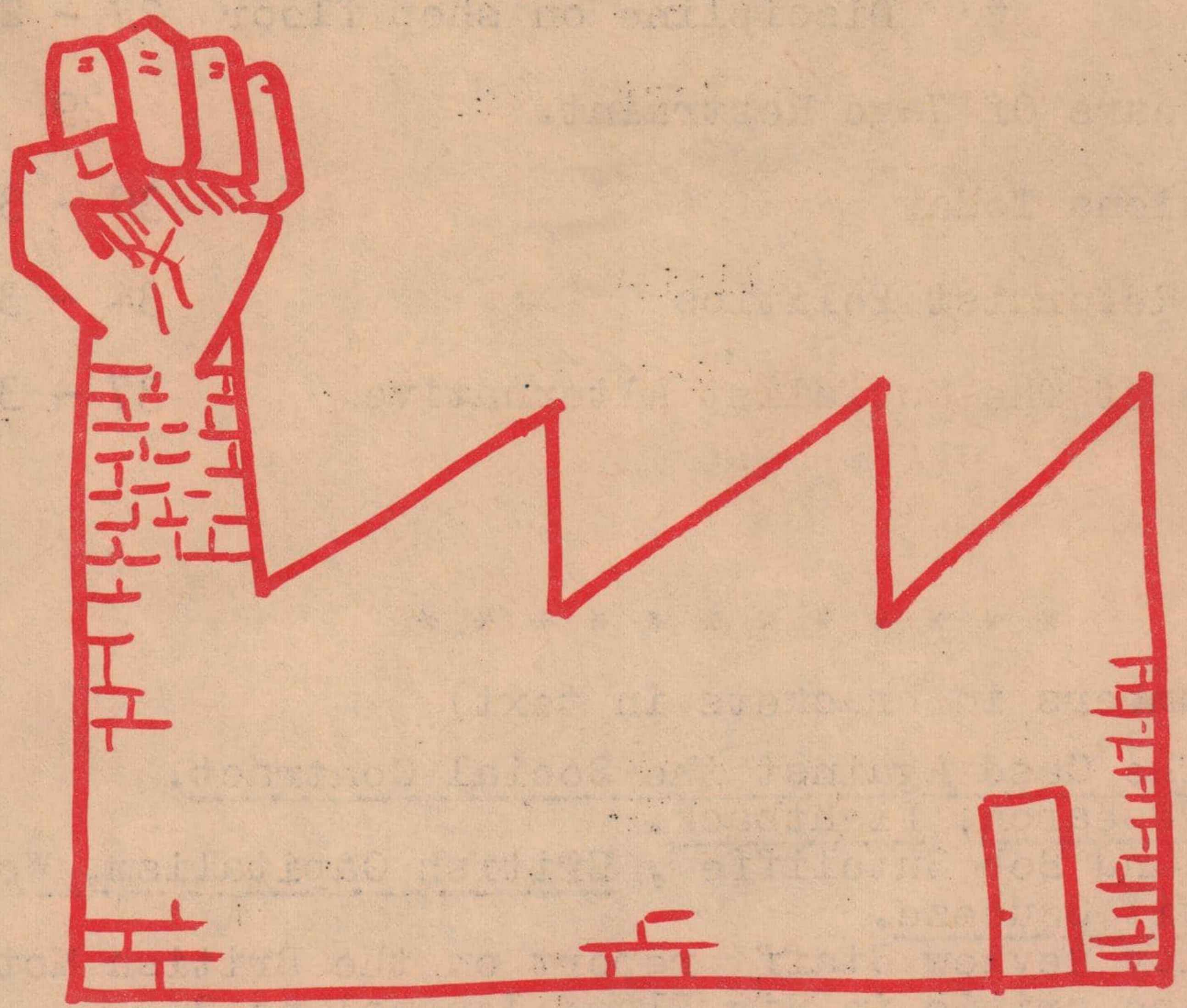


ORGANISING TO WIN...

WORK PLACE ORGANISATION & TRADE UNIONS



A BIG FLAME INDUSTRIAL
COMMISSION PAMPHLET

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Footnotes: (numbers in brackets in text)

1. Details in The Case Against the Social Contract.
2. See Labour Research, Fightback.
3. Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe , British Capitalism, Workers and the Profit Squeeze.
4. Central Policy Review Staff report on the British Motor Industry
5. Article on the crisis in Big Flame Journal no.2
6. See article in Revolutionary Socialism no 3.
7. Article by Dave Lyddon on Leyland in International Socialism no. 102.

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A NOTE TO READERS

You'll have noticed that this is a very long pamphlet! And you might think it looks like a heavy read. In fact, no-one should try to read the whole thing at one go. Each section is self-contained, and can usefully be read separately.

The pamphlet is divided into two parts. Part 1 is an analysis of why from 1975 until mid 1978 we were consistently losing nearly every workplace struggle we fought - Grunwicks, Leyland, Lucas, the firefighters and so on. This is basically a theoretical section - but it's broken up with many examples from struggles, and deals with the problems that every militant has faced.

Part 2 is organised as a manual - a theoretical and practical guide on how to win struggles. It has sections on fighting unemployment, closure, manning cuts, productivity and bonus deals. A long section is devoted to the struggle for better wages and the shorter week. We deal with organising on the shop floor, building a rank and file movement for socialism, organising in the trade unions, fighting racism and sexism in the workplace, struggling for better safety and health at work, and fighting for more unity and against divisions.

The pamphlet has been written for members of Big Flame, prospective members who want to know more about our politics and for close sympathisers. It's the first attempt by Big Flame to write down systematically everything we've learnt over the past nine years about the politics of organising at work.

Our aim is to start a debate within and around Big Flame about workplace organising. It's never been possible to do this in the past in an organised way, because so much of our politics has been based on the unwritten experience of a handful of long-time members of Big Flame. Writing it all down like this immediately shows up all the weaknesses and shortcomings. It shows where we haven't really worked out our ideas, or where those ideas are based too narrowly on one industrial sector. So this pamphlet is just a beginning, from which we can go on to produce shorter pamphlets for a wider audience based on clearer insights, and more thoughtful discussion.

We should warn you about a couple of weaknesses in the pamphlet right away. First, it's been mainly written by someone working at Ford. So it's dominated by the experience of a man (white) working in a fairly large, racially mixed, all male, Measured Day Work factory. It doesn't draw sufficiently from the experience of the members of Big Flame working in hospitals, in schools, down pits, on the railways, in engineering factories and so on. Hopefully, the debate around this edition of the pamphlet will encourage those comrades to write down their experiences, and make corrections.

Secondly, it's taken nearly a year and a quarter to write. In that time, the political situation has changed and changed again. So remember when reading it, that the first page was written in December 1977 and these words are being written at the end of March 1979, with a General Election in the offing.

SEND US YOUR COMMENTS AND YOUR EXPERIENCE

AS WE'VE SAID ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE - THIS PAMPHLET IS NOT A ONCE AND FOR ALL, DEFINITIVE POLITICAL STATEMENT OF BIG FLAME'S IDEAS ABOUT ORGANISING AT WORK.

OUR AIM IS TO STIMULATE IDEAS AND DEBATE AMONG MILITANT SOCIALISTS ABOUT HOW TO ORGANISE FOR WORKING CLASS POWER AND SOCIALISM AT WORK.

OUR EXPERIENCE IS LIMITED. AND SO WE'RE ASKING ALL READERS OF THIS PAMPHLET TO SEND TO US DETAILED CRITICISMS - SAYING WHETHER YOU FOUND SECTIONS HELPFUL, UNHELPFUL OR TOTALLY WRONG. WE'D LIKE TO GET AS MANY VARIED EXAMPLES FROM STRUGGLE FOR THE SECOND EDITION - NOT JUST FROM "INDUSTRIAL WORKERS" BUT FROM ANYONE WHO'S TRYING TO ORGANISE AT THEIR PLACE OF WORK.

WRITE (AS SOON AS POSSIBLE) TO:

INDUSTRIAL ORGANISER,
BIG FLAME,
21st WAVERTREE ROAD,
LIVERPOOL 7.

GET IN TOUCH

A B O U T T H I S P A M P H L E T

THE past few years have, on the whole, been bad ones for the working class. Our standard of living between 1975 and early 1978 dropped dramatically (1). Unemployment increased by a million. There have been heavy cuts in housing, education and the health service (2). And we've been forced to work much harder.

THERE have been struggles against all this. But too often they've ended in defeat: Grunwick; the firefighters' strike; the miners' campaign against productivity deals; the fights against closure at British Steel and Triumph Speke. And as a result of these defeats, the bosses gained in confidence, while the working class became more divided and demoralised.

ONLY in late 1978 (the Ford strike) and early 1979 (with the low pay strikes) did things begin to look really different. But even here, there have been few signs of the working class as a whole winning permanent gains. The Ford workers' victory was not built on in the private sector (with a few exceptions); the Council workers were pushed into accepting a poor deal with a promise of more later; the hospital unions split disastrously on whether to accept a 9% offer; and the other public sector unions and industrial groups all pursued their own claims separately from each other.

THIS pamphlet is an attempt to understand why all this has been happening - so we can stop losing, and start winning.

WE have a serious problem. It's clear that in the present uncertainties, and with the bad divisions inside the working class and unions, there's a real danger that the bosses will use their strength to inflict a permanent defeat on the working class. Already there is talk of permanent wage restraint, more severe legal restrictions on strikes and picketing, and permanent high unemployment. But it would mean more than that. It would mean at a national level, the trade unions would be even more identified with the state. (The "concordat" signed by the TUC and Government in February was proof that the TUC had no desire to cut loose from its top level connections). And at a local level, our shop stewards and convenors would be brought closer to management - through "participation" agreements, "no strike" guarantees, and tighter procedure and disciplinary agreements.

IT IS clear what the employers want - a passive and disciplined workforce, so demoralised by repeated defeats that it has lost the will to struggle. What sent the bosses, the media and the top politicians hysterical during the lorry drivers and low pay strikes was the demonstration of working class power and control. Unfortunately, this power is also what many union leaders fear. They talk of the need for "give and take" and "responsibility". And they enjoy a cosy relationship with management, doing their best to avoid conflict.

 PART 1

 WHY WE'VE BEEN LOSING

WE'VE come along way from the heady days of 1972 and 1974. They were years of growing working class power and struggle. It was a time of notable victories - the miners and railway workers; the dockers' struggle against Heath's Industrial Relations Act; the defeat of the Tories as a result of the 1974 miners' strike ; the wages " explosion" of 1974/75.

THERE were defeats at that time - the post office workers in 1971; the gas workers ; the hospital ancillaries. But they were seen as set-backs against a background of growing working class strength. Workers were putting forward radical demands - demands which unified different sections. For example, the miners dropped a percentage claim in favour of a flat-rate demand which favoured the lowestpaid grade, the surface workers. The amounts demanded were large, and divorced from productivity.

WORKERS were struggling not only for higher wages, but for better conditions and against work itself . Instead of arguing over how much the workers were entitled to ,new questions were raised making it clear that people were beginning to separate their ideas of what they wanted , from what capitalism was prepared to offer. Instead of the old slogan "a fair day's work for a fair day's wage", some workers were asking "What is the point of working ? Who are we working for ? " (And in the communities, there were widespread rent-strikes against the Tories' Housing Finance Act, which was aimed at getting "market rents" for council houses and flats)

THE impact of the great strikes and sit-ins in France in 1968 in particular, led many workers in Europe to new considerations of class justice. There were distinct signs of a new unity amongst working class people separated from the laws of the market. And couple with this, a new confidence, manifested in Britain by the widespread belief that it was possible to win reforms from the new Labour Governments elected in 1974.

SO WHY HAVE THINGS CHANGED ?

WHY did all this change ? Why were things so quiet in 1975-78 in comparison to the early 1970's ? Some people say it was because of betrayal by our union leaders. Some folk blame the mass media for "brainwashing" workers. Others say their mates have "gone soft" or "haven't got the guts".

WE don't think any of these explanations is good enough. They just describe whats happening, without making us any the wiser. as to why its been happening. Why did millions of trade unionists allow themselves to be "betrayed" by the likes of Jones and Scanlon with their Social Contract ? Why did tens of thousands of AUEW members vote for Terry Duffy in the presidential elections ?

And why did thousands of workers in the private sector who "had the guts" for a struggle 5 or 7 years ago, "go soft" ?

WE don't think the working class is stupid, or that its been brain-washed, or that it has gone soft. But we do think that working class people are facing a new and difficult situation - one which will require new ideas and a new kind of politics if we're to start winning. And merely denouncing "betrayals" and "sell-outs" doesn't get us very far. The way Jones and Scanlon went, as we'll show in more detail later, was a fairly predictable outcome of the functions of union leaders in modern capitalism. This doesn't mean we don't condemn what they did - but it does mean that we have to do a lot more than just elect a new leadership.

THESE in our view, are some of the main reasons why its proving so hard to win struggles: (The rest of Part 1 goes through each of these factors in order).

1. Mass unemployment and economic recession
2. Changing processes of production undermining strong sections
3. Increasing divisions in the working class
4. The growth of Measured Day Work, Participation, and tougher Procedure and Disciplinary agreements - all tying down the freedom and power of the shop steward.
5. Successive years of "wage restraint" (a polite term !) imposed by a Labour Government.
6. The growing incorporation of the Trade Unions into Governmental machinery; the use of the courts in industrial conflict.
7. The hold of reformist politics, including reliance on Parliament and the courts; the greater use of the courts in industrial conflict.
8. The weakness of any socialist alternative to these policies.

FACTOR no.1. Mass Unemployment and Economic Recession

WORKERS in many industries, such as shipbuilding, trucks, tractors, power-generating, textiles, TVs, & steel, are experiencing a worldwide "slump" in demand. When we refer to a "slump" we don't mean there is no demand for say steel - clearly there is a great potential demand for steel in Britain and in the 3rd world. The problem is that poorer countries cannot afford the capitalist (and BSC) world prices, British Capitalists are more interested in exporting capital, and the Government has cut back on public works.

SLUPMS give the bosses an opportunity - especially in the big and multi-plant or multinational companies, to play off one factory against another. The threat is always closure or redundancy. No increase

in productivity, they say, and the factory will be closed. If workers struggle against harder work, or demand higher wages, then again the management threaten closure and the shifting of work elsewhere, perhaps to one of their subsidiaries with spare capacity and lower wages. And this is no idle threat, as we saw at Leyland's Triumph plant at Speke. In motors, steel and shipbuilding, redundancies and closure threats have been used to destroy workers' organisation.

Even some quite small companies are now beginning to shift work abroad now, to take advantage of wages up to 1/50 of West European rates of pay. Goods are assembled in countries like the Phillipines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Brazil, and then imported into Europe at prices undercutting European-made products.

IN the Spring of 1978, a large order for ships from Poland was used by British Shipbuilders to encourage workers at Govan and Smith's Yards to scab on their brothers at Swan Hunters. (The latter were refusing to drop a parity claim). The Swan Hunter workers held out, but all the other yards, by CP convenor James Airlie at Govan, signed "no strike" guarantees and flexibility agreements which gave away what shipyard workers had struggled to win over decades. As a result the ships were transferred to Govan's and Smith's, and the Swan Hunter workers went on the dole.

IT'S also true that a time of mass unemployment is a time of harsher discipline on the shop-floor. Workers are less inclined to "have a go" at management, because they know that the firm is less worried about the difficulties of getting replacement workers. In this, workers are not being "soft". They're being quite realistic, even in a place with a "strong union" like Ford's.

"We've recently had a situation at Ford Langley of falling orders for trucks. The lines were slowed down, and management took a lot of blokes off the line - giving them jobs like sweeping up, opening and shutting doors. The rest of the blokes on the line were forced to work much harder - but they didn't feel they could do much about it, because they knew management could ride out a long strike because they didn't have any orders. They even victimised a militant shop steward for missing off four clips off a couple of jobs - about ten seconds work out of eight hours. He got a one day suspension - but because he's a militant he got no support from the convenor. If he gets in trouble again, he could be sacked, and they'd have no trouble recruiting someone else. You can see the blokes thinking - if they can do that to him, they can do it to anybody."

WHEN there are few orders, managements can even go the lengths of provoking a strike - both to reduce wage bills, and to force a demoralising dispute which will probably end in defeat for the workers. This happened at Eaton's Axles in Newton Aycliffe, and also at Triumph Speke in 1978.

AT Speke, Leyland management was afraid of swamping the market with TR7 cars which weren't selling very well. By acting in a deliberately obstructive manner over job timings, they helped provoke a strike. This could later be used by management as an instance of the poor labour relations which was cited as a key reason for closing the no.2 plant. (The full story is told in Huw Beynon's pamphlet What Happened At Speke)

What Caused the Crisis ?

A RECESSION is a time when the working class is weak. But it's not a natural disaster. Recessions happen periodically under capitalism because the economy is not planned - the decisions of capitalists are not coordinated, except in very specific situations for limited objectives (e.g. price fixing and "cartels" in the steel industry). Market forces often work in unexpected ways. And the constant need of capitalists to compete and thus introduce new processes, shift operations, switch products etc means that there is a constant tendency for some sectors to stagnate, creating unemployment, regional decline and uncertainties for those left with jobs. The Government is always trying to keep on top of the situation - if it weren't for state intervention, most capitalist countries would be in a far worse state of crisis. But on the other hand, if the Government goes too far in nationalising and planning the economy, capitalism as a system might itself be brought into question.

THE economic recession in the UK is part of a world-wide crisis of capitalist economies which has been with us since 1974. We use the term "crisis" carefully, because it's often bandied about without much definition. We talk of a world crisis because of the simultaneous recessions in the major Western countries. Temporarily at least, there is no obvious way back to world boom for the capitalist nations without triggering off a new inflationary spiral and a strengthened position for the working class. In Britain however, the recession has been used by capitalists to restructure industry and the service sector, through mergers and takeovers, closure or run-down of old plants, and introduction of new technology and work-processes.

THE main problem in Britain in the late 60's and early 70's was that profits were falling. Between 1964 and 1970, the share of profits in national income was almost halved (3). In some crucial areas and companies, profits had virtually been non-existent e.g. shipbuilding, Chrysler and Vauxhall. There was a short-lived recovery in 1972-73 (much of the surplus going into property speculation and fringe banks), and then a further slump from 1974-76. The worst effects were offset only by highly generous fiscal concessions from Chancellor Healey. (e.g. tax relief on stocks and new investment; relaxation of the price code etc).

THIS reduction in profitability didn't mean that workers were no longer exploited - merely that they were not being exploited enough to provide sufficiently large profits for the bosses. But low profits do provide employers with serious problems. For

at a start, it means that the company will find it very difficult to raise money for future investment. Potential investors or banks will prefer to invest their money in another company that's making a greater profit. So the company will invest less than competitors which are making more profit - which will mean that the company will become less productive, and less profitable..... and so on. (Although workers should always be wary when the boss says he's not making any profits. He'll probably be referring to pre-tax profits, which in - variably understate the actual surplus produced by the workforce. For further information, consult Christopher Hird's book, Your Employers Profits)

BUT if large numbers of companies are making low profits, it means the capitalist economy will stop growing. Companies won't be ordering new machinery. So workers in industries making machinery (or components for it) are put on short time or are sacked. So these workers have less to spend, and the demand for consumer goods begins to fall off. This sets up a vicious circle, for companies making consumer goods begin to lay off workers, and they cancel or cut down on orders for new machinery, raw materials, components etc. (e.g. the steel industry in Sheffield and Rotherham has always been badly hit whenever car sales slump). Very soon there is mass unemployment and slump.

Why Have Profits Been Falling ?

ALTHOUGH we've said that Britain's recession is part of a world-wide crisis, we need some understanding of why British capitalism has been so weak in comparison with with economies like West Germany and Japan, where growth rates have held up far better. Britain's failure to adapt to a new world situation where the British Empire no longer rule the waves, has many causes. But we want to just emphasise two in particular :

1) The loss of empire itself. Direct colonial exploitation guaranteed British companies a source of very cheap raw materials and a market for their goods. Britain still has a neo-colonial relationship with many of the ex-colonies - an exploitative relationship now largely operated through multinational companies - but this has been at the expense of the domestic base of British industry .

2) Working class Resistance. Especially in the 1950's and 60's, workers fought hard for better wages and conditions. This was a time of economic growth and labour shortage, so workers were in a good position to win their demands, and wage rates (but more significantly, earnings) rose fairly fast. What was particularly important was the ability of workers to push wage increases beyond productivity increases - thus eating into profits.

PRODUCTIVITY is a key problem for British employers. They don't mind paying us higher wages - as long as they can get us to work harder to pay for the wages and make higher profits. (Being able to pass on wage increases in prices helps considerably here - and after the mid-60's this became

much more difficult as foreign competition heightened).

BUT in Britain, there's a long and stubborn tradition of struggle against work, and changes which threaten workplace organisation. In many workplaces, there's a daily battle over how much work we're prepared to do; over the speed of work, manning levels, mobility, demarcation and "restrictive practises". Work is felt by many people to be boring, pointless, alienating, and a "rip-off". And so, especially in less skilled jobs, people do as little as possible.

THIS has been one of the strengths of the working class in Britain. Compared to capitalists in Germany or Japan, British employers have found it difficult to manage their plants as they wanted - to defeat the insubordination of their employees. In Germany and Japan, fascism inflicted a big defeat on the working class. When these countries were rebuilt, their economies were under US domination. With US backing, they started off with much new plant and equipment, and new institutions which made it easier for bosses to exercise control over the production process. It is thus no accident that labour productivity, even with identical machines, is much higher in many other capitalist countries than in the UK (4).

Who Is To Blame For The Crisis ?

WHAT we are saying is that working class struggle is one of the factors causing the economic crisis. We are not denying that there are other factors, but we are making a point of emphasising this one. Some socialists spend a lot of time and effort trying to absolve the working class from any blame for inflation, recession etc. But the job of socialists is to look at what is actually happening. If capitalism goes into a severe recession when the working class begins to fight for what it needs, this simply shows us that capitalism cannot fulfil those needs. It shows us that we need another kind of society.

SURE, we do blame capitalists for creating unemployment, putting up prices etc. But on the other hand we think that to "cover up" or "explain away" the effects of working class struggle is dangerous and demoralising. Dangerous because it leaves workers unprepared for the consequences of their struggles. Demoralising because it denies the power of the working class to bring down the present system and replace it with a better one. (5)

Conclusion.

Workers' struggles over the last 15 years for more money and against exploitative and alienating work have contributed to falling profits. Bosses have hit back with an "investment strike" in many sectors - which has helped bring about mass unemployment. Mass unemployment weakens the working class.

ITS obvious that this isn't an argument for an end to the struggle against capitalist work - that we should knuckle under in order to reduce unemployment. What it does mean is that we have to fight for a broader strategy against both unemployment and harder work. We develop this in part 2, but with predictions of 3-4 million unemployed in the 80's, working class militants have got to get to grips with this reality fast.

FACTOR no 2. Changing Processes of Production

A CRISIS means that the bosses are forced to try out new ways not only of exploiting workers, but also of dominating them. If workers have built up a bit of power and control for themselves, capitalists have to find ways of either subverting it, incorporating it, or simply smashing it. This section is about how they subvert our power.

UNTIL quite recently, there were a number of important groups of workers in Britain who had clearly built up a certain amount of power. For example, dockers and printworkers. They had won relatively high wages, fairly strong control over the job and good manning agreements, and there were clear lines of demarcation. In other words, they didn't have to work too hard, and they were paid quite well relative to other workers. This is not the kind of positive, creative power that socialists believe workers can have in a different sort of society. It's a negative kind of power - but it's still power!

EMPLOYERS have used technology to transform production. This has often subverted the existing power of the working class. New commodities are made, using processes in which workers will have less control; production is managed differently; wage systems are altered (e.g. the "buying out" of piece work). Very often the intention is to make production "safe" from what the bosses define as "overmanning", "restrictive practises", sabotage, go-slows and strikes.

Recently, a bloke at work got a disciplinary warning letter for "working without enthusiasm". Can you imagine that? I don't know anyone, except the worst scabs and people who're crawling - trying to become a foreman - who works with enthusiasm.

Worker from Ford Langley

Examples1) The Docks

THERE'S no doubt that the strength of dockworkers has been knocked right back by containerisation. This means that instead of loading and unloading cargoes at the dockside, a great deal of work is carried out at inland container depots - initially employing unorganised and lower paid workers. The only work left for dockers was the loading of the containers onto the ships, and the handling of cargoes that were difficult to containerise.

The Vietnam war started containerisation. They had ships which could switch containers mid-sea. There was no more general cargo, now everything was in boxes.

Before that time, you worked from 8 till 5. The cargo was loose, or in boxes or cartons. But now you get pallets with the parcels all banded up.

The Devlin Committee which published its report in 1967 set out guidelines for new work practises in the docks.

It all looked good on the surface. If it had come all at once for everyone, it would have been better, but the unions allowed each firm to make its own agreement.

At first we refused to accept Devlin because the rate of pay was not high enough. They remodernised Tilbury in 1967 with millions of poundsworth of equipment. But we wouldn't let them man it up for 2 years. We said we wanted a higher basic rate.

Devlin was introduced in phases : phase 1 put everyone on 8 till 5 plus overtime and piecework. It was the end of casual labour which was very good. Everyone was on a basic of £39.50 whether working or not. Phase 2 of Devlin introduced shift work. It was 7 till 2 pm, and 2 till 9 pm, with $\frac{3}{4}$ hour meal break.

By this time, we allowed them to work Tilbury and had allowed container terminals to make their own agreements, but the unions allowed different negotiations. We accepted Devlin on the basis of it being one agreement, and the end of casual labour.

The smallest container is now 40-50 tons, and this can be moved in one "hit" which takes a couple of minutes. Previously it would have taken us an hour to shift that.

Also there was a great reduction in the workforce. Hundreds of jobs were lost and we were offered severance money.

Before Devlin, London was the fastest working port in the world. We worked piece work and it was fast. Piece work was one way in which the shop floor kept control of the work. But now its worse. We have all day-work and all sorts of different agreements. Whole areas of the port are closed and you can't transfer from one place to an other.

Before, you could negotiate your own money for things like bad stowage, salvage jobs and dirty jobs. These are "abnormal cargoes" and you could negotiate and get an answer straight away. Now, you can ask for it, but it goes to this committee or that committee and by the time they've finished, the jobs done. We had to wait for a year for one claim to be settled. We had to take photos of the cargo to argue about it because no-one could remember !

Until Devlin, there was a special night - "bath night" - when you knocked off at 5 O'Clock once a week and we held our union meetings then. We used to get hundreds there. But when we went into shift work, it skippered us altogether. Now we have branch meetings on a Saturday morning and attendance is low.

No-one I know objects to the new technology. Everyone wants better and easier work. But we want more control over it. As it is, the employers have their say and we trail along behind. The new machinery cuts the workforce and only really benefits the people who operate it.

The dock is more divided now than before Devlin. There are now three separate worlds. You've got the "riversiders" ; the men in the enclosed docks (where 20-30 different agreements operate). and the terminal berths , where you've got different agreements again. Under Devlin, we thought we would all be equal, but look what happened !

The TGWU national docks officer said "We'll support any action to get the work back," but of course no action has been taken.

London dock worker. (TGWU member)

Example 2. The Print

MORE recently, printworkers have been the target for similar processes. In this case, the new technology involves computer controlled typesetting and printing that eliminates whole st in the printing process. There have been major battles over the introduction of the new methods, and over manning and wage levels . These came to a head in 1978 with a series disputes at the Daily Express (under the tough new management of the Trafalgar House property empire), and then at the Times, Observer and Sunday Times.

THE threat to workers was quite opn. Victor Matthews, the head of Trafalgar House, warned repeatedly that he would have no hesitation in closing down the Express. Similar threats were made by management at the Times and Observer, and in the former case carried out, temporarily at least. In response to these threats, leaders of the print unions simply withdrew all support from the workers involved in the struggles - and organised scabs to take jobs of workers who continued the disputes.

Some Sources of Information for this Pamphlet

This isnt a pamphlet with loads of footnotes and academic references. But there are some particular sources we'd like to mention which we found very useful for this part:

The Case Against The Social Contract , By a group of independent socialists. 10p

Big Flame Industrial Bulletin , - Issues 1-3

Notes On the Mining Industry - BF industrial Commission

Articles by Richard Hyman and Leo Panitch in Revolutionary Socialism no 3

Article on the Crisis by PB in the Big Flame journal no.2

Plus earlier drafts of this pamphlet. All these documents are available from Big Flame, 217, Wavertree Rd; Liverpool 7

THE MINES

There's no doubt that one of the biggest long-term threats to the power of the miners is the development of the nuclear power industry. (The biggest short-term threat is the attempt to smash the unity of the miners through local productivity deals). If electricity generating through nuclear powered stations becomes the main form of generating the effect will be as devastating on miners as containerisation has been for dockworkers - (it may also be devastating for the world).

But this shows another side of the problem. Nuclear powered generators were not developed specifically to smash miners. They were developed because the technology became available, and they entered into much wider use after the 1973 rise in oil prices made it economically and politically attractive. But the fact remains that the technology exists today to marginalise coal miners - if it is profitable for capitalists to do so.

Again that doesn't mean that we think coal miners should stop struggling for higher wages and against productivity agreements. It means that they need to develop a political strategy which recognises that one of the consequences of a successful struggle by miners will be the possible extension of nuclear powered generators.

A couple of final examples. In the first two decades of the century, skilled engineering workers were among the strongest sections of the working class. But it was at this time that mass production of a new commodity was developing - the motor car.

At first, motor car production was based on existing methods of manufacture - using the labour of the skilled engineering workers. The first Ford factory in Britain was at Trafford Park in Manchester, a centre of power of skilled workers. It wasn't long before Ford decided to move to London, and a new, unorganised and unskilled workforce. And assembly-line techniques were being introduced, in which jobs were being reduced into smaller and smaller units, which made the traditional skills redundant and made the process of production easier to control. This de-skilling of the working class is still going on. For example, at Mather's engineering factory in Bolton, the machining of gear wheels and cogs has, only four years ago, been put on a production line basis. And the development in the past two years of very cheap computers based on microprocessors¹ is about to introduce a massive new wave of de-skilling - not only of industrial workers: white collar jobs are also about to be extensively de-skilled and speeded up.

1. The tiny size of the new electronics technology also makes it much easier to internationalise production e.g. by flying components as air freight, which further weakens the power of the working class in Britain and other West European countries.

THERE was nothing intrinsically wrong with the methods of manufacturing cars which existed before the assembly line. In fact, in a different sort of society, they might be far more efficient - harnessing the skills of workers, rather than the stubborn insubordination which can be found on most car assembly lines. (The old methods would probably also produce better quality and longer-lasting cars too ..) The point however is, that skilled workers in the early 1920's were expensive, had rigid demarcation, and were well organised. Assembly lines were one answer to that. In other parts of engineering, the spread of piecework and the standardisation of production provided two more answers for the employers.

SO THE introduction of the motor car had very wide - reaching effects. It affected the type of jobs people did, the pattern of industry, the shape of our towns and cities. And it helped to blunt the power of skilled workers - an important problem for capitalism at the time.

SIMILAR things are going on today. The development of both the plastics and micro-electronic industries is based largely on small factories - mainly on new industrial estates in the South East. They employ unorganised and semi-skilled workers, many of them women and immigrants. And this is another way in which Capital tries to decompose the working class - that is to say reduce its strength by changing its composition. Women were brought more and more into factory production during the 1960's, at the same time of labour shortage when the Government was encouraging emigration from the West Indies to Britain. (6)

Women and Immigrants

NEARLY twenty years later, neither group of "new" workers is fully organised (although increasing numbers of both have been joining unions). This is partly due to the sexist and racist ideas still prevalent in the official labour movement. That was clear in the Grunwick strike:

" We came down here today to help organise these lads . "

- TGWU official at the day of action, July 11th 1977. The struggle was mainly one of immigrant women, striking for union recognition.

THE USE of women and immigrant workers for certain jobs has changed the face of the working class in Britain. They were used only for certain kinds of jobs. Women were supposed to be "good with their hands" and "didn't mind repetitive work" - and they were "good" at domestic chores. So they ended up doing electronic assembly work, or caring, or cleaning jobs. Immigrant workers were supposed to be "good" at heavy manual jobs. Both women and immigrants were paid less than white, male workers. And, to start with, they weren't organised.

BUT TODAY this is changing. One of the first signs was the Imperial Typewriters strike involving hundreds of Asian workers for 13 weeks in 1974, at a hitherto "quiet" factory

in Leicester. Then there was the struggle for equal pay at Trico in West London in 1976, which in turn inspired several other womens' strikes. And more recently, we've seen the long and bitter disputes at Grunwick and Garner's steakhouses in London.

Conclusions

WOMEN and immigrant workers were recruited into the waged workforce at a time of economic growth, when the working class as a whole was much stronger than it is today. They were recruited principally to solve the bosses' problem of a shortage of workers. But the effect was undoubtedly to weaken those section of the working class which found themselves working alongside the "new" workers who were willing to work at lower rates of pay, and were largely unorganised. (A parallel can be drawn here with the demise of the male workers in the cotton industry in the last century, many of whom were replaced by women and children).

OF COURSE for the women and immigrant workers, the effect was far more dramatic. Women found themselves with double the workload - with an unwaged job at home, and a low paid job outside the home. Immigrant workers found themselves in a hostile society, with lousy jobs and lousy pay. The fact that their struggle against these conditions have often been opposed by the rest of the working class, has been a major contribution to the problems faced by the class in today's crisis. Which is what the next section is about.

SECTION 3 - The divisions in the working-class

The British ruling class is expert at divide and rule. Britain is a very small nation, and at one time it ruled two thirds of this planet - so we're told. And the technique it pioneered at a mass level (every foreman knows the technique on a smaller scale) was divide and rule: give one section of the population a bit more wealth, a bit more power and a bit more prestige - and use it to rule the rest on behalf of the real Power. This technique was used in the British Colonies such as India, Ireland, Kenya, Nigeria and Aden.

One of the slight beneficiaries of this process was the British working class, who - arguably - were not exploited quite as hard as they might otherwise have been, because of the Empire. As a result some sections of the working-class hark back to the "great days of Empire" - and have incorporated the ideology of Empire with its foul attitude to "natives" in their current attitude to immigrants.

This is an important, but only partial explanation of racism. It can't explain, for example, why racism (and sexism) have grown during the past four years of crisis. The answer to that lies in the divide and rule policies of the bosses today, and in the divisions in the working-class.

There's no doubt that the working-class in Britain is seriously divided: unemployed against those with jobs; skilled workers against unskilled and semi-skilled workers; men against women; white against black; youth against middle-aged. These are real divisions in the class, not just "a problem of old fashioned attitudes and ideas" - as some people believe. The vast majority of unemployed people have much less money than people with a job; skilled workers get more money and often don't have to work as hard as semi-skilled workers; as we've said before, the majority of women now have two jobs - inside and outside the home, and in waged work they still get less than men who're doing similar jobs; immigrant workers have the hardest, dirtiest jobs - often for much worse money - and lousy housing; young people often have little or no money.

There have been important struggles against these divisions - by black people against their status in society, the kind of work they have to do, and the wages they get; by women against their status in society, the kind of work they do, and the wages they get in waged work, and don't get for the work they do at home.

But few of these struggles have had the support of the white, male working-class. And although they have succeeded in making some gains - for example, women have in some cases like the Trico strike won equal pay - their struggles have not yet succeeded in transforming either the position of women or immigrants in the working class. So the divisions remain, and in this period of recession, they're added to by mass unemployment and by the problem of differentials.

DIFFERENTIALS

Over the past few years, particularly under the "Social Contract", differentials between skilled and unskilled workers have been eroded. But this has happened not because the working class as a whole has actively decided to struggle for equality and more unifying conditions - a very radical idea. Instead, it has happened passively, through the powerlessness of the working class.

In particular, it has happened against the will of skilled workers who had previously done well out of high differentials. Now those workers are fighting for a restoration of differentials - for example, the Lucas and Leyland toolroom workers.

In our opinion, these are very divisive struggles at a time when the working class can only start winning by being more united. So (unlike some other socialists) we don't think these struggles should be supported.

But these struggles do show clearly how divisions can weaken the class, especially at a time like this when there is competition between different sections of the working class for jobs - which are scarce; for money - which is scarce; and for housing - which is scarce. At worst, this leads to direct confrontations within the class: the growth of racism and the National Front; men scabbing on equal pay strikes, as at Trico; women fighting their husbands for a decent amount of housekeeping money; skilled workers fighting the rest of the workforce for a greater proportion of what the boss is prepared to offer; older working class people calling for more police to be used against vandalism and robberies by the youth. And divisions prevent different sections of the class from combining to fight the problems facing all of us. For example, most people at work are totally unconcerned about the unemployed. And yet, unemployment is just the reverse side of the coin of harder work, manning cuts and low wages. Despite this, for the moment it's unthinkable that unemployed workers and workers with jobs might combine at a mass level to fight these problems.

Why is it that workers find it easier to fight each other over the crumbs thrown to them by the bosses, than to combine to fight for the cake? We've all seen this happening - particularly on a small scale in our department or section: for example when the foreman or supervisor increases the workload on a section, frequently workers will fight and complain about who's going to get the heaviest job and who's going to get the lightest, rather than fight the foreman. Partly it's because of a fear of conflict with authority - an important part of our childhood conditioning in the family and at school. Partly because it's easier to win against the weak than against the strong and powerful: and with the Government, the Courts, the Trade Unions increasingly on the side of the bosses, it's not difficult for workers to fathom out who is powerful, and which sections of the working class are weaker.

Finally, it's because sectionalism (looking after the interest of only your own section of the class) has a long tradition in

Britain - and for a time, it used to work. During the 50's and early 60's - a time of economic growth and labour shortage - it was possible to win demands on a sectional basis, particularly under the piece work system. This was the basis for the rise of the shop stewards' movement after World War II. Often this was done by a strong section (for example toolmakers) winning a rise, and then other sections following up to demand that the gap between their pay and that of the strong section should be narrowed back to what it was before.

Increasing the divisions in the working class

The bosses know, from years of experience, that divide and rule is a successful policy. And at present, there is a conscious policy of increasing the divisions in the working class.

Unemployment is one example. Even clearer is what happened in mining in 1978 where we saw the breathtaking audacity of the National Coal Board and the right-wing of the N.U.M. in their successful attempt to smash the unity and political power of miners by forcing the introduction of local productivity deals AGAINST the decision of the national conference of the N.U.M. and AGAINST a national ballot of the whole membership.

It's interesting to see why there was no fight against this. For a start, the left-wing in the N.U.M. at first relied on the Courts to stop the breach of the conference and national ballot decisions. The Courts supported the right-wing. Secondly, it's because the National Coal Board has power, power which they used in this case to offer money (without a fight) to certain coal fields where it was relatively easy to increase coal output (for example, Nottinghamshire). This strategy successfully divided the mineworkers - even dividing militant areas like Scotland where some pits (a minority) stood to make a lot of money out of the productivity deal.

The Coal Board are paying out large amounts of money on the deal. But they're hoping that this will pay off in the long term by successfully dividing the N.U.M. - preventing miners uniting around a straightforward wage claim without strings. (Bonuses in early 1979 varied between less than £5 a week in some pits, to over £100 in others!)

Dividing workers by paying them different amounts of money is one method of divide and rule. It has probably been the most common method under piece work. But over the past ten years, more and more industries have changed to Measured Day Work payment systems - where workers are paid by the hour, and are given a measured amount of work that they have to complete each day. Workers are separated into different grades, each paid a different hourly rate. The various grades are then divided one from another, but compared with piece work, much larger numbers of workers get the same money. For example, at Ford there are only five different grades of workers.

This potentially means that much larger numbers of workers are united by their rate of pay. But this is where divide and rule comes into play. Under Measured Day Work, workers in the same

grade are divided by the workload allocated to them.

Where I work, everyone knows that the cab trim line is an easy number, and the engine dress is hard work. On my section, there are easy jobs and hard jobs, and that's the way the foreman keeps control. The threat is there that if you cause trouble, you'll be given a harder job.

The stock feeders, who bring your parts to the line, are paid the same as us lineworkers. But they're working only half as hard as us. They're on a cushy number, and they never support us.

Fordworker

Some employers also use this system to divide the work on a racial basis. Again at Ford's, there are far more immigrant workers as a proportion of the total on the assembly lines than among stock feeders or quality control inspectors. There are struggles against this. Young Asian and West Indian workers are rejecting this division of workload, but as expected, this is meeting resistance and hostility from the more privileged white sections.

SECTION 4 - Tying down the shop stewards

For years, shop stewards have been seen as the "militants" in the workplace. On TV and in the papers they've been portrayed as troublemakers, always willing to have a go at management. We wish this were true! But, as most people who work in an organised workplace know, this picture of the shop steward is far from the truth. In fact, although there are militant shop stewards, they are greatly outnumbered by "moderate" shop stewards. And the number of "moderates" has been growing over the past few years.

Even the bosses are clear about this. The Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations had this to say about shop stewards:

"Trouble is thrust upon them (shop stewards). In circumstances of this kind, they may be striving to bring some order into a chaotic situation, and management may rely heavily on their efforts to do so."

(page 29)

And the authors of a book about shop stewards - written for managers - say:

"In a sense, the leading stewards are performing a management function, of grievance settlement, welfare arrangement and human adjustment, and the acceptance by management of the shop steward system.... has developed partly because of the increasing effectiveness - and certainly economy - with which this role is fulfilled."

Unfortunately, this book is dead right about the role that increasing numbers of stewards perform at work. But by saying this, it doesn't mean that Big Flame is "anti-union" or "anti-steward". All of our members in waged work try to organise in unions. Many of them are shop stewards - fighting against this kind of "management" role, and fighting to organise workers they represent to win through action.

But socialists and working-class militants have to face up to reality. And the reality is that too many shop stewards are just as bad as the Jack Joneses and Hugh Scanlons who've served the working class so badly.

Why is this? It hasn't always been the case. The period after the Second World War saw a major growth in the shop stewards movement, and in the numbers of shop stewards - many of whom repeatedly led their sections into industrial action, which frequently resulted in victory. There were several reasons for this:

* The increasing use by bosses of the piecework payment system - under which workers have an incentive to work harder because they get paid according to the amount they produce. Piecework meant a mass of detailed negotiation - different for every section of a factory. The person who would represent workers in these negotiations had to be a local representative - usually the shop steward. So shop stewards were repeatedly involved in struggles over piecework rates (IE money) for their members.

* This was a time of economic growth, booming order books and shortage of labour. Bosses were crying out for production. This gave the shop floor a local bargaining power to rival the unions' attempts to negotiate nationally. Workers knew that a short strike by their section could be very disruptive, and would often mean they won.

As we've seen, these struggles contributed to falling profits. The bosses had to act. They had to erode rank and file workers' power to control their wage rates, and they had to deflect the strength of the shop stewards' movement.

The exact outline for this was laid down by the Donovan Commission on Trade Unions (set up by the Labour Government in 1965) whose recommendations have been crucial. Their main conclusion was that there were too many unions, that grievance procedures were antiquated and commanded too little respect, and that management discipline was too weak on the shop floor.

The Report recognised that a head-on attack on shop stewards was out of the question. Instead, the attack was to be made in more subtle ways. According to Donovan, it was necessary for employers and union officials "to recognise, define and control the part played by shop stewards in our collective bargaining system". The strategy that developed after Donovan included:

1. The introduction of Measured Day Work to replace piece work. Under Measured Day Work (MDW) there are no complex sectional negotiations. Everything can be carried out at factory or national level by full-time union officials. MDW takes bargaining over money away from the shop floor and away from the individual shop steward.

2. Rapid moves towards more centralised wage bargaining throughout companies, or throughout a whole industry, rather than bargaining plant to plant, or mine to mine. But it was clear that the centralised negotiations were to be carried out by national union negotiators, not the stewards or convenors. The whole idea was to negotiate with union leaders who were being increasingly drawn into planning and managing the national capitalist economy.

3. Attempts to incorporate stewards into management. Under MDW, shop stewards would not have any direct part in negotiating over money. Instead, the job of a steward would be:

- * To represent workers with "a problem" - over the timing of a job (i.e. too much work), over safety, over the attitude of a supervisor - and workers who're subject to discipline (for lateness, absence, gambling, fighting etc.).

These are the most common problems a steward has to face daily - individual problems. To "get a worker off the hook" depends on the steward having the good ear of management, usually by showing a genuine concern to help management overcome problems such as absenteeism, low productivity, sabotage, poor quality etc. It's for this reason that workers will often elect a "moderate" shop steward under MDW - a steward who is good at arguing a case, and who has a "good" relationship with management.

- * To negotiate with management the occasional collective grievances of the workers - over manning, intensity of work, working conditions. But in conducting these negotiations, the steward would have to stick to procedure.

4. Where piece-work remained, the increasing using of productivity deals, often tied to long-term wage agreements.

Procedure and Disciplinary Agreements

Another part of the Donovan proposals was to introduce stricter grievance procedures and disciplinary codes - negotiated between companies and unions at national level. This is what is happening today - for example, at Chrysler and British Leyland; in ship-building and on the docks.

The aim of procedure is to take a struggle out of the hands of workers at a time when they're angry about a collective problem (and are thinking of taking action about it) and instead putting it in the hands of union representatives for a stipulated amount of time, during which direct action is forbidden. In other words, a cooling-off period.

EXAMPLE - THE FORD PROCEDURAL AGREEMENT

This is a good example because Ford has had MDW for years. The agreement contains a 3 week cooling-off period, during which workers cannot take industrial action. If they do, they can be warned, suspended or sacked. (And this does happen). During the 3 weeks, any grievance goes through 5 stages of negotiating procedure. First, a discussion between workers and their foreman. Then, if they can't agree, the shop steward is brought in. The third stage is negotiations between superintendant, the foreman and the shop steward. If there's still no compromise, the dispute goes to the factory convenor who negotiates with the industrial relations manager. And in the 5th stage of procedure, the District Official (a

full time Trade Union official) meets with the convenor, the industrial relations manager and the factory manager.

During this time, the status quo is whatever the management decide it to be. In other words, if a dispute starts because management decide to speed up the assembly line without adequately increasing manning levels, then throughout the 3 weeks of procedure, the line speed and the manning levels remain at the level which actually caused the dispute.

At the end of the 3 weeks negotiations, if the workers are not satisfied, they can take industrial action - provided they can remember what it was about, and still feel sufficiently angry and united about the incident or problem which provoked the dispute.

As far as the union is concerned, the role of the steward in all of this is to make sure that procedure is followed. So if workers take industrial action at the time a grievance arises (instead of waiting 3 weeks like they're supposed to), the steward's first task is to cajole them back to work, so that the problem can be put "in procedure". This is what happens all the time at Ford. Engineering workers can tell many a similar tale.

At a national level, and very frequently at District level, the union strongly enforces this role for the shop steward:

"About six months ago, we had a situation in the plant where things were getting so bad on the lines - management were forcing harder work, and procedure was getting us nowhere - that several line stewards started ignoring procedure, and encouraging the blokes to continue industrial action rather than drop it for the 3 week's negotiations.

So after a couple of weeks of sporadic stoppages (which we won quite often), the management - with the support of the convenor - phoned up the TGWU District Official and asked him to organise a meeting of all the TGWU shop stewards to lecture them about procedure. This he did, and the management gave time off and a room in the plant for the meeting (which never usually happens).

He came in, and told us that we were officials of the TGWU, and responsible to the union. The union had a national procedure agreement with Ford, and the agreement belonged as much to the union as Ford. And he warned that if stewards persisted in encouraging members to break that agreement, they would have their credentials withdrawn by the union. This was backed up by the chairman of the branch, and by the Deputy Convenor, both "moderate" TGWU stewards."

Ford Langley steward

The central importance given to observing procedure in the TUC/Government "Concordat" agreed in February 1979 illustrates how far unions have now taken responsibility for discipline.

Participation and the Bullock Report

ALL these attempts to draw shop stewards much closer to management have come together in the "participation" schemes at firms like Leyland and Chrysler. A variety of schemes involving employee or works councils were already in operation in the private sector when the Bullock report, commissioned by the Labour Government, was published.

THE BULLOCK Report was concerned specifically with the idea of worker representatives on the boards of directors of large companies. The members of the committee (which included union leaders Jack Jones and Clive Jenkins, labour lawyers and employers like Heath of GKN and Callard of ICI) couldn't agree. So two reports were submitted - a majority and a minority report.

Majority Report

THIS should have been the report which would act as a basis for future legislation. But a ferocious attack from the CBI, coupled with splits in the unions led Labour to draw back on the main proposals. These were :

- ++ Workers should sit on the boards of companies with more than 2,000 employees (i.e. about $\frac{1}{3}$ of all workers in the private sector in just over 700 firms).
- ++ In future, boards of directors should consist of equal numbers of worker directors and shareholder-nominated directors, plus a number of co-opted directors, appointed by agreement of the other directors. These would be an uneven number to enable deadlocked votes to be broken.
- ++ The size of boards would vary from company to company, ranging from 11 to 25 members.
- ++ The manner of electing worker directors was to be decided by the unions in each company. In each company, a Joint Committee would be made responsible for sustaining representation on the board and coordinating it with any collective bargaining.
- ++ Company law would be amended to prevent the annual meeting of shareholders simply overruling board decisions.

It's clear that workers would have neither a majority nor even equality on the board. The set-up would encourage the myth that 'Capital' and 'Labour' are equal, and differences can be settled by putting them together with a few "neutrals" - as if it's possible for someone to be neutral. In W. Germany, these "neutral" directors have usually backed up the management and the status quo. But there are a number of more basic objections which militants should put forward :

- 1) The proposals would force workers to accept and work with the logic of capitalism, where firms' main interests are exploitation and competition, without any regard for 'social' considerations. Workers' interests are only

taken forward by abolishing wasteful competition, and overcoming the competition between workers. The worker director would, in practise, be helping the firm beat off the competition, or buy raw materials at cheap prices from the Third World.

- 2) The worker director proposals undermine collective bargaining, which at plant level can involve the mass of workers in meetings or collective action.
- 3) They are explicitly aimed at weakening the independent, autonomous power of the working class. Whatever small benefits they might offer are outweighed by the fact they are part of a strategy to restructure capitalism and plan industrial relations on a basis which will aid profit making. In West Germany, there is a wonderful structure of participation but shop floor power and democracy is almost non-existent.
- 4) Worker directors would be subject to Company Law which states that all directors are responsible for the well being of the firm. This means profitability - and if necessary, redundancies, or voting funds to the Conservative Party if it offers better tax conditions! On top of that, the directors would not be allowed to divulge certain kinds of information which could "damage the competitive prospects of the firm."

The Minority Report

DESPITE Bullock's attempt to offer capital a new strategy for getting out of the crisis, the capitalists themselves thought it went too far. Heath (of GKN), Callard (ICI) and Biggs (Esso) submitted their own report advocating $\frac{1}{3}$ worker representation on a German style 'Supervisory Board' which would concern itself with longer term policy, leaving day to day management to the existing Board of directors. This would of course offer even less than Bullock, and was a cosmetic exercise aimed at dressing up the power structure, making it look more accountable and sympathetic to workers.

THE TWO different reports reflect the dilemma that exists inside the capitalist class and reformism about how to escape the crisis. In many ways, the majority report was quite a radical proposal - an unpleasant compromise from the capitalists' point of view designed to avoid damaging confrontations by incorporating the unions into the power structure. In short, it was an exercise in long-term strategic thinking. But the majority report went too far for most capitalists. They aren't prepared to take the risks at this stage, despite the salutary lessons of employee directors in British Steel and the long history of consultative machinery in this country. Whether a future Labour Government will try to bring in a bill along Bullock lines in the future will depend both on the severity of future recessions, and the degree of resistance from employers and unions, many of whom have already realised that this form of participation is a trap for the working class.

Participation ,Leyland - style

ALONGSIDE the debate about legislating on the basis of the Bullock proposals, another debate was taking place on the shop floor about a different kind of participation. The prime example was British Leyland. The Ryder Report of 1975, which had recommended a Government take over of Leyland, had also proposed a scheme of "workers' participation".

At the time of writing there are signs that this scheme may now be doomed (early 1979), but the Leyland experience carries many important lessons for trade unionists. (7)

THE RYDER report was quite emphatic -

"The most crucial factor in improving industrial relations at BL and in creating the conditions in which productivity can be increased is that there should be some progress towards industrial democracy."

But this industrial democracy had nothing to do with workers' control. The report proposed "a new structure of joint management/union councils, in which BL's shop stewards and particularly their senior shop stewards will have a major role....Trade union members will have to recognise the new responsibilities which the shop stewards are exercising on their behalf and ensure that the right people are chosen to exercise these responsibilities."

IN PRACTISE, Leyland's "participation" involved only the leading stewards in each plant - and it was clearly accepted by management because it was in their interests. There were no facilities for report-back meetings. Notes (not minutes) of meetings were often not displayed, and when they were they didn't contain anything considered "confidential". Nonetheless, and despite the fact that Ryder had made it clear that participation would not mean joint regulation, the majority of stewards accepted the scheme. Derek Robinson even claimed that: "If we make Leyland successful, it will be a political victory. It will prove that ordinary people have got the intelligence and determination to run industry."

THE BASIC structure was a three-tier one, with committees at plant, divisional and national level. There were to be 31 Joint Management Committees (JMC's) covering either single plants or groups of plants. These JMC's selected representatives to three divisional JMC's. These in turn selected 11 shop floor and 4 staff reps for the top body, the Cars Council. The plant JMC's met monthly; the divisional committees quarterly; and the Cars Council was to meet "at least quarterly" - in fact it met 7 times within its first 6 months. When you add to these, the "agenda meetings" held by employee reps prior to each JMC, and the provision for departmental meetings and twice-yearly conferences for all JMC reps, we begin to get some idea of the time spent away from the shop floor by these involved in the participation scheme. (The meetings were of course in addition to the stewards' other normal duties).

THE employee reps, many of whom were already full-time stewards, were caught on the horns of a dilemma. The aim of the JMC's was to "improve the performance of the activity within which the employees who are represented in the body are employed."

Yet this inevitably meant the reps would be making the workers they represented do more work. How could they represent the interests of the company and their members at the same time?

Especially when the committee members were not allowed to divulge confidential information. For confidentiality meant there could be no proper accountability.

The Ryder scheme had a clear aim. Although the JMC's and Cars Council were not supposed to discuss wages and conditions in relation to collective bargaining issues, Leyland must have hoped that the "responsible" attitudes promoted by participation would spin-off into talks about reforming the wages structure - the drive towards centralised bargaining.

BUT the company, and many senior stewards had reckoned without the shop floor. The "Fringe Benefit" document put forward by the stewards (which proposed that all wage agreements would start from a common date) was thrown out by the rank and file, largely because of 'penalty clauses' which would stop lay-off payments to workers involved in 'unconstitutional' industrial action. It took the toolmakers strike of early 1977 to get centralised bargaining back on the agenda, this time through the involvement of full-time officials.

BUT BY the summer of 1977, the effects of participation were beginning to be felt - the culmination was the fiasco at Longbridge when Robinson claimed 50 to 1 support for strike action on the pay claim, even before the night shift had voted; and then called off the strike after a demonstration by a few hundred workers, although a majority of workers did in fact vote in favour of a strike. In an interview in Socialist Worker, three Longbridge militants explained the Longbridge events:

"There is one fundamental overwhelming reason: the collapse of the stewards' organisation at Longbridge."

They attributed this collapse to measured day work, and participation. The senior stewards "spend most of their time with management." The best militants no longer wanted to be stewards. "You can't," they said, "tell people year after year that management is good for them, and then suddenly flick your fingers and call a strike."

THERE is little doubt that participation has been used to 'rationalise' Leyland. And from management's point of view, it has had considerable success. Edwardes' plan to cut 12,000 jobs was accepted. But from the workers' point of view, the scheme has made Leyland workers less of a political force. Because it has prevented them from organising and fighting independently from management. Many Leyland workers, like those at Canley who knocked the scheme back right at the start, have realised this. Most were never given a chance to vote on it. But now, even the senior stewards are thinking again. Jack Adams, secretary of the BL Cars Combine has been quoted as saying: "We are convinced that they have used participation as a management tool." He feels that the attitude of management in late 78 and early 78 was a breach of the confidence stewards had placed in the company before Edwardes was appointed. There is an alternative to participation - independent organisation.

More Discipline on the Shop Floor

One of the problems of Measured Day Work (MDW) for the bosses is that it contains no incentive to workers to work hard - unlike piecework. A MDW factory is a great place for the struggle against work! Workers don't hurry back to work after tea and lunch breaks; there's no hurry to start work in the morning; assembly lines mysteriously break down or are switched off; there's a shortage of a key component and no-one tells the foreman - and so on. In all these ways, workers can fight back against exploitation, without it affecting their wage packet.

So - as Leyland management and the Coal Board discovered when they switched from piecework to MDW - productivity begins to fall. And the only way to get over this "problem" is to have heavy disciplinary sanctions, agreed between management and the union, which can be used by foremen, supervisors, superintendants etc., against any "offender". This is the trend in many workplaces over the past five years - especially with the move to MDW.

The Problems of a Militant Shop Steward in this situation

A militant worker, becoming a steward for the first time, will rightly say "stuff procedure". This will mean a few problems:

1. Management will take a very hard line on any disputes involving that section - because it's a direct challenge to their power. So to win a serious dispute will almost always mean taking action. But even if the steward has the backing of the section, and they're willing to go out fairly often to win struggles, there is still a risk that this section will get isolated from other sections.

Management will try to make certain this happens, by a deliberate policy of divide and rule. They'll rapidly lay off other sections without pay. In this way, the militant steward could get isolated on the shop stewards committee, and even risk victimisation by either the management or union (or both). This happened recently with Tom Birmingham, a steward at Ford Dagenham Body Plant.

2. The steward will start losing individual cases of discipline or grievance. Cases like lateness, absenteeism, "not doing the job properly" etc. - which the rest of the workers on the section are unlikely to be willing to support through strike action because they're too trivial, too frequent or it's too much of an isolated case. To win these cases without a struggle, the steward will usually need to have arrived at some working understanding with the Department Superintendant. So, without this cosy relationship with management, the militant steward starts losing individual cases, and people start to get pissed off. Even worse, the section gets demoralised, and gets used to losing.

3. Militant stewards will, in any case, frequently find themselves in a minority on the stewards' committee of a MDW workplace. As already outlined in Section 3, management's main tactic of divide and rule under MDW is to divide the workload unequally. It is nearly always true that the most militant areas are those with the heaviest workload. They tend to elect militant stewards with the intention of resolving their problems through action.

Other areas tend to elect moderate stewards who avoid action (which loses money) but who're good at negotiating over individual problems.

In most workplaces, areas where there is a heavy workload are usually very under-represented on the stewards' committee. For example, in a car plant the hardest work is nearly always on the assembly-line, where there might be one steward for every 80 workers. But there'll still be one steward for the 10 plumbers; one steward for 20 stock feeders; one steward for 12 hoist maintenance workers - and so on.

Even in areas where there's a heavy workload, the steward can fairly quickly succumb to a combination of management threats and favours. It's like the famous "hard and soft" approach of police interrogators. The threat of the sack will be rapidly followed by the offer of a softer job, more overtime, no hassles about going about "union business" in "company time". Fairly soon, these stewards are never seen in overalls, and on the shop stewards' committee they're lining up with the "moderates" against anyone who is supporting workers in struggle.

Conclusion

Over the past few years there has been a systematic attempt to tie down shop stewards, and reduce their power against management. This has involved the introduction of MDW, centralised wage bargaining, participation, nationally (and sometimes domestically) negotiated procedure and discipline agreements, and continuing productivity deals.

But it's important to emphasise that even under MDW there are militant shop stewards who are successfully struggling against these pressures. However, it is increasingly difficult to do so without a great deal of resolve and a clear political understanding about the alternatives.

It is also true that in the Health Service and in piecework factories, there are a far higher proportion of militant stewards than in workplaces under MDW. But what we're talking about in this section is trends - the trend towards MDW, and the trend towards incorporating shop stewards into management and the creation in many factories of a new layer of "rank and file Bureaucrats" - the full-time convenors and senior stewards.

SECTION 5 - Successive years of wage restraint under Labour

For more than four years, we've been faced with continuous wage restraint. For the first three years it had the official support of the trade union movement, under the "Social Contract". In September 1977, Healey introduced the 10% wage guideline. In 1978 it was a 5% guideline. Officially, the TUC is against these guidelines. In practice, as the firefighters discovered, any workers who try to break these guidelines will get no sympathy from the TUC.

So fighting for decent wage rises has meant taking on both the TUC and the Labour Government. To win a major fight could have meant forcing an election - as the miners did to the Heath Government in 1974. In our view, of course there's nothing wrong with that - it's just very difficult. You need a great deal of power - such as the united strength of the miners - and you need a lot of support from other sections of the working-class.

And with practically every section of the class fighting in isolation (for what were effectively very similar wage demands) there was never much chance of this. Wage restraint has worked partly because every major wage struggle was fought separately. The power workers, the teachers, the oil tanker drivers, the firefighters, Ford workers, hospital ancillaries and all the other groups could be headed off much more easily on their own, than if they'd campaigned together.

Had this happened, it would have been a major attack on the anti working-class policies carried out by this Government. It would have raised directly the question of political power. But another key problem is that there is no viable left-wing alternative to this Government. The only alternative to the Labour Government is the Tories - not an attractive alternative for many workers.

The result has been widespread demoralisation in many places, and a weakening of shop-floor organisation. The failure of the bakers, and later the hospital and council workers to win widespread support from the private sector was a good illustration of the cumulative impact of 4 years of the Social Contract. Individual factories have got good rises in some cases, but their success has not been generalised.

SECTION 6 - The Trade Unions Today

The past four years has seen something unique in British political history. The trade unions have policed a policy of cutting the standard of living of millions of their members - the Social Contract. Even more extraordinary is that the architect of this policy was the leader of the TGWU, Jack Jones.

On top of this, we've had the role played by the TUC in the defeat of the Grunwick workers' struggle for union recognition, and in the defeat of the firefighters. At Grunwick, the TUC took the struggle out of the hands of the strike committee (through a combination of threats and promises) - and then prevented the organisation of mass picketing and prevented other workers from taking industrial action in sympathy. The Postal Workers Union even fined several union officers who organised the solidarity blacking of mail to and from Grunwick. And the TUC refused any support for the firefighters, despite the TUC's token opposition to continuing wage restraint.

In almost every case where workers have gone into struggle, they've found themselves fighting not only the bosses, but their unions at national level too. The power workers found themselves up against the EEPTU, the printworkers in London found themselves against SOGAT and NATSOPA, the Grunwick workers found themselves suspended by APEX, the union for which they were seeking recognition, and so on.

It's not just the leaders

In the history of the trade union movement, there have been countless examples of defeats that have happened because trade union leaders have been too willing to compromise, not militant enough and anxious to avoid a fight. The General Strike was one such occasion.

But the situation today is clearly different from that. There is a new element. Today, the trade unions are actively involved in organising against working-class attempts to get better wages, better conditions and less work.

Why are the trade unions so much worse than they were even fifty years ago? Many socialist organisations pin the blame on the national trade union leaders. Men like Gormley, who helped push through the Coal Board's pit productivity scheme against the decision of the NUM conference and a national ballot of all miners; like Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon who both played a major role in carrying out the Social Contract; like Tom Jackson, for scabbing on the Grunwick workers; like Terry Parry, leader of the firefighters' union, who from the beginning of their strike was against any effective action.

The idea is that workers should kick out these "bureaucrats" and vote in new, left-wing trade union leaders - like Arthur Scargill. There's no doubt that this sounds very attractive. We think it would be a lot better for the working class if trade unions were

led by people with similar politics to Scargill. Unfortunately, things are not so simple, and pinning the blame on national leaders - saying they've been "bought off", "lead a cushy life", "are paid more than the average industrial wage", or that they "can't remember what it's like to work down a pit, or drive a bus all day, or slog your guts out on an assembly-line" - can be misleading and dangerous. It just doesn't explain the scale of the problems we're facing in the trade union movement. And it isn't a convincing explanation of why these trade union leaders behave in this way (or why Scargill might well shift to the right if he succeeds Gormley).

On the left, we have to face up to these facts:

- * Some of these trade union leaders have a large amount of support in their unions. In the recent elections in the AUEW, right-winger Terry Duffy beat "left-winger" Bob Wright as President. In the TGWU, Moss Evans (a "moderate") got far more votes than Alex Kitson - the Broad Left's candidate.
- * The strategy of replacing right-wing leaders with "left-wing" leaders has frequently failed. Both Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon were "left-wing" candidates in the TGWU and AUEW - supported by the Broad Left. We have to begin to understand the pressures on these men that lead them to turn against the working class. The role of Trade Unions in capitalism is changing - they've been given far more power, and are increasingly involved in the state apparatus.
- * The problem isn't just the national leaders. As we've seen, increasing numbers of convenors and stewards are behaving in exactly the same way.

Our problems lie in the role of trade unions today

Workers created trade unions because, for the time being, we unfortunately have to live under capitalism. The job of a trade union is to get the best deal possible for workers in this situation. The problem is - if workers win all their struggles for better pay, less work and better conditions, capitalists go bankrupt and workers end up on the dole.

Trade unions have "solved" this problem by limiting themselves to pressing for better wages and conditions up to the point where they begin to hit capitalism hard. But no further.

So, trade unionism accepts the existence and the ground rules of capitalism - the exploitation of workers by bosses. The aim is not to win struggles but instead to compromise, using mass industrial action as a threat or bargaining counter.

It took some time for capitalists to understand all this, and with good reason. When the unions were forced to call their bluff and unleash mass industrial action - as happened in the battles over union recognition and wages particularly in the years before the First World War - the resulting action always

contained the threat of major political crisis and drastic social change. And before the slump took its toll, there were many revolutionaries organising in the unions, some - like James Connolly in Ireland - in leading positions.

But many things changed in Britain as a result of the world slump in the 30's, the most severe recession ever. Up to then, economists believed that capitalism would return to full employment after a recession. But the depth of the slump in the 30's made it look as though mass unemployment and stagnation was the natural state of capitalism. Most attempts by individual capitalists to get out of the recession, by cutting wages so that they could lower prices and sell more, simply made things worse.

What changed this situation was the intervention of the state. In Nazi Germany arms expenditure and road building seemed to be pulling the economy out of depression. In Britain, the economist Keynes showed that the problem was that because of wage-cutting and because of the numbers on the dole - there was not enough demand for goods. So the state would have to artificially increase demand by spending more than it collected in taxes.

This extra spending would either be by direct grants to industry, by public works (roads, schools, hospitals) or by cutting taxes to private businesses.

So the slump forced capitalist governments to take a greater role in planning the economy - to plan the level of investment, the level of demand, the level of unemployment, the level of wages - in order to avoid the chaotic social consequences of mass unemployment. By this time, most capitalists had come to see that trade unions were not the threat they had feared. The industrial and political defeat of the working class in the slump had pushed the trade unions to the right, and it was now even more clear that trade unionism accepted the existence of capitalism. The aim of the unions was to eliminate the worst aspects of capitalism - wage cutting, bad conditions and super-exploitation, and mass unemployment. And they saw that this could be achieved by a greater amount of planning of the capitalist economy.

What we're saying is that the introduction of capitalist planning is the most fundamental change which has taken place in society over the last 40 years. It has affected everything : the power of the state ; the growth of the "public sector" (health , housing, education etc); collective bargaining , unemployment and much more besides.

In particular, it has changed the role of the unions. Interestingly enough, it was the Tories who took the first steps along the road to involving the unions in this planning, when they set up the NEDC (National Economic Development Council) and the National Incomes Commission, the latter in the late 50's. These moves were accelerated by Labour after its election victory of 1964. Wilson and George Brown established the National Board for Prices and Incomes, since when there has been almost constant wage restraint of one kind or another. (Wilson actually imposed a complete wage freeze in 1966). The NBPI

was set up initially without TUC backing, and had a Tory chairman. But it did receive TUC sanction in the Autumn of 1965.

SO THIS is the major change in the role of trade unions: sixty years ago, trade unions were a force in society largely outside of the state - the first world war Treasury Agreement was seen as a temporary expedient only. Today, because of planning, the unions are an increasingly important part of key state institutions. And they are informally involved in Government at all levels on an unprecedented scale.

Under the 1974-79 Labour Government, the trade unions became one of the main vehicles for smashing working class resistance to the bosses. The Social Contract was a pact between the Government (on behalf of Capital) and the unions to cut the standard of living of workers in the interests of restoring the profitability of the private sector. The promised social benefits never materialised. As architects of the social contract, it was hardly surprising that Jones, Scanlon and the rest were unwilling to lead struggles against it.

NOR was it just a question of union leaders failing to lead struggles. They often connived or even initiated victimisation of trade unionists who did defy the contract. There were warnings to stewards at Fords from the unions. Strikers at SU Carburettors in Birmingham were fined by the AUEW. Members of NATSOPA were expelled after an unofficial strike at the Times newspaper in 1977, and the union offered to help management find replacements. But probably the clearest example was the attempt to discipline 9 leading shop stewards at the Leyland assembly plant at Cowley, Oxford. The stewards had led a strong fight against "participation", the Social Contract and redundancies. As a result, two of them were elected convenor and deputy convenor by ballot of the whole TGWU membership. Leyland refused to recognise them, and shortly afterwards, the TGWU Regional Committee brought charges against all 9 for "bringing disrepute to the trade union movement."

ITS no accident that all this happened under a Labour Government, but it is not just a question of the relationship between the unions and Labour. When the Heath Government was forced out of office by the miners in 1974, it was clear to the employers that the working class was once again becoming a threat to capitalism. 1969 to 74 was a period of growing working class political power in society. Not only was there greater wage militancy and a decline in the rate of profit - but there was a growth in radical ideas about society.

THE solution has been to institutionalise this growth in power by giving the reformist organisations of the working class - the trade unions - more power than before. Instead of the working class' power becoming an uncontrollable threat, it can be channelled into manageable waters for the benefit of capital.

FOR the unions, this has meant not only a role in Government (discussing the budget, planning, the social contract etc), but also important legislation to increase their power and control. e.g. the Trade Unions and Labour Relations Act, Employment Protection Act, Health and Safety at Work Act. All this could only

happen to the extent it did under a Labour Government. But Heath's own attempts to involve the unions in tripartite discussions in 1972/3 shows that the Tories could continue in the same vein, if the Heath/Prior faction wins out.

Conclusion

UNION leaders nowadays spend much of their time sitting on Government committees, "trying to make British industry work". Its no good criticising these people for simply doing their job. And equally, its no good basing a strategy on electing "left-wing" leaders to do the same job. (We've seen the result with Jones, Lord Scanlon and Lawrence Daly) As we say in part 2, left wing leaders can obviously help - but they can never be the whole answer. And they very often sow illusions.

WE think that to start winning struggles again on a regular basis, we have to go beyond the limits of trade unionism. We have to develop a political strategy to challenge the power of capitalism. Without a clear political alternative, union leaders inevitably accept the logic of the employers' arguments, and we stay on the old treadmill.

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SECTION 7 . The Hold of Reformist Politics in the Working Class

REFORMISM takes different forms. Right wing reformists, who inhabit many leading positions in the unions, come out with ideas like :

- ++ There will always be workers and bosses
- ++ Things will get better in the end if we all pull together
- ++ The police, courts and Parliament are usually fair and should be trusted
- ++ MP's have power
- ++ Moderation and "give and take" is better than conflict
- ++ Its not worth looking for solidarity because you won't get it - look after yourself.

These ideas have an influential effect on the way struggles are fought, and often stop them being fought at all. But reformist ideas and methods are not confined to the right wing. Left-wing reformists (like the Tribune group of MPs and its union supporters), although speaking in much more radical terminology, are also usually tied to working within the system. And they often end up supporting similar ways of conducting campaigns and strikes as the right-wingers. Some examples would be :

- ++ NEVER GETTING WORKERS INVOLVED IN THEIR OWN STRUGGLES. This begins right at the base. How many stewards hold regular section meetings for example ?

The number of workplace bulletins produced regularly by stewards committees or union branches is tiny. And when a struggle starts, its rare that mass picketing or mass occupation is used as a tactic. During a strike, workers who arent on the strike committee are often left in the dark about whats going on. Too many officials, and shop stewards too, see mass involvement as a threat to their power, or they dont believe the rank and file have the intelligence or the consciousness to be closely involved.

++ RELYING ON COURTS AND TRIBUNALS

Over the past few years, a whole labyrinth of industrial legislation has been created. And with it, new courts and more tribunals, and new powers for both. So theres ACAS, CAC (Central Arbitration Committee), EAT (Employment Appeals Tribunal), the industrial tribunals as well as the civil and criminal courts. Union officials have encouraged their members to participate in the new tribunals and appeals bodies. And there is still faith in the courts, despite the long history of anti-union judgements. Arthur Scargill's recourse to the courts, in the dispute within the NUM over productivity deals in 1978, is a good example of how a legal action helps to head off a struggle - while the courts or tribunals are deliberating, workers are encouraged to drop their action. In practically every case, this whole procedure is very demoralising - and there's usually little chance of restarting effective action.

In this way, workers at Grunwick were encouraged to "have faith", first in ACAS, then in the High Court, then in the Appeals Court, and finally in the House of Lords; rather than continuing with the mass picketing in the summer of 1977, which could have closed the factory down.

++SECTIONALISM

THIS means never trying to link up with other workers - either inside the workplace (e.g. toolmakers going it alone), or with other workers facing similar problems, or with other working class people in the community around the workplace. It means saying "our section has a special case", and "we should get more than them."

THIS kind of attitude was widespread in the 50's and 60's. But in those days of economic growth and labour shortage, sectional actions could often win. Solidarity was more of a luxury principle to be kept in cold storage until shop stewards felt it could be used without upsetting the balance of power in their section or factory. (There was also an element of pride here - the view that no well organised factory should have to turn to others for help, other than perhaps some financial help). Today this policy is a disaster. But its proving hard to shake off.

++ FIGHTING TO COMPROMISE, NOT WIN

This is the normal practise of trade unions and an essential part of reformism. Unions are there to strike bargains over the price and conditions of sale of labour power - not to abolish wage labour. A good example was in the firefighters' strike. The FBU leader, Terry Parry held a series of private meetings with the employers seeking ways to end the strike, and effectively sell out the claim. Every militant initiative, like the flying pickets

in Essex - was attacked by the FBU executive. In other words, they were fighting to lose. (Although they wouldnt have put it quite like that...)

JUST how important these ideas are for the stability of capitalism can be seen from the ferocious response of the state when workers go beyond reformism. For instance, the Grunwick workers broke with sectionalism when they appealed to other workers to support the mass pickets. On the first day that other workers turned up, over 80 were arrested in an unprovoked police attack. The same thing happened when the miners linked up with engineers and car workers outside Saltley coke depot in February 1972. (Except that the miners won)

UNFORTUNATELY, there are few examples we can give of struggles like this which go beyond reformism. Despite a few recent exceptions, like the lorry drivers' strike, it would appear that reformism has if anything, been gaining ground since Labour won in 1974. Reformist union leaders continued to have widespread support at all levels of the unions, despite their part in cutting their members' living standards. In the Cowley example, cited earlier, it was significant that the right wing ex-convenor Parsons was able to turn to lay bodies of the union (District and Regional TGWU committees) who pressed the disciplinary action. He didnt have to go the top leaders like Evans and Jones to start the victimisation.

So Why Is Reformism So Strong ?

AT a time of a falling standard of living, growing unemployment, and cuts in education and health spending, it is natural to think that workers would oppose these things in their own interests. Many workers have done and still do - but in general there has been little active opposition apart from the low-pay strikes of early 1979, and isolated struggles against the cuts, like at Hounslow and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospitals. Nearly every time theres been a recession in this country, we've seen a growth in reformist and reactionary (including fascist and racist) ideas. This is because of the recession on the one hand, and the absence of a credible alternative on the other. For example :

- 1) Threats of redundancy push workers towards "moderate" solutions, unless the left can put forward alternatives such as mass occupations linked to workers' plans. We can see this at British Leyland, where because of the talk of bankruptcy and losses, together with threats of closure and actual closures, workers at many factories have voted for redundancies and productivity schemes. They saw their future as best assured in a profitable and successful capitalist company - one in which workers are highly exploited. The one plant where workers have not overwhelmingly voted for all this is Cowley. But its at Cowley that left-wing activists have been able to put forward credible alternatives - based on struggle. In this way, they've been able to maintain the morale of the workforce.

- 2) In a time of mass unemployment, it's difficult to start struggles, because workers know they're up against big odds. But it's times of intense struggle that throw up left-wing leaders - you learn what you're up against, and you feel the strengths of class solidarity. For example, Arthur Scargill did not create militancy in the Yorkshire coalfield. He rose to power through it - he was an expression of it, and, like any good leader, he extended it.

BUT recently, there have been few struggles which have thrown up militant leaders. Years of incomes policy, measured day work, and right-wing media propaganda have left many workplace organisations in the domination of moderate leaders, whose reformist leadership further demoralises and divides the workforce. Under their leadership, fostered of course by employers, workers get used to losing - there are no radicalising struggles, so the moderates are re-elected. A vicious circle. Only in a few unions, such as NUPE, where a conscious effort was made to train new stewards, have new left-wing leaders emerged at the base.

- 3) We've seen how "divide and rule" policies create privileged sections of the working class; sections which earn more money, or have less work, or both. At a time of growing divisions amongst workers, people don't feel that the class as a whole has the power or unity to challenge the positions of the bosses. So they organise around individual or sectional solutions to the problems they face. Reformism, racism and sexism grow when the working class is more divided and demoralised.

THESE are the material reasons for the strength of reformism. There are also ideological reasons. The patriotism of many folk, which leads them to think in terms of the "national interest" (import controls, immigration controls), rather than the interests of the working class. The success of the media campaign to blame wage rises for causing inflation - which led many people to support the Social Contract. Loyalty to Labour (giving rise for example to Leyland and nationalised industry workers talking of supporting "our industry"). The legacy of sectionalism in the 50's and 60's. And the reformist methods of doing things - leaving it to the stewards, or deputations to Parliament. All these things contribute to the apathy with which working class people face their worsening situation.

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SECTION 8 : The Weakness of the Socialist Alternative.

WHEN we say there's been no credible left alternative, we don't mean that the left has not tried to put forward realistic strategies. There have been many good tactics and ideas generated in the struggles of the past few years. But they have not succeeded in welding together a movement which can successfully challenge the right wing reformists currently in power. Broadly speaking, there have been 3 main currents in the working class movement since 1974; the Broad Left / Tribune/

Communist Party current; The "Rank and File" movement of the Socialist Workers Party ; and the small and more varied alternatives promoted by the IMG/Socialist Challenge and the more independent rank and file groups like the Ford Workers Group , Fightback etc (We are talking here only of those currents which some kind of clear political identity - many workers have been active in rank and file organisations in their own industry which have no marked political orientation to a particular party or group).

The Broad Left . In our opinion, a fair amount of the blame for the left's weakness in recent years can be pinned on the Broad Left . We think they've ducked a number of key issues e.g. the rightward shift of formerly left union leaders . They've failed to follow up the big conferences they've initiated such as the assembly on unemployment. They've not organised link ups and conferences in key struggles like the lorry drivers and low paid strikes . They've been too much concerned with electoral politics and manouvering in conferences - and not concerned enough with organising at the base and coordinating struggles.

OF course ,its easy to criticise - and some groups spend most of their time doing that. But repeated cries of "betrayal" dont always help us tp understand why the Broad Left current has failed to generate a mass movement against the Government's policies, despite the fact that the left union leaders and MPS do have an alternative economic strategy. We believe the main reason for failure ,is that the Broad Left centres its strategy in the wrong place. It relies on Parliament, and on union leaders' influence in the Labour Party. And so when it tries to mobilise the rank and file, it doesnt always succeed - because the necessary groundwork , the political education , the base organising, hasnt been done . And the alternaive economic strategy is divorced from the struggles - and therefore becomes ^{an} abstract concept for most militants - something to pass resolutions about, rather than to struggle for.

Rank and File. An analysis of rank and filism is given in part 2. But in the context of this section ,we want to say that the key weakness of the SWP's Rank and File Movement (indeed, the reason it hasnt become a real movement) in our opinion ,is that it has been largely a front for a political party. As such it has contributed to the sectarianism of the left, and the suspicion with which many workers regard the far left. Yet despite this, Rank and File has done alot of hard work and attracted militants in some areas. A more modest approach , in cooperation with other forces on the left , could however have achieved much more.

Other Left Groups. Big Flame has been involved in a number of independent rank and file groups and left initiatives since the early 70's. The small size of these groups has in itself been a major weakness - in that workers are looking for real help and usefml contacts which a small organisation cant always provide. Also, we have suffered from groups jumping from one project to another, and putting great energy in "building" for this conference or that march, but somehow forgetting the consistent work that has to be done in between. Faced with the massive problems outlined in earlier sections , it is only going to be through unity on the revolutionary left, and a willingness to take part in joint initiatives which cut across the 3 currents, that a new socialist movement in workplaces will be built . Read on.