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A Draft Manifesto  
for discussion  
BIG FLAME\* March 77

**TOWARDS A NEW  
REVOLUTIONARY  
SOCIALIST  
ORGANISATION**



Copies of this manifesto are available from:

The National Secretary, 217 Wavertree Road, Liverpool 7

Price 25p + 15p postage and packing.

All agreements, disagreements, requests for further information should be directed to the above address.

If the project outlined in this manifesto is to reach the widest possible audience, money will be needed. All donations will be greatly appreciated.

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# INTRODUCTION

This manifesto has been prepared by the revolutionary socialist organisation, Big Flame. Our history is brief. We emerged as a rank and file grouping in Liverpool in 1971, owing no allegiance to any particular ideological current or historical tradition. While this had the defect of forcing us to learn many practical and theoretical lessons from our mistakes; it has meant that we have defined our political task as that of developing a revolutionary politics for Britain today. This has meant that our ability to learn from and analyse the needs of modern conditions has been the touchstone of our politics and is the essence of this manifesto. Many other currents on the left still tend to impose politics developed from previous periods of history.

Our own ability to formulate a coherent political strategy was held back while we remained a local group. Since 1974, the setting up of Big Flame groups in other cities has partially enabled us to overcome that difficulty. Another help has been the inspiration of learning from revolutionary movements in the rest of the world — in our early years from Italy in particular, and more recently from Chile and Portugal.

The development of Big Flame has been consolidated by two national conferences. The first, in 1975, gave us an agreed minimum political basis and a national structure. Following from this came nationally-co-ordinated practices in industry, amongst women, in education, in hospitals, and in the Troops Out and anti-fascist movements, to name the main ones. The second conference, in November 1976, consolidated the political direction of the organisation in a National Committee and a Secretariat; voted on

more developed political strategies for different sectors of struggle and an overall political project for Big Flame, of which this manifesto is a part.

This history has been brief because the intended aim of this manifesto is not recruitment into Big Flame. It is a manifesto for a new organisation. This was the project decided on by our last conference. Big Flame has a distinct political identity and a growing and viable practice. But this does not guarantee that we are able to make the impact that it necessary for our politics in Britain today. For historical reasons we are relatively small and many who share our broad ideas and ways of working are fragmented into a number of local groups, autonomous movements, cultural activities and other left organisations. Pulling together these forces could significantly advance the class struggle. We therefore want to create, with others, a new organisation. This manifesto is a part of an investigation into whether this is possible.

Our reasons for this are outlined in the first section of this document. The manifesto has a more specific purpose. It is not the completed basis for an already formed organisation. It is a document to set in motion a process of discussion. The manifesto tries to put together many of the things we've learned. It also tries to clarify and systematise the ideas that have developed amongst sections of the socialist movement trying to break from certain traditional models of organisation and politics. But we are not arrogant enough to believe we know all the answers. This manifesto will no doubt be modified in discussion.

During the next three months we hope to organise such discussions with many groups on this document or anything else. If you would like a meeting, please contact us as quickly as possible.



## POSTSCRIPT TO INTRODUCTION

Since the production of the first issue of this manifesto, quite a lot has happened in the intervening eight months. Firstly, it sold out (1,000 copies) without ever having been put on public sale. There is little doubt that it has created a tremendous amount of interest. We have had many letters saying that they thought the ideas in the manifesto were a real leap forward for the left in Britain: echoing one of the hopes in our original introduction that we were trying to systematise and clarify theory and practice well beyond the ranks of Big Flame.

Nevertheless, we have had more than correspondence. A number of discussions have taken place with national and local groupings of militants. Nationally, we had discussions with the Revolutionary Marxist Current, a group from the Trotskyist tradition. They decided to support the project for a new organisation and fused with Big Flame as the best means in their view for helping create the conditions for such a development. As a product of discussions with local groupings of militants, many of whom were brought together to discuss the manifesto, there now exists a small number of groups in different cities working towards a new organisation.

But there have been other developments. Since Big Flame's initial decision, the political terrain of the left has changed. The crisis in the capitalist system has had its echo in a rethink and re-organisation by sections of the left.

The emergence of Socialist Challenge as a more open newspaper of the International Marxist Group, as well as a number of unity-in-action initiatives like the launching of the Socialist Unity alliance to fight elections are just two of the most prominent examples. This has meant that many other parts of the left are also talking about the need for a new and different organisation. Sometimes this has been in terms of 'regroupment' which Big Flame disagrees with as it fails to go beyond the fusion of existing organisations. But it still radically alters the political scene.

Secondly, there has been a large upsurge of interest in Big Flame itself, partly through the manifesto, other publications like the critique of Trotskyism and our practical involvement in Socialist Unity.

The result is that the prospects and nature of a new organisation are less clear to us and will only unfold with the development of the struggle and common activity. But no matter what happens our priority is to strengthen the kind of theory and practice that this manifesto represents and that we know is supported by many other militants. We want to build what we call the *mass politics tendency* inside the class struggle. For us that means in organisational terms:

1. Building a stronger and bigger Big Flame as a core element in this process.
2. Gathering together militants and potential supporters of a mass politics tendency in common initiatives and possibly in a new organisation. While this would not be a qualitatively different organisation, it would represent a significant strengthening of those forces and their impact in the struggle.

Working together with wider forces in the left on common initiatives and testing in practice the longer term potential for a much larger and different kind of organisation.

As practical steps towards some of these points Big Flame will be organising a working meeting to discuss common activity for militants interested in the project for a new organisation, with the perspective of producing a joint bulletin to discuss ongoing theory and practice. We are also opening up our new journal 'Revolutionary Socialism' to the kind of debates that are essential to the formation of a new organisation and its relation to class struggle. We are also producing a new statement on organisation that will take up some of the issues being raised in the regroupment debate.

If you are interested in any of these initiatives please contact our National Secretary at the address below.

December 1977

217 Wavertree Road, Liverpool 7.



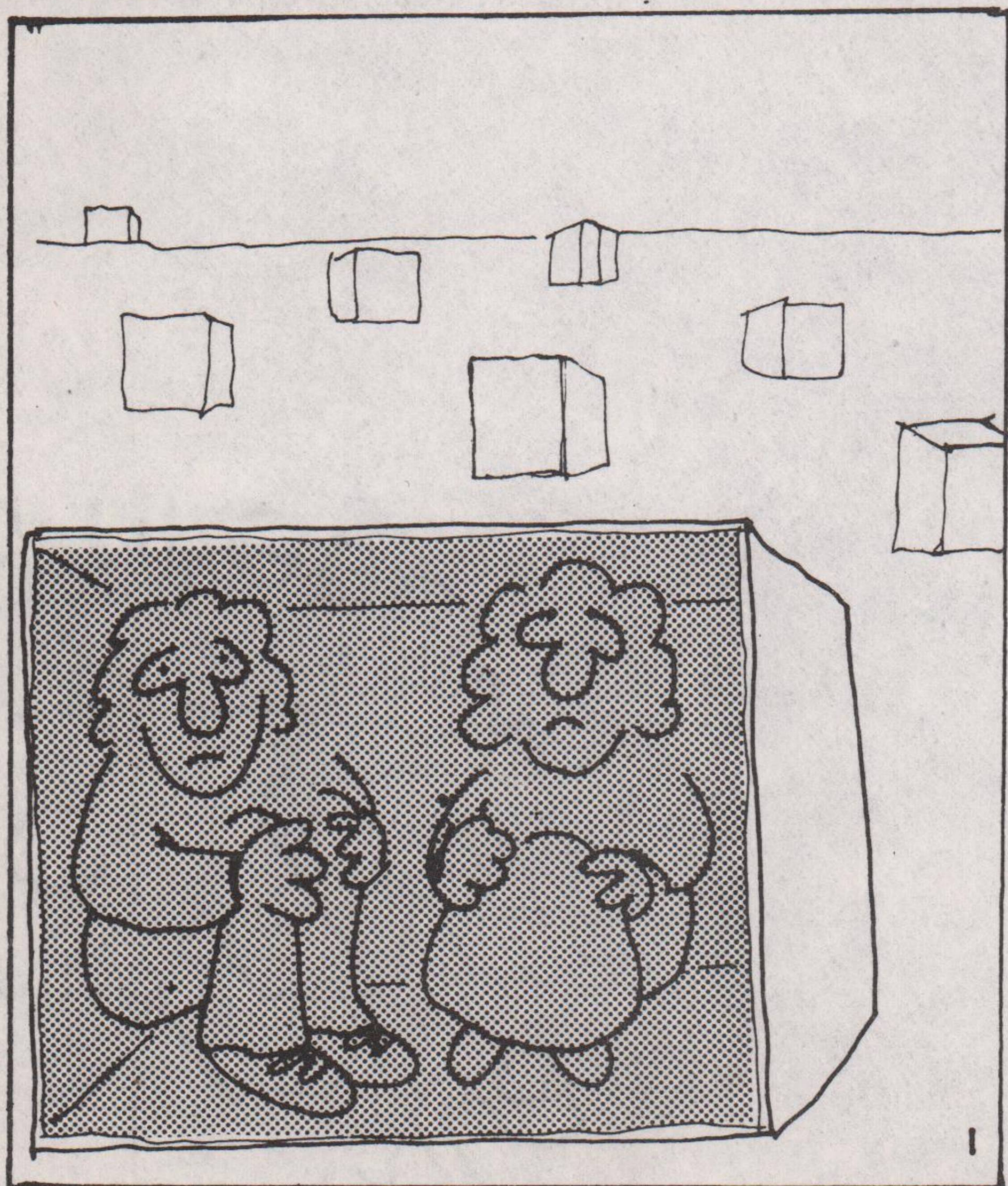
1. How do we assess the present political situation? What do we feel about it? What is the balance of class forces? Or, in other words – are we winning or losing? Are we getting nearer to communism or are we suffering a setback which is going to postpone hopes for decades? Never since the General Strike have these questions been so important in this country. Not only to revolutionaries, but to all working class men and women who daily are fighting hard for survival against the increasing ugliness of this society.

We characterise the present political phase as one in which the *balance of class forces* is in favour of the *bourgeoisie*. In our opinion this phase started with the referendum of June 1975. Despite the fact that at present we see for the first time the possibility of a fight back, we still think that overall the capitalist class is still on the offensive and the working class on the defensive.

In other words, we think that the referendum of 1975 started a period of retreat by the working class forces, which has not yet ended. The fact that now struggles are mounting again and the possibility of smashing the social contract shows us that this phase might be on the point of changing into a new phase, in which the working class will be on the offensive.

This also confirms that despite the brutal, total attack by the capitalist class against the material conditions and the organisation of the working class, the working class has not suffered a *historical defeat*, even if up to now it has not succeeded in building a total fight back.

We are not saying this because we believe that capitalism develops through a series of conspiratorial decisions and plots (although often it does). We are just restating that capitalism, under the blows of a strong working class offensive, has to fight hard for its survival. In order to do that it has to employ the best strategy and tactics – which at the moment for capitalism can be implemented only by the traditional institutions of social democracy – the Labour Party and the trade union apparatus.



2. In Big Flame, over the years, we have repeatedly emphasised the role of the rapid growth of working class struggle in this country in the 1960s and early 1970s as one of the principal reasons for the deep crisis of capitalism in Britain. We can point to the explosive struggles over wages, the freeing of the Pentonville Five, the smashing of the Industrial Relations Act, the fight against the capitalist organisation of production, especially on the assembly lines as evidence of this. Also the refusal of productivity, notably in the mines; the emergence of egalitarian demands (eg. equal pay and the miners' demand for a national bonus). The spreading of tactics: sit-ins, flying pickets. The emergence of struggles of appropriation – squatting, rent strikes etc. The emergence of demands for a guaranteed income (eg. lay-off pay). The growth of the women's movement, and its increasing part in the movement of working class women (equal pay, the right to choose).

This list is long and it could be much longer. It illustrates one side of the working class – its strength and combativity, its ability to mount autonomous struggles, that is struggles in which there is a separation between the needs of capitalist development and the needs of the working class.

However, throughout this period the working class remained dominated by reformist organisations, the Labour Party and particularly the trade union apparatuses. We think that what happened – and continues to happen – is that working class organising and consciousness remain trapped within what seemed appropriate in the period of reforms and expansion that dominated the post-war period.

In this period it was possible to fight and win by delegated struggles on a local and sectional base. This tended to confirm the working class within a consciousness that was aware of class divisions but inward-looking, not dealing with society as a whole. The fact that there were many strong and combative struggles in many sectors did not mean that this consciousness and forms of organisation were capable of coping with the *different demands of a crisis and recession*.

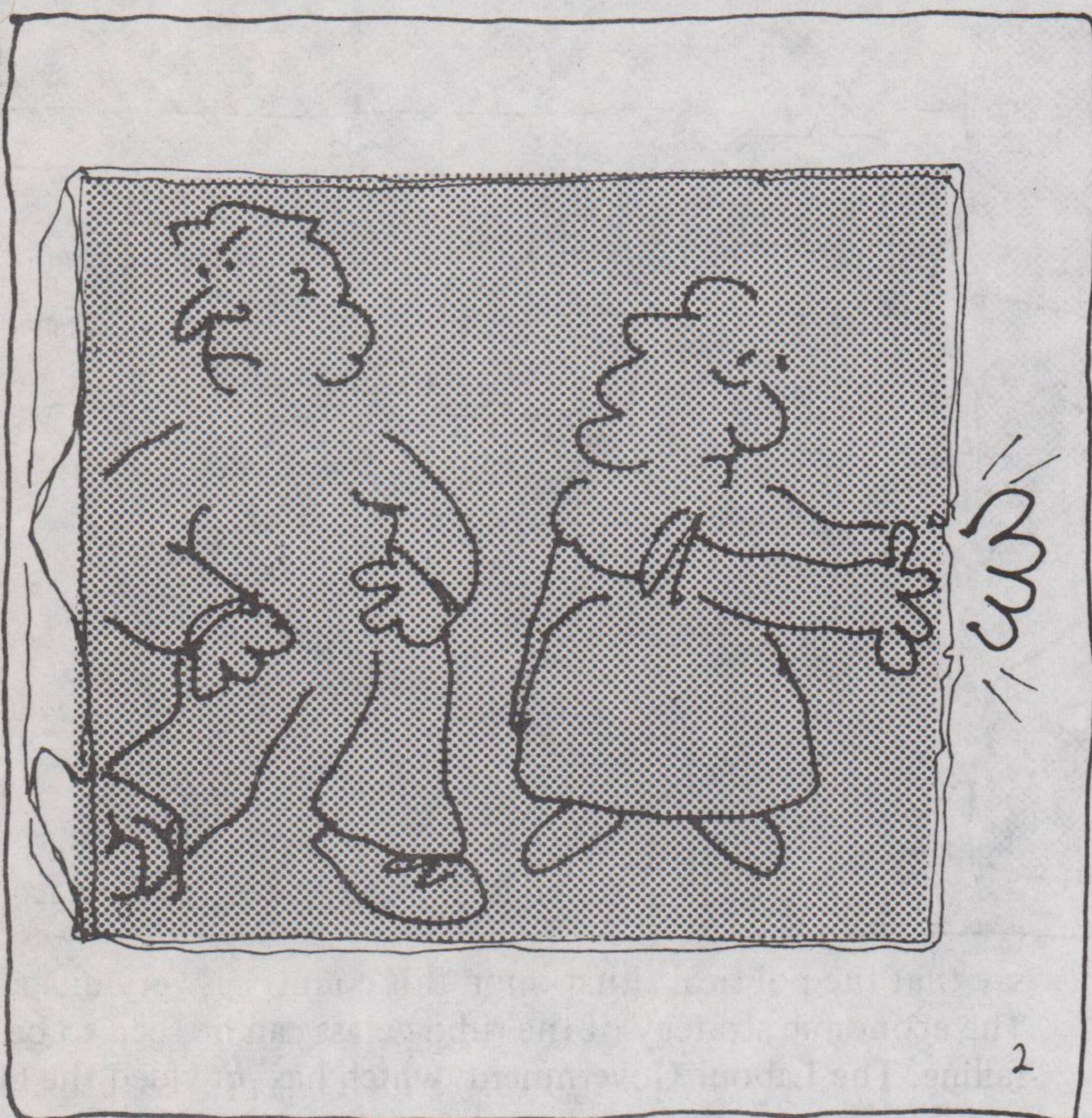
And this undoubtedly remains the single most important weakness of the working class in this country. But today the situation is changing. Social democracy can give very little to the working class. So while it maintains power over the working class, its ideology and institutions find it increasingly difficult to maintain their domination over the working class. The huge unemployment, inflation, the cuts in public spending, the increasing integration of the unions into the state; all these have contributed to a serious weakening of labourism's ability to hegemonise the working class.

3. In the last few months the situation seems to have improved again. Very hard and politically advanced struggles have been fought in many sectors. Some of them have brought about a much needed feeling of enthusiasm.

Last Autumn saw the victory of the Trico women in their equal pay strike. The huge demonstration against the cuts, mainly of public sector workers. The fights against lay-offs and increased productivity in the car industry.



The months of January and February have seen a long list of struggles take place. We'll mention just a few which have been significant for their content and forms of organisation. The Massey Ferguson occupation and then strike in Coventry against increased productivity. With weekly mass meetings of around 1,000 workers (out of 1,200); with stewards meetings open to all workers; with leafletting organised for the wives; the Massey Ferguson workers have become a real reference point, particularly for the British Leyland workers during their strike or lay-off. The Wildt Mellor textile machinery factory occupation in Leicester against a 50% cut in the workforce. The work-in at the Kirkby plant of Plessey, against closure. The occupation of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital in London against closure. The demonstration of hospital workers of Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith who locked the Area Health Authority in the Town Hall and forced them to listen for a change. The long strike which ended in partial victory at Balfour Darwin, Sheffield. The occupations of polytechnics and universities. The list could be very much longer.



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On top of this we have witnessed the beginning of the battle to smash the Social Contract. Especially centred in the car industry — with the BLMC toolmakers strike, motions, resolutions and meetings from all sides — this battle has the potential to unify the working class over the issue of wages, ie. against the attack on our living standards. Coupled to this, one sense that a lot of people are ready to have a go — especially in a situation which is so unstable.

On the other hand we still witness the isolation of some of these struggles, or their inability to break through the general framework outlined earlier. Like at Trico, where the feminist contents of the strike have been played down by the leadership ever since. Or like the fight against the Social Contract, which seems to be channelled into the traps of demands for increased differentials or 'free collective bargaining'.

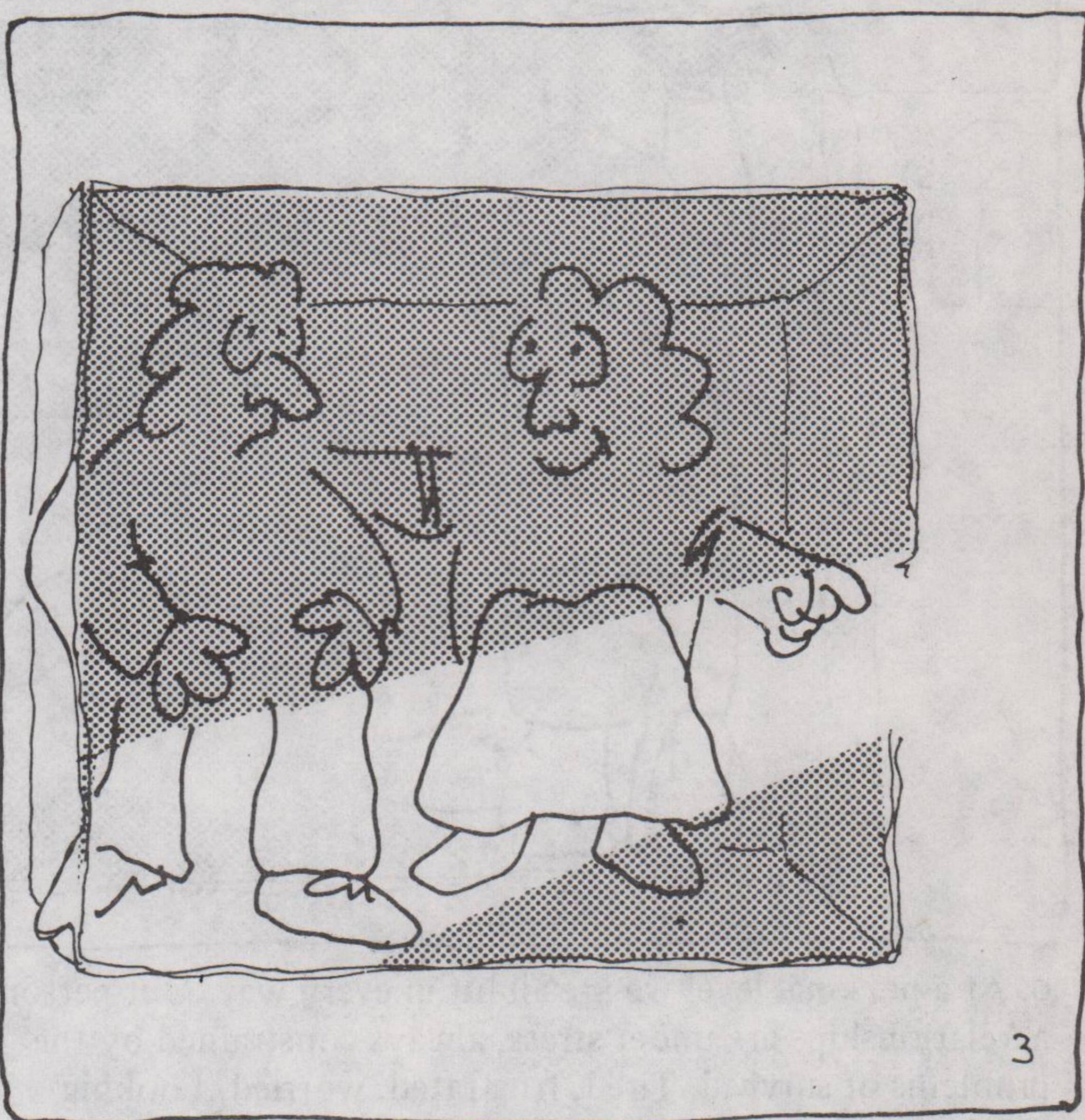
All these struggles are breaking the period of social peace, but are still incapable of generating a feeling of unity and power throughout the working class. This is the direction in which we have to work. If we are successful, then very soon we might witness the beginning of a new explosive phase of class struggle.

4. In the meantime, for the majority of the working class the problem of survival becomes harder and harder. The capitalist offensive is brutal — not in the sense of mass repression, torture, assassination etc. — but in terms of the effects it has on our lives

When we live on a housing estate and have massive rent arrears, can't cope with gas or electricity bills, can't go for a drink, feel totally isolated, in a ghetto, no money for the bus fare into town.

When we work on an assembly line, 8 hours a day, and we see the bosses trying to take away what we have won over the years by increasing productivity, reducing manning levels, increasing discipline.

When we are housewives, stuck in the home, trying to make ends meet, having to work harder because they've closed the local hospital, or there is no place in the nursery, or a 1001 other cuts in social services.



3

When we've just been made redundant, or been on the dole for years, and we know that there are no jobs — suddenly we feel that you've got a new label on our — 'unemployable'.

Then we know what the word brutal means. It means unemployment and inflation. The need to work overtime. The impossibility of enjoying a social life.

Then we know what the word brutal means. It means unemployment and inflation. The need to work overtime. The impossibility of enjoying a social life.

These are the effects of the crisis on our living standards, on our material conditions. It's all very well to say that the crisis of capitalism is unavoidable and that we, as revolutionaries, should welcome it and speed it up. This is true in a sense. But people want victories, solutions, power, sometimes ways-out. These can't be left to a future society that nobody knows when we'll be able to build. People ask themselves — 'Is it worth the fight?' And the next bill comes, and powerlessness increases.



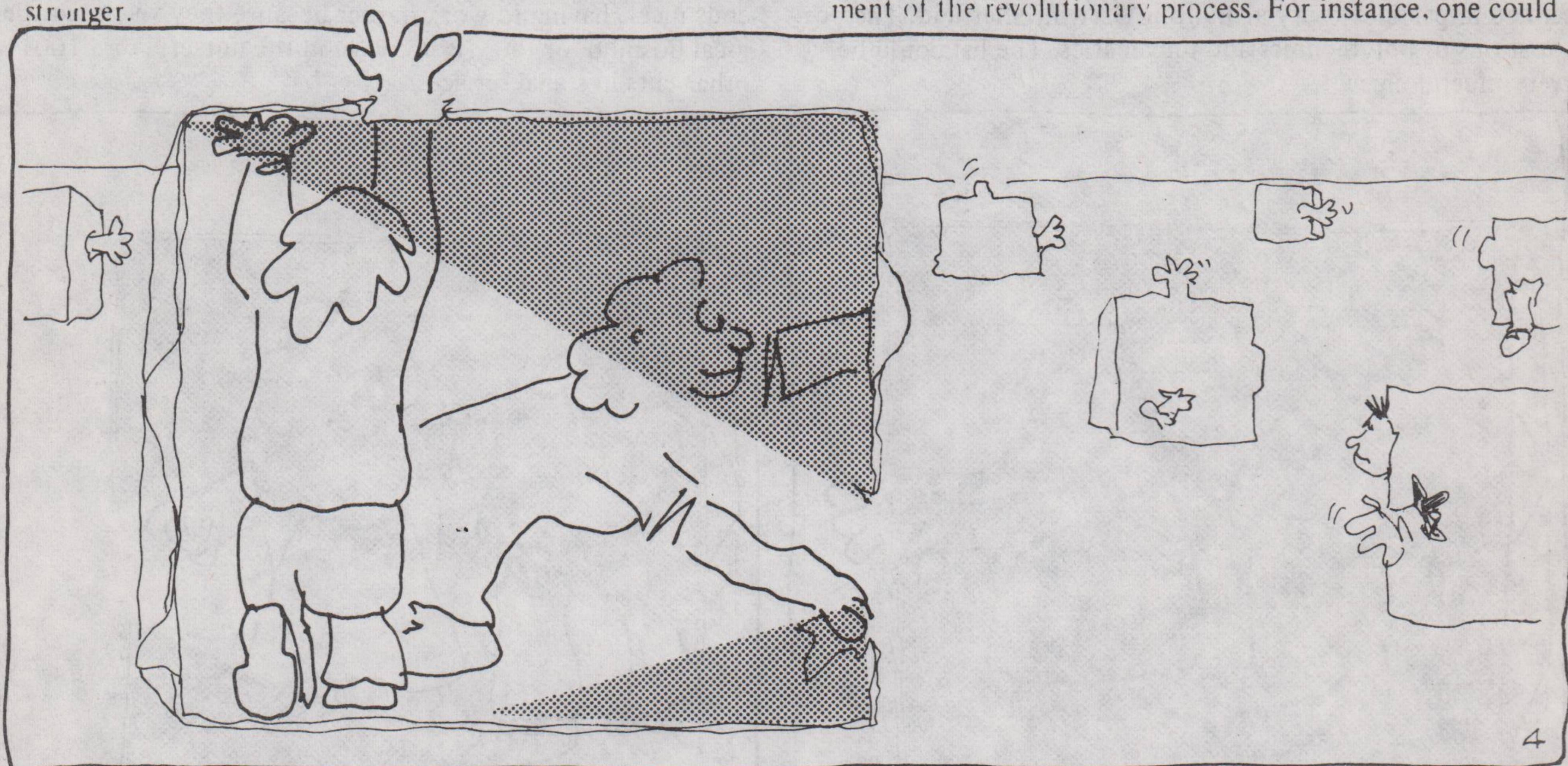
5. The brutality of the effects of the crisis on the working class is not just on their material conditions — it is on their ideas as well. And we all know how clever the ruling class is at this game. The blackmail of the 'national interest', the revival of the war spirit, the hullabaloo over the Queen's jubilee. More important — the campaign against 'the scroungers' — a device to try to divide those with a job from the unemployed.

More frightening — the upsurge of fascism and racism. Easy solutions — apparently full of common sense: 'I know the solution to unemployment — Kick the blacks out'. The National Front is gaining a lot of members and influence. It is no coincidence that this is happening now, rather than, say, 1972 or 1974, when the working class was more united and stronger.

of the capitalist economy necessarily leads to a pre-revolutionary situation, regardless of the balance of forces among the classes. According to this view, the task of the vanguard is to keep itself together in 'revolutionary party', which, when the crisis is deep enough, will lead the masses to seize power.

This view is wrong on two counts. In advanced capitalism the crisis does not come as a sudden collapse, but as a protracted phenomenon. Within it, it is the working class, with its struggles, that can lead the crisis to a point of no return, not the other way round. It's no coincidence that all the attempts by the capitalists to survive take the form of direct attacks on the working class.

So the existence of the crisis does not guarantee the advancement of the revolutionary process. For instance, one could



6. At a personal level we are all hit in every way. Our personal relationships are under stress, always constrained by the problems of survival. Tired, frustrated, worried. Looking for an escape, rather than collectively trying to tackle the problems with creativity and energy. Desperately holding on to the old, rather than accepting the challenge of looking for the new. And even losing the old.

How many working class families are splitting up? Countless. Not that we want to defend the family as an institution — on the contrary. But we want to be able to make choices, not to be compelled by the stresses created by capitalism to destroy that little bit of security, love and affection which we thought we had.

7. Does this sound tragic? No, it shouldn't. That's how people feel. It's on an understanding of this, on the anger that it creates, that we can and must build.

By stating all this, we want to fight two of the theories of the development of the revolutionary process which exist inside the working class. The first says that the inevitable collapse

say that the political situation in this country is very unstable. The economic strategy of the ruling class can be seen to be failing. The Labour Government, which has provided the best possible framework for ruling class policies, is under heavy attack from the Tories, Scottish Nationalists etc. and would stand no chance of being returned at another election.

The instability of the political situation is always a good ground for revolutionaries to operate in; but does not necessarily imply an advancement in their politics. As recent by-elections have shown, large sectors of the working class, without a clear alternative and in a situation of relative powerlessness, have tended to react against Labour's policies either through passive abstention or voting to the right or the fascists.

The vital issue which is misunderstood by these comrades, putting forward this theory, is that in the struggle for communism, the working class fights not only against the class enemy, but also against itself. The new men and women have to start to be born today. The contradictions within the working class have to be worked on now, not allowed to sharpen, and eventually left till after the seizure of power. Because, besides anything else, without a unified working class there is no possibility of seizing power.

The second theory is that held by so many disillusioned working class militants who say: 'Wait till people are starving, no pint, no ciggies — then they will rise.'



Although it's true that the more the working class threatens the survival of capitalism, the more capitalism will try to make its life miserable in every sense; it certainly doesn't follow that when everyone is starving, then they'll rise.

The question is a different one — it is at the level of *power*. If the capitalist offensive manages to win, to start making the working class feel powerless, if we start taking their attacks for granted, if they manage to split us up and actually make us fight it out amongst ourselves for survival. Then, no matter how starving we are, for a long time the working class will submit to the status quo. That's why our starting point is always the struggle of the working class, because this struggle often shows a clear anti-capitalist content. It is through such struggles, and the intervention of revolutionaries in them, that the power of the working class is built — the consciousness of being a class, the most important class in society. Without this power, every possibility of advancing towards communism is non-existent.

9. The unity of working class people, of various sectors — the confidence of fighting for the same goals — this is what we must fight for. It is that unity which is going to make people strong and full of support in their attempt to fight the crisis — the stimulus to continue, rather than passively give up.

Because to all of us, individually and collectively, it makes a big difference to feel part of a movement which is accomplishing that unity. If threatened with eviction, or the sack, or to be without money for food, it makes a difference if we see a march of workers and tenants, women and men, blacks and whites, going by the house, chanting slogans against inflation and unemployment, waving banners and making you feel you are not alone.

You will still be confronted with your bill for rent or food, but you'll feel part of something which is going to change it



8. When we assess a situation we always look at three aspects, all interrelated. *The radicality of the clash, the degree of crumbling of the bourgeois institutions and the level of unification of the working class.*

Whereas in other countries as well as Britain, the third aspect has more or less followed the other two as a consequence of them, we argue that this is not the case today. In fact we say that the struggle can be further radicalised and the bourgeois institutions further hit, only by starting from a newly acquired level of unity among the working class forces. A total political offensive by capital can only be effectively met by a total, general and unified response. Today this question takes an unprecedented priority.

all. You'll feel enthusiastic. You'll feel powerful. You'll know that if the bailiff comes, all those people, your neighbours and workmates, will be prepared to defend and protect you.

The process of building the unity of all working class sectors and the system of alliances that can be formed with other strata, starting from the needs of the working class, is what has been called popular power — the growing capability of the working class to impose its viewpoint on every aspect of society. The growing confidence in defeating the old and building the new. The capability to express, through struggle, unity and discussion, those demands, perspectives and strategies which go totally beyond the boundaries of reformism.



The attempt to tackle all the contradictions which exist among us. The progressive elimination of bourgeois thinking and ways of behaving. The challenge posed to the capitalist ruling institutions.

10. We don't advocate the setting up of institutions of popular power as a realistic perspective for the situation in Britain today. Popular power is not just the product of the aspirations, hopes and work of revolutionaries. It develops only when conditions are ripe. But it is up to us, as from now, to fight for the politics of popular power. To build towards it. To understand and generalise the embryos of popular power which exist in the struggles of today. To reject any attempt to dilute the historical message of revolutionaries, and instead to reaffirm the primacy and the necessity of a total revolutionary perspective.

When people fiddle the meter or pay the wrong fare, when workers manage to sneak out of the factory 5 minutes early, or to the pub at dinner hour, when housewives shoplift, they are all engaged in struggles for survival. But these struggles, even if massively widespread, are still *individual*. When the electricity board comes around to put a new seal on, or you are caught shoplifting, or getting out of the factory early, this form of individual action becomes totally ineffective.

Which is not the case if you organise a mass struggle for the reduction of electricity prices, or a collective non-payment of fares, or you take time off the boss by going slow. These are examples of *collective actions*. In these situations you are powerful, because you are part of a struggle which directly involves hundreds, maybe thousands.

Our task today, more than ever, is that of finding in the individual struggles for survival or the isolated fights taking place, the *seeds of communism* and transforming them into a collective struggle for communism.

11. These last few points lead us inevitably to the question of the *revolutionary party*. Unification of the working class, working class power and revolutionary organisation are interconnected questions. We've already explained why we reject a concept of the party based on ideological continuity. We've also explained why we believe in the necessity of revolutionary vanguard organisation – and eventually the revolutionary party, the party which will lead the working class to the seizure of power. All very well.

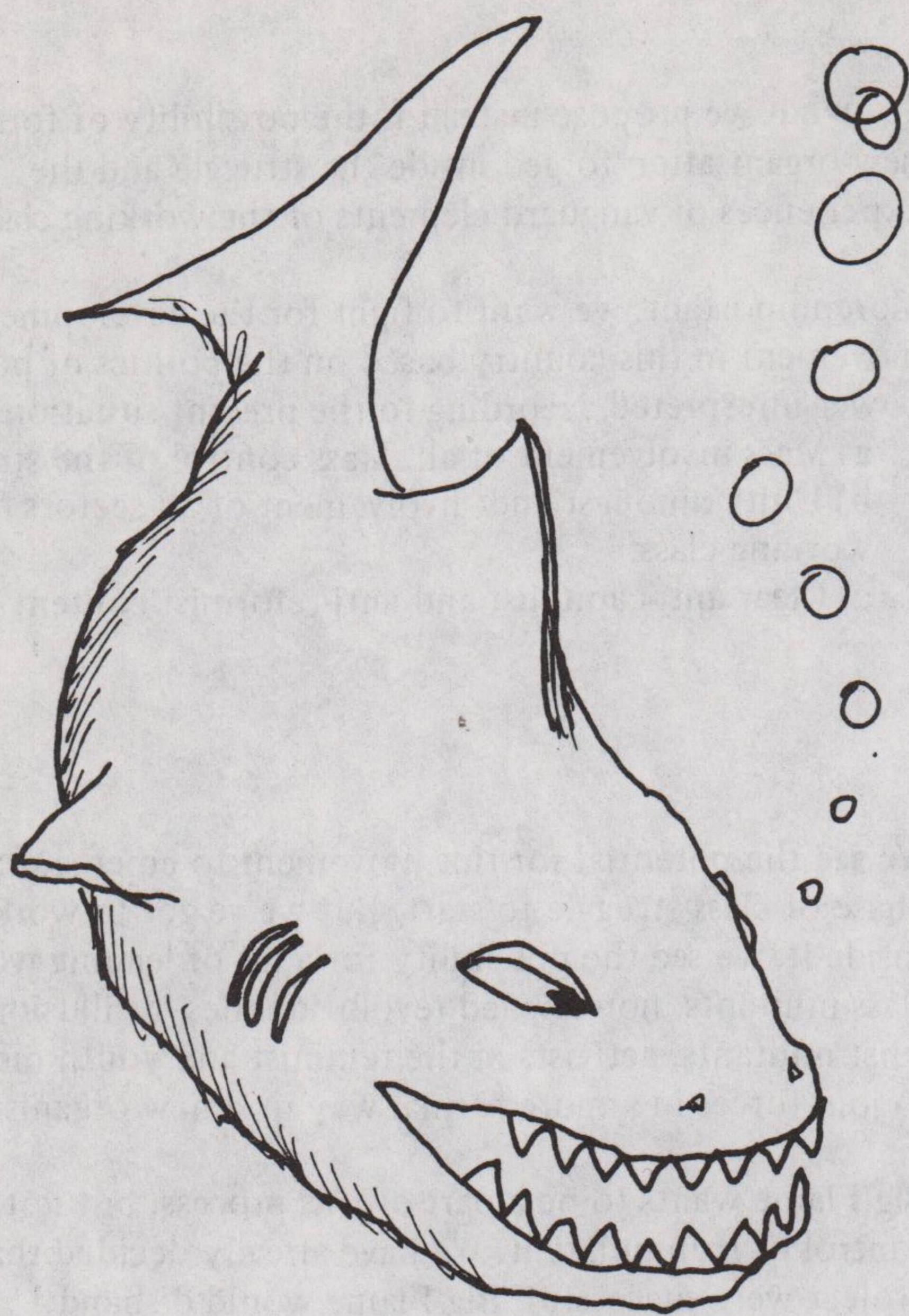
But the question remains: how do revolutionaries help the strengthening and unification of the working class? How do we help the building of the revolutionary party in this situation? In other words – it is in this situation that we must make our contribution to the practical and theoretical development of the revolutionary party. Otherwise, if we are just interested in principles, or dogmatically apply models of the past, or prepare ourselves only for a distant future, we will end up building a small sect, which will simply preserve its own purity. We are not interested in that.

In every phase of class struggle we must define the conditions under which revolutionary organisation is built, who will build it and how to do so. Only this will help towards the redefinition of the revolutionary party in advanced capitalism – a problem still unresolved today.

12. Various tendencies exist within the working class movement. Some are reformist, others revolutionary. Some are better defined, some less. Some are organisationally consolidated, others aren't. We believe that the revolutionary party will be born out of a long, non-linear process of *struggle, co-operation, confrontation and fusions* among these tendencies – and this will happen in the heart of class struggle.







This is what distinguishes us from other revolutionary organisations — we do not consider ourselves the sole depository of revolutionary truth. We think that we represent an important tendency and fight for our politics.

This is not sufficient to justify our existence. If or when we felt that our existence as a revolutionary organisation added nothing to the development of the power of the working class and the revolutionary party, then we'd be ready to disband ourselves.

It is necessary to define exactly what are the revolutionary tendencies within the working class. To define their politics. To examine their power. To make sure that no comrade is lost to the cause.

13. Other revolutionary organisations must feel the same need. They have proposed changes, even if for slightly different purposes. Whether it is the move from I.S. to the Socialist Workers Party, or the International Marxist Group's attempt to regroup the Trotskyist left — most organisations seem concerned with the lack of power they have in society, their incapability to further the power of the working class.

At the same time, we all agree that the situation is full of potential. The situation is unstable, more people are ready to approach revolutionary politics, there is a general need for a total alternative and a sharpening of class polarisation.

That's why the situation presents us with urgent tasks. Either we build now something valuable and powerful for working class people, or our influence within the class will diminish while the power of reformism will grow again, and the reaction against it will be mainly in the wrong direction.

14. We in Big Flame are going through a crisis in this period. As with the rest of the left, this is a positive crisis, in the sense that it is a product of a better understanding of society and a higher consciousness of the hard task before us. This crisis is at two levels.

The first one is the level of individual comrades. Most comrades with a student or intellectual background have come out of the wave of struggles of the late 1960s — from the women's movement, the claimants movement etc. Most of the working class comrades have become involved and then conscious during the great wave of struggles which in the end brought down the Tories and then forced Labour on to the defensive for at least a year.

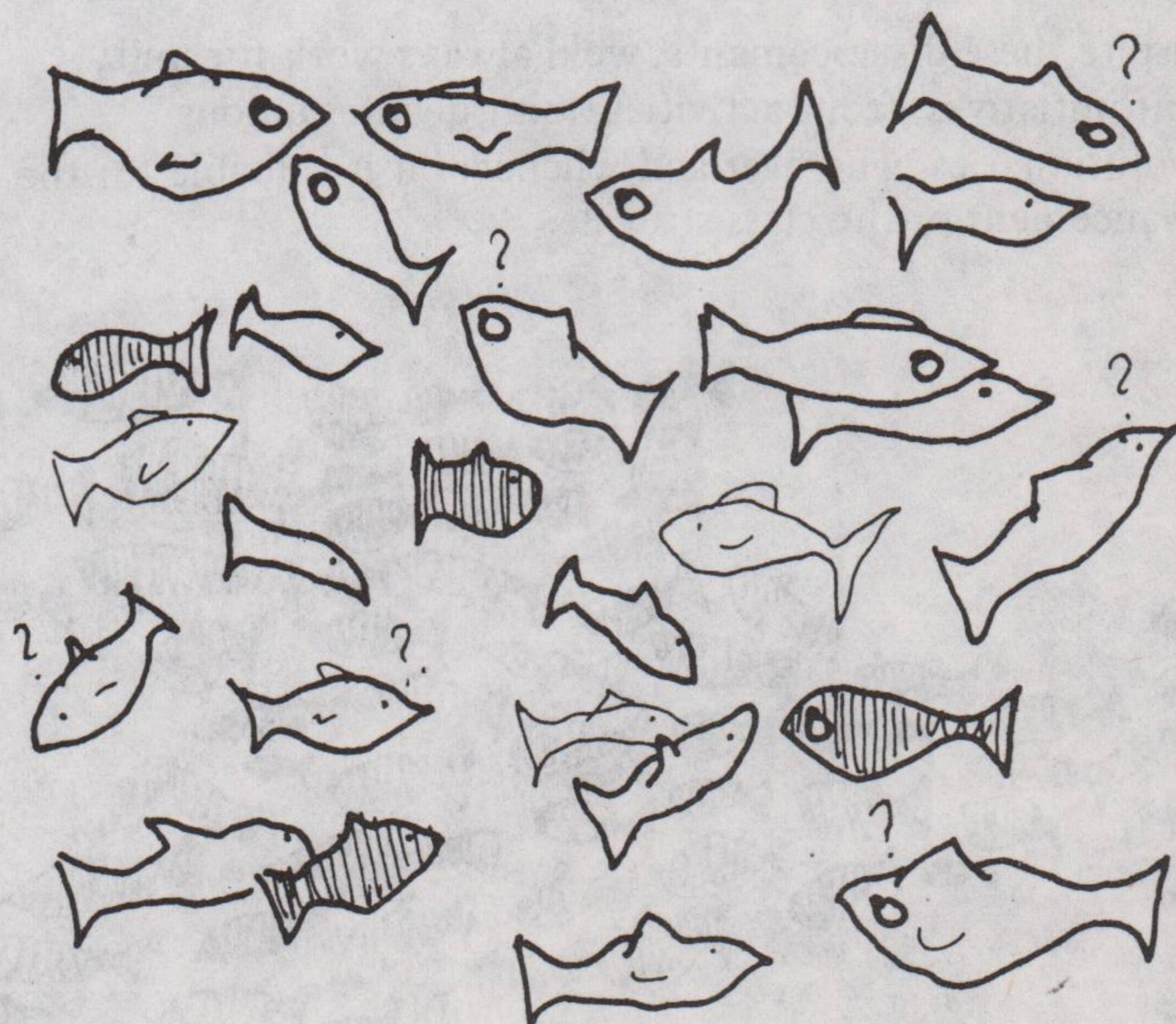
In a changed situation, the problems, difficulties, and doubts facing every working class person, are doubly present in the lives of committed revolutionaries. The need to see some 'reward' for our patient work. The need to feel enthusiastic about the future as we sometimes feel nostalgic about the past.

The second level is that of organisation. Although growing in numbers and importance, Big Flame is still too small and too little important in relation to the needs of the struggle. When, in another phase of class struggle, we saw our role as simply that of stimulating the full expression of working class autonomy, our numbers and overall influence at a general, national level, were of little importance.

But today, in this situation, it's not sufficient to have a good base in one or two factories or communities. People ask for *total* alternatives. If you are not capable of giving this to people, you are bound to lose a lot of them, not only to the organisation, but to the revolution. A national presence, numbers and a working class composition are now more important than ever.

How many times have we heard comrades tell us — 'I agree with your ideas, but what can you do about them?' Or 'I agree with 99% of your political line, but I have doubts that BF will manage to become a strong enough organisation'.

We in Big Flame have had similar doubts, and that's why we are trying to work towards the solution of their problem. It is our priority to investigate the possibility of developing a new revolutionary socialist organisation





15. We mentioned before that other organisations are going through changes. We are talking mainly about the I.M.G. and I.S. (now SWP). We view these changes with interest, but there are some fundamental differences in the conception of building political organisation that prevent us for the time being from considering the possibility of fusion, joining or regrouping with either of them.

We criticise the SWP for its *quantitative* concept of building the party and its way of seeing the movement only as an appendix of the party. In this sense we criticise their involvement with the black movement — particularly as it manifested itself in the Summer of 1976 — which was correct from the point of view of *content and political line*, but was seen by the majority of blacks as *manipulative*. The main concern of the SWP appeared to attempt to recruit into the ranks of the party. The same could be said of the SWP's involvement in the National Abortion Campaign. We reject the idea that the task in every situation is always that of building the party, i.e. recruiting, recruiting, recruiting.

One affect of this mistaken idea is the lack of internal democracy within the SWP and its sectarianism, shown by its unwillingness to co-operate with the rest of the left at any but the most minimal level. Again this shows an incorrect attitude towards the mass movement and almost total disregard for other revolutionary tendencies, even if they are weaker.

We counterpose this with just one sentence. For us the movement comes first, the party second.

We also criticise the IMG's proposal for a regroupment. Even if we are not among the people they would like to regroup with (the Trotskyist left), we must say something about this. Firstly, we have already mentioned our disagreement with the concept of the party as being posed in terms of ideological continuity (Trotskyism in their case). Secondly, we think that a regroupment among revolutionary forces is valid only if it is fought for, debated and decided inside the masses and their struggles. In other words if it adds to the organisation and strength of the class. Otherwise it can be a dangerous exercise, where differences are simply forgotten, only to re-emerge after a few months and produce a new split. That's why what we are proposing is not a regroupment of vanguard organisations within the revolutionary left.

Despite these disagreements, we'll always work for unity, joint initiatives, front activities, joint debates among revolutionaries, wherever and whenever it is valuable for the advancement of the class struggle.

16. What we propose instead is the possibility of forming a new organisation forged inside the struggle and the experiences of vanguard elements of the working class.

More important, we want to fight for the development of a movement in this country based on the politics of popular power interpreted according to the present situation:—

- a) Mass involvement of all. Mass control of the struggles.
- b) Unity amongst and involvement of all sectors of the working class.
- c) Clear anti-capitalist and anti-reformist content.

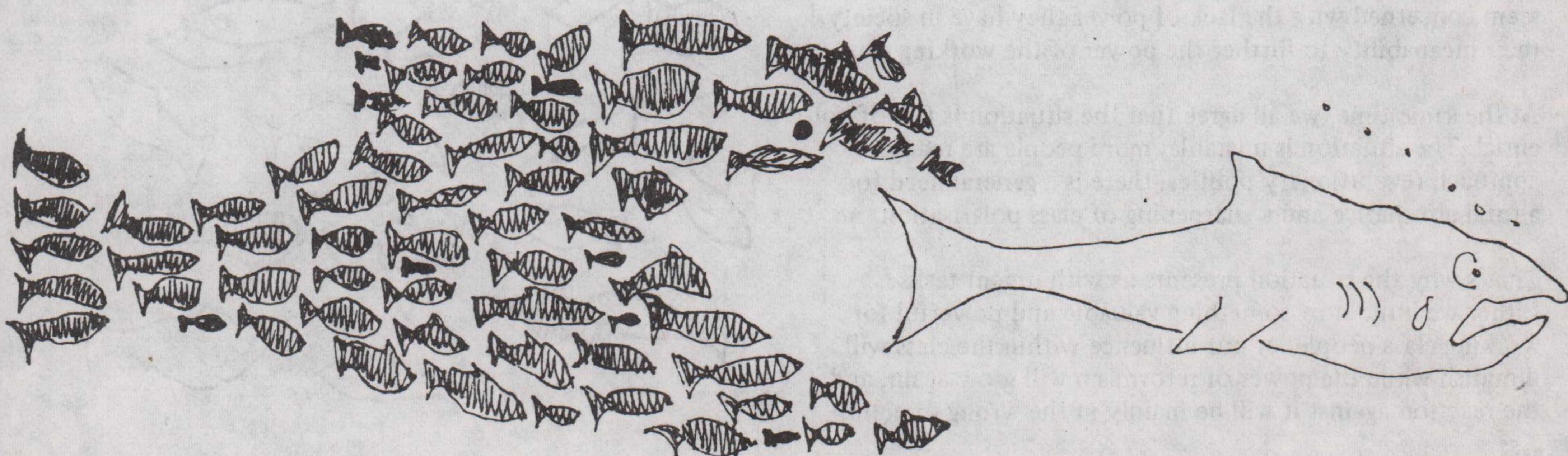
We see the potential for this movement to emerge, for a new phase of class struggle to start. But we've got to work for it. Inside it, we see the possibility for a lot of leading working class militants, non-aligned revolutionaries, disillusioned socialist militants, activists in the feminist and youth movements to join forces in a more formal way in a new organisation.

Big Flame wants to be a part of this process, but not to control or manipulate it. We have already decided that if this project were successful, Big Flame would disband.

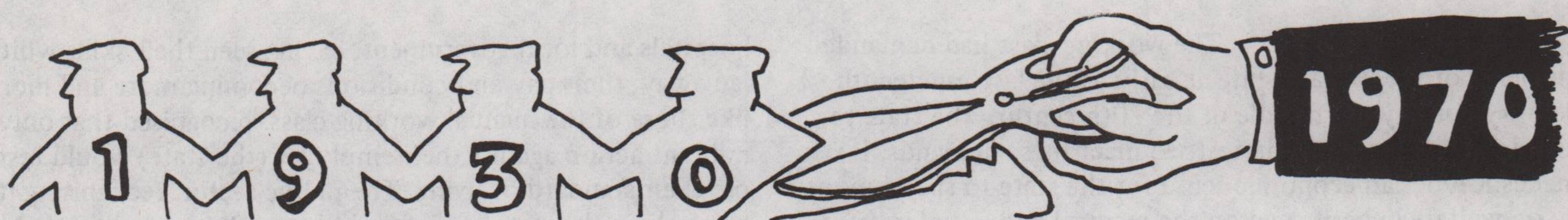
The first part of our investigation into the possibilities for such a new organisation has been encouraging. We've come into contact with hundreds of people who, on their own or in groups, share similar feelings, ideas and practice. We've participated in joint initiatives, some short term, some long term.

A lot of the comrades we've come into contact with will not join, or help to create a new communist organisation as yet — they will be working with us. A lot will. But all of us share the basic will to reaffirm the primacy of revolutionary politics. All of us want to liberate politics both from its reformist meaning and context and from the often narrow debate about political line. And we want the working class to attempt to collectively solve its problems in the struggle for communism. We think that never before has the task been so urgent — and it corresponds to the needs of the majority.

This manifesto starts for us the second part of our project towards building such a new organisation. We hope it will be useful to continue the debate, to sharpen our practice, to clarify doubts. It represents a first attempt to draw up a series of points about political line. We invite all comrades to express criticisms, comments, agreements and disagreements.







# MODERN CAPITALISM and REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

## INTRODUCTION

In order to build the struggle of the working class against capitalism, we need to understand how modern capitalism works. We need to understand how capitalism, the state and the working class relate to each other. The system doesn't operate in exactly the same way as it used to before the Second World War. So to fight the system as it now is, we cannot simply rely on the ideas and strategies of revolutionaries who were fighting at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

## PRE-WAR CAPITALISM

In the later parts of the 19th and the first years of this century, the more far-thinking capitalists decided it was time to do something about skilled workers. Skilled workers were the backbone both of industry and the trade unions. Throughout the world it was the skilled workers who spearheaded the militancy of the whole working class. But the problem facing the capitalists was that they needed these workers as long as industry was based on skill and ever more complicated engineering.

So the idea — pioneered by the likes of Henry Ford and F.W. Taylor — was for mass production. Break the job right down and rely on semi-skilled labour. This sort of labour was there in mass. Especially in the US the wholesale introduction of unskilled workers — usually native or immigrant farm workers and peasants — had the effect of destroying traditional trade union organisation, since this had been based on skilled workers with a history of militancy. This process was slower in Britain than elsewhere, but it went on in all advanced capitalist countries.

The attempted destruction of workplace solidarity was paralleled outside the factory by the demolition of working class communities, some of which (eg. Clydeside 1915) had been the basis of militant organisation. In their place were built the soul-less, barren and isolated council estates on the outskirts of the major towns. Coupled with the tendency for families to live in units separated from their relatives, this new form of social life created new problems and increased the workload and pressure on housewives.

However, the new techniques of mass production and the increase in the plunder of the colonies — driven on by the thirst for increased profitability — led to the world-wide economic crisis of the 1920s. The hunt for profit led to a massive

over-production of goods, which the impoverished masses could not buy. Capitalism was chaotic, unplanned.

The attempt to 'solve' this crisis by wage cuts led to the British General Strike of 1926, led, significantly, by the miners, the one group of workers who had maintained their workplace and their community organisation intact. Although the strike was defeated, paving the way for the mass unemployment of the 1930s, ruling class strategists realised that they could not allow such a threat to develop again.

## THE POST-WAR CAPITALIST PLANS

After the Second World War, leading members of the ruling class and the governments (both Labour and Tory) accepted the recommendations of the economist Keynes, who said that if production was to go on increasing without booms and slumps, workers must go on getting higher wages (and benefits via government spending) to buy the increasing number of goods.

Keynes believed that the crisis could be solved by incorporating the working class and its struggle for a better life into the system. Wages were to be allowed to rise according to local negotiations; welfare benefits were increased; and HP facilities were increased to expand demand and maintain production. In those days, a mild inflation was what the system encouraged.

What has not been so clearly recognised is the related dynamic of the capitalist state to control not just the national economic life, but every other aspect too. Thus the economic plan has its counterpart in the social plan. This is not a capitalist conspiracy, it is part of their response to the strengths and de-

But the key to the Keynesian idea was the changed role of the state. After the Second World War, the state was to become the overall co-ordinator and stimulator of the economy. Post-war Labour and Tory governments recognised the need for nationalisation of the basic services that private capitalism couldn't handle (railways, health, gas, electricity etc). And state spending in the public sector became the largest source of employment in this country. The state used grants to determine where industry should be sited, contributed to the setting of production targets throughout industry, set interest rates and regulated imports and exports. demands of the working class.



The working class had demanded elements of the welfare state as early as the late nineteenth century, and by the middle of the 20th century the state realised that it was in its interests to meet these demands. It makes Keynesian economic sense for the state to spend money on welfare benefits and on the medical and social institutions and their supplying industries. And it is obviously in the state's interest to have a healthy and suitably educated workforce. But just as important to the state is the control it now has, through these agencies, over the social and personal lives of the working class. The state now penetrates right into everyone's home, further regulating our spending (via control of rents, gas and electricity prices, and the extra payments we have to make for medical and educational services which were once free). The state can now have far more influence over our social and personal behaviour through the ideology put over in schools, and through the 'helping hand' of social workers, education welfare workers and probation staff.

The welfare state is, in part, the product of working class strength, so its not surprising people have been slow to recognise its recuperation, its use by the state against the working class. Nor has sufficient attention been paid to the fact that the dream of capitalist propaganda, the 'Happy Families' of the Kellogs advertisements, is being shattered as meaningless work, futile leisure and the intolerable personal strain of life in capitalist society can lead to ever increasing use of tranquillisers and other drugs, breakdowns, broken families and so-called called 'senseless' vandalism, hooliganism and truancy.

"Housework is vital to the economy. It is the housewife who sends the worker back to the factory — fed, clothed and refreshed. It is the housewife who will produce tomorrow's workforce. The housewife reproduces labour power."

## WORKING CLASS RESISTANCE

The increased role of the post-war state required the help of the trade union movement. The newly elected Labour government was guaranteed TUC support, and the succeeding Tory governments maintained friendly relations by increased welfare spending. There was no reason for the Tories to try and regulate wages and the success of shop stewards in local and sectional negotiations, especially amongst engineering and car workers, meant that traditional forms of labour militancy appeared to pay off. Thus the trade union leadership and the Labour Party, never wholly opposed to capitalism, now finally became wedded to the state.

But, by the mid-1960s, things were not so rosy. The consistent rise in workers' real incomes and the increasing refusal to tie rises to productivity deals, meant that the capitalist's rate of profit was declining. The 1968 sterling crisis showed that international capitalism no longer had confidence in the British economy and, focused by the International Monetary Fund, pressure was brought to bear for the state to control working class demands.

The late 60s and early 70s saw the highest point in class struggle since the war as a succession of strikes rocked the Tory government, forced it to withdraw its major effort to break shop floor organisation (the Industrial Relations Bill) and finally forced it out of office. Not only was the struggle in the factories, mines and docks. Workers in education,

hospitals and local government, having seen their skills whittled away, their pay and conditions becoming more and more like those of the manual working class, recognised that only militant action against their employer (the state) would restore their standard of living. The public sector, recognising its new role in the state plan, fought back. Black workers, led by the Asians at Mansfield Hosiery, Imperial Typewriters and elsewhere, made a resounding impact on class struggle. And the working class communities, beginning to re-establish their organisation, saw the Housing Finance Act for what it was — an attack on their living standards, just like wage restraint, and an attack on the principle of council housing — and entered the struggle with a wave of rent strikes. It's for these reasons that we insist that working class strength is part of the reason for the crisis of the system — eating into the rate of profit, struggling for more money and less work in the factories, social services and communities. We are not just victims.

## THE NEW CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE

While working class struggle reached a new pitch, it did not depart from the sectionalism which has always bedevilled working class organisation. The 1974 Labour Government won the support of the so-called left union leaders, and the working class has by and large accepted the argument that it cannot go on getting wage rises. And the state has accepted the dictates of the international financiers, that British capitalism must be restructured if it is going to have any chance of survival. The Keynesian 'solution' has run out of steam, unable to deal with the co-existence of high unemployment and high inflation. The new ruling class measures are detailed elsewhere.

## WORKING CLASS STRATEGY

But the whole context of class struggle in the post-war period is a new situation revolutionaries now have to face up to. It requires new perspectives and strategies. The traditional demands, often located in the needs of the old skilled workers and based on the conditions of the 1930s, are far less relevant than they were. Demands for nationalisation and further state planning, for instance, can no longer be the lynch-pin of revolutionary strategy, since this is precisely the direction most suited to the needs of modern capitalism. In fact, state planning is now the main agent (through the cuts in social spending) by which the working class is induced to pay for the crisis. While nationalisation may be a viable tactic for the defence of jobs, it cannot be the basic socialist demand.

We have to develop workplace strategies which pose the question of the nature of work and the question of power. Outside the workplace there is the same need for revolutionary organisation — among housewives, the unwaged reproducers of labour power, and in the community where the state increasingly exerts its power over our social and personal lives. The working class struggles every day in every aspect of its life. Our job is to articulate and develop the communist content of working class struggle.

# FOR WORKING- CLASS POWER





# THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING CLASS

## INTRODUCTION

As Marxists, we understand that the basic fact about society is that it is made up of a constant class struggle. In our society, a class struggle between the bourgeois ruling class and the working class. But it is clear that while this class struggle is permanent, the working class in Britain is not yet in a position to seize power.

Some revolutionary groups explain this weakness by talking about the 'level of consciousness' — that is, the way that the ruling class has a hold on working class thinking and ideas. We are taught in the schools and in the press not to believe in socialist struggle. Obviously, this is an important factor, and there has to be a real fight against the false, lying ideology that the bourgeoisie spreads around. Although we must add that working class consciousness is a complicated thing — it is not *just* socialist or *just* bought off by bourgeois ideology. Many different ideas, progressive or reactionary, swim in the same sea.

But the limitations and problems of working class consciousness have to be seen in the context of the *material*, real-life divisions that the working class lives in.

"The conflict between workers and bosses is *antagonistic*. One side has to win, the other to lose. Inside the working class there are other conflicts. For example between men and women. But these conflicts are *non-antagonistic*. Out of that struggle — for equality and genuine unity — we are all winners".

So we must add a materialist analysis of the reasons why the working class is not yet willing to take on its revolutionary role. For us, the other fundamental problem is that the working class is divided. Different sections of the class are often more willing to fight for their separate interests than for the interests of the class as a whole. We say that these conflicts within the class are *non-antagonistic* — they are in the process of being overcome, and they are secondary to the basic antagonism between the working class and capital. But it is essential that we identify these conflicts, that we understand how they come about, and that we have a clear revolutionary perspective for speeding up the process by which working class unity is achieved.

Broadly speaking, we locate the divisions within the class as being between men and women and between blacks and whites. We see further divisions between those who have wages and those who do not, and there are also important divisions between those who are waged. And there are divisions between the youth and the older workers.

Some sections of the working class suffer from a double oppression — for example, women are oppressed both as *members of the working class* under capitalism, and as *women*. In our view, socialists have to give complete support to those sections of the class who suffer such double oppression and who have created their own organisations to pursue their interests against capitalism and other sources of oppression. Women and black people have done this. They have created autonomous organisations to deal with the oppression they have experienced, both at the hands of the ruling class and at the hands of the rest of the working class.

In these circumstances Big Flame does not make abstract calls for working class unity, which often mean unity on the terms of the stronger sections. But we do try to develop a process in which such unity can be built; we see this growing through *autonomous struggle*.

We maintain that class unity is forged through these autonomous struggles. Women organising as women against capital may often challenge the short-term interests of working class men. The resolution of this conflict, when men are brought to support the women, is a step forward for the class, since unity is found and women become more powerful, both within the class and against capitalism. The same goes for black people. Each time they win their demands, their power, and the strength of the class, visibly grows.

In this situation the question of class alliances assumes a new dimension. The question is not any longer that of trying to win over the 'middle class' or 'peripheral sectors' to the industrial working class and its programme. The primary question is that of politically re-unifying the various sectors of the working class. That of recognising the particular nature of the struggles of each sector and its need for autonomy as the springboard for unification.



This is the context for our discussion of the composition of the working class and the potential for class unity. We now look in more detail at each major section of the working class. We concentrate on the industrial workers because, although it is central to our analysis that other sectors have great anti-capitalist power and potential, there is no doubt that the industrial working class has the best stranglehold on capitalism.

## 1. THE COMPOSITION OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKING CLASS—ITS ORGANISATION AND STRUGGLE

Basic changes in the organisation of production have occurred since the beginning of this century, which have profoundly changed the composition of the working class and its consciousness. The most important source of this change has been the development of mass production factories.

a) The introduction of the assembly line (Fordism) and the consequent organisation around it both in the factory and at the social level (Taylorism) are the starting point for our analysis. The assembly line, ie the breaking down of the process of production into a series of short, simple jobs, to be repeated continuously, up to now represents the most 'revolutionary' innovation by capitalism since the introduction of the factory system itself. Its consequences were, and still are, of paramount importance.

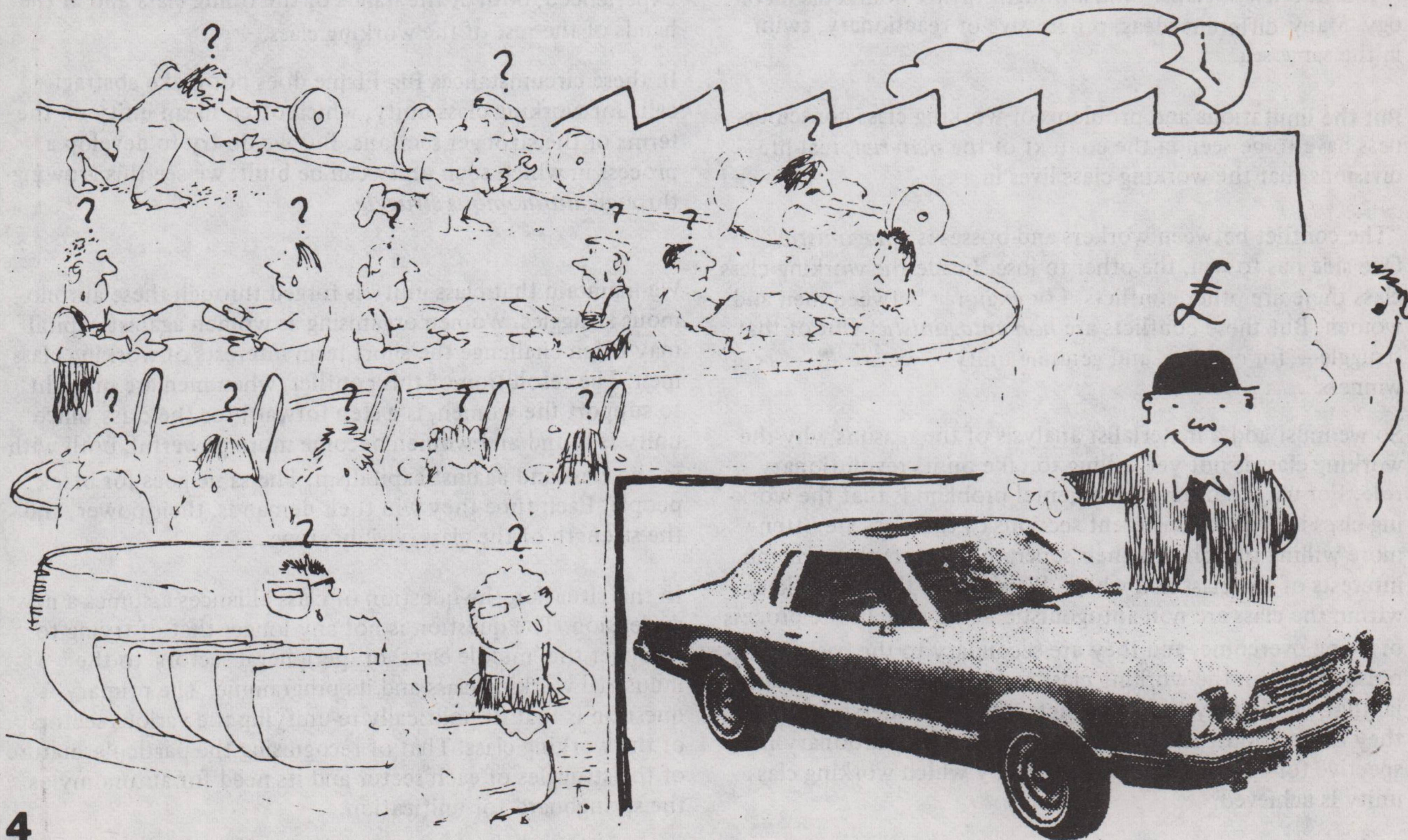
The whole face of the working class was to be changed because of it. In most industries the figure of the old skilled worker who had almost total knowledge of the production process, tended to disappear. Also, the number of totally unskilled labourers tended to decrease, while the mass of workers tended to become the 'semiskilled workers' (the mass workers). Skilled workers retained their importance only in 'side' processes to the productive cycle, eg. toolmakers, maintenance workers, electricians, fitters etc.

Whereas in some countries this process was very rapid, as in the USA, or helped by fascist regimes (Italy and Germany), in this country it was very slow and to a certain extent can be understood only now. The reasons for this are:— (i) the strength of the organisation of the working class in Britain — the unions based on and led by the skilled workers put up a continuous resistance against the deskilling involved in the process. (ii) the structure of the British engineering industry which was the oldest in the world and very much based on a large number of small workshops. (iii) the relative importance of sectors where changes would necessarily be slower.

b) It is in this context that we can understand the abolition of piecework. Due to the strength of the industrial workers, piecework, which had begun as a system of payment to tie wages to productivity, had often become a weapon to be turned against capitalist accumulation, in the sense that it was used by the shop floor to push wages up further than the dynamic of capitalist development could allow. The abolition of piecework and the introduction of Measured Day Work and similar systems of payment all over industry was a vital step in the rationalisation of industry which is taking place now. The struggles at British Leyland, before and after the government stepped in to bail it out, are a case in point.

c) Despite the long and contradictory process, the long-term tendency is that radical changes in the organisation of production, radically alter the working class — its values, attitudes and behaviour. The 'old' worker, with a consciousness born of being a producer and his degree of control over that production, proud of his job, is *slowly substituted* by the new worker, almost totally alienated from the productive process, with no identification with the job except for financial reasons, and seen by the employers as flexible and mobile — to be moved where needed, to do what is needed. This change is bound to have an effect on the content of struggle.

The potential political content is increased by the necessity of having to confront the goals and organisation of capitalist production.





d) With the progressive integration of the trade union apparatus inside the state apparatus, a consequence of the changes in capitalism in the post-war period; the working class developed its shop floor organisation — the stewards. Not necessarily representatives of struggles, as they had been thirty years before, they certainly represented the capability of the working class to exploit the period of boom and relative backwardness of British capitalism.

The end of the boom and the introduction of Measured Day Work, coupled with the total offensive by capitalism at the structural level (rationalisation) and at the ideological level (the appeal to the 'national interest'), and the desire on the part of the national union leaderships, the employers and the government to exercise control over the stewards by forcing their adherence to nationally negotiated 'procedures.' — all this has restricted the independent power of the stewards. Their expected role, the objective nature of their job *often* tends to make them perform as shop floor policemen.

However, two qualifications have to be made to this. Firstly, in sectors where struggles and organisations are lower, eg. the health service, the stewards movement and even union branches are often more representative of shop floor struggle. They have not yet been institutionalised.

Secondly, even in traditional sectors the process is uneven. Stewards committees are sometimes the only means of organising and the best militants tend to go for the stewards job.

The essential point is that the stewards committees and union branches have to be approached tactically in the light of what actually advances workers' power.

e) Despite the fact that due to the changes in capitalism and the capitalist strategy in this period of recession no lasting victory can be achieved through sectional struggles, the working class remains trapped in this. In this respect, as we will spell out later, it is the public sector workers who seem to put forward consciously points of a programme towards unification of the working class.

The last times that industrial workers managed to unify the class around them was in 1972 (miners and dockers) and in 1974 (miners). In those situations these sectors were a mass vanguard for the whole of the class. The fact that a situation like that has not happened again, since the referendum, reflects the hold that trade unionism has over the class.

*But when we identify mass vanguards within the class we cannot only look at the factor of consciousness.* For instance, car workers like those at Fords, represent a vanguard in the class. We say this is *not* so much because of the structural importance of Fords in the capitalist economy, which makes Ford workers powerful in relation to capital — which is true.

*Nor* because Fords represents one of the most advanced managements in the world; if you beat them, then you are setting an example to all the others — which is also true. *Nor* because Ford workers in the past have given a clear lead (first equal pay strike in this country, smashing of the pay policy in October 1974, in election period), the recent advanced contents of struggles at Dagenham and Halewood) — although all this is true.

But *mainly* because the organisation of production in a place like Ford tends to create a workforce whose daily activity is that of fighting that very same organisation.

It is in this struggle that the main content of the struggle for communism can be found — the fight against wage labour. We are not saying that the mass of line workers in the car factories, for example, are communists. But that daily life in those factories means a constant struggle against the very essence of capitalist society: work that has no meaning and which destroys; power wielded ruthlessly by management and foremen; the creation of vast wealth by the working class, but owned and controlled by a small elite. It is in such places where historically the working class has manifested its sharpest autonomy from capitalist development and reformism alike. It's the numbers, the balance of forces, the power that can be generated. The struggle of the mass of car workers does not come out of the desire to be privileged, to enjoy differentials. It comes out as a *mass* struggle, from the very heart of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

## 2. WHITE COLLAR WORKERS

No-one doubts the power of the industrial workers, but what has frequently gone unrecognised on the left is the power of other sections of the working class. It follows, both from our emphasis on the unification of the class and from the material changes in the nature of capitalism, that revolutionaries must organise outside industry as well.

### a) Offices, shops and services.

Half of the waged working class are to be found outside industry. While the proportion of industrial workers in the population has remained static since the war, the proportion of clerical workers has jumped to 13%. But these are not the privileged, high status clerical workers of the 19th century — two thirds of them are women, and the average weekly wage is lower than many manual jobs.

The rapid growth of offices has meant that the workforce had to be systematised and controlled in the same way as the industrial workforce. This has led to the 'factory-office' methods, similar to those used in industry, ie. de-skilling (no one person is responsible for the entire process), assembly line set-up (eg typing pools, measured day work, the institution of a complex hierarchy of management at all levels, employees readily interchangeable etc.) This, together with the low rates of pay, has led to the proletarianisation of a large section of the workforce. The one difference with industrial sectors is that this field of employment expands with technological advance rather than declines. It is therefore important it is to the employer to have a weak, poorly paid workforce.

The same can be said of the retail sector, ie. shop assistants, distributors, advertising etc. As capitalism expands, the necessity to market commodities itself becomes big business — 'spend money to make money' is their slogan. Yet another large sector of workers is sucked into and processed in order to make profits for capitalists. Here again we see a majority of women employed.

Service occupations (catering, laundries, hairdressing, health, transport, education etc.) are no longer luxuries enjoyed by the ruling class and paid for out of their profits. They have become profit making and necessary to produce and reproduce controlled labour power. Again new jobs are created and organised to suit the needs of the ruling class.



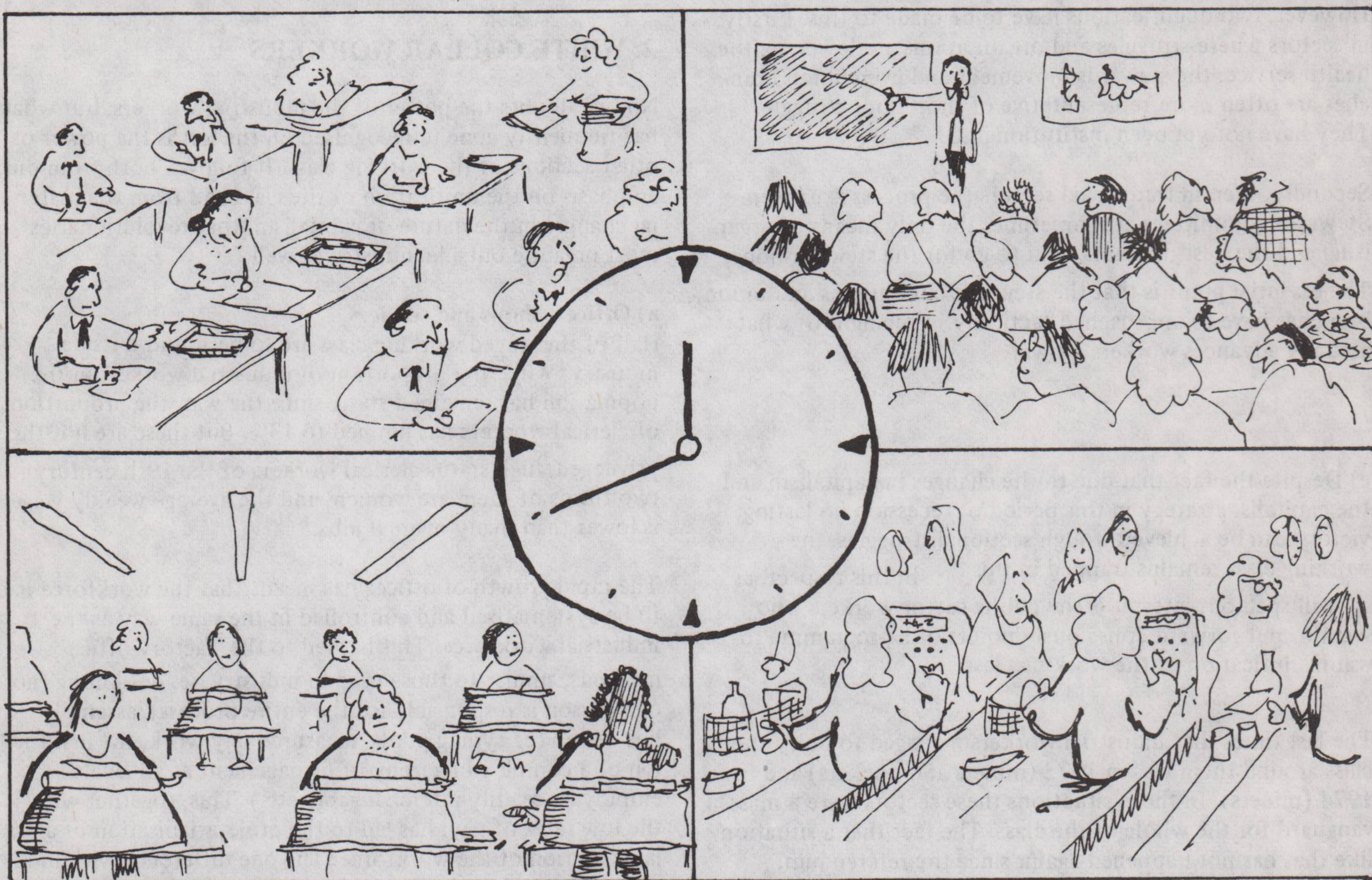
The rise in numbers in this sector of the workforce is paralleled by its rise in importance to the economy. As Britain's industry loses its competitiveness, particularly in the northern towns which industrialised first, whole areas begin to rely on office and service work for their economic viability. In Leeds, for example, employment in the town's traditional industries (tailoring and engineering) has been in decline for years, and resources are transferred to offices and shops as Leeds makes a desperate effort to avoid decline. In towns like this, while socialists must make every effort to save jobs in industry, political activity must also relate to the white collar workers who are becoming the economic backbone of the area.

Nor should anyone doubt the power and consciousness of these sections of the working class. The massive demonstration by public sector unions against the cuts (November 1976) showed the awareness and combativity of people who have been dismissed for too long by the left.

But although sectionalism and elitism characterise the struggles of these workers, they can no longer be excluded from our political concern. Like the white collar workers, as their conditions of work decline, as their jobs are downgraded or restructured, and as their wages fail to rise with prices, the potential for these groups identifying themselves with the working class struggle increases. Our role, therefore, must be to encourage this process.

## STUDENTS AND YOUTH

Higher education students face similar privileges and contradictions as professional workers. Less and less are they the educated children of the bourgeoisie. The realities of their future are more and more imposing — unemployment or jobs



### b) Professional workers.

Capitalism has created a new middle layer of employment which cannot easily be fitted into the definition of 'middle class' or 'working class'. This portion of employment embraces the engineering, technical and scientific workers, the lower ranks of management, professional employees occupied in marketing, finance, teaching, medicine, government services. Like the working class they possess no economic or occupational independence, they are employed by capital and must sell their labour power in order to live. But, in contrast, they enjoy, depending upon their specific position in the hierarchy, the privileges of exemption from the worst features of the working class situation, including job security and higher pay. The struggles in this sector are sectionalised and strive to enhance the differentials among workers, both in pay and privileges. For example, the ASTMS union members' card bears the slogan 'elite of the white collar workers'.

whose pay and status are declining. Furthermore, the cultural, educational and independent character of education tends to disappear as methods of 'learning' are introduced to gear the institutions closer to the needs of capitalism.

School students too have an important role to play in the struggle for socialism. Lacking any real independent income, frequently the butt of the anger and frustration felt by their parents, incarcerated in schools which, however hard the progressives may try, are more often authoritarian and irrelevant to the students' needs... all these factors contribute to their growing hostility to the system. As yet, school students often react individually — by violence, vandalism and the refusal to attend school. The few collective actions — walkouts over uniform or petty discipline — are sporadic and unsustained.

Similarly, the growing ranks of unemployed youth fight against their oppression in spontaneous and unorganised ways — theft, football violence — or content themselves with a sep-

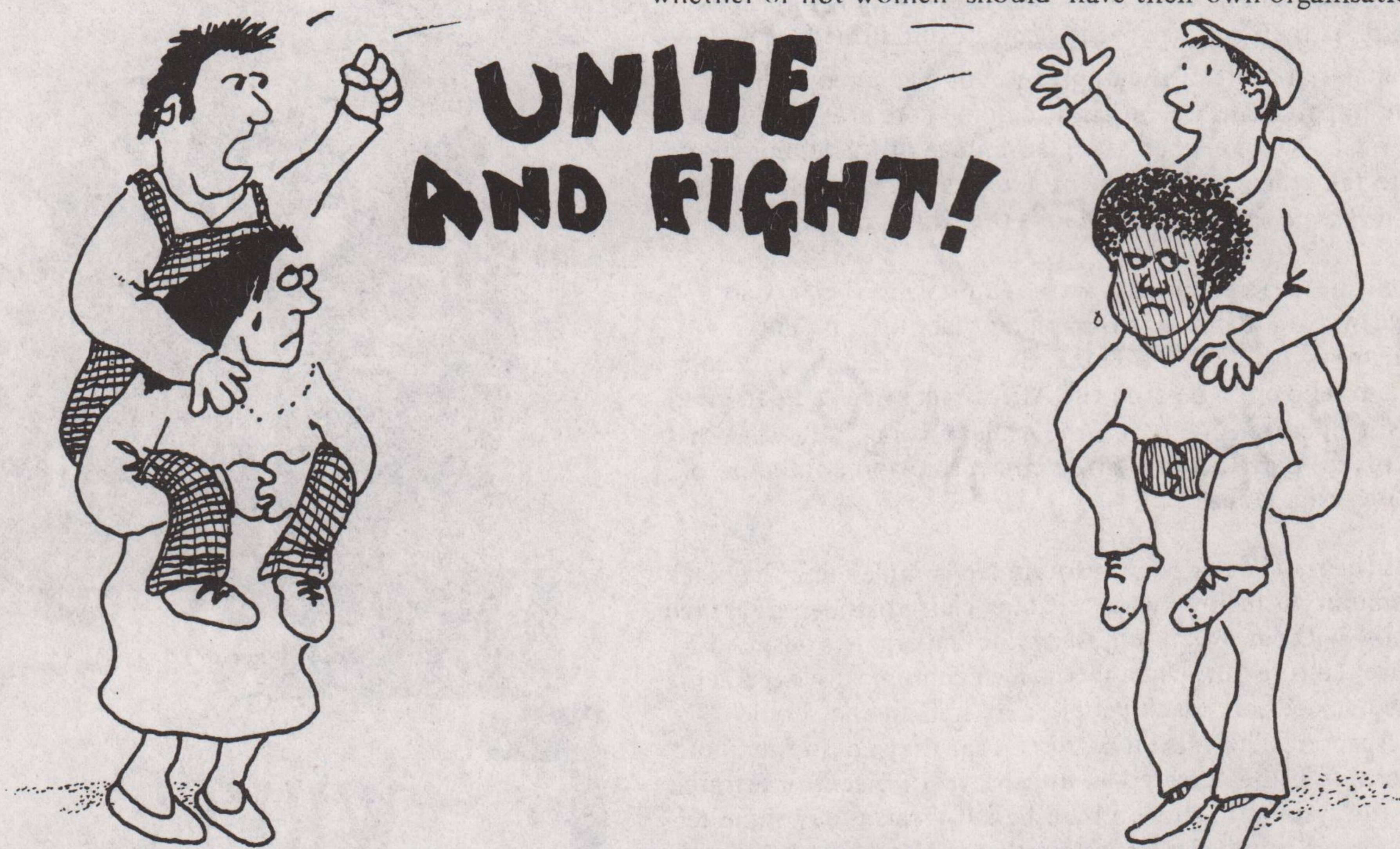


erate youth culture. Some of them are prey to the false 'solutions' offered by the fascists.

The left in Britain has tended to treat young people as raw recruits for their organisations. Big Flame seeks to build the independent power of youth, to help them create their own organisations which meet their own specific needs. Although these organisations may have to oppose the arbitrary and often oppressive actions of adults, one of their main purposes will be to unite with other sections of the working class in the fight against capitalism.

#### 4. THE AUTONOMOUS STRUGGLES OF WOMEN

So far, we have discussed the composition of the working class mainly in terms of its relation to production. But the class is not only split in this way, it is also divided on sexual and racial grounds. Women are to be found in many economic positions in industry, in white collar work, in services, and also in the unwaged, and therefore unrecognised economic role of housewife. Economically oppressed even more than male workers — less money, worse jobs and prospects, and always having a second job in the home — women also suffer the oppression of a culture which defines them as inferior to men.



These are the material conditions of life for working class women. Although sexual divisions existed before capitalism, the modern economy has used them to its advantage. Having created a 'welfare state' and transferred many of women's traditional roles to institutions (hospitals, schools etc.), capital has then employed women in these places. Women are told they are in the 'caring professions', and therefore require lower wages than men would accept. If they are working in other sectors of the economy, women are said to be working for 'pin money'.

Women have always been a force to reckon with in class struggle and the last few years have proved this again. Because of their double oppression, as workers and as women, they have created their own organisations. Initially the struggle was mainly ideological, with the Women's Liberation Movement campaigning against the way women were seen and treated. But there developed parallel struggles for equal pay,

equal rights and equal opportunities. Women's struggle has taken up issues that combine material and ideological issues, like the fight for a woman's right to choose over abortion, or the setting up of refuges for battered wives — creating the National Abortion Campaign and the Women's Aid Movement. A vital by-product of this process was making clear that the community was an important area of struggle, especially in the context of the attempt by the state to control social life through the welfare state and housing policy.

Housewives have continually led struggles on estates to pay less rent, against gas and electricity cut-offs, for nurseries, play facilities and safe roads. All these can be important political issues.

Latterly, as the trade union leadership has knuckled down to the social contract, women have been quick to exploit the space won by the struggle for equal pay, the Trico women especially showing resolution and solidarity which was an inspiration to the working class as a whole. Now we are witnessing the same strength in the women's struggle to save the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital.

In this context — militant independent struggle based in material needs — it is irrelevant for men in the left to argue about whether or not women 'should' have their own organisations.

Women have demanded and created their autonomy — using their own organisations to develop the struggle for their own needs against capitalism.

In Big Flame we welcome this fact and see it as a positive step towards class unity, since there can only be effective unity when all major sectors of the class are strong enough to ensure that their own demands are taken up. But we have no illusions about the real state of this unity. Leaving aside the opposition of many men, there are also divisions among women. Some middle class feminists simply demand equal rights within capitalism. Others refuse any political co-operation with men. The Women's Liberation Movement as a whole fails to relate effectively to the needs of working class women. Big Flame fights for a working class perspective in the women's movement, and a feminist perspective in the struggle of the working class as a whole can get nowhere unless the demands of women about women — feminist demands — are



accepted as the demands of the whole working class.

In particular, we demand the socialisation of housework — that is, the setting up of child care centres, laundries, etc., *paid for by the state*, in order to help free women from the home. We demand a guaranteed income for all women as of right (like pensioners, the unemployed, etc.), and we support the struggle against the division of labour between men and women inside or outside the home. We demand that housework should be paid for by the state, whoever does it and wherever it is done.

Combined with demands for equal pay, for free abortion on demand and the demands of the women's movement, this perspective can make a real contribution to the development of women's — and class — power.

## 5. THE AUTONOMOUS STRUGGLE OF BLACK PEOPLE

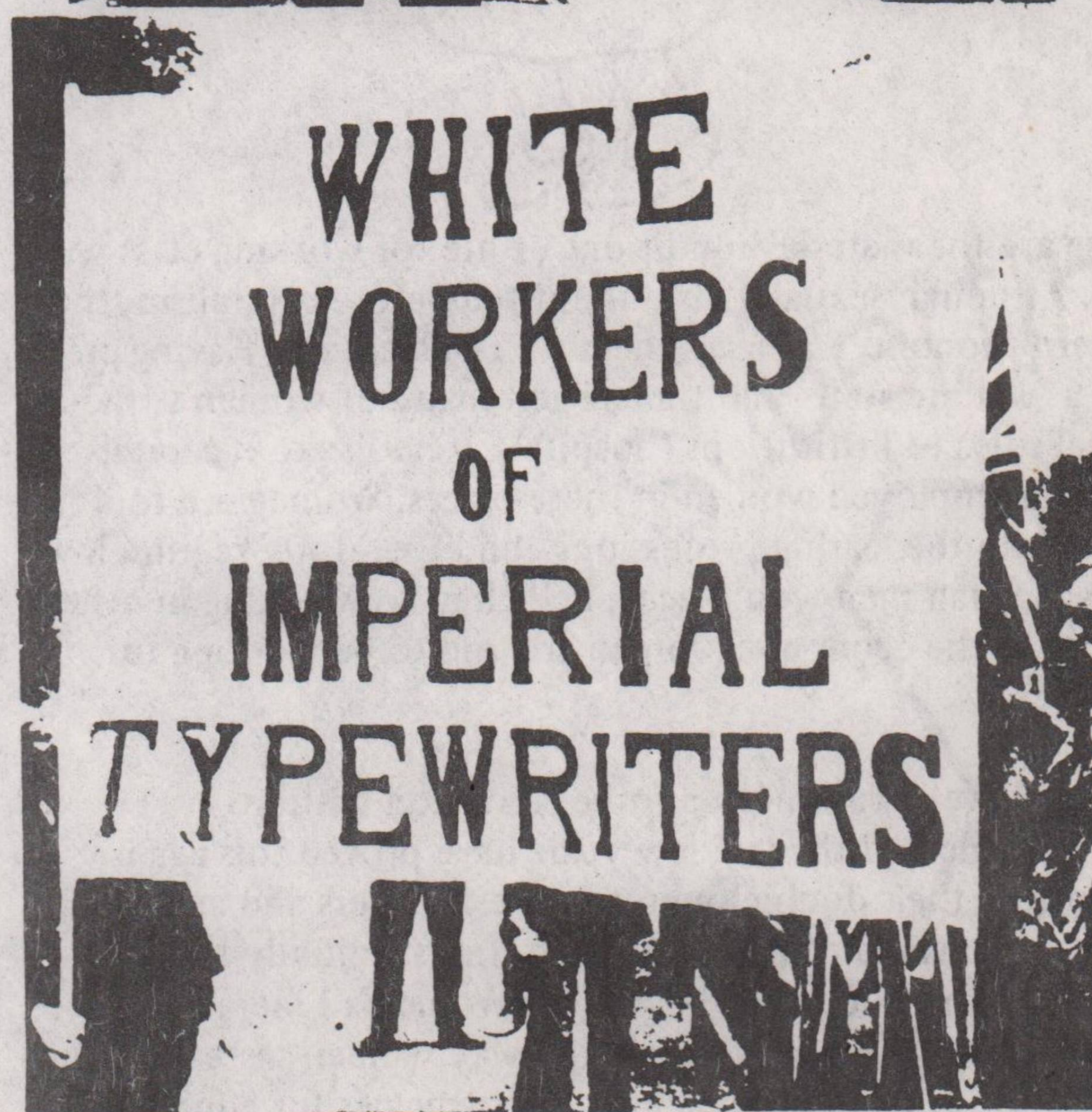
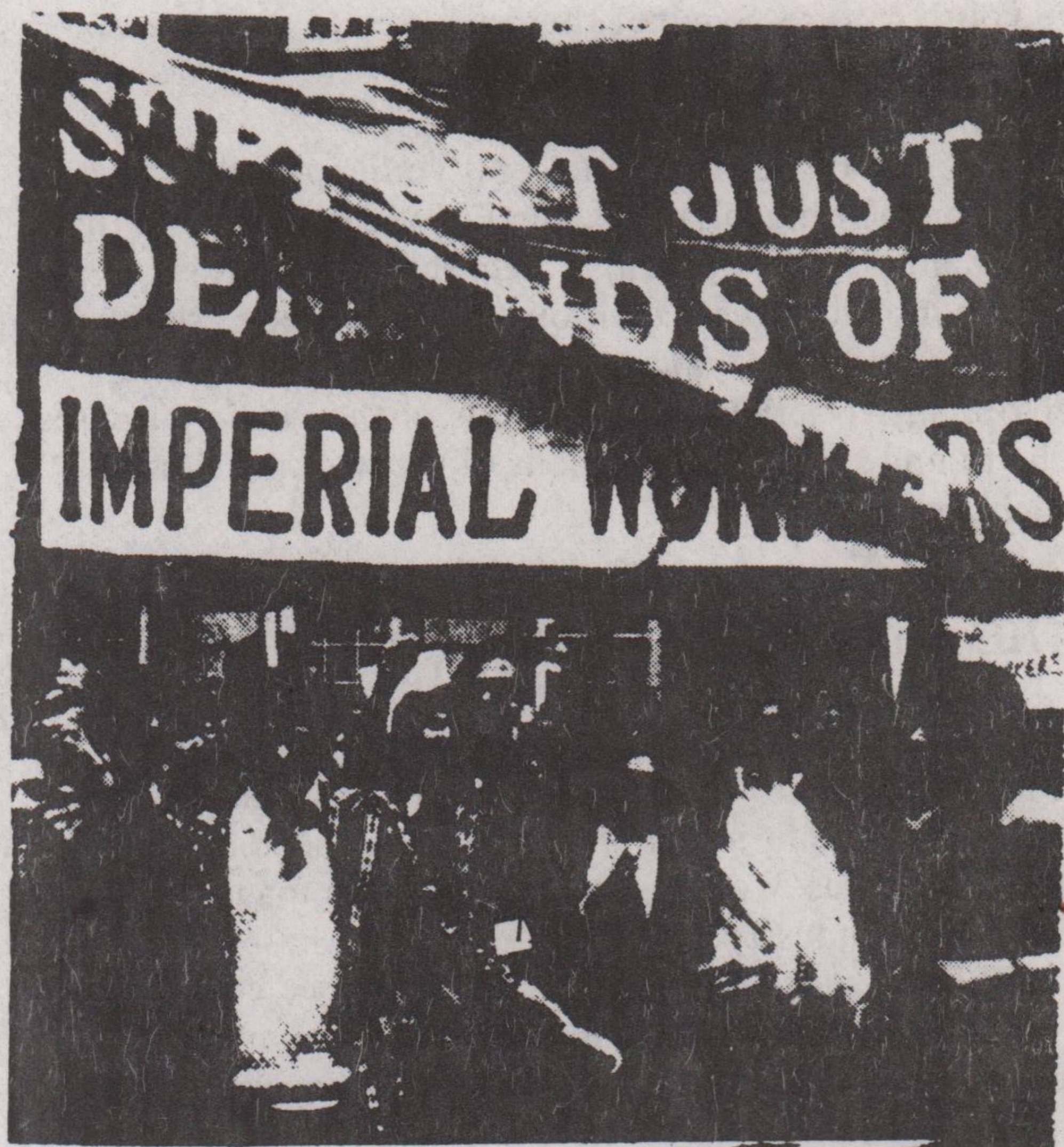
Like women, black people are to be found in all areas of the working class. They too suffer dual oppression as workers with the worst jobs and conditions, and as victims of the racist discrimination that runs throughout our society. Similarly, black people have developed their own organisations to express their specific needs against capitalism.

The material roots of the oppression of black people lie in white imperialism. Encouraged to come here after the war, when white workers had taken advantage of the labour shortage to take the jobs with the best wages and conditions, black workers were forced into the jobs the whites refused.

Other European economies were rebuilt after the Second World War on the backs of immigrant labour — notably Germany which uses the Turks. But Britain had used its culture and religion to destroy the African identity and had given British citizenship in return. While Asian culture was not destroyed, they too were given citizenship and a full dose of British propaganda.

Thus the roots of racism in Britain are complex and the black community is highly divided. Ruling class attitudes are mixed. Almost without exception, the white imperialists despised 'native' culture but, when it became economically expedient, some decided that black people were human and should be respected. They also recognised that they could rule more effectively if they created an upper level of blacks, integrated into the system, to rule on their behalf. Thus today some sections of the ruling class maintain that they are not racist and are keen to develop a black middle class in this country, being particularly aware of the threat posed by black militancy at work and in the community. Hence the legislation against discrimination, and the money poured into the community and race relations bodies.

Similarly, white working class attitudes are mixed. The whole of the white working class has some material basis for its hostility to black demands for equality. Improvements in working class conditions in the 19th century were based on the gains made from exploiting the black empire and the relative comfort of today's working class depends upon the shitwork done by blacks. So parts of the working class are easy prey to those sections of the ruling class who seek power, both by becoming 'popular' and by dividing the white from the black working class, by fanning the flames of racialism.





On the other hand, the socialist current in the working class maintains an anti-racist position. But with a Labour Government openly capitulating to racist pressure and introducing discriminatory immigration acts, the anti-racists in the working class have had a hard time.

Divisions among black people make these problems worse. West Indians and Asians are culturally miles apart. The forcible imposition of British culture on West Indians has contributed to the nationalist tendency among some blacks who seek a distinctive black identity and reject socialism. It has also resulted in the desire of some to become part of the black middle class. In the face of these currents, black socialists have a major battle to establish autonomous organisations.

The Asian community is similarly divided. Active socialist groups, allied to organisations in Asia, struggle in Britain both against the white bosses and against the rapidly growing Asian middle class of doctors, lawyers and businessmen. And Asian youth are less and less attached to their parents culture and life style.

There is no doubt that, despite these divisions, black militancy is growing, from the wave of Asian strikes in the midlands in 1974, to the actions of black youth in Leeds and Notting Hill against the police, to the riots at Ford Dagenham. While these struggles have been autonomous both organisationally and politically, there are many examples of blacks fighting alongside whites – on the November '76 cuts demonstration and against the fascists for example.

Faced with these struggles and the divisions within its own ranks, the ruling class is now attempting to both contain the black revolt with more race relations legislation, and to further divide the working class by removing black people's rights as citizens, giving them the non-status of migrant instead.

In this situation, white socialists have a clear role. We have to support and build links with autonomous black organisations – sharing information, discussing perspectives and developing common strategies wherever possible. We have to support all initiatives aimed at building the power of the black working class, and in particular support for their efforts to organise self-defence for their communities against fascist, racist and police attacks.

Secondly, we have to counter racialism among the white working class. We have to build anti-fascist committees, to deny the National Front, National Party etc. the right to organise and spread their poison. We have to fight against the racist immigration controls, supported by all the main political parties. And we have to show that the genuine grievances of whites can be solved, not by fascist scapegoating of blacks, but by programmes of revolutionary socialism.

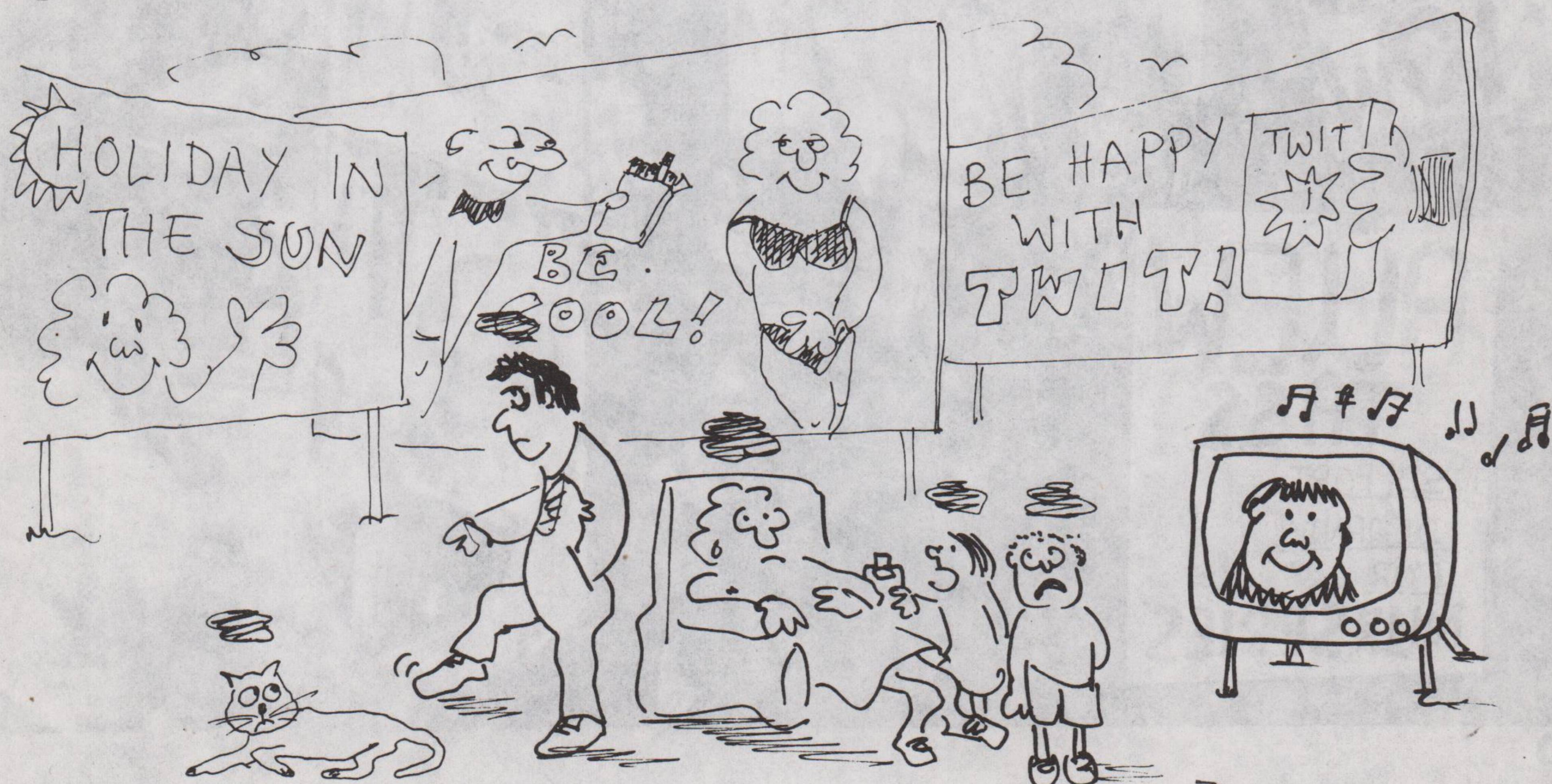
## 6. THE STRUGGLE IN PERSONAL LIFE

When we talk of divisions in the working class we must also recognise that life in capitalist society is also sliced up and compartmentalised. According to the work you do, or your lack of a job, or your race, sex or age. Yet another split is between your private and public life, between home and work.

As capitalism destroys much of the potential for pleasure and meaning at work, it has attempted to create an illusion of satisfaction in the home. Either singing the virtues of family life or offering us 'easy sex', luring us into buying consumer goods, creating a leisure and holiday 'industry', capitalist society tries to dull the pain and make us forget its harshness. But, especially at a time of economic crisis, the contradictions break through.

It is increasingly obvious that the nuclear family is the source of both great satisfaction and great tension, that consumer culture is often an empty shell and that our 'freedoms' are not really freedoms at all. The lynch-pin of the fetish of personal life is sex. By using sex as a commodity, as a means of both selling goods and selling ourselves, capitalism strips the human core from one of life's basic pleasures.

This is why we maintain that political struggle must cover every aspect of people's lives. In particular we support demands which go towards the removal of sexual oppression – for the rights of lesbians and homosexuals, for sex education, free contraception and abortion on demand and an end to all sexual stereotyping.











# REFORMISM AND POPULAR POWER

Historically reformism has been based on two main standpoints. Conventionally we understand it as the theory and practice that accepts the 'national interest', thus eliminating the fundamental conflict between the classes. It forsee the possibility of achieving socialism through a series of reforms within the capitalist system, without destroying the bourgeois state.

This denial of the necessity of destroying the capitalist state gives rise to parliamentarianism — the strategy based on slowly winning over a majority inside the bourgeois parliament, and the reduction of class struggle to a form of pressure on parliament to pass more 'progressive' legislation. Historically, this tendency is embodied in the Second International [1]. In this country it is represented by the Labour Party. Recently, the West European Communist Parties have adopted reformist policies too.

But reformism is based on a deeper fault and misconception — that of failing to understand the contradiction between the forces and relations of production. Firstly, the reformists tend to identify the relations of production solely with who owns the profit-making property. The result is that they see socialism in limited terms, concerned only with changing some patterns of ownership (through nationalisation) and wealth (through income distribution), at best. They do not stand for the transformation of all social relations of life, work and leisure. Secondly, reformism accepts the supposed 'neutrality' and 'objectivity of production. Science, technology and machinery are seen simply as 'productive forces' to be developed regardless of the type of society we live in. We must oppose this idea with the necessity to transform the nature of science, technology and all productive forces under socialism.

Furthermore, reformism denies that the main productive force is the working class itself. This not only means ignoring the creativity and necessity for self-emancipation of the working class, it accepts the capitalist organisation of production and work. The workplace is not seen as the centre of class antagonism, but simply the ground for 'economic struggle'. The fight for 'better conditions' to be fought only by the unions, while the 'real' struggle would be the 'political' reform of the state.

In this country reformism rooted itself inside the working class more than in other countries, for three main reasons:

a) The imperialist nature of British capitalism. This often put the British working class as a whole on a better deal, often allied to its masters in common interests against the people of the colonies.

b) The 'non-bureaucratic nature of the British state, its 'democratic' nature.

c) The highly skilled composition of the working class (or the domination of the skilled working class inside the struggle). Because of the characteristics of production in skilled sectors (the old skilled workers who have a knowledge of the whole productive process), production could seem neutral. The problem could be seen merely as that of *ownership, property*.

All this was at the basis of the formation of the traditional organisations of the working class — the Labour Party and the trade unions.

The hold of reformism over the working class has many aspects. There is the acceptance of certain ideas (eg. the neutrality of the state and the law, action through official channels/parliamentarianism etc.) and the dominance of reformist institutions. This 'hold' is neither static nor permanent. At high points in class struggle and crisis, like the General Strike, either the ideas or the institutions seem to crumble. Even in everyday situations they are challenged directly and indirectly by many different struggles. But the *power* of reformist organisations and the weight of tradition always tends to limit the situation unless a clear alternative is built.

The obstacle cannot be overcome simply through a battle of ideas. Reformism is not just an external stranglehold on struggle, it is a living relationship that is inside the experience of the working class. Failure to grasp this leads to a non-historical understanding of the relationship between reformism and the class struggle. This can be illustrated by seeing how reformism has changed since the last war. The Labour Party and the trade union machines have been integrated into the running of the system. The Labour Party was the overseer of the important post-war reforms aimed to extend the system by using working class needs and struggle as a motor of development in a conscious and planned way. Since then they have not had a real reforming strategy, now competing solely as better managers of capitalism without altering the structures. Recent events have also shown that the



union leaders too are prepared to play the role of co-managers of the system.

These processes have been clearly visible to the working class. The effect has been that even when fighting in very ways for limited goals, the working class has had to rely on its own struggles. Even during the 1950s, when a period of economic expansion guaranteed a low level of struggle, a new 'home-made' reformism replaced working through the Labour Party and official union channels. This new reformism was therefore based less on a traditional ideological basis of illusions in parliament and the Labour Party. It was rooted in the type of struggle characteristic of this period, in particular on sectionalism and delegation.

When we talk about sectionalism we must be clear on a point of confusion. We do not say that every struggle, if it is confined to one sector, is reformist and that the only revolutionary struggle is that of the working class as a whole for the seizure of power. On the contrary, struggles of one sector can open up the way for the rest of the class, and therefore to the revolutionary process. No struggle is in itself revolutionary or reformist — this depends on the content, context and form of the struggle. The struggle of women on an estate for safety barriers, for example, is not reformist if it increases the level of anti-capitalist consciousness of the women, their organisation and the unity of the working class in the community.

Secondly, delegation. The habit, pushed by the institutions of the labour movement, to leave it to others — 'your representatives'. The politics which doesn't stress the necessity of involving the mass of the people. The best way to keep the working class under control. At a general level, the conviction that a Labour government still may deliver the goods without struggle.

So even today at the height of the crisis, when many people are very clear about the pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party and union leaders; years of experience of these limited forms of thinking and acting trap the working class in a limited response. It has led to a feeling of powerlessness to oppose the measures.

For the above reason we reject any strategy that is based on entrism into the Labour Party or the concept of 'exposing' Labour. Both are rooted in fundamental misconceptions about the relationship of the Labour Party and reformism to the working class. Entrism is based on the assumption that the mass of the working class identifies with the Labour Party, therefore it is necessary to be inside it and expose to the masses the wrong ideas of its leaders. The main 'evidence' used is that the majority of the working class vote Labour and belong to the unions which are linked to it. But few working class people vote Labour because they have illusions that it will advance socialism, or even their daily interests. They do so because of the basic class instinct which makes them choose the lesser evil. Entrism, combined with a blind 'Vote Labour' under any conditions, can reinforce any illusions that people have left. Large numbers of Labour voters have, and will, abstain, in certain situations because of disillusion with Labour's capitalist policies. While voting Labour is a *tactical* question, dependent upon the particular situation and balance of forces: we must put stress on building a political and organisational alternative to Labour, as a reference point for vanguard sectors.

In relation to the unions, it is necessary to distinguish between combatting the limitations of trade unionism and the

influence of the Labour Party. The equation of membership of the unions with identification with Labour leads to illusion that when entering into debate with reformist leaders you are addressing the whole of the working class. Many working class people, inside industry and out, cannot be reached within the structures of the Labour Party and union branches. The entrism strategy so often leads to 'resolutionary socialism', divorced from the mass of the working class. The 'exposure' strategy backfires firstly because the 'exposure' is stating the obvious, and secondly, because it is done in front of a very restricted sector of the class.

While we understand why many comrades enter the Labour Party, especially for local reasons, entrism is often seen as conspiratorial by working class people. We would tactically support the elimination of right wingers and their replacement by the left if it helped the mass movement outside. But it can involve a lot of manoeuvring that is very distant from building that movement and can put power in the hands of 'left wingers' who are as frightened of the power of the working class as the people they replaced — concerned to keep initiatives in their hands alone.

In the end we think that by pushing people back towards an identification with Labour, the entrism-exposure strategy increases the dependence of the working class on those politics which constitute the power held by Labour over the class. Furthermore, it misunderstands the nature of Labour's role in capitalism today and greatly underestimates the potential of autonomous activity.

The task of revolutionaries is to break the hold of reformism by building an alternative working class power. That is why we pose the fundamental question of *mass politics* at the heart of our political activity.

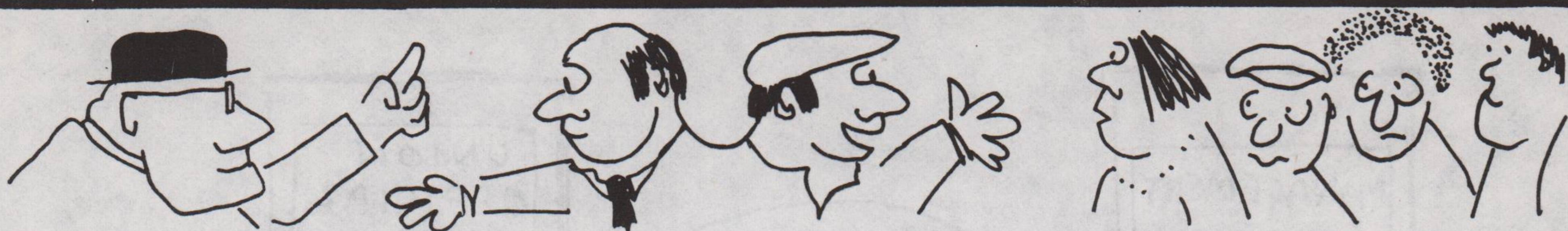
By mass politics we mean:—

- a) Independent self-organisation of the working class. Organisations built in the heart of struggle that can carry the fight beyond what the traditional structures are willing to do.
- b) Full involvement of all sections in leading their own struggles. Too often lack of involvement leads to defeat, as leaders get isolated or struggles in a factory are not spread to the community or vice-versa.
- c) Clear anti-capitalist politics based on the needs of the mass of the people, not outworn formulas developed outside the unfolding of class struggle and consciousness.

What we are saying is not new. On these principles the movement grew to develop popular power both in Chile and Portugal.

A movement which grew inside most of the oppressed strata of the population and saw the active involvement of the majority of the people. Mass organisms, which in form and content went beyond and against reformism. They openly challenged the power of the ruling class in society, and started to develop the power of the working class — a working class point of view over every sphere of society. Even if they did not actually go as far as solving the question of how to seize power. We are committed to building a similar movement for popular power in Britain.





# TRADE UNIONS AND THE AUTONOMY OF THE WORKING CLASS

The working class has two sides — a 'dual and contradictory nature'. The working class under capitalism is the *labour power* that the system lives on. The working class is the class that enters constant negotiations, bargains, compromises with the bourgeoisie over the sale of that labour power.

But the working class is also the class that will bury capitalism. The historical enemy that is forced by its position in society to be an *antagonistic class* against capital. The class that carries forward the struggle for communism.

Trade unionism is all about the first side of the working class — the working class as labour power. For that reason the trade unions should not be confused with the working class. For a start, the trade unions do not include anything like the whole of the working class. But even then, the point is: trade unionism is the organisational form of the reformist side of the working class, *inside* capital. The working class is much more than that.

This general theoretical principle is becoming clearer today, with the progressive integration of the union apparatus into the state. The very development of capitalism since the war has seen the tendency to transform the unions into powerful institutions for the management of capitalism.

At the same time, since the war there has been the development of a working class which fights more and more autonomously from capitalist development and therefore from the union directives.

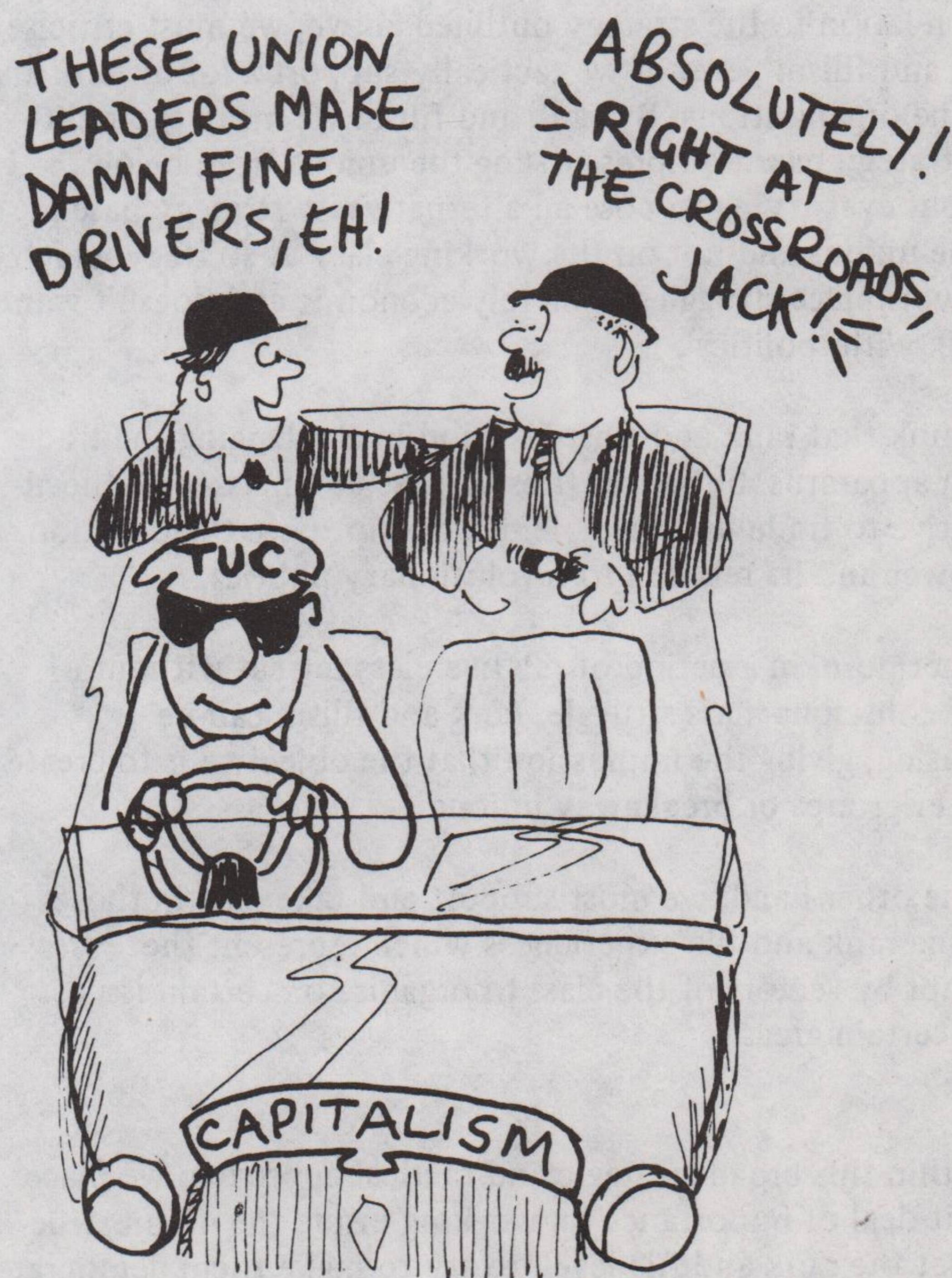
The struggle for communism is not only the struggle of the working class against capitalism, it is also the struggle of the working class against itself — the struggle of the contradictory sides of the working class, one against the other.

What does this mean concretely for revolutionary strategy? Basically it means that we have to be aware of the political and organisational ways that the working class does show its revolutionary side through daily struggle. For instance in the struggle over lay-offs, when the working class demands guaranteed pay — work or no work, there we see the class instinct, expressed at a mass level, for going beyond capitalism; for being more than labour power, more than a comm-

odity to be negotiated. It is the revolutionary instinct of the class, which is not just militant trade unionism.

This does not mean that unions or stewards committees can be ignored. We recognise the political, ideological and organisational hold which trade unionism has in the working class. In fact, revolutionaries should be very active in the trade union arena.

Neither does it mean that there can be no progressive work done inside the unions. Quite the opposite as we explain below. There is always a very important conflict between the 'trade unionism' of the rank and file, and the 'trade unionism' of the union apparatus and leadership.







In relation to the strategy outlined above, we must criticise 'rank and filism', even if we tactically support a lot of rank and file organisations. By rank and filism we mean the political strategy based on pressurising the unions from below, without ever trying to pose an alternative. A strategy based on the unions and not on the working class. A strategy which sees workplace struggles as merely economic and doesn't want to mix with 'politics'.

We think that rank and filism is good in challenging the trade union apparatus, but never tries to pose at a mass level the alternative to trade unionism, ie. it does not pose the question of power and its relation to revolutionary politics.

Furthermore, in a period of relative class retreat without a clear, conscious mass struggle, rank and filism can be confusing, giving the impression that the objective is to create splinter groups or breakaway unions.

On the other hand, we must support and take part in those genuine rank and file experiences which represent the attempt by sectors of the class to organise on certain issues, or in certain areas.

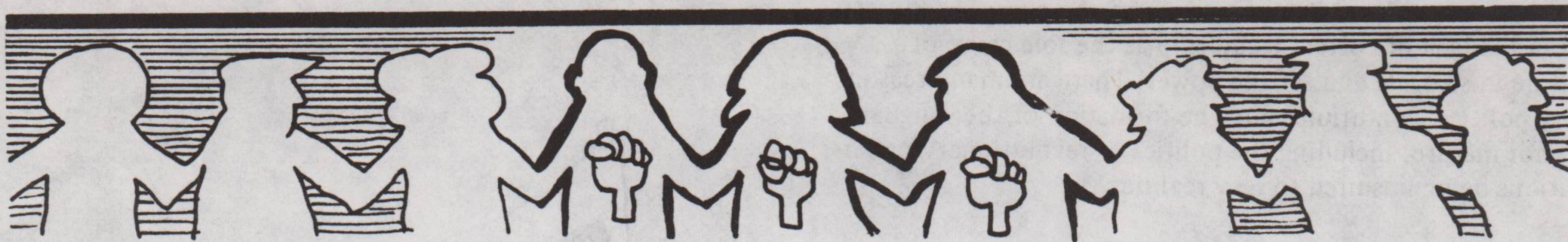
Within this broad strategic and tactical approach, we place a great deal of importance on working inside the union structures at the rank and file level, to try to make them democratic, so that they reflect the struggles of the rank and file.

This is particularly true and relevant in public sector unions or small workplaces or weak sectors or non-unionised or newly-unionised workplaces. A particular tactical approach must be given to 'craft' unions, in particular the AUEW, which is still dominated by the skilled members. In it we must make the effort, as everywhere else, to help the struggles out of sectorial boundaries, towards the unification of the class.

Given this analysis we reject the view that the solution of the relation of the trade unions to the working class is to replace the existing leaders by more left wing ones. While this can be supported tactically, it does not confront the real problem of the limitations of trade unionism itself. The behaviour of Jones, Scanlon, Daley and even Reg Birch is a tragic, but predictable confirmation of this. The 'replace the leaders' strategy alongside rank and filism and strategies to build left caucuses in unions without posing a political alternative, mystify the nature of the unions and underestimate the capacity of the class to struggle autonomously.

In the next section we consider the question of the party. Although this manifesto concentrates on the Labour Party, the trade unions and the revolutionary party, it should be clear from our analysis that we emphasise the importance of the daily, often hidden, struggles of the class. We are also concerned with the permanent mass organisations of the class — sometimes called soviets etc. But at this stage of class struggle in Britain we have to deal with the immediate questions facing revolutionaries. At a time when some groups are calling themselves the revolutionary party, we have to clarify this important question.





# PARTY AND CLASS

1. Our document has so far left out the question of the *vanguard organisation* and its relationship with the class. We think that this is a very complex question which influences deeply the main organisational project, outlined at the end of this document. But before seeing how to go about it, let's re-affirm a few principles.

2. A vanguard organisation that collectively intervenes to direct and develop class struggle is necessary. That necessity arises out of consciousness, experience and struggle in the working class. It needs to be a *vanguard* because the function of a revolutionary organisation is to earn the right to lead by being rooted in the working class and its struggles. This enables it to systematically express the needs of the class through demands, programmes and actions. Such an organisation is based on bringing together conscious and active militants as *cadres*, with the education and training to act as members of a combat organisation.

At a further stage, when the struggle and the vanguard have reached a certain level of maturity, the party will also be necessary. Its main role is in arming and leading the proletariat to seize power. Seizing power against the modern and complex bourgeois state is not as straightforward as in Russia in 1917. But this only amplifies the need for the party. The existence of autonomous working class organs of popular power (Soviets, People's Councils etc.) is the most important aspect of the revolutionary process; but they do not guarantee victory. They do not dissolve differences of interest and ideology overnight, solving all tactical and strategic problems.

Not can they carry the main weight in combatting the strategies put forward by the reformist forces. The recent events in Chile and Portugal emphasise clearly that the centralisation of the revolutionary vanguard in the party to 'seize the time' is still necessary. This is not to underestimate the complexity of the problems, not to reduce everything to the existence of the party. But the crisis and the struggle for power reach crucial moments when decisive action is needed. This action, conditioned as it is by highly complex military and political and ideological considerations is beyond the capacity of the organs of popular power.

The party is also vital in consolidating victory through the dictatorship of the proletariat, and ensuring that the revolutionary victory is sustained. In that period, with enemies inside and outside, harassing the new workers' state, with 57 varieties of opportunists jumping on the revolutionary bandwagon — then inside the mass democracy of the socialist state, there needs to be an organisation of proven, dedicated militants. Any organisation that seeks to be effective in the struggle must also seek to centralise its own leadership, resources and strategies: while organising discussion and implementation in the most democratic way possible.

It must be recognised, however, that the degree of centralisation must serve the needs of the situation. An ossified and bureaucratic leadership is the inevitable result of centralisation which arises from a purely abstract principle: applied without reference to the level of development of class struggle.

3. As important as any of these organisational principles are, they are a long way from telling us everything about the relationship between party and class. There are no universal formulas that can be applied to every situation, nor does any structure — democratic centralist or otherwise — guarantee being in touch with the needs of the class struggle. Formal principles must take second place to an understanding of the content of the specific conditions of those struggles.

Organisations must flow from and meet the needs of the conditions or it is a bureaucratic imposition from above. Conditions change; capitalism, the state and the working class are very different from what they were in the pre-war period. Whenever consciousness, organisation and capacity for struggle are regarded as unchanging things or when objective conditions are always regarded as ripe but the subjective factor of leadership missing: disastrous political mistakes are made.

4. The idea of revolutionary organisation has been de-valued by repetitive and unimaginative formulas being put forward no matter what changes on conditions. There has been an over-

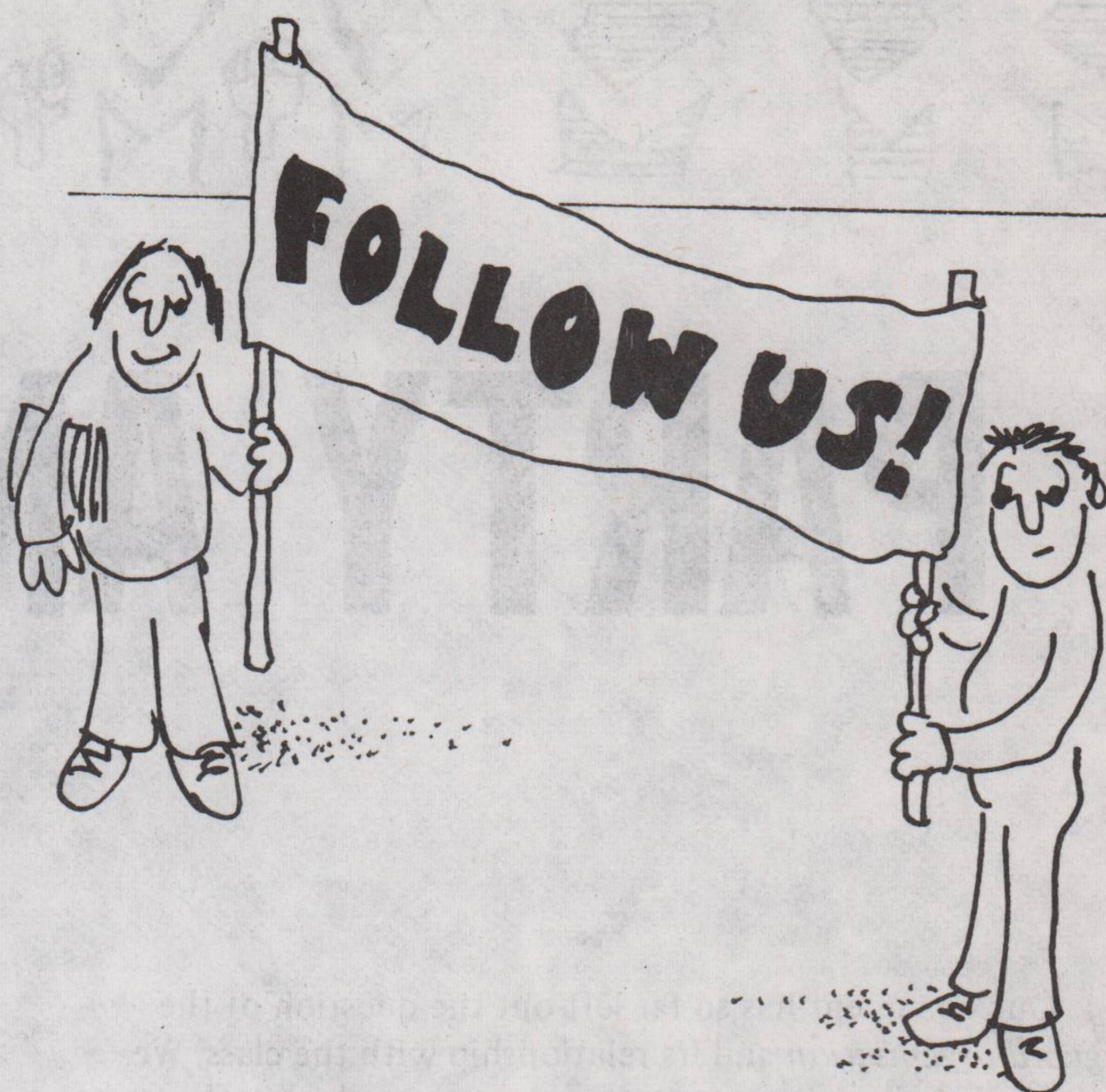


emphasis on the problem of leadership. An exaggerated belief in the lack of correct leadership as the sole cause of failure in struggle and seizing power. There are many reasons why political conditions, and the formation of the vanguard do not mature: including the politics of revolutionary organisations being unsuited to new realities.

But the over-emphasis on leadership leads to a belief that it can be transplanted on top of the class struggle. Parallel to this is the sectarianism that often characterises the left. So many organisations have failed — because they have put building themselves above building the struggle. The problem of leadership is, as one Italian comrade put it, 'not to *put* yourself at the head of the masses, but to *be* the head of the masses. This is only possible when revolutionary politics comes from *inside* the development of the struggle. If politics is seen as something coming solely from 'outside' and programmes are worked out by application of external formulas derived from the 1930s, the left can never end its isolation.

The seeds of communism are often present within the daily battles that people wage: it is for us to organise, develop and make them conscious. We must be prepared to *learn as well as teach*. It is also worth saying that elitist attitudes on leadership are part of the reasons why there has so often been authoritarian relations between party and class and degenerations of revolutionary processes.

5. Need and desire are not sufficient conditions for the formation of the party. The revolutionary party cannot be 'announced' when an organisation reaches a magic figure of members. The party must be the summit of the growth of the aut-



onomy of the working class movement. It must be a product of a real development of the mass struggle and the needs of the vanguards that lead and emerge from that situation. No organisation in Britain today has earned the right to call itself 'the revolutionary party'. Nor could they. The maturity of political conditions has not been reached. The role of the revolutionary organisation in this period is to stimulate the kinds of mass struggle that can make a decisive break with reformism and sectionalism. We shall return to this in the final section.







# INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

As the international links of capital grow stronger between states and companies, the pressure is on for the class struggle to develop an international dimension and for revolutionary organisations to link up. But neither process is easy. It is not helped by abstract calls for impossible links, nor by attempts to set up Internationals that have no mass base in any country. More than anything else, international perspectives need to be guided by a sense of reality, by an understanding of the concrete ways that the process of building socialism is happening in different countries.

This means firstly that international work, though primarily solidarity activity with the struggles of other countries — Portugal, Ireland etc. — must be made relevant to the situation here. We must find ways of relating revolutionary processes elsewhere to what people are actually experiencing in their own country — like women in Ireland speaking directly to women activists in the community here, about the similarities and realities of the national liberation struggle. Secondly, that priorities must be given to solidarity work that most clearly connects to the experience of sectors of the class in Britain. This particularly means work around South Africa, the Caribbean and Ireland to give weight to the struggle against racism and imperialism felt by the black and Irish communities. So our perspective is that we learn from, and are inspired by, the revolutionary struggles in other countries, and that we best help them by applying their methods, when relevant, to the task of building revolutionary politics in Britain.

Most importantly, international perspectives must be guided by understanding the specific situation of the struggle in different countries. The world-wide struggle is not exactly the same everywhere. It is uneven, because, although imperialism unites the world into a single market, it still leaves the world in a combination of different forms of political and economic development.

Because of this there are no universal formulas for advancing the revolution. There are lessons, experiences, that can be shared between countries. But too often we have seen organisations in one country laying down the line to those elsewhere. Without any understanding of the real dynamic of that other situation.

Our method of analysis must start from seeing who is *actually* the motive force of anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist struggle: what forces have a mass base and are capable of mobilising and involving the masses in struggle. This may not always be the organisation that is most correct ideologically. In Portugal, for instance, it was important to recognise the effect that the Armed Forces Movement has in building working class power in the early stages; while being fully aware of the dangers of military elitism. And later to support the presidential campaign of Othelo, despite his imperfect programme and the cult of his personality. The campaign was a vital way that the autonomous organs of popular power re-created their unity and purpose, thus partially reversing the retreat of the working class and revolutionary forces.

The unevenness of the international situation is added to by the fact that some countries still do not enjoy national freedom and political self-determination. This is true for instance in Ireland. And it was true up until recently in Vietnam, and in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau.

In these situations, the immediate goal is self-determination. And in fighting for this, the working class and poor peasants will find themselves fighting alongside some local middle class and bourgeois forces; forces certainly opposed to any longer term struggle for socialism.

However, the goal of national liberation can only be won if the struggle is put in the hands of the workers and peasants, and made part of the struggle for socialism.

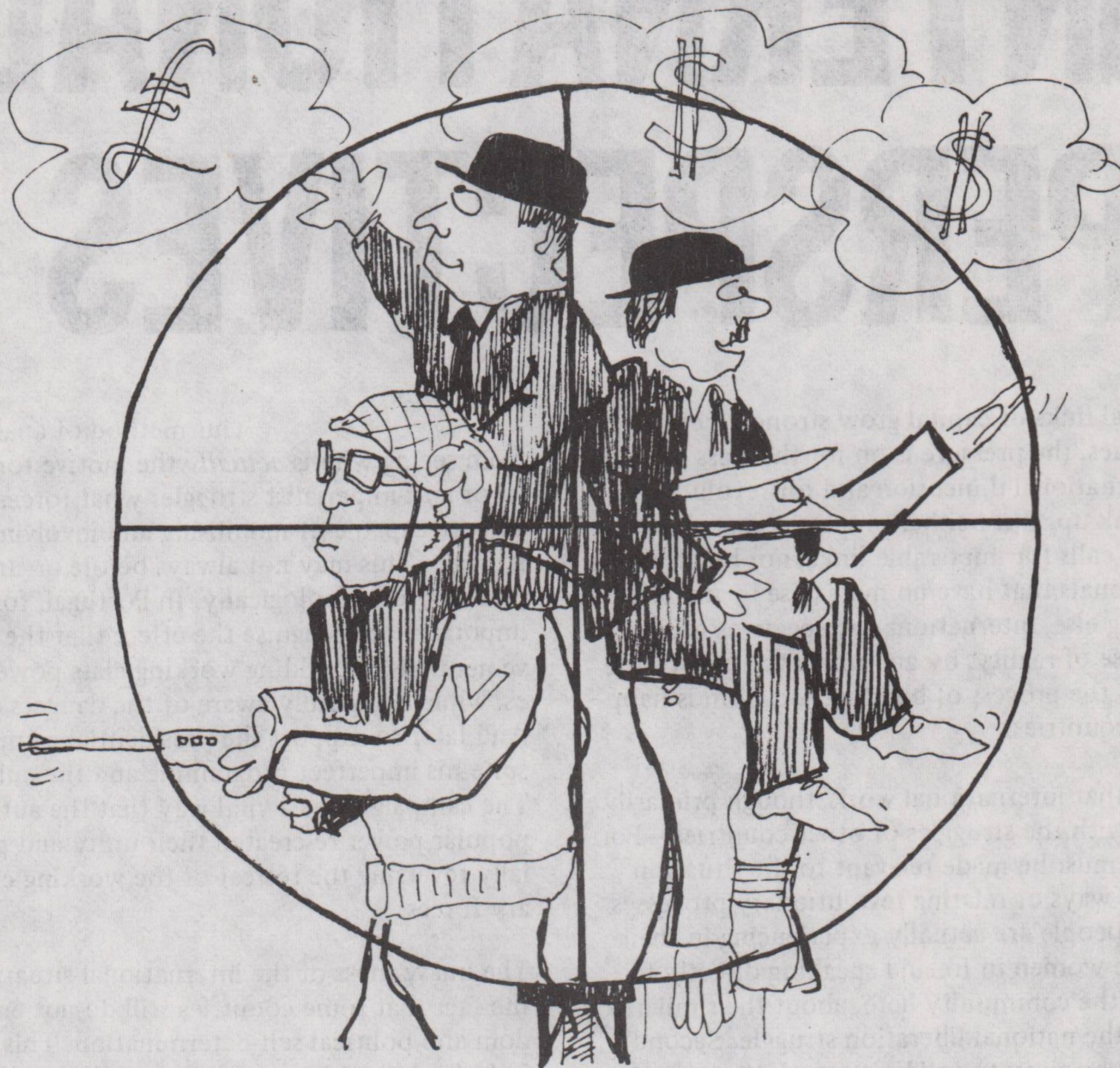
Only socialist perspectives are broad enough to mobilise the masses behind a struggle for national liberation. But the struggle must actually be in the hands of the workers and peasants, not any elite in their name. This perspective implies the rejection of the theory of revolution by completely separate stages — first bourgeois democracy, then socialism — and those theories that see any national liberation struggle, only supporting those struggles and organisations they see as 'pure' socialist, no matter how irrelevant they are to the real situation.



We must clearly recognise in this context that the anti-imperialist struggles of such movements as the MPLA and FRELIMO show that revolutionary forces have learned many of the bitter lessons of previous phases of national liberation battles. They have defeated imperialism, but now face the task of building towards socialism in conditions of backwardness and a capitalist dominated world. They are not helped by the metropolitan arrogance of those on the left who tell them they can do nothing until the Western working class have made revolution and that their own revolutionary processes will inevitably degenerate in the context of world capitalism.

This will be the basis for a movement towards communism and the abolition of wage labour, classes and the state, the full socialist development of the productive forces and the instatement of the principle 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need'. Communism is only possible on a world scale and even the full completion of socialism is not possible within one country. But the process of building socialism can be started (and has already started) within individual countries.

Each country and its transitional processes must be examined in terms of its own specific development, to see whether or not it is advancing towards socialism.



4. There will be no combined, instantaneous world revolution. Capitalism will be defeated first in specific countries, which will face the problem of building socialism in conditions they did not choose, but which all revolutionaries must realise are the real situation facing millions of people.

At this stage we must say what we think building socialism means. The abolition of the private ownership of the means of production in any post-revolutionary society is only a precondition for socialism, not socialism itself. A transition to socialism must involve the total transformation of the social relations of production and society. This involves movement towards:— i) Workers' and peoples' management of the economy and society, and freedom of association and criticism. ii) Elimination of the inequalities between manual and mental labour, town and country, between the sexes and between the races. iii) The egalitarian distribution of rewards and knowledge. iv) Elimination of competition and production according to exchange value in the economy and its replacement by democratic planning and production for use. v) Elimination of the power of the old classes and struggle against the growth of new elites in the party and state structures. vi) Revolutionising the mode of work; who produces what and how.

With the above criteria in mind, the USSR (and similar societies in Eastern Europe) is neither socialist nor on the way to socialism. The planned economy is a left-over achievement of the 1917 revolution, but in all other ways the social relations of production have not been changed or revolutionised. (That is, the way production is organised, decided and carried out.) And throughout that society there is a system based on new patterns of class domination which deny all power and independence to the working class.

China, however, has embarked on some major aspects of transforming social relations and therefore building socialism. This includes important struggles against the emergence of new classes and elites. The transitional process is, however, still in balance, because of the existence of powerful forces wanting to build a new class system, and because mass proletarian power and control has not fully reached the party and state structures. These negative elements are re-inforced by a foreign policy that is based on a totally incorrect principle. The dynamic of class struggle will determine whether China will build socialism or not.



# OUTLINE FOR A REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

Since we are arguing for a new organisation, it would be inappropriate for us to lay down a detailed strategy. That is the task of all comrades in the new organisation. But we want to suggest some ideas arising from our analysis for discussion.

For a start, we must understand the main characteristics of the capitalist offensive in the present period. In this respect the slogan 'back to the thirties', even if charged with emotional meaning and agitational effect, does not explain the *new* measures aimed at making the system safe for the eighties. Capitalism is not trying to turn the clock, but to renew itself, restructure itself for the future.

There are a number of basic features to the re-structuring process. The first is an attack on shop floor strength through changing the organisation of production and de-composition of the workforce. Decomposition means changing the face and structure of the workforce. The key aspects of this are cuts in manning levels, increased labour mobility and casualisation of employment (through constant lay-offs etc.) These moves are held together by the kind of blackmail over jobs that we've recently seen at Leylands, and the further incorporation of the trade union leadership into state management of the economy.

Secondly, and linked to this, is the creation of a higher level of unemployment. Not a reserve army of labour as in the 1930s, to be employed again during a boom. But permanent, structural unemployment that is the product both of the decrease in manning levels and the increase in capital intensive investment — investment in new, more sophisticated machinery which itself cuts the number of jobs.

The evidence is becoming clear that so-called temporary schemes of job creation and other phoney means of employment will of necessity become regular features of state policy. A fact that the left must rapidly come to terms with, and which adds to our criticisms of the limitations of the 'right to work' perspective. In a context where 'work' in

many sectors is being eroded in a long term sense, we have to turn our attention to the demands for a guaranteed living income for all unemployed. And at the same time we have to begin to work out strategies in relation to job creation schemes.

Thirdly, long term cuts in public spending. These create, not only a permanently lower level of service, but also a complete transformation of the way in which the service is provided in education, welfare, health and housing. For the middle class, a growing range of private, fee-paying services will become available, outside the state sector. For the working class in these sectors it will mean more work and worse conditions. For the working class users of these services, it will mean increased financial hardship and more work — especially for housewives who will have to spend even more time looking after children, nursing them and teaching them, and who will put even more energy and worry into 'making ends meet'.

The fact that the capitalist state has extended itself into every aspect of our existence, from the workplace to the community to personal life means that we have to extend the range of the struggle against capitalism. We will see a more vanguard role being played by traditionally less organised 'weak' sectors: public sector workers, women, blacks. The examples of the demonstration against the cuts in November 1976 (the largest since the demonstration against the Industrial Relations Act) and the Trico victory over equal pay are significant.

In relation to Trico we say that the victory there, after a long strike, means that a long phase of struggle for women's rights has finished and a new one begun. This last phase of the fight began in 1968 with the Ford Dagenham workers demanding equal pay and now it's finished with a splendid victory. Trico marks the fact that now equal pay and the struggle for it have become a permanent heritage for the working class.

The struggle of women at work is paralleled by their important role in the community. Although the rent strikes of the early 1970s were not wholly successful, they proved the combativity of tenants. As the welfare state is increasingly cut and restructured, the people in the community most directly affected — housewives, schoolstudents, pat-



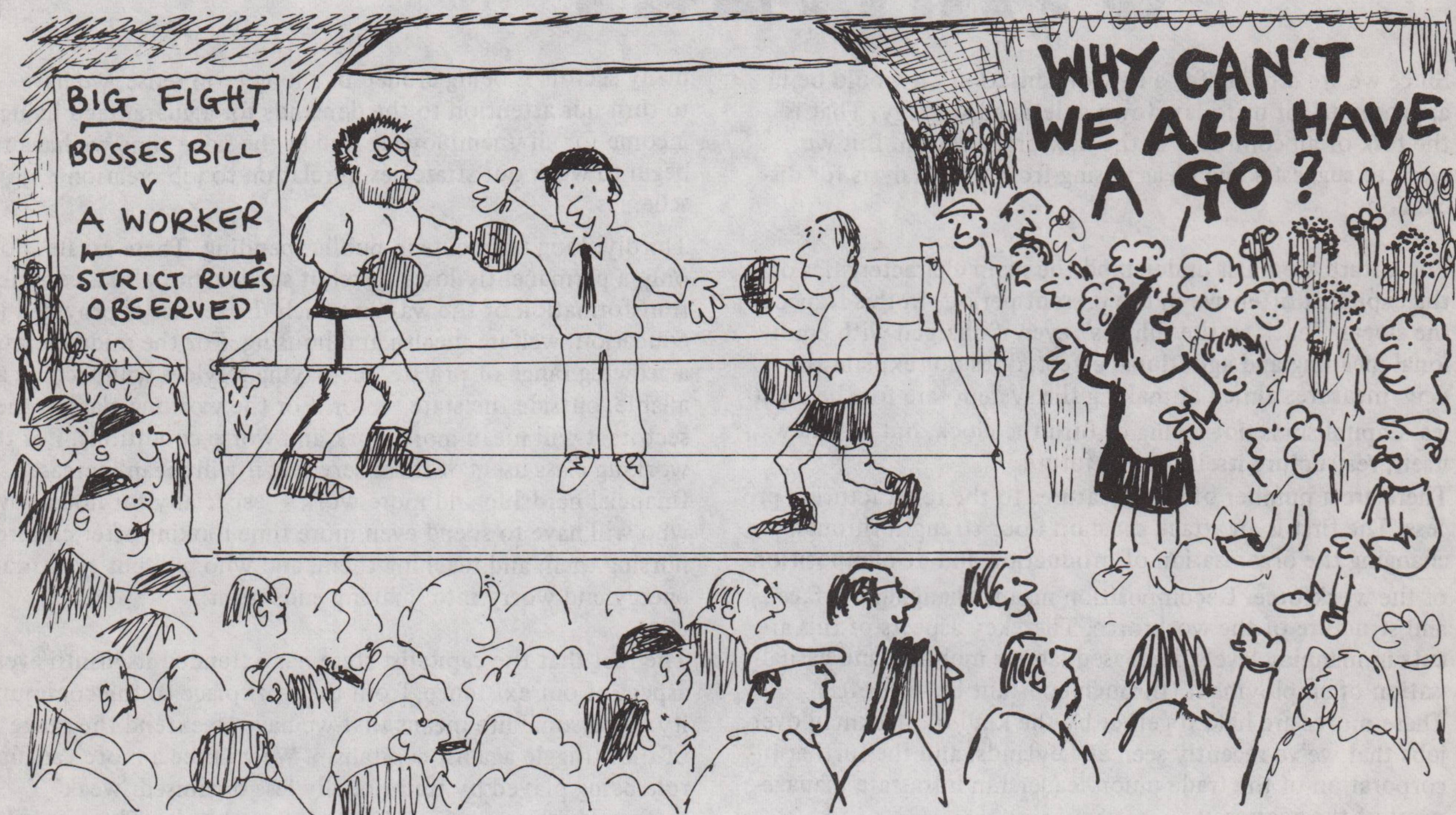
ients, claimants — will increasingly be looking for ways to fight back. Revolutionaries must be inside these struggles, generalising their communist content.

Recognising the way family and personal life is made ever more intolerable, we have to show that the underlying cause of personal crises lies in the alienated, de-humanised and oppressive system we live under. Slogans and demands, however correct, will not alone prove to people that 'socialism is the answer'. Our politics, both in content and the way we put them over, must relate to people's personal hopes and fears. We have to make the struggle for socialism meaningful, worthwhile and enjoyable. This is why we emphasise the importance of socialist culture — people participating in film, theatre and writing, expressing our common struggle for a new world is one of the ways that socialism can come alive.

At the same time, this slogan has been quite useful in fighting redundancies and closures. But to fight for less workload is much more complete — and does come out of the experience and need of working class people, both employed and unemployed.

Within this perspective we see in this political phase that the demand for a shorter working week with no loss of pay is vital. This means for most people, a 35 hour week, paid 40.

We also think it's a mistake to separate the question of jobs from that of wages — a mistake common to most of the left. We reject this separation because wage restraint is the major plank in capitalism's present strategy. Also, low wages will facilitate the attitude of not caring about defending the job or fighting against redundancies. But most of all,



In relation to the fight for jobs we put forward the strategic perspective explained in the slogan 'Less workload for the employed — more jobs for the unemployed'.

In the context of a protracted capitalist crisis, like the one we are living through now, the above slogan represents the autonomous struggle of the working class. Autonomous from the needs of capital to make the workers pay for the crisis, autonomous from the reformist idea that we are all in the same boat and must tighten our belts. It is an attacking perspective which starts from the point of view of the working class in wanting to work less. It puts forward a working class solution to unemployment.

We support this slogan in preference to 'The right to work', because the latter does not challenge the conditions we work under. It does not openly recognise the necessity to fight against increased exploitation at work. It does not take into account the need to work less under capitalism.

low basic wages will push people to work overtime, or to accept productivity deals eventually. In both cases this will in fact go against a working class solution to unemployment, increasing the working week and the workload per worker.

These are the areas of struggle which we think are important. There is no doubt that recently the class has been in retreat and there has been a downturn in struggle in all areas. The Trico victory, the struggles at Dagenham, Notting Hill and Hull Prison, the Hemel Hemstead hospital demonstration may well be signs of recovery. Our role is to generalise the most advanced contents of these struggles, and for that we need organisation. The period of retreat has seen many organisational traumas on the left. We do not believe that organisational change alone can make up for inadequate analysis or unfavourable material conditions. But we do think it essential that the sections of the left which broadly agree with the analysis of this manifesto must unify themselves into a new organisation and prepare themselves to be inside every struggle of the working class



## THE STRUCTURES OF BIG FLAME

### — HOW IT WORKS

**MEMBERSHIP:** All people wanting to join Big Flame have a period of **associate membership**. This lasts for three months and the period is used for basic education, mutual learning and the investigation of potential types of activity. At the end of this period the associate member and the organisation decide whether to take up full membership. The decision is based on broad acceptance of the politics and programme, willingness to be active and payment of subs. While an associate member the comrade has full rights of participation (including voting), except for representing BF on external or internal bodies.

**THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE:** is the sovereign decision and policy-making body for all spheres of activity.

**A NATIONAL SECRETARIAT** is elected at the conference. This consists of five people, a minimum of two of whom must be women. Its job is to implement policy and to provide overall guidance and direction of the day to day political work of the organisation. Each member is responsible for a certain area of the country and it also includes a full-time National Secretary, who does much of the administrative work.

**THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE** is responsible for policy-making between conferences. It meets monthly. At the present time it is not elected but consists of: the National Secretariat, a delegate from each local BF group, delegates from the women's and industrial commissions, and the education officer and newspaper editor. The latter two are non-voting and are elected by the national conference.

**COMMISSIONS** for each major sector of our work formulate policy recommendations and feed into the decision-making process, as well as organising the ongoing activity in their area. At the moment these include:

- Industry
- Women
- Hospitals
- Anti-Fascist and Anti-Racist
- Community
- Teachers
- Students
- Ireland
- Cultural

Of these the **women's commission** has a special status, not simply because of the importance of women's struggle, but because women are more than a sector. Its role is to organise the political activity of women in BF and to provide overall political perspectives for the whole of BF.

**DISTRICT COMMITTEES**, or some equivalent, usually provide local political leadership and co-ordination of activity within the national framework.

**AN INTERNAL BULLETIN** open to all members provides the means of communication and discussion.

Anyone interested in joining Big Flame should write to the National Secretary or get in touch with the local group. For those interested in a particular area of activity, the National Secretary will put them in touch with commission convenors.

## BIG FLAME PUBLICATIONS

### REGULAR

**BIG FLAME NEWSPAPER:** 10p. Subscription £2.25 per year/ £1.10 six months. Monthly.

### REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

**REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM:** The Journal of Big Flame. Recently re-issued and more open, involving independent militants. Quarterly, 40p. Subscriptions £2.00 for four issues (Britain and Ireland), £3.00 (Europe) and £4.50 (USA airmail) Back copies of previous journal 'Big Flame' (Nos 1 and 2) at 20p.

**INDUSTRIAL BULLETIN'** Duplicated publication for industrial militants, available from our Industrial Commission. 10p. Irregular.

**womens struggle notes:** Produced by an open group, including Big Flame women. Monthly at 10p. Subscriptions £1 for six issues. Available from Box 339, 182 Upper Street, London N1

Big Flame **IRISH BULLETIN** has recently been discontinued with the emergence of a number of publications from the new United Troops Out Movement, although special issues will be produced. Back copies are available for 5p each.

### PAMPHLETS

**CHILE SI — 1974.** 20p. Perceptive account of the Popular Unity experience and of working class struggle, drawing on the writings of the MIR.

**PORTUGAL: A BLAZE OF FREEDOM — 1975.** 30p. Twice reprinted pamphlet giving the history and an analysis of Portugal after the overthrow of the dictatorship. Includes chronology and glossary, as well as accounts of struggles in the community and industry. Also controversial analysis of the Armed Forces Movement.

**IRELAND: RISING IN THE NORTH —** Another big-selling pamphlet combining interviews with analysis of the relation between the class and national struggles. Still useful for basic historical understanding of the Irish conflict. 20p. 1975

**THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION — 1977.** 30p. Pamphlet from the Big Flame Teachers Commission attempting to re-assert a materialist analysis of the educational crisis. Of vital importance in the 'Great Debate', aiming to take socialist activity in education further than fighting the cuts and wages battles. Sections on teachers, pupils and parents, as well as the experience in Russia and China.

**THE REVOLUTION UNFINISHED: A CRITIQUE OF TROTSKYISM — 1977.** 50p. The first non-sectarian critique of Trotskyism. Much praised pamphlet that has already sold out of its first 3,000 run. Attempts to link the strengths and weaknesses of Trotsky's original ideas, developed in the battle with Stalinism, to the theory and practice of the current Trotskyist organisations.

### PAMPHLETS ON INDUSTRIAL AND COMMUNITY STRUGGLES IN BRITAIN

**WE WON'T PAY — 1975.** 20p. Account of the Tower Hill Rent Strike of 1974, stressing the role of women. Of theoretical importance in analysing the role of community struggle and of housewives.

**FIVE MONTHS OF STRUGGLE IN FORDS HALEWOOD.** Produced by the Big Flame Ford Group, it puts the account of a particular struggle inside a wider analysis of unions and shop stewards. An earlier pamphlet, **SHOP STEWARDS AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE**, is now out of print.



