vast experience of struggle. This experience shows in the skilful organisation of strikes, in the unanimity and high discipline of strikers, in the diversity of strike forms, and in the flexible combining of strikes with other forms of mass action.

POLITICAL STRIKES

The working class resorts broadly to strikes not only in its economic struggle against private capital, but also as a means of struggle against the social and economic policy of the bourgeois state, as a form of protest against imperialist foreign policies.

The Tables in this article were drafted on the basis of official statistics which belittle considerably the actual scope of the strike movement. These statistics discount, as a rule, political strikes altogether and some types of economic strikes are not taken into consideration at all or are considered only in part. Nevertheless, official strike statistics provide an approximate idea of the scale and dynamics of the socio-economic struggle of the working class.

STRIKES IN CAPITALIST COUNTRIES IN 1970

As we may gather from the Tables, the late Sixties were marked by an upswing in the strike movement in practically all the main capitalist countries. In 1966-1970, the level of struggle in the **USA** was the highest for the past 20 years, its scope and intensity growing from year to year. The strikes of **British** workers in 1970 and 1971 surpassed in scope and activity the country's working-class action in the 40 years past. In December 1970 and early 1971, for the first time after the 1926 general strike, the British working class challenged the government's home-policy course by mighty strikes which several million people (not taken into account by statistics) took part in.

Extremely high is the level of strike movement in **France** and in **Italy**. The general strike of 10 million French working people in May and June 1968 was the largest working-class action in the post-war period in the capitalist world. In 1961-1965 one

out of every six industrial and office workers in France took part in strikes every year, whereas in 1966-1970 the respective proportion was one out of every four. This indicator is still higher in Italy where in the first half of the Sixties 24.3 per cent of all workers and office employees on the average went on strike every year, and in 1966-1969 their number increased to 30 per cent. Here it should be borne in mind that official Italian statistics practically did not reflect the one day general strikes in November 1968 and in February and November 1969. Twelve million working people participated in the first of these actions which took place under slogans urging important social and economic reforms, whereas the two strikes that followed were joined by 20 million people each, i.e. actually by the entire gainfully employed population of the country.

Official data considerably underestimate the scope of the economic struggle of **Japan's** working class. They consider only the strikes in which the workers fully stop work for more than 4 hours. Though the number of strikers somewhat decreased the significance of such forms as short, periodically repeated strikes of up to 4 hours and go-slow action has increased in recent years. About 7-8 million working people take part every year in the "spring offensives" of the Japanese working class, which are characterised by a diversity of mass action forms.

A bitter class struggle is going on in **other capitalist countries**, as well. In Canada and Australia the strike movement reached in recent years its all-time highest level. For the first time since the civil war of the Thirties, a mass strike movement has been spreading in Spain. Many thousand working people went on strike in Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, Ireland and New Zealand.

STRIKES IN 1971

The first months of 1971 were also marked by large-scale working people's action. From January to April, some 3.2 million people in **Britain** took part in economic and political

strikes directed against the anti-trade-union bill, while the number of strike man-days reached 12.7 million, i.e. more than, in the entire foregoing year. In **Italy**, a nation-wide strike took place on April 7 in support of democratic, social and economic reforms; 11 million working people went on strike that day. A regular "spring offensive" was launched by the working class of **Japan**. On April 15 alone a total of 1.2 million people went on strike.

Over 600 strikes took place in the **USA** in January and February 1971, in which 336,000 working people participated. They included the strikes of 15,000 workers of New York telephone companies, teachers of Chicago and Pittsburg. Some 36,000 post-office workers struck in February in **France**, and the teachers of Paris schools staged a strike in March. In January 1971, for the first time in 25 years, 15,000 employees of the **West-German** Lufthansa airlines went on strike. A long strike of 70,000 metal workers, machine-builders and miners took place in **Finland**. The strike of 47,000 government employees in **Sweden** in January 1971 was the largest labour conflict in that country after 1945. Such are but a few facts which point to the high intensity of class battles in the present capitalist world.

STRIKES OF HIRED WORKERS

Among the paramount indicators of the intensity of the strike movement, there is a share of hired workers annually taking part in strikes and the number of strike man-days per 1,000 hired workers. The former provides an idea of the relative scope of strike struggle and the latter shows its intensity. In the second half of the Sixties (see Table 3) the share of strikers increased, in addition to Italy and France, also in Australia (from 12.5 per cent to 18.5 per cent), in Canada (from 1.6 per cent to 4.8 per cent), and in the USA (from 2.4 per cent to 3.9 per cent). In the late Sixties it grew in Britain too, (from 6.6 per cent in 1961-1965 to 8.4 per cent in 1968-1970). The number of strike

man-days per 1,000 hired workers increased in France, Italy, Canada, the USA, Australia and Britain.

LEVEL OF THE STRIKE MOVEMENT

All this shows that the level of the strike movement varies in the various capitalist countries. It is determined by the traditions of the working class movement, by the ideology and political organisations of the proletariat and first and foremost, of the trade unions which directly guide the economic struggle of working people, by the tactics of the monopolies' struggle against the trade unions, by the socio-economic policy of the governments, by the specific features of each national system for regulating relations between labour and capital and, finally, by fluctuations in economic conditions. The high level of strike movement in Italy and France reflects both the acuteness of class relations and organisational role of strong Communist parties and Left-win trade-union centres — the General Italian Confederation of Labour and the General Confederation of Labour (France).

In a number of countries (Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, the FRG and some others) the strike movement level is comparatively low. This is due, in the first place, to the fact that in the post-war period the manufacturers' associations and the governments of these states have been adhering to flexible tactics of social manoeuvres. The low level of the strike movement does not mean that there is no economic struggle between labour and capital. In recent years the threat of major working class movements and even general strikes arose repeatedly in Denmark, Sweden and Norway and was averted only due to substantial concessions on the part of enterprise owners. In the FRG the trade unions of metal workers, miners, chemical workers and other strata of working people repeatedly decided to go on general strike in the given industry, struggling in this way for having their demands satisfied. In 1970 the first one-hour warning nation-wide strike in the post-war period was organised by the three principal trade-union centres of the Netherlands.

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN THE VAN

Industrial workers are, as always, in the van of class struggle. This is borne out by data on the strike movement in the basic sectors of the economy (Tables 4 and 5). They accounted for the bulk of strikers and strike man-days. By its actions the industrial working class is drawing other strata of working people into the struggle. Extensive use is made of strike by builders and transport workers, especially railwaymen and dockers. Meanwhile, such detachments of working people as trade personnel, office and bank employees, teachers and medical workers, government employees, etc. are being increasingly drawn into the strike movement. However, the general level of strikes in the non-productive sphere in all countries except Italy is lower than in industry, building construction and in transport.

DURATION OF STRIKES

Data on the average duration of strikes (Table 6), show that in most countries strikes are, as a rule, of a short duration. This is due to two reasons: in the first place, the relief drawn by striking workers (and this is issued not in all countries) covers but a part of their earnings, while the strike funds of trade unions are quite limited and do not allow for strikes of long duration. Second, though a strike involves material privations for workers, it also spells a major economic loss for the manufacturers and is fraught with an aggravation of the inner political situation.

In two countries — the USA and Canada — strikes are of longer duration, which is largely due to the “hard” tactics of powerful monopolies. The trade unions of these countries, in their turn, have built up large strike funds allowing the waging of a long struggle.

II

Tables

The following Tables were drafted on the basis of the publications of the International Labour Organisation and statistical publications of the various countries for the respective years.

The statistical material has been collected, processed and prepared for publication by Y. Borko.

(From: **“World Economy and International Relations”**,
No. 9; 1971)

Table No. 1

GENERAL INDICATORS OF STRIKE MOVEMENT*

a = number of strikes

b = number of participants (thous.)

c = number of strike man-days (thous.)

Countries		1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1969	1968	1969	1970
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
U.S.A.	a	4,547	3,647	3,592	5,069	5,045	5,700	5,600
	b	2,468	1,710	1,362	2,652	2,649	2,481	3,300
	c	32,220	32,320	27,300	44,280	49,000	42,900	62,000
Canada	a	198	245	350	558	582	595	—
	b	80	88	106	338	224	307	—
	c	1,691	1,777	1,540	5,513	5,083	7,747	7,804
Western Europe	a	6,187	6,894	8,793	8,097	7,560	10,494	—
	b	4,938	4,378	7,105	10,440	17,450	11,351	—
	c	14,006	16,401	21,441	63,600	165,000	49,556	—
Japan	a	717	865	1,311	1,449	1,546	1,783	2,749
	b	1,218	1,214	1,422	1,100	1,163	1,412	1,875
	c	6,534	5,440	4,432	2,762	2,841	3,634	4,041

Table No. 1—(Contd.)

Countries		1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1969	1968	1969	1970
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Australia	a	1,490	1,082	1,176	1,585	1,713	2,014	—
	b	445	378	419	721	720	1,235	—
	c	1,000	656	685	1,119	1,080	1,958	—
New Zealand	a	72	57	85	139	153	169	—
	b	23	15	24	36	38	44	—
	c	255	27	55	127	130	139	—
14 All economically developed countries	a	13,211	12,790	15,323	16,897	16,599	20,600	—
	b	9,182	7,783	10,435	15,297	22,244	16,840	—
	c	55,706	56,621	47,776	117,400	223,734	105,753	—

* Here and in other Tables — mean annual data for the period.

Table No. 2

STRIKE MOVEMENT IN WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

a = number of strikes

b = number of participants (thous.)

c = number of strike man-days (thous.)

Countries		1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1969	1968	1969	1970
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Austria*	b	25	34	90	37	3	17	—
	c	61	73	197	28	7	18	—
	a	1,917	2,612	2,456	2,387	2,378	3,116	3,890**
Britain	b	658	771	1,512	1,297	2,255	1,654	2,150**
	c	2,382	4,446	2,562	4,180	4,690	6,846	11,350**
	a	130	85	42	73	71	88	—
Belgium	b	138	144	22	33	29	25	—
	c	663	1,270	225	310	364	163	—
	a	176	129	272	—	—	—	—
Greece	b	74	76	126	—	—	—	—
	c	142	98	270	—	—	—	—
	a	12	46	31	27	17	48	—
Denmark	b	4	21	38	21	29	36	—
	c	8	236	521	29	34	56	—

Table No. 2—(Contd.)

Countries		1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1969	1968	1969	1970
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Ireland	a	94	54	80	113	126	134	—
	b	134	71	23	43	39	62	—
	c	292	94	363	577	406	936	—
Spain	a	—	—	186	326	309	491	—
	b	—	—	72	143	131	205	—
	c	—	—	152	305	241	560	—
16 Italy	a	1,620	1,994	3,666	3,052	3,377	3,788	4,162
	b	2,343	1,685	2,941	4,175	4,862	7,507	3,722
	c	4,974	5,581	13,017	17,513	9,240	37,825	18,276
Netherlands	a	67	72	57	17	11	28	99
	b	14	25	14	7.5	5	12	53
	c	64	148	34	14	14	22	263
Norway	a	34	18	11	6	6	4	—
	b	13	15	8	0.7	0.5	1	—
	c	83	220	105	11.5	14	22	—
FRG*	b	205	68	86	91	25	90	184
	c	1,193	707	486	173	25	249	93

Table No. 2—(Contd.)

Countries		1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1969	1968	1969	1970
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Finland	a	64	55	54	105	68	158	—
	b	20	113	38	50	27	83	—
	c	180	1,553	306	223	282	161	—
France	a	2,035	1,803	2,039	1,689	1,103†	2,207	3,033
	b	1,415	1,414	2,102	4,400	10,000†	1,450	1,074
	c	3,894	1,940	2,794	39,750	150,000	2,224	1,742
17 Sweden	a	29	17	14	17	7	32	—
	b	11	1	2	9.6	0.5	9	—
	c	275	23	14	116	1	112	—
Western Europe	a	6,187	6,894	8,793	8,097	7,560	10,494	—
	b	4,938	4,378	7,105	10,440	17,450	11,351	—
	c	14,006	16,401	31,441	63,600	165,600	49,556	—

* The number of strikes is not recorded in Austria and FRG.

** Including 2 actions of a political nature — strike of 22,000 dockers on March 17 and national day of protest on December 8 against the anti-trade-union bill when about 350,000 working people went on strike.

† Including general strike in May-June 1968, not considered by official statistics.

Table No. 3
LEVEL OF STRIKE MOVEMENT

Years	USA	Canada	Britain	Italy	France	FRG	Japan	Australia
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Share of strike participants among hired workers (%)								
1951-1955	5.0	1.5	3.2	—	11.5‡	1.3	8.1	16.8
1956-1960	3.2	1.5	3.6	14.1§	11.0	0.4	5.9	12.8
1961-1965	2.4	1.6	6.6	24.2	15.7	0.4	5.1	12.5
1966-1969	3.7	4.8	5.6	30.0	30.0	0.4	3.5	18.7
1968	3.9	3.5	9.9	33.8	68.2	0.1	3.6	18.7
1969	3.5	4.6	7.3	52.1	9.9	0.4	4.2	32.7
1970	4.7	—	7.9	—	7.3	0.8	—	—
Number of strike man-days per 1,000 hired workers								
1951-1955	653	324	115	—	314‡	77	436	377
1956-1960	628	308	209	479§	159	37	265	222
1961-1965	479	239	112	1,060	209	23	159	205
1966-1969	585	808	183	1,292	2,672	8	86	289
1968	694	795	207	642	10,226	1	87	273
1969	610	1,169	303	2,623	151	11	109	500
1970	892	1,158	489	—	18	4	—	—

‡ For 1954-1955.

§ For 1959-1960.

Table No. 4

DISTRIBUTION OF STRIKE PARTICIPANTS THROUGHOUT ECONOMIC SECTORS

a = number of participants (thous.)

b = number of strike man-days (thous.).

Countries & Period	Industry		Building Construction		Transport and Com- munication		Trade and Finance		Services	
	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b
1	2		3		4		5		6	
USA										
1956-1960	1,200	15,354	277	3,986	154	1,822	54	8,528	20.2	363
1961-1965	857	12,552	252	3,396	170	2,332	38	500	39.4	484
1966-1967	1,235	12,662	380	5,650	589	3,420	71	813	136.5	1,164
1968-1969	1,462	25,905	399	9,560	392	6,670	91	1,420	213.5	2,216
Canada										
1956-1960	52	1,028	15	257	5.8	61	1.6	34	1.1	9
1961-1965	61	919	23	274	14	166	3.4	72	2.8	60
1966-1967	119	2,223	44	636	87	954	2.4	33	62	590
1968-1969	140	4,310	49	1,133	27	491	6.1	319	37	124

Table No. 4—(Contd.)

Countries & Period	Industry		Construction Building		Transport and Com- munication		Trade and Finance		Services	
	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b
1	2		3		4		5		6	
France*										
1956-1960	903	1,379	102	185	237	283	—	85	111	—
1961-1965	1,071	1,763	110	113	643	653	—	223	165	—
1966-1967	1,626	1,932	180	185	544	600	55	47	28.5	32.5
1969	—	1,086	—	63	—	495	—	45	—	94
Italy**										
1956-1960	822	2,499	178	274	251	323	75	170	139	288
1961-1965	1,452	6,926	305	1,096	283	783	65	160	670	1,963
1966-1967	897	6,357	120	768	232	876	65	471	477	1,835
1968-1969	3,383	15,658	515	1,840	475	1,067	263	755	775	2,320

* There are no data for 1968 because that year's general strike was not recorded by official statistics.

** Data on the strike movement of farm labourers in **Italy** are as follows :

	1951-1955	1956-1960	1961-1965	1966-1967	1968-1969
Number of participants (thous.)	327	406	257	226	601
Number of strike man-days (thous.)	1,284	1,745	1,959	1,064	1,720

Table No. 4—(Contd.)

Countries & Period	Industry		Construction Building		Communication Transport and Com-		Trade and Finance		Services	
	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b
1	2		3		4		5		6	
Britain										
1956-1960	643	3,507	20	114	54	388	7	35	6	20
1961-1965	1,275	12,748	46	225	157	268	7	23	19	39
1966-1967	476	1,413	36	173	114	946	2.2	38.5	3.5	9.0
1968-1969	1,541	4,581	45	256	271	673	6.7	15.5	73	98.5
Japan										
1956-1960	830	1,042	5	14	182	411	12	59	119	200
1961-1965	1,022	5,578	25	51	281	780	9	38	81	209
1966-1967	674	1,656	14.4	27.0	206	517	5.9	11.1	18.8	44.6
1968-1969	865	2,195	21.6	27.6	332	838	14.8	30.1	47.7	108
Australia										
1956-1960	171	371	18	42	181	230	—	20	18	—
1961-1965	202	449	29	55	126	164	—	10	16	—
1966-1967	300	412	52	114	57	103	—	29.4	38.8	—
1968-1969	510	900	134	198	257	287	—	101	134	—

Table No. 5
SHARE OF STRIKERS IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF HIRED WORKERS
 (for the economic sectors : percentage)

Countries & Period	Industry	Building Construction	Transpor and Communi- cations	Trade and Finance	Services	
1	2	3	4	5	6	
USA						
1956-1960	6.8	9.5	3.8	0.4	0.3
1961-1965	4.6	8.4	4.3	0.3	0.5
1966-1967	6.2	11.7	11.6	0.4	0.5
1968-1969	7.1	11.9	9.0	0.5	0.9
Canada						
1956-1960	3.1	3.5	1.2	0.2	0.1
1961-1965	3.6	5.6	2.4	1.0	0.3
1966-1967	6.1	9.0	15.5	0.5	0.6
1968-1969	7.0	10.3	4.6	1.6	0.5
Britain						
1956-1960	6.7	0.7	1.3	0.05	0.09
1961-1965	12.6	1.5	4.0	0.05	0.2
1966-1967	5.1	2.3	7.1	0.06	0.06
1968-1969	16.9	3.1	17.3	0.2	1.3

Table No. 5—(Contd.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
France							
1956-1960	17.5	8.3	24.7	2.5	
1961-1965	20.2	8.1	73.2	8.6	
1966-1967	27.3	12.1	56.4	3.0	
Italy*							
1956-1960	18.6	10.4	18.8	5.5	
1961-1965	22.5	17.3	36.8	21.6	
1966-1967	14.8	7.2	28.0	15.4	
1968-1969	68.7	29.3	67.1	26.7	
Japan							
1956-1960	11.7	0.3	8.4	0.3	2.5
1961-1965	10.6	1.1	10.7	0.2	1.5
1966-1967	7.1	0.5	7.2	0.1	0.3
1968-1969	7.3	0.7	13.0	0.2	0.6
Australia							
1956-1960	14.5	7.6	55.0	1.7	
1961-1965	15.8	10.0	41.4	0.7	
1966-1967	20.9	15.2	34.3	2.0	
1968-1969	34.0	37.7	38.5	6.2	

* Share of strikers among agricultural workers in Italy :

1959-1966=30.2%; 1961-1965=15.6%; 1966-1967=15.8%; 1968-1969=43%.

Table No. 6
DURATION OF STRIKES

(Number of strike man-days per 1 participant)

Years	USA	Canada	Britain	Italy	France	FRG	Japan	Australia
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1951-1955	13.1	21.1	3.6	2.1	2.8	5.8	5.4	2.2
1956-1960	18.9	20.2	5.8	3.3	1.4	10.4	4.5	1.7
1961-1965	20.0	14.5	1.7	4.4	1.3	5.7	3.1	1.6
1966-1970	16.4	17.6*	4.0	4.6*	4.1	2.4	2.8*	1.6*
1968	18.1	22.7	2.1	1.9	15.0	1.0	2.4	1.5
1969	17.3	25.2	3.5	5.0	1.5	2.8	2.6	1.5
1970	18.8	—	6.2	4.9	1.6	0.5	2.2	—

* 1966-1969.

III

Charts

Chart I.

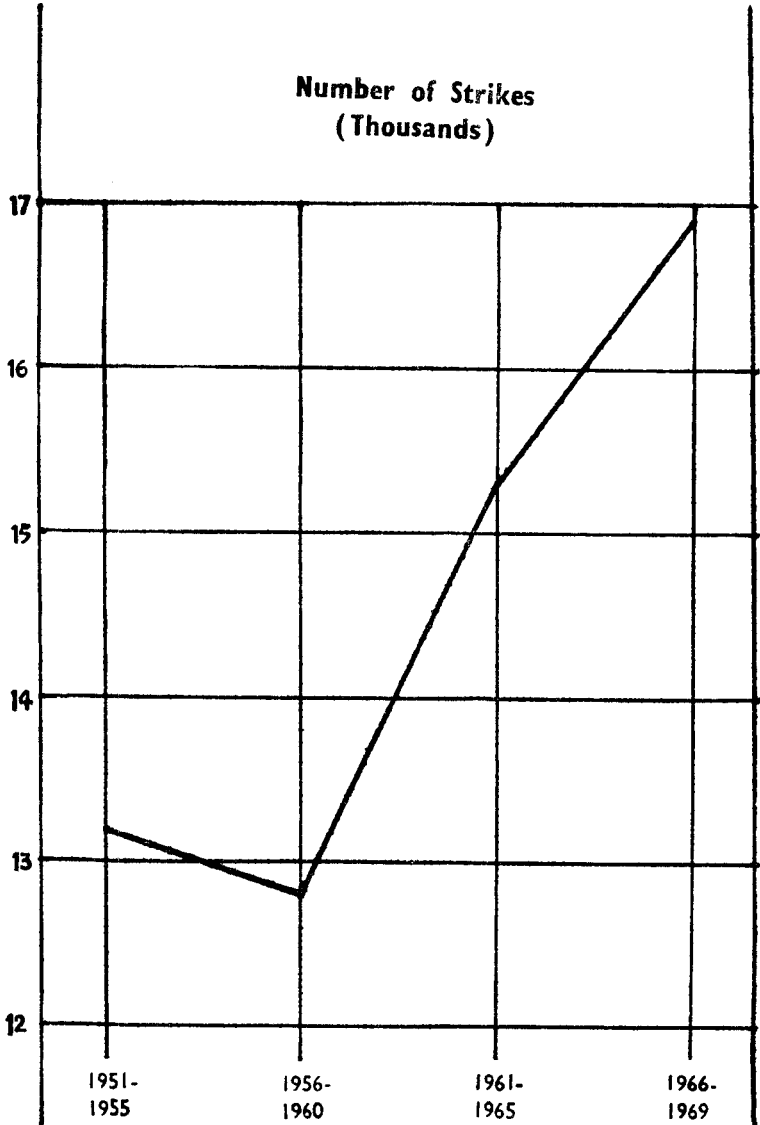


Chart II.

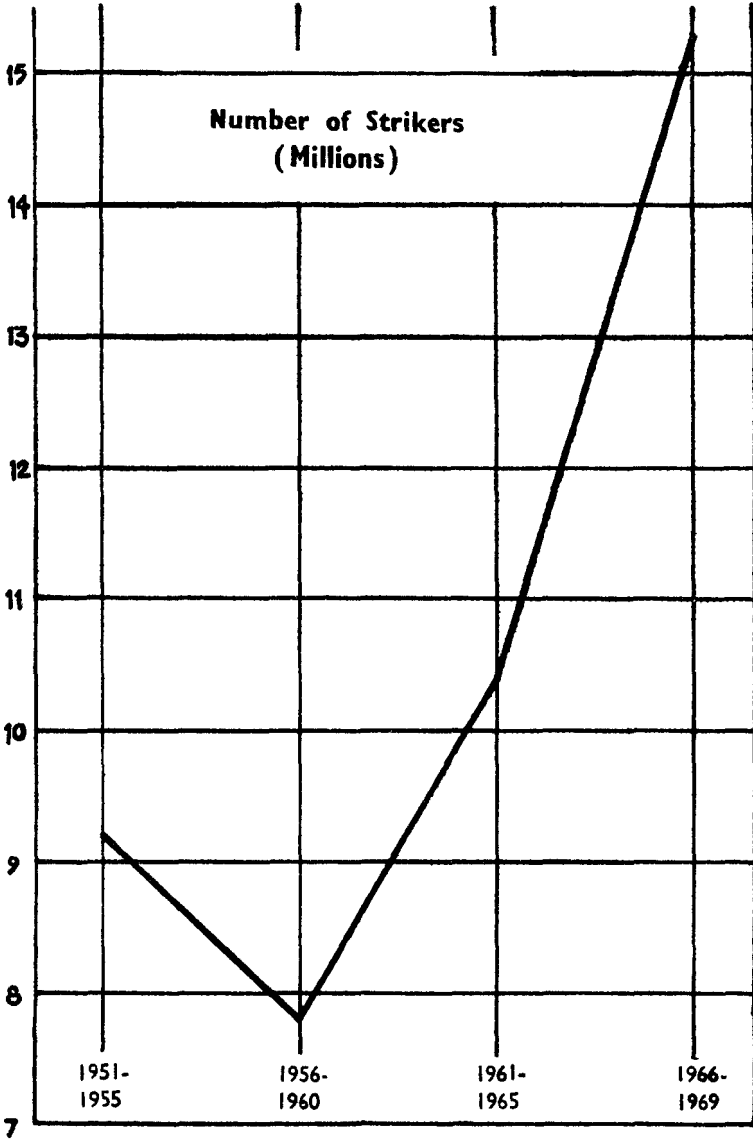


Chart III.

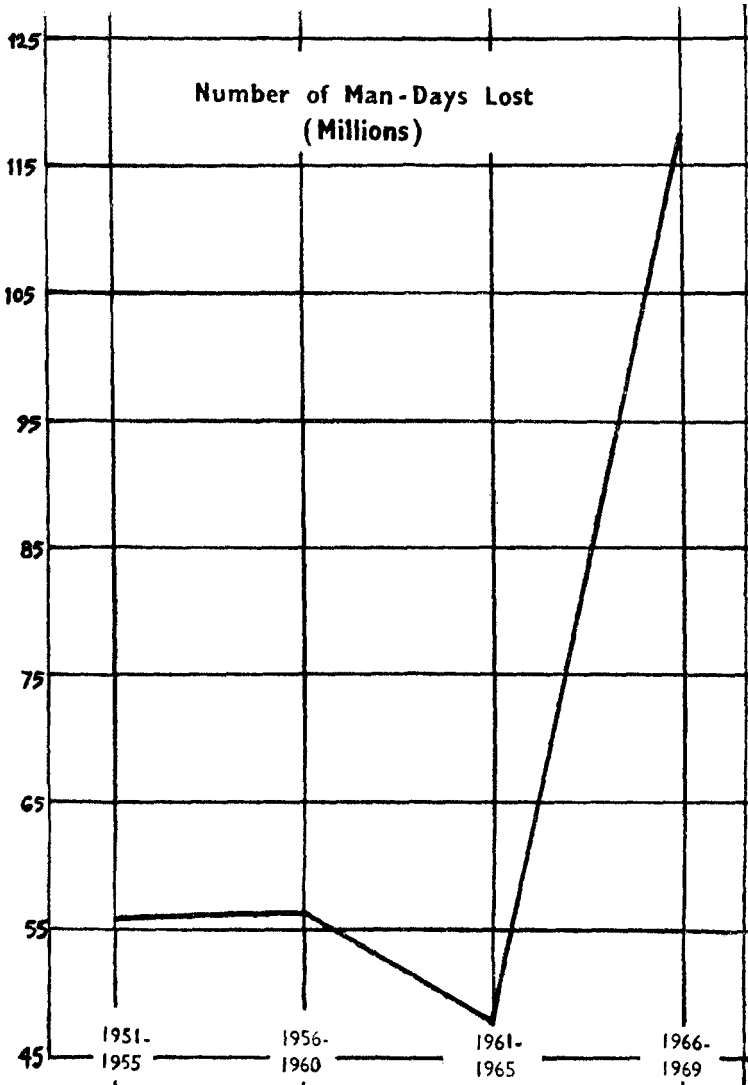


Chart IV.

**Number of Strike
Man-Days per 1000
Hired Workers.**

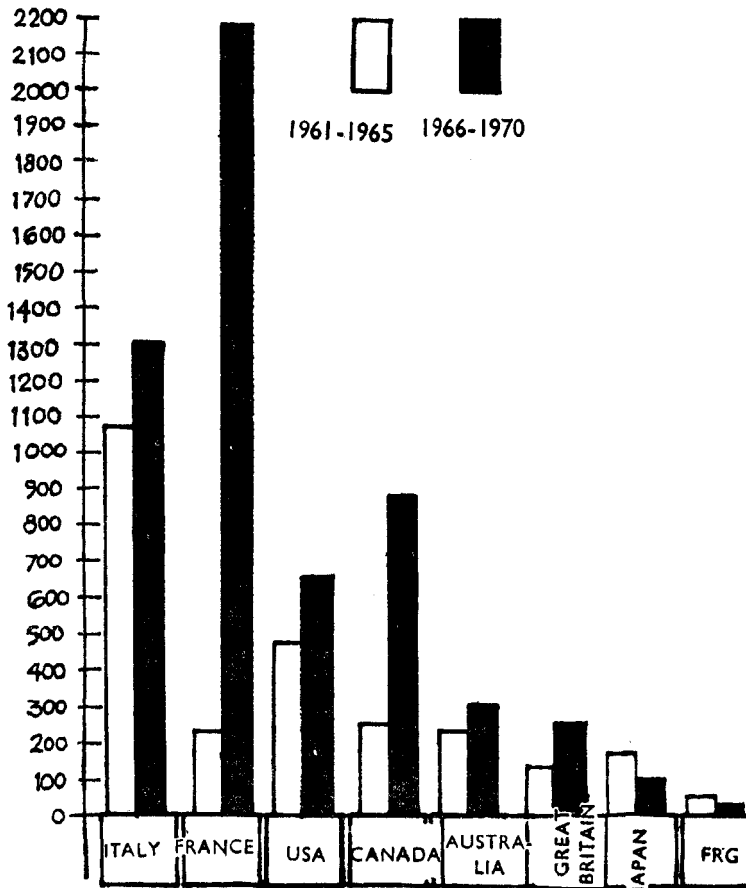


Chart V.

