

## Organising to Win

Over the past few years, the working class has taken a hammering. Five years of Labour government has left workplace organisation in many sectors seriously weakened.

And now we're in the second year of a Tory government which is mounting an all-out attack on the *rank and file*.

This pamphlet is about why we've been losing so many struggles at work, and how we can start winning once again. And it's about how we can defeat the Tories.

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A POLITICAL MANUAL ABOUT HOW  
TO STOP LOSING STRUGGLES  
AT WORK - BY THE BIG  
FLAME INDUSTRIAL  
COMMISSION

# ORGANISING

# TO

# WIN



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FLAME**

**60p**

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# Introduction

Over the past few years, the working class has taken a hammering. Unemployment has increased by more than a million. Loss of part-time jobs and nursery closures have meant that many women have been driven back into the home. Under the Labour government there were massive cuts in the *social wage* (money spent in the public service sector for everyone's benefit). And since their election, the Tories are imposing even greater cuts in the public sector, leading to a double standard service – inadequate public provision for the majority and a luxury private service for the rich.

At work we're facing speed ups, manning and staffing cuts, sackings, closures, victimisations, and attempts to push through new codes of discipline, procedure and working practice which will undermine conditions won through years of hard struggle.

## THE TORY ATTACK

This pamphlet is about why this ruling class offensive is happening, and how it can be defeated. We're not pretending that there are any instant solutions. It's time that socialists faced up to some harsh realities: after five years of Labour government and economic recession, shop floor organisation is now seriously weakened in workplace after workplace. The rank and file is increasingly demoralised and divided.

And right now the Tories are introducing a whole range of measures to further attack the rank and file – to increase demoralisation and division. Our argument is that in the face of this attack, the traditional strategy which dominates the trade union movement – for moderation, compromise and sectionalism and against mass action, solidarity and a real socialist alternative – is a recipe for continuing disaster.

Equally, the approach of much of the Left simply doesn't face up to these problems.

## RANK AND FILE POWER

In our view, the Tory offensive will only be defeated through the full mobilisation of the rank and file. But with the present state of workplace organisation, that's not going to be easy. So the priority now for militants is to start organising at work to rebuild workplace organisation and rank and file power.

That means a political fight among the mass of workers in every workplace against the way the employers divide us: by race, by sex, with differentials, by unequal allocation of overtime and workload, with unemployment. It means a fight for more democracy at every level of the trade union movement, and a campaign for the election of more militant representatives who won't let us down every time there's a battle with management.

## SOCIALIST POLITICS

It also means consistently taking up all the problems and struggles faced by workers in their everyday lives and showing how they relate to revolutionary socialist politics. We've got to be just as hard on Labour as we are on the Tories. Otherwise we'll be failing to prepare people for the anti-working class policies of the next Labour government.

So this is a political pamphlet – written from the experience at work of members of the revolutionary socialist organisation Big Flame. We believe that if we're to defeat the Tory offensive, we need a new approach to politics in the workplace and in the trade union movement. Although the steel strike ended in a sell-out, its best moments showed that the working class is not defeated. We have the possibility of winning. Our job is to turn that possibility into reality.

# Ch1. Labour's Legacy

## Weakened Workplace Organisation

For too long, the working class has been losing struggle after struggle at work: the victimisation of Derek Robinson and the implementation of the Edwardes plan at Leyland; the defeat of the Grunwick struggle by the combined might of the Special Patrol Group and George Ward, with the passive collusion of the TUC; the defeats in the struggle against the Social

Contract under Labour; the successful closure of hospitals, schools and nurseries.

There have been some victories, but they're few and far between. *And there is now a real risk of permanent and major demoralisation in the working class unless we can urgently begin to turn the tide and start winning struggles at work and in the community once again.*

## Why we've been losing

Our problem is that today, workplace and trade union organisation in many sectors has emerged from five years of Labour government seriously weakened. These are among the main reasons why this has happened:

1. Mass unemployment and the threat of closures and redundancies resulting from the economic slump.
2. The growing incorporation of the trade unions at national level into state machinery – particularly through the Social Contract – leading to repeated attempts by trade union leaders to sabotage rank and file struggles.
3. Successful attempts to undermine strong shop stewards' organisation and turn it to management's advantage by the introduction of Measured Day Work and national wage bargaining to replace local bargaining and piece work. And combined with this, stewards and reps have been increasingly tied down through participation, and tougher procedure and discipline agreements.
4. Increasing divisions in the working class along the lines of race, sex, differentials and over sectoral interests.
5. Changing processes of production (such as new technology) being used to deliberately undermine sections of the working class.
6. The increasing use by workers of Tribunals and Courts to try to win conflicts at work – instead of relying on mass action. In part this was because of government legislation such as the Employment Protection Act.



'No work until Robbo is back'. A march through Birmingham during the unofficial strike at Leyland against the sacking of Longbridge convenor Derek Robinson. The strike caved in when the AUEW Executive refused to back the strike and instead set up an 'inquiry'. 3 months later the 'inquiry' found in Robbo's favour and sanctioned strike action. But the Longbridge workforce refused to take action – by a vast majority. Read on for the full story. (Photo: A. Wiard, Report)

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## British Leyland

One of the clearest examples of all this is at British Leyland. There, shop floor power has been under direct attack for several years. The first step was the introduction of Measured Day Work – under which workers are paid by the hour, not by how many pieces of work they complete. Under piece work, Leyland workers had developed strong shop floor organisation, pushing up wage rates through individual shop stewards bargaining with local management over the rate for the job. This meant that there had to be a close relationship between shop stewards and their members.

Measured Day Work was brought in to break this link between stewards and their members. And it was reinforced by the introduction of national wage bargaining between top Leyland managers and national trade union officials. At the same time, workplace organisation was gradually undermined by tighter discipline and procedure agreements, and through successful attempts to involve convenors and stewards in 'participation' schemes with management.

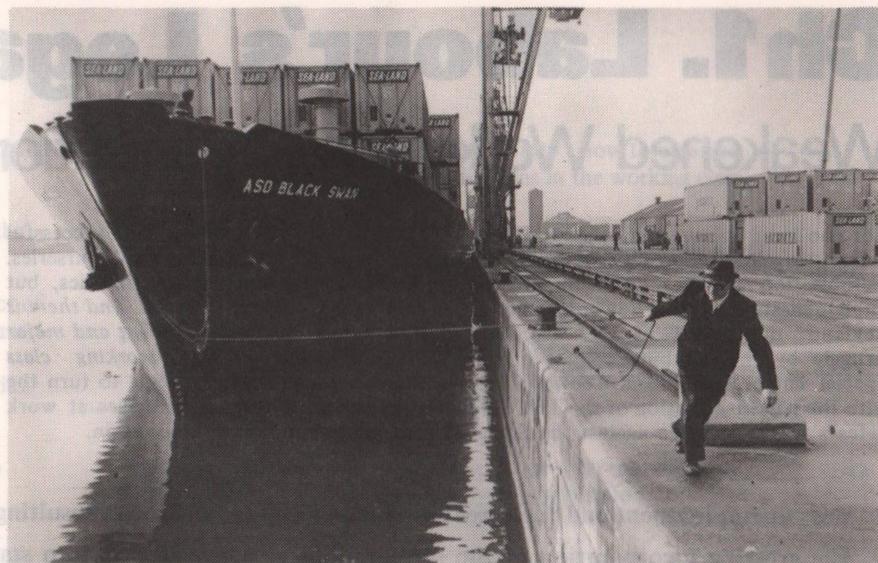
As a result, stewards increasingly began to act more like managers – policing the shop floor, defusing and even scabbing on struggles, and enforcing high level agreements between union and management. The week after Michael Edwards announced his infamous plan to axe 25,000 jobs at Leyland, the Big Flame newspaper carried this interview with a senior steward:

### What position are the unions in to lead a fightback?

*The main problem is that the unions in British Leyland have lost almost all credibility. In every plant, senior stewards have been involved in Joint Management Committees (participation) which have been basically acting as rubber stamps for management. They endorsed the last round of productivity deals and the redundancies proposed in 1977 and there is no doubt that their participation in the JMC's has led to a dampening of militancy and so also to an erosion of wage levels.*

At this time, Derek Robinson even claimed this of participation: 'If we make Leyland successful, it will be a political victory.' As a result of this outlook, he and the majority of stewards encouraged increased productivity, harder work and flexibility – and acted firmly against any disputes.

Where sections of the Leyland workforce did start fighting back, management stepped in quickly with threats of closure and sackings if the action continued. And at Triumph Speke, after a 17 week strike provoked by the management who were trying to further cut manning, this threat was carried out. Faced with this combination of a *direct* attack on the rank and file and the *indirect* attack on shop stewards' organisation, the rank and file at Leyland have become cynical about their stewards, and there's been growing division, demoralisation and apathy.



*Preston dock. Containerisation has hit dockers' organisation hard and drastically cut manning levels. But this is ridiculous! (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)*

## Restructuring industry

Under Labour, this kind of policy was carried out in sector after sector – and the result is a major decline in the militancy of the shop stewards' movement. The attacks have been directed most sharply at what have traditionally been among the strongest sections of the industrial working class – heavy engineering and shipbuilding; the motor industry; the docks; printing.

The way they've been trying to restructure industry to attack working class power can be seen very clearly in the docks over the past ten years. The methods were very similar to those used in Leyland: the change to Measured Day Work, the introduction of new technology (containerisation) and new work methods to intensify the dockers' work, and attempts to divide up the workforce. The plans for this were laid down in the report of the Devlin Committee on the docks, set up by the Labour government in 1967.

*Before Devlin we worked piece work and it was fast. Piece work was one way in which the shop floor kept control of the work. But now it's worse. We have Day Work and all sorts of different agreements. And the dock is more divided now than before Devlin. There are now three separate worlds. You've got the riversiders; the men in the enclosed docks (where 20-30 different agreements operate) and the terminal berths, where you've got different agreements again.*

### London docker (TGWU)

## The threat of the dole

In the motor industry, steel making, ship building and heavy engineering, threats of closure and redundancy are being used to destroy workers' organisation. In each of these industries, orders have fallen sharply with the slump, and employers are telling their workforces to accept low wage rises, to increase their productivity (in other words, how hard we work) and to agree to worse conditions and less control over the job – or face cutbacks, closures and redun-

dancies. One example of the way this blackmail has been hitting workers comes from the shipbuilding industry:

In the spring of 1978, a large order for ships from Poland was used by British Shipbuilders to encourage workers at Govan and at Smith's Yards to scab on their brothers at Swan Hunter. All these yards were short of orders and faced redundancies. British Shipbuilders insisted that all yards taking the Polish orders would have to sign 'no strike guarantees' and flexible working agreements. But the Swan Hunter workers refused to drop a parity claim, and refused to sign these agreements.

So the employers offered the work to Govan and Smith's – provided they signed the agreements. Led by Communist Party member and Convenor at Govan, Jimmy Airlie, the other yards signed the no strike and flexibility agreements – giving away in one blow what shipyard workers had struggled to win over decades. As a result the ships were transferred from Swan Hunter where large numbers of workers went on the dole.

## Labour and unions together

Throughout their last period in government, Labour's strategy was clear: they wanted to ride out the economic recession by undermining rank and file power in one way or another, while giving more power and responsibility to the trade union leaderships. That is the importance of the Social Contract and the 'Concordat' with the TUC. During the Wilson and Callaghan governments, trade union leaders played an increasingly important role in key state institutions – becoming almost a part of government.

So during that period, in almost every case where workers went into struggle, they found themselves fighting not only their bosses, but their unions at national level too. Strikers against the Social Contract at SU Carbuettors in Birmingham were fined by the AUEW. Nine stewards at the Leyland assembly plant in Cowley were charged by the TGWU



*Facing a bleak future: Swan Hunter shipyards in Newcastle-on-Tyne. (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)*

Regional Committee with 'bringing disrepute to the trade union movement' – for leading a strong shop floor fight against 'participation', the Social Contract and Leyland's plans for massive closures. And the Grunwick workers found themselves suspended by APEX, the union for which they were seeking recognition! There were many more examples.

Just how far right wing leaders together with the Labour government were prepared to go to help employers smash strong sections of the working class was seen in the mining industry in 1968.

The National Coal Board wanted to introduce local productivity deals to replace the existing national wages rates. The idea was to undermine the unity and political power of the miners by turning pit against pit and area against area. Supported by the right wing in the NUM and by Energy Minister Tony Benn, the Coal Board management in a breathtaking display of audacity pushed through the scheme *against* the decision of the national conference of the NUM and *against* a national ballot of all miners in Britain which totally rejected productivity deals.

It's important to see why this attack succeeded. For a start, the left wing in the NUM at first relied on the Courts to stop the breach of the conference and national ballot decisions. Not surprising-



*Firemen striking against the Social Contract protest at the total lack of support from the TUC. During the years of Labour government, workers faced repeated attempts by trade union leaders to sabotage their struggles. (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)*

ly, the Courts supported the right wing. Secondly it's because the National Coal Board offered money to certain coal fields where it was relatively easy to increase coal output (for example –

Nottinghamshire). This strategy successfully divided the miners – even dividing militant areas like Scotland where a few pits stood to make a lot of money out of the productivity deal.

**Divide and rule**

Dividing workers by paying them different amounts of money, as in piece work, is one method of divide and rule. As the working class began to organise itself collectively to push up piece rates, more and more industries have changed to Measured Day Work (MDW) payment systems, where the workforce is graded and each grade paid a standard hourly rate.

However, workers in the same grade are divided by an unequal division of work; some groups of workers are given a harder work-load than others, and some sections are given much more overtime than others.

*'Where I work, everyone knows that the line workers work twice as hard and in worse conditions than the stock feeders who bring parts to the line. But line-workers and stock feeders are the same grade. The garage areas where they repair the vehicles at the end of the line get a regular two hours overtime a day and weekends. They've been bought by management, and stock department and the garage areas hardly ever support us on the lines.'*

*The same kind of thing even goes on in my own section on the line. The foreman and time study bloke have made sure that there are some hard jobs and some easy jobs. The threat is always there that if you cause trouble you'll end up with a harder job. That's the way the foreman keeps control.'*

**Ford worker, Langley**

These kinds of differences in how hard we work and the conditions we work in, and how much money we get are some of the most important ways that capitalism keeps us divided - to make sure we don't unite against the whole system. Skilled workers get more money and often don't have to work as hard as semi-skilled workers; immigrant workers have the hardest, dirtiest jobs often for much worse money - and lousy housing; young people, taken as apprentices, often have little money.

Take the situation of working class women. Every day, thousands of women attempt the impossible: to fit in the maximum number of hours going out to waged work, as well as running the home (their other unpaid job). Women have to work part-time because it is assumed that it is they who also have to look after the family. Certain jobs thus become 'women's jobs' at considerably lower rates of pay than their fellow male workers. Even when they're working full-time they still get less than men doing similar work. Despite the Equal Pay Act the difference between men's and women's earnings of hourly paid wages has actually increased to £19.60 for 40 hours.

Women's wages are essential, not only for 'luxuries' like going on holiday, but also for paying food bills, rent, mortgages and rates. Women have to work to make ends meet but the only jobs available to them are low status, badly paid ones. Now the cuts in social services, nurseries, hospitals, school meals and the

increasing cost of 'convenience foods' are forcing women to work harder at home too.

**Racism and sexism**

Over the past few years, there have been important struggles against these divisions. But few have won the support of large numbers of white or male workers. For example, one of the first signs that Asian workers were no longer prepared to tolerate lousy wages and conditions and overt racism was the Imperial Typewriters strike involving hundreds of Asian workers for 13 weeks in 1974 at a hitherto 'quiet' factory in Leicester. There the white workers scabbed on the struggle. During the equal pay strike at the Trico windscreen wiper factory in West London in 1976, the men stayed at work:

*'The women feel that the men working in the factory are scabs. My husband's the chairman of the shop stewards' committee at Trico, in the same union as us - the AUEW - and although the strike is official he's still in there working.'*

**Women on strike at Trico, Spare Rib 49**

Despite some notable victories - like the Trico strike - these struggles have not yet succeeded in transforming either the position of women or immigrants in the working class.

Under Labour, the divisions in the working class got worse. For example, after the 1979 low pay strikes, the Clegg comparability report gave the lowest grades of council workers (90% of whom are women) the lowest pay rises. Towards the end of the Labour government, Callaghan and Healey - as well as Thatcher - spoke repeatedly of the need

to widen differentials between skilled and semi-skilled workers, and blue collar and white collar workers.

But probably the clearest example of the way that government policy increased divisions in the working class is unemployment. In March 1974 when we voted to 'get back to work with Labour' unemployment was 593,000. After five years of Labour in office, the figure stood at 1,407,000 - almost three times as high. As unemployment has increased, it's becoming more and more difficult to win support for any kind of solidarity action, and work place racism and sexism is becoming more of a problem. This is exactly the effect mass unemployment is intended to have - to weaken the unity of the rank and file.

**New technology**

One cause of the increase in unemployment is the rapid introduction of new microprocessing and robot technology based on the silicon chip. There's no doubt that this will destroy thousands of jobs. 'The society of Manufacturing Engineers (in the USA) recently completed a survey of top manufacturing managers and engineers who predicted that 20% of the workers employed in the direct assembly of a car will be replaced by 1985 and that 50% of the workers will be replaced by 1995.'

The most devastating effect of the new technology has so far been in offices, and the people whose jobs are most at risk are nearly all women. For example, the word processor enables a typist to produce the work of two or three, while reducing the skill needed.

'Bradford Council reduced its staff in one section from 44 to 22 with the intro-

Why we've been losing 5

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New technology is very much about power and control - not just about creating more unemployment or higher productivity. Employers have repeatedly used new technology over the years to transform production processes where workers had been able to build up job control, organisation and power under those processes.

In Britain until quite recently there were a number of important groups of workers who had built up considerable power. For example, dockers and printworkers. They had won high wages, strong control over the job, good manning agreements, and there were clear lines of demarcation. And occasionally they were willing to use this strength in solidarity with other sections of the working class. But, as we've seen, the dockers were seriously weakened as containerisation was introduced. And now printworkers are the target of a similar attack - through attempts by

employers to introduce new computer-controlled printing technology.

In the motor industry, it's mini-computers and robots that are being used to destroy the power that semi-skilled line workers have built up over the years.

'What is even more frightening is the fact that the workers left in the plants will be nothing but industrial slaves. They will be controlled by an ever-watching, ever-present, ever-recording computer. And this is happening right now.'

At General Motors' Oklahoma City plant, as each worker enters the plant he punches into a time box connected to a central computer. Each foreman has a computer TV screen which tells him instantly who is there when the shift begins. The computer can tell the foreman who else in the plant can do the job if an employee is absent.

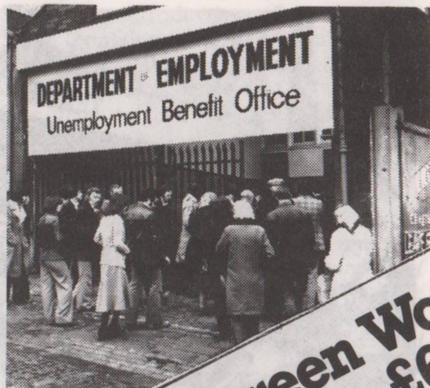
This is only the beginning. Many plants are using a central computer in combination with mini-computers on

every machine or operation. This can give management a continuous record of the following information: when the worker punches in or out; when the worker starts his or her operation, and minute by minute how fast they're running that operation; anytime the worker stops for more than two minutes; whenever the worker reports back late from lunch.'

(From *Ford Facts*, paper of local branch 600 of the United Auto Workers' Union in Detroit, September 1979)

**Conclusion**

There's little doubt that the combination of all these different methods of attack - unemployment, undermining the shop stewards' movement, incorporating even further the trade union leaders, increasing divisions, new technology - have left working class organisation at the base in a bad way in many sectors. In particular it has left the working class unable to deal easily with the very different strategy of the Tory government.



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# Ch2. The Tory Offensive

## Attacking the Rank and File



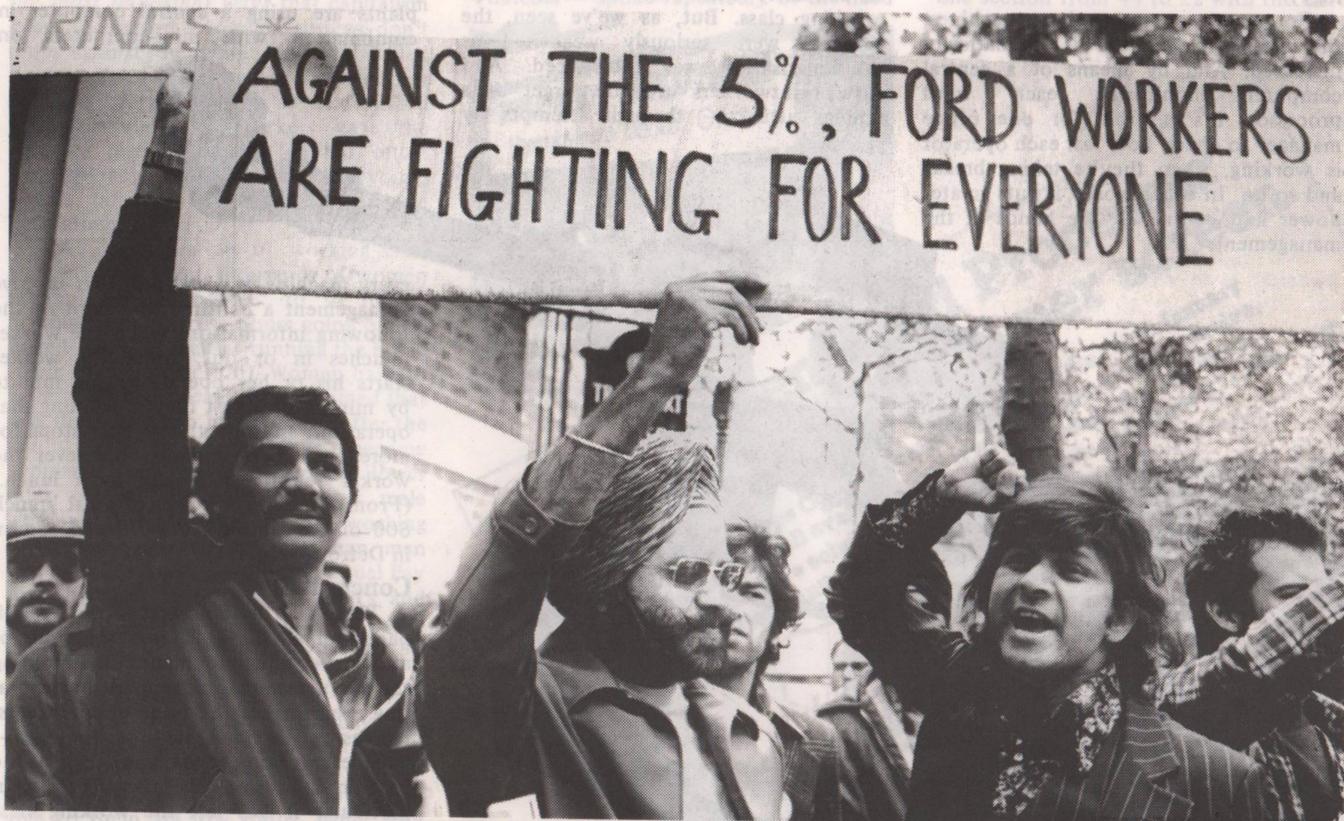
Rational, Reasonable, Rampant. Sir Thief Joseph thumps out his simple message: 'More for those who have. Less for those who have not and do the work. Increase profits. Smash the working class.' He's our public enemy number one. (Photo: Mark Rusher, IFL)

It's against this background of a weakened rank and file that the Tories are introducing the Employment Bill. Together with their monetarist economic policies, the even more rapid introduction of the microprocessor technology and their proposals attacking the rights of women and the rights of immigrant workers, it's clear that they have decided to seize this opportunity to use their present strong position in relation to the working class to permanently alter the balance of power between the bosses and the working class. It's a major political attack on the power of the rank and file.

The purpose of this attack is straightforward. They want to bring about a massive redistribution of wealth, income and power from the working class who produce that wealth to the already rich and powerful. In order to do that, they've got to restore work discipline, productivity and high profitability. As Keith Joseph said in a radio interview on January 4th 1980:

'I've said it before and I'll say it again - the key problem facing this government is the catastrophically low profitability of manufacturing industry in this country. We will use every means at our disposal to put this right.'

From the actions of this government so far, it's already clear that Joseph



October 1978: the Ford strike. Trade union leaders could no longer hold back the wave of rank and file anger against the Social Contract. That's why the Tories are now directly attacking the power of the rank and file. (Photo: Laurie Sparham, IFL)

means what he says. Their methods are first to make it more difficult for the rank and file to win struggles - that's the reason for the attack on picketing. And they want to divide the working class - particularly through a massive increase in unemployment. The Tories will also encourage private sector workers to turn against public sector workers, and those in profitable industries to turn against those in less profitable ones. The purpose is to increase sectionalism in the working class and make it more difficult to build solidarity.

### Labour and Tories - same aim, different methods

We want to stress, however, that the central aim of the Tories is no different to that of Labour. They both want to create a thriving and successful capitalism. And that means greatly boosting profits and productivity - in other words to make us work harder, suffer more accidents, get ill and tired more often, while holding down our living standards.

Where the two parties differ is in the methods used. Where Labour trod carefully - trying to gradually undermine rank and file power while giving more power to the union leaderships to do their dirty work - the Tories have a different aim. They want to restore the ethic of capitalism and destroy the power of the trade union movement. The Tory government reckons that following the massive strikes by Ford workers, lorry drivers and local authority and hospital workers against the Labour government's incomes policy during the winter of 1978/79, the trade union leaders are not strong enough to hold back a determined rank and file. That's why the Thatcher government is planning to make a direct challenge to rank and file power - the most serious challenge the working class has had to face in fifty years.

### MONETARISM - HOW IT WORKS:

Underlying the methods the Tories are using to try to defeat us is a new approach to the economy - monetarism.

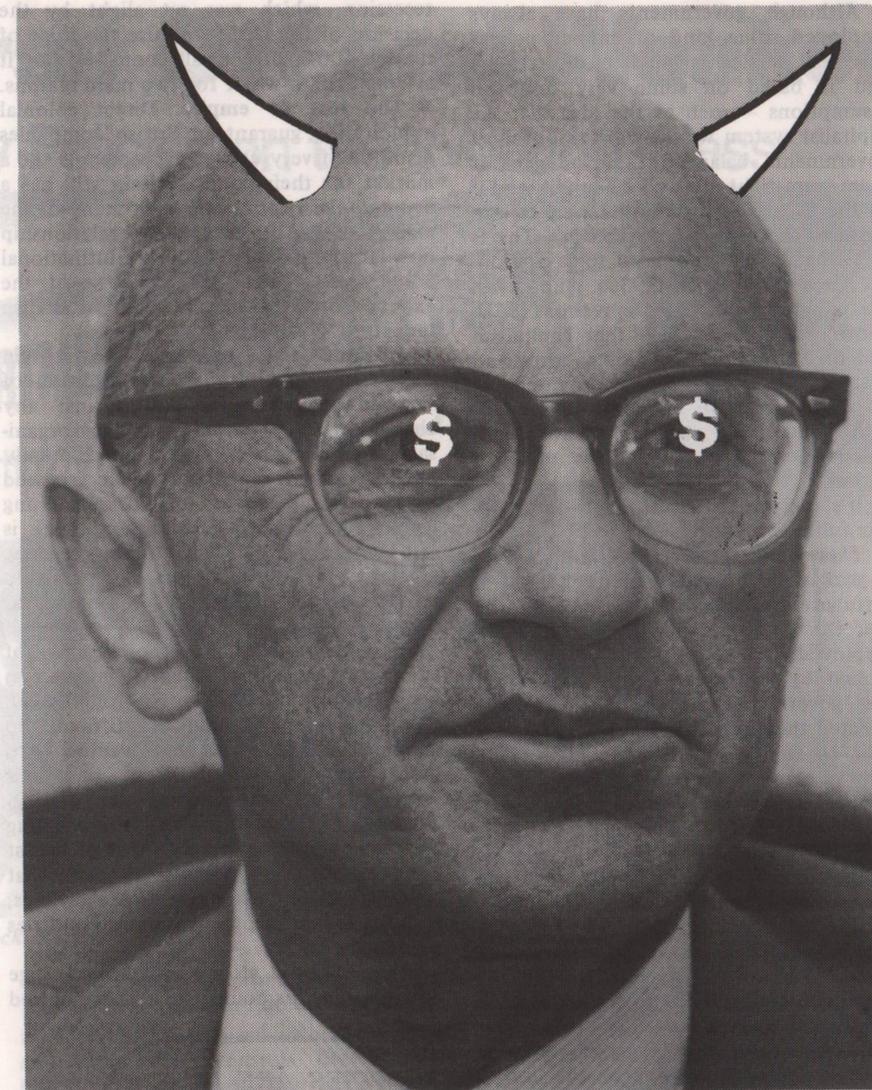
How does monetarism work? It's an attempt to control the whole economy simply by controlling the supply of money. The supply of money is not just notes and coins. It also includes current account deposits at banks, which in fact accounts for about 80% of the money supply.

To control the supply of money, the government can do three things. First, it can increase the minimum lending rate at the Bank of England - which forces all the banks (and then the Building Societies and hire purchase companies) to put up their interest rates.

This makes borrowing money more expensive - which means that companies will only raise loans if they are making enough profit to cover the higher rate of interest. So less profitable projects will not be undertaken, and firms not making enough profit will simply not be able to borrow. And less borrowing means less money supply.

Secondly, the government can put controls on the banks to limit the amount of overdrafts they give. This can have a serious effect on companies - because most companies have to make temporary borrowings to pay wages bills or for raw materials.

Finally, this government is also trying to control the supply of money by cutting back Public Sector borrowing - in other words how much is borrowed by the government itself, by the



PLEASE ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF  
Professor Milton Friedman - American professor of Economics who travels the world expounding his monetarist economic theories. Economic advisor to Thatcher in Britain and Pinochet in Chile.

local authorities (for example, to spend on housing), and by the nationalised industries. This leads to cuts in public spending.



Political prisoners in the stadium in Santiago, Chile. Control the money supply + repress the working class = Freedom to Choose (for some).

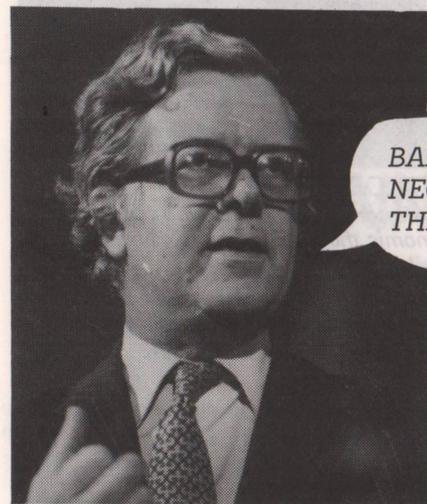
Although governments have always employed some kind of 'money policy' this new version is much more extreme and is based on some very doubtful assumptions — such as the idea that the capitalist system would work smoothly if governments balanced their budgets, if there were tight controls on credit, and if all the factors of production were free to move to their most profitable use. This is just what economists used to say before the Depression in the 1930s. And it was the experience of the Depression which convinced many people that capitalism had no automatic tendency to grow and that governments would have to intervene to make sure the economy did grow.

So since 1945, two aims have dominated the economic policies of both parties:

1. It's the job of governments to 'maintain full employment.'

2. There's a need for a 'welfare state' — in part at least a safety net for the 'less fortunate' in capitalism — the young, the old, the sick, the disabled and the unemployed.

Led by Thatcher, Joseph and Howe, the government has now completely rejected these ideas. Instead they've gone over to full blooded monetarism. And they've made it clear that they don't give a damn about the welfare state — and they positively welcome growing unemployment as the price the working class must pay if there's to be a massive increase in profits.



Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, Geoffrey Howe, speaking at a conference of New York bankers, June 1979.

Since they were elected, the Tories have taken three main steps to implement their monetarist policy:

1. A huge increase in interest rates.
2. Severe controls on bank lending.
3. The slashing cuts in public spending and the introduction of the system of strict *cash limits* to control spending and borrowing by government departments, nationalised industries and local authorities.

#### The economic crisis in Britain

The Tories have adopted these monetarist policies in an attempt to cope with the world economic recession. The

recession, which was set alight by the decision of the OPEC to raise the price of oil by 400%, affects all countries, but it affects Britain worst for two main reasons. 1. **The loss of empire.** Direct colonial exploitation guaranteed British companies a source of very cheap raw materials and a market for their goods. Britain still has a *neo-colonial* relationship with many of the ex-colonies — an exploitative relationship now largely operated through multinational companies — but this has been at the expense of the domestic base of British industry.

2. **Working class resistance.** In Britain there's a long and stubborn tradition of struggle against work and against any changes which threaten workplace organisation. In many workplaces there's a daily battle over how much work we're prepared to do: over the speed of work; manning levels; mobility and demarcation. Work is felt by many people to be boring, pointless, alienating and a 'rip-off.' And so people do as little as possible for as much money as possible.

This has been one of the strengths of the working class in Britain. Compared to capitalists elsewhere (apart from Italy), employers have found it difficult to manage their plants as they wanted — to defeat the insubordination of their workers. This is much less the case in Japan and Germany, where the working class was weakened by ten years of fascist control. It's therefore no accident that productivity, even with identical machines, is much higher in other capitalist countries than in the UK.

There's also a strong tradition of wage militancy in this country. This has resulted

BANKRUPTCIES ARE NOT NECESSARILY A BAD THING.

in a long series of government incomes policies which have either ended in defeat or in a wages explosion. By 1974 the proportion of the Gross National Income taken up by wages was higher in Britain than in any other European country.

What gives the bosses ulcers is that they can't easily get back all this money simply by raising their prices. This is because of world competition. For example, Japan or Germany can sell cars cheaper than Britain because less of their production expenses goes in wages.

Underlying this is the problem of *investment*. Capitalists are unwilling to invest in a weak economy with a strong working class because they can't guarantee their profits. Britain is such a country.

#### The future

As we've said, today we're living through a major economic and political crisis of the whole system on an international scale. This is much more than a temporary economic recession. What's happening is that the model of accumulating capital and making profits which worked well for capitalists from the end of

the Second World War until the mid 1960s has now broken down. Economic growth has slowed down dramatically — in some countries it has stopped dead.

So now capitalism is having to completely *restructure* itself — against working class needs and power — in an attempt to find another stable model of capital accumulation and making profits. It hasn't found the solution yet, and it's impossible to make exact predictions. But there are a few developments which point to the way things are going:

\* very big leaps forward in the development of international transport

\* the increasing division of production processes into very small sub-operations — to eliminate skill

\* greater uniformity in the world market so it doesn't matter so much where you manufacture or design a particular product (for example, Ford is right now starting production of its first 'world car' — the new Escort. It's the first time they've marketed a single model all over the world.)

\* increasing awareness by the multinationals that in parts of the 'Third World' there's an enormous reserve army of labour.

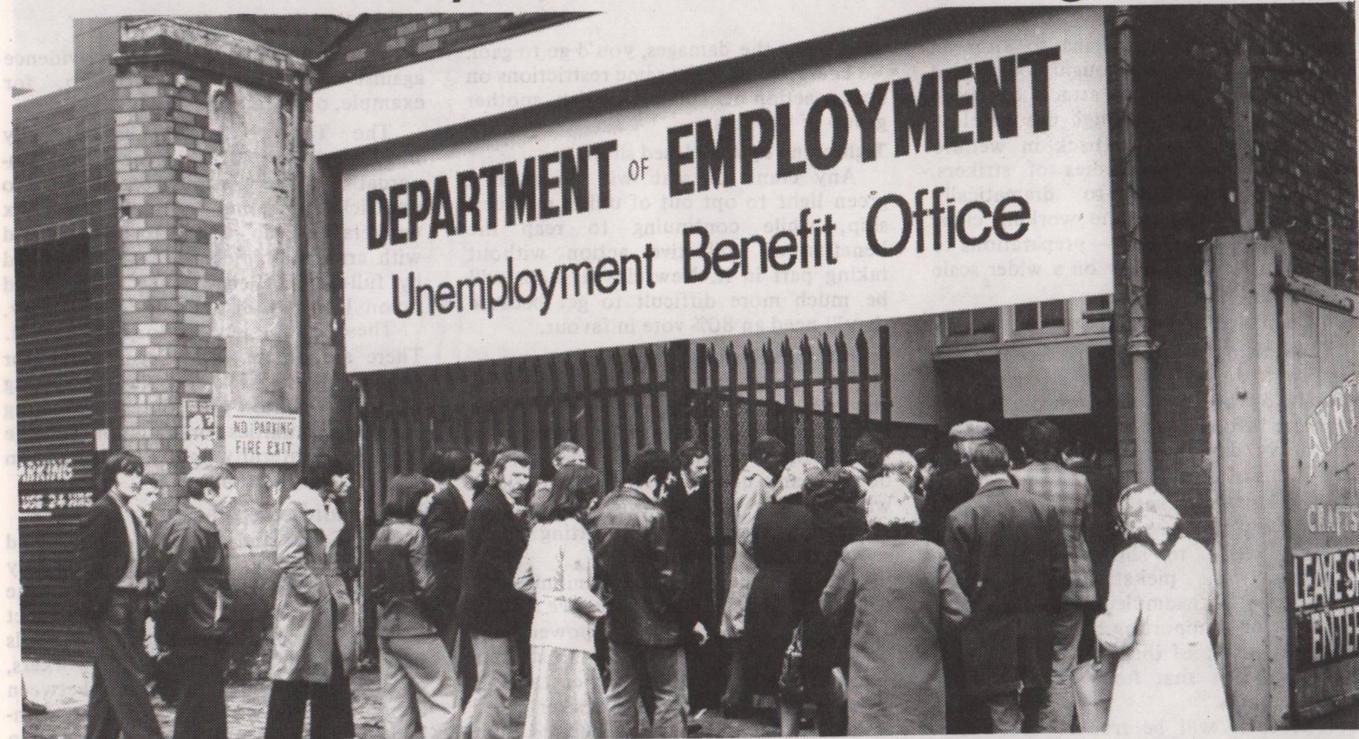
So it looks as though a possible new phase of growth for capitalism could involve a major restructuring of the *international division of labour*. It's already happening. Increasingly, labour intensive production is moving to countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brazil and Nigeria. This is especially true of the new micro-electronics assembly industries. The older industrialised capitalist countries like Britain will more and more have economies based on *capital-intensive* industries — using large amounts of machinery and employing relatively few people. This will create a permanent pool of unemployment in those countries which will enable capital to grow without working class power growing.

It's important to see how raising the rate of unemployment is a direct result of the policies of the Thatcher government. The high rates of interest discourage companies from investing by making it more expensive to borrow money. A strong pound slows down the demand for British exports by making them uncompetitive in the international market.

So this is the capitalists' strategy. It could work. But they've still got a few problems. The international monetary system is not yet stable. There's growing rivalries between capitalist countries, and moves to protect their economies through import controls and tariff barriers. No one capitalist country has emerged as top dog (though the USA is having a good try). The most important problem they face is the *working class*. The whole purpose of all this is to restructure capital against our needs, against our interests and against our power. Their idea is to put us on the defensive. But if instead the working class goes on the political offensive, totally rejecting capitalism's 'logical' development and finding new and fresh forms of organisation, then the ruling class is in real trouble.

# Ch3. Worse Off and Weaker

## The Effect of Tory Policies on the Working Class



Dole office in Liverpool (Photo: John Sturrock, Report).

#### Wages and conditions

Today, workers are increasingly being subject to straightforward blackmail. Employers are telling their workforces that because of the economic situation (produced by monetarist policies), they've got to choose between better wages and conditions or keeping their jobs — they can't have both. In the public sector, time and again management are pointing to cash limits as the reason why they can't concede a decent pay rise without making more people redundant:

'Any increase on this offer will have to be paid for by more productivity, more redundancies and maybe more closures. There's no more cash. The government have made it clear that they will stick by their cash limits. They will not give us more money.' (Bob Scholey, Chief Executive of the British Steel Corporation speaking on the radio in the 9th week of the steel strike.)

The same thing is being told to hospital workers, local authority workers, teachers and civil servants.

#### Living standards

Inflation has doubled since Thatcher took office. Mortgages are at a record level. Rents are about to shoot up. Gas and electricity are up. VAT has added nearly 4% to our bills — and so on. The effect of inflation is to cut real wages. Before long, we predict that there'll be a hysterical media campaign about inflation, but it won't be demanding a total *price* freeze. As usual, it will be

aimed at wages. If monetarism and the Employment Act don't hold down wages, the police will be used to crush strikes and impose wage controls. Even during her election campaign, Thatcher said she couldn't rule out a wage freeze, despite the Government's supposed policy of non-intervention in the market-place.

#### Unemployment

The worldwide capitalist slump will be made worse in Britain by the government's monetarist policies. In industry after industry thousands of sackings are being planned if they haven't already been carried out. Whole cities like Liverpool are being decimated. Because of the public spending cuts, thousands more jobs are being lost in schools, hospitals, local authorities, and government departments.

Meanwhile, the Tories are cutting back unemployment and social security benefits so they don't keep up with inflation. Earnings related unemployment benefit will end on January 1st 1982. And from about the same time, unemployment benefit will be taxed. The government have also announced a major campaign against so-called 'scroungers' (allied to more spying on claimants).

#### Cutting the welfare state

The welfare state was never as good as successive governments claimed. But it was a big improvement on the workhouse. Now it's being cut to shreds, and the private sector built up for the rich. The Tories do not believe people have a right to health care, housing, education, social

services; those who have the money get the services, those who don't go without.

The human misery caused by these and all the other policies can't be measured. In the home, women's workload will increase as a direct result of the cuts in public expenditure. Individual racist attacks will increase as a direct result of government policy as people look for a scapegoat for their own worsening situation. As life gets harder, people will turn against one another. So there'll be more daily violence, and in the family there's going to be more men battering their wives and children.

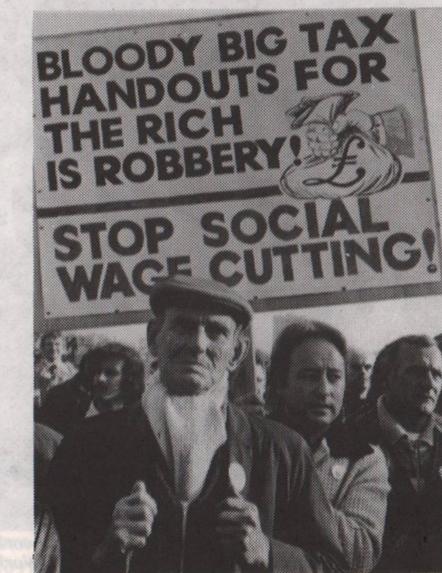


Photo: John Sturrock (Report)

# Ch 4. Keeping Us Down

## How the Tories plan to get away with it

The government's plans to stop an effective fightback can roughly be divided into three. First, the attack on trade union organisation through the Employment Act and the cutback in welfare payments to the families of strikers. Secondly, measures to dramatically increase divisions in the working class. And finally, repression – preparations to use the police and army on a wider scale against workers.

### The Employment Bill

The main purpose of this Act is quite simply to make *effective* strike action illegal, or at least very costly to the workers involved by making them liable for heavy damages. These are the basic provisions of the Act:

#### Restrictions on picketing:

Workers will face huge financial risks if they want to show solidarity by supporting the picket lines of other workers – for example, workers from a local factory supporting hospital workers fighting closure of their hospital, or even patients from that hospital supporting those workers.

The same will be true of 'secondary picketing' – we call it effective picketing – pickets on other branches of the same employer, or the head office, or the docks, or places holding stockpiles. For example, if the work at your factory was being transferred to another plant in the same company as part of a plan to close down part (or all) of your factory, you could be sued for picketing the plant where the work was going. And if you

didn't pay the damages, you'd go to gaol.

There are also the same restrictions on strike action in solidarity with another group of workers.

#### Tightening up the closed shop:

Any crank or scab will be given a green light to opt out of union membership, while continuing to reap the benefits of collective action without taking part in it. New closed shops will be much more difficult to get because they'll need an 80% vote in favour.

#### Secret postal ballots:

The government is attempting to encourage trade union leaders to use secret postal ballots more frequently by offering to pay for such ballots. No doubt many union leaders will go along with it – knowing that this will frequently be an effective way of getting themselves out of mass action.

The essence of trade unionism is *collective* discussion and *collective* action. That way we can feel our power. Not surprisingly, employers prefer to see our decisions made by post rather than at meetings because if each worker votes alone at home, he or she is isolated from the views of fellow workers, and much more open to the influence of the press and TV.

#### Codes of Practice:

The Secretary of State is given the power to draw up 'Codes of Practice' on any aspect of industrial relations. This Code of Practice 'would have status in law in that it could be taken into account in court proceedings.' That means that

such a code could be used in evidence against a picket charged with, for example, obstruction.

The Tory code will undoubtedly include all the ideas in the TUC Concordat with the previous government: no unofficial picketing; no more than six workers on each picket, to be identified with armbands; pickets to be controlled by full-time officials or an experienced union leader with a letter of authority.

These are the key sections of the Act. There are others – making it easier for employers to sack people, abolishing ACAS recognition procedures, the ending of legal immunities for trade unions. The attack on maternity rights is dealt with in the following section.

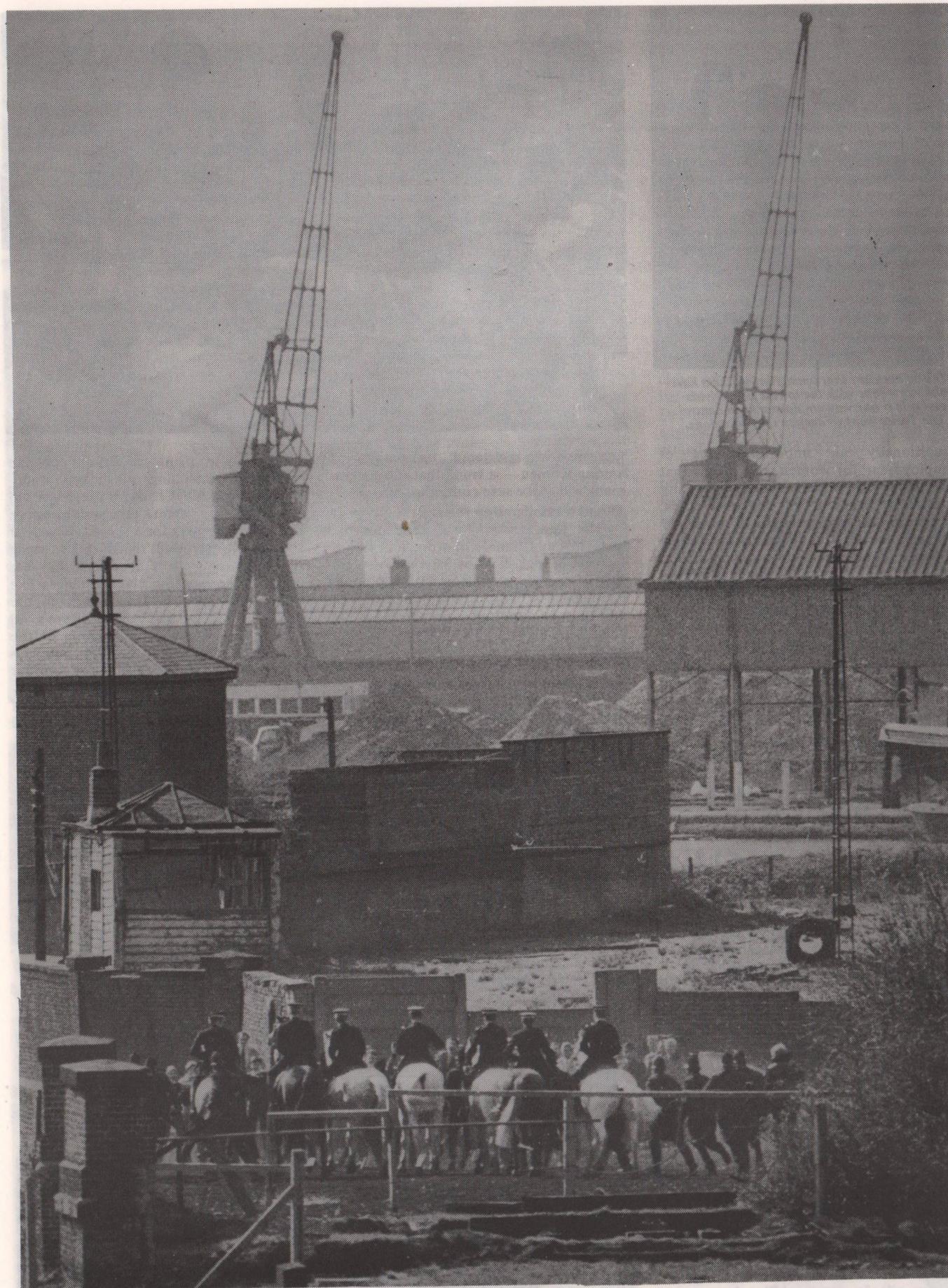
#### Divide and rule measures

The Tories and the employers intend to exploit every division in an already divided workforce by attacking the weaker sections hardest. We can expect a major campaign to increase differentials between skilled and unskilled workers, between white and black and between men and women workers. The government has evidently decided to hit women particularly hard, attempting to force them back to their unpaid work in the home. This is the only explanation for the attacks on maternity rights in the Employment Act.

Their proposals would mean that a woman will not have the right to return to her job after having a baby if she works for a small firm employing 5 or less. As small shops and offices are



Steel strike: winter 1980. A mass picket by workers from the British Steel Corporation attempting to close Sheerness Steel, a private steel company where workers defied an official strike call. Workers could now be sued for taking part in action like this under the Tory Employment Act.



City of London Police train in breaking picket lines inside Poplar Docks, London April 1980. The men in donkey jackets behind the police horses are policemen playing pickets. The group of men standing to the right are high ranking police officers watching this final training session – preparation for even greater use of the police under the Employment Act? (Photo: Carlos Augusto IFL)

Photo: Chris Davies, Report.



It's no accident that immigrant workers have the worst jobs with the lowest pay. Divide and rule is one way employers keep control. The Tories want to deepen these divisions.



Photo: Michael Ann Mullen.

traditionally an important area of employment for women, this means that thousands of women won't have any maternity rights at all. In other firms, a woman will lose the right to maternity pay and her job back if she doesn't follow a bureaucratic procedure involving a total of 3 letters at specific times. And the right to your own job has gone. It only stays if it is 'reasonably practical.'

Among other attacks on women are the cutback in nurseries, the introduction of new technology in offices and the big campaign that 'women's place is in the home.' It is hardly surprising that from 1976 to 1978 there was a sharp

increase in registered unemployment among women - a trend that the government will make sure continues.

**The new immigration rules:**

The new controls will keep out the husbands and fiances of women not born in Britain, regardless of whether they are British passport holders (unless they happen to be white). Children under 18 will only be admitted if unmarried, while elderly relatives will be subject to even harsher tests.

This is state racism. It's designed to make racism in the working class respectable. And it will give the police even more excuses for the harassment of all

black people living in Britain on the grounds of searching out 'illegal' immigrants. It is a move towards the European 'guestworker' system. This system brings in foreign workers for a specific length of time, with few civil rights and working for low wages. It is a system that has crippled the working class in places like Germany - and is an attempt to use black people as scapegoats. There's no doubt that the strict application of the Act and Labour's racist 1971 Immigration Act will make any black worker contemplating trade union or community activity think twice. The Prevention of Terrorism Act is already having that kind



Anger about the Tory's new controls on immigration brings these Asian women on the streets. (Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report)



A striking fireman watches as troops scab: December 1977 during the firefighters' strike against the Social Contract. And now the Army is in training for more frequent use in workplace struggles. (Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report)

of effect in the Irish community - with repeated arrests and deportation of militants who're in no way involved in military activity.

**The role of the media:**

All these measures will undoubtedly have the effect of increasing the differences in standard of living, how hard we work, and social status of the different sections of the working class. They'll be combined with determined campaigns by the mass media to isolate any groups of workers who do successfully start a fight-back against any aspect of the Tory attacks. That's why we've got to work out ways of defeating these divide and rule policies.

**Repression**

If all else fails, the ruling class will resort to *state violence*. The Tories are clear on this even if we are not. Just before the last election, the present Defence Secretary, Sir Ian Gilmour, explained why public spending on the armed forces should be increased:

'Instead of being treated worse than other people, the Armed Forces should have better treatment. They have a unique strategic importance... They are used to keep community services running when other workers go on strike.' (Hansard record of Parliament 26/3/79)

The use of troops in the Glasgow dustmen's strike and in the firefighters' and ambulance workers' disputes was seen under Labour. It will happen again. Thatcher has kept her election promises: army and police wages are up with increases much larger than the rate of inflation. Public spending on the police and armed forces is the only part of overall government spending to increase in real terms.

Joint police-army exercises are now regular events - geared to controlling 'civil disturbances.' And of course the British Army has had plenty of experience dealing with 'troublesome' sections of the working class - in this case sections of the Irish working class in Belfast and Derry. But for the moment in Britain, the job of maintaining direct control falls to judges and the police. Under the Tories, police behaviour at Grunwicks and in Southall will become the norm. The police violence outside Hadfields during the steel strike is what we must now expect on any effective picket line.

Some workers scoff at such talk. When Heath jailed five dockers, organised workers freed them. When police tried to break the miners' pickets, the Birmingham engineers shut down the Saltley coke works. We are not so confident that these victories can be easily repeated. We have great faith in the *potential* strength of our class. But neither can we forget that Des Warren and his building worker colleagues rotted in gaol. We cannot forget that the attacks on black workers, on Irish workers, on women, are already under way. The government's divisive propaganda, the power of the media, the *existing* divisions and weaknesses in our movement must all be overcome if we're to start winning.

# Ch5. Organising to Win

## Lessons from Recent Struggles

It's now urgent for socialists to work out effective ways of fighting this political offensive. That's what the rest of this pamphlet is about. Already we've pointed to the key problem: the fact that workplace organisation in so many sectors is in a bad way. There's increasing demoralisation among the rank and file, and a growing cynicism about the role of shop stewards. This is the major lesson to come out of British Leyland.

So the major priority right now, for all militants is to start

rebuilding workplace and trade union organisation at work. That'll mean consistent mass work among the rank and file, a political fight against the way they're trying to use divide and rule tactics against us, and a serious campaign for greater democracy and participation at all levels of the union. We go into this in more detail in the next two chapters. The remainder of this section is concerned with all the other lessons that have come out of the many struggles of recent years.

## Struggles in the Steel Industry

The steel industry is one of those sectors where the bosses have been trying to destroy shop floor organisation by repeatedly threatening and carrying out closures and sackings. Management have been attempting to use a period of falling demand for steel to force much lower real wages, worse conditions and new working practices. Just how damaging this can be was seen in June 1978, when the British Steel Corporation closed the Shelton steel works in Stoke and 1,600 jobs disappeared:

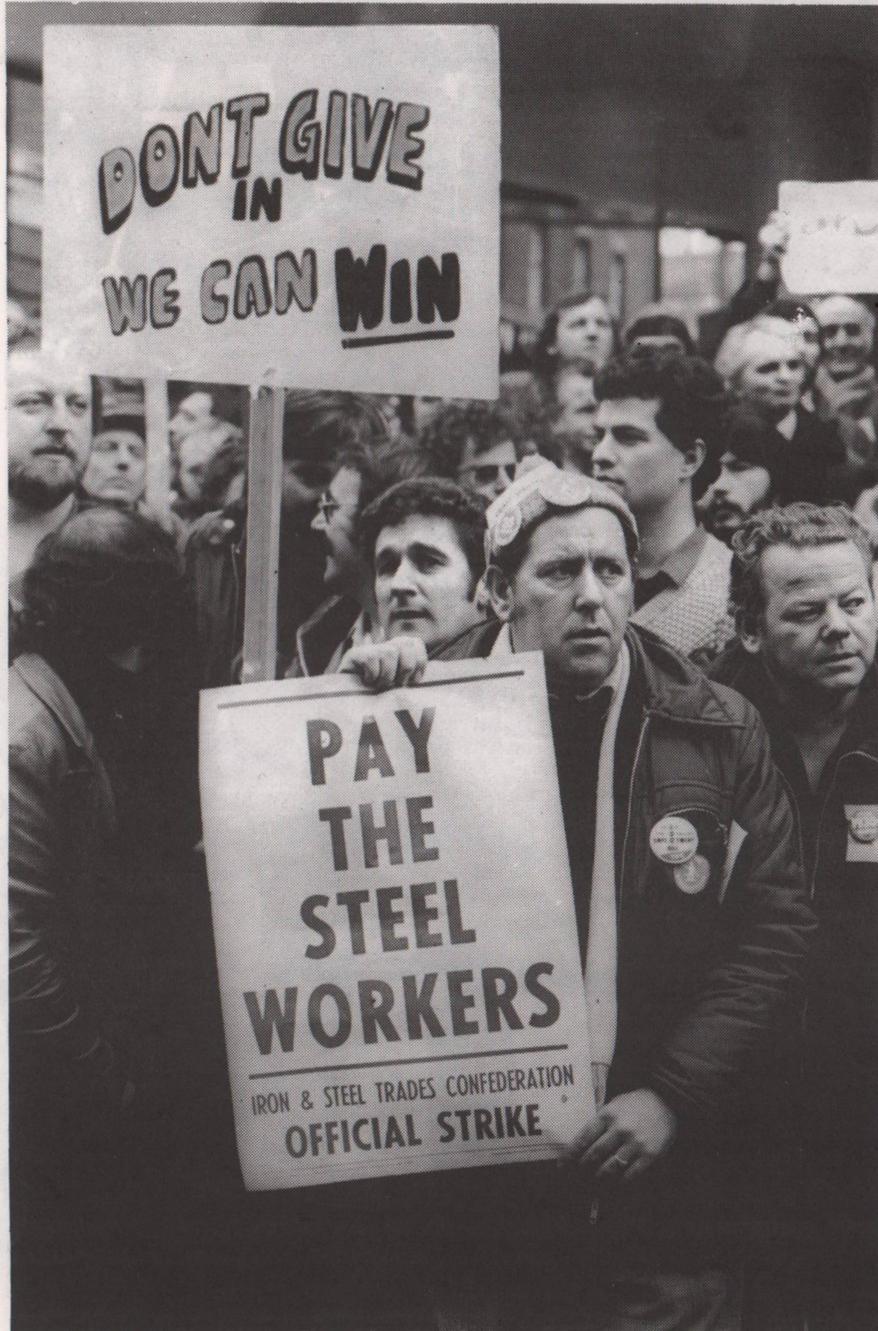
'In our fight to keep Shelton open, we played it by the book. We proved the economic viability of the plant; we produced an advance employment plan; we accepted management's demand for redundancies of 16% of the workforce; we let them introduce work measured incentive schemes.

We did everything they asked for — and still we lost. It's because we were so reasonable that they thought they could get away with closure. What happened here is a lesson to everyone. Don't fight closures on management's terms.

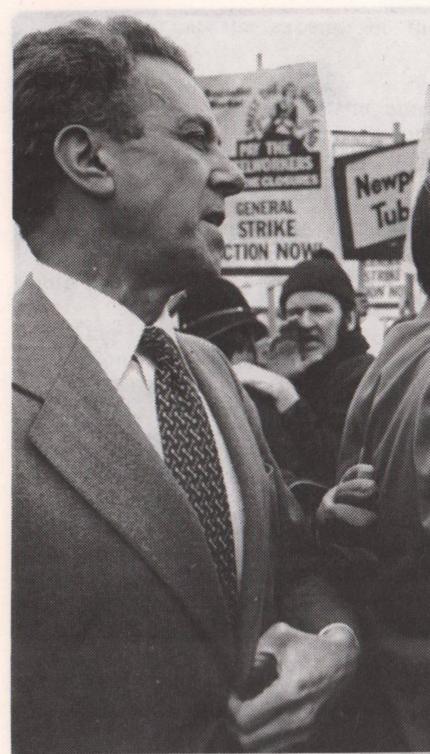
(Member of Shelton trade union action committee)

Fighting on management's terms — accepting their right to make a profit off our back — is a guaranteed loser in any struggle. We've got to reject the choice between accepting attacks on our wage levels and conditions, or losing our jobs. By 1980, steelworkers were no longer willing to accept that kind of blackmail. They weren't willing to fight any longer on management's terms.

The steel workers were up against tremendous odds. They were up against the government and a determined employer. They faced the threat of even more closures if they won. In the ISTC they had one of the most right-wing unions in the country. They were up against the TUC who early on wanted them to settle for 3%. And there were all the problems of the divisions between the skilled crafts and the semi skilled workers in the industry.



The confidence of rank and file steel workers with a message for their leaders in the 7th week of the strike. (Photo: Mark Rusher, IFL)

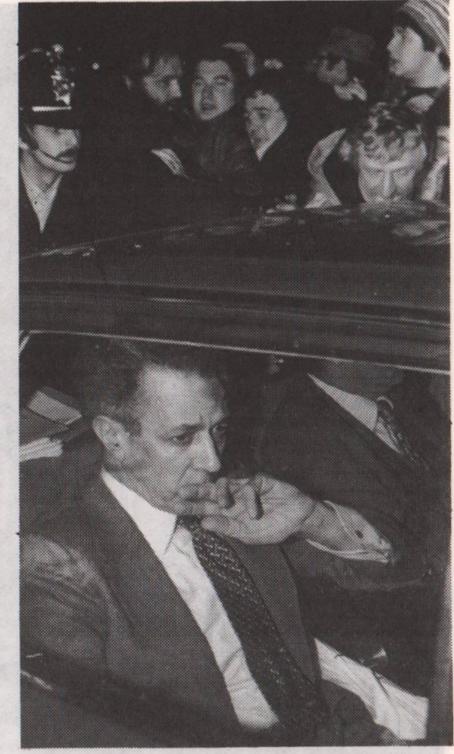


GOING

Keith Joseph on the run from rank and file steel workers fighting loss of jobs in S. Wales. A high point of the strike. Photos by John Sturrock (Report)



GOING



GONE

Despite all this, by the middle of the strike, the rank and file had built up a real momentum. They rejected the blackmail of more closures and demanded that the union start fighting the closures BSC had already scheduled. They began to impose on their union leaders the demand for 20% with no productivity strings. They rejected token picketing and took

on the police in mass battles to close down private steel works.

To organise this mass involvement, there were frequent mass meetings in some areas, called by local strike committees. These cut across the divisions between craft and semi-skilled workers. By the 10th week of the strike,

these strike committees had formed a national co-ordination which had the possibility of taking the lead in the struggle. But still there was too much reliance on the full-time union officials. And the national organisation of strike committees never felt able to take over from the official leadership, who ended up by selling out the struggle.

### LESSONS:

Don't fight on management terms. Don't accept their blackmail. Prepare to fight for both higher wages, better conditions and shorter hours *and* against closure and redundancy. And never *rely* on trade union officials.

## Fights Against Hospital Closure

Among the first and most successful struggles against hospitals being closed down by the Labour government public spending cuts was the occupation and work-in at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (the EGA), the only hospital for women in London. Not only did the workers occupy the EGA. They went out and made contact with shop stewards in other hospitals and nearby firms. They got the backing of Trades Councils, community groups and women's groups. They realised that to *win*, they would need maximum support and solidarity. So they explained to the patients, to previous patients and to local residents why they were fighting the closure and the cuts. They helped to make a film about their occupation — made by a socialist film group, the Newsreel Collective — which was shown in union

branches and hospitals all over the country.

The campaign's tactics were militant. They occupied, staged mass pickets, blocked main roads — and when the Health Minister announced a closure date, workers at other hospitals went on strike. Through this rank and file activity, they forced the unions to act more militantly — and they showed the way to other hospital workers facing closure who increasingly began to use similar tactics.

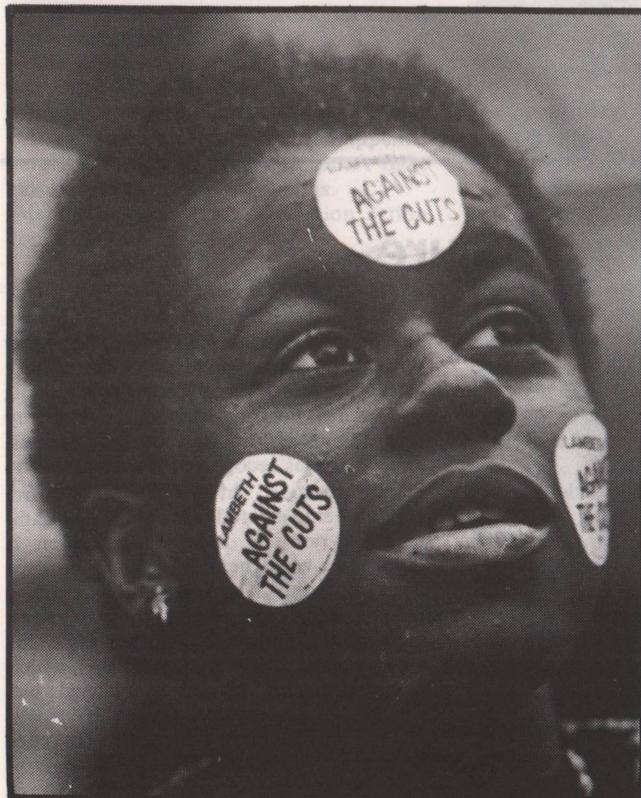
The EGA struggle is also an example of a campaign that was not simply fought defensively *against* this or that cut. It was fought as part of a struggle for a better and socialist health service. The EGA workers talked about the need for *more* hospitals where a woman can be certain of being treated by women medical staff who are sympathetic to her needs. And

they've put more emphasis on *preventing* ill health, so after the occupation started, they provided space for a screening service for healthy women to check up for problems before they become serious.

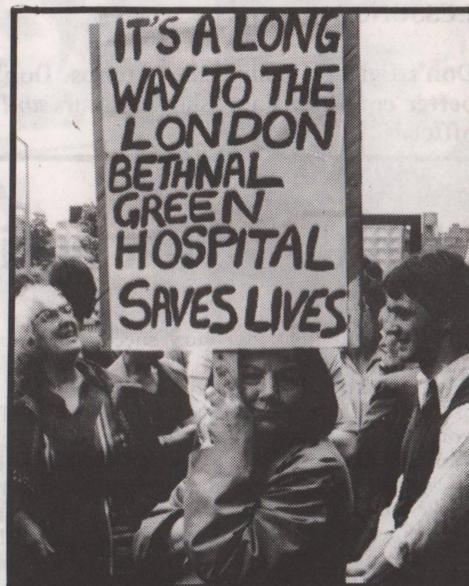
The Tories recognised the total nature of the struggle. One of Thatcher's first acts on being elected was to deal the campaign a political blow from which it didn't recover. The EGA was to be kept open, but only if money could be raised through charities and the women's movement. The EGA would go private! This went against the whole campaign which was to ensure that a specialised but widely needed service was available to all, regardless of income. Maggie Thatcher understood very well the need to confront this political campaign to reverse the cuts in the NHS. It was the Prime Minister's first attempt to boost the



Militant tactics at the EGA: hospital workers block the main road outside the hospital in protest against the proposed closure.



Protesting against the cuts: Lambeth November 1979.



**LESSONS:**

The traditional sectionalism of the trade union movement has a long history. But today it's no good to us. To win, we *have to* understand the links between different groups of workers in the public sector who're fighting cuts, between the workplace and the community, between the employed and the unemployed and between private and public sector workers.

In order to launch a struggle on the scale that will be needed to reverse the whole drift of anti-working class policy, we've got to start fighting with an openly socialist perspective for *working class needs*.

It's only *offensive* demands that can unite the class against attempts to divide us.

private sector at the expense of the welfare state.

Problems have been caused in other hospital campaigns by divisions among the workers. For example, at Bethnal Green, the work-in was seriously undermined when nurses agreed to job transfers to other hospitals. This has not been a problem at St Benedict's hospital in South London:

'A key factor in the success of the occupation so far is the fantastic support of the nurses who have the powerful support of a very militant shop steward in the Royal College of Nursing. The local NUPE and COHSE full time officials have also been very active. As a result, out of 170 nursing staff, so far only two part time nurses have accepted transfers to other hospitals.'

(Interview with secretary of the occupation committee Arthur Hautot in *Big Flame*, January 1980)

At St Benedict's, they've got a policy of developing mass participation in the struggle. Staff meetings are held twice a week and are open to all hospital staff. They made sure there were more women than men on the occupation committee to reflect the high proportion of women on the hospital staff. At first some of the women were lacking in confidence but they're getting stronger and more involved as the struggle goes on. The big problem facing St Benedict's is its isolation. Four other hospitals locally are being shut down, but they've taken no action. And there's not enough support from other workers in the area. This was a big problem at Bethnal Green:

'In "Cuts and the NHS" by the Politics of Health Group, the Bethnal Green occupation is criticised for not defining its aims clearly enough in relation to the needs of the local community. Perhaps that's true, but they leave out the main reasons why the Bethnal Green campaign and most of the anti-cuts campaigns over the last two years have not succeeded. And that is that the working class movement has simply not been sufficiently strong, organised or powerful to defeat the whole strategy of cuts. The fact is that individual campaigns on their own cannot win this overall fight.'

(From a review by the national co-ordinator of Fightback in *Big Flame*, November 1979)



St. Benedict's in S. London: winning the support of patients and local people in the community and nearby workplaces. (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)



'We need this hospital' - demonstrating against the proposed closure of Bethnal Green hospital.

# Grunwick

In August 1976, 150 Asian workers – mainly women – went on strike at Grunwick for union recognition. They'd joined APEX. Within a month, postmen at the nearby Cricklewood sorting office blacked all Grunwick mail in solidarity (Grunwick was a mail order photo firm). The High Court ruled that the blacking was illegal, and Tom Jackson, leader of the post office workers' union, ordered it to be called off.

Meanwhile, the strike achieved national publicity when the first mass picket resulted in about 80 arrests – although it was totally peaceful. As a result, Len Murray promised TUC support and 100 Labour MPs declared that they were right behind the strike.

In June 1977, the really big mass pickets began. With the energetic support of the secretary of Brent Trades Council, Jack Dromey, the strike committee had

contacted workers all over the country. Thousands attended, and were met with unprecedented police violence. Despite the numbers, the scab bus got in.

Now the TUC stepped in, determined to take control. Again with the advice of Jack Dromey, the strike committee agreed. At this time, there were growing tensions on the committee, particularly between those still expecting TUC support, and those who didn't have so much faith in the official trade union movement. In July a mass picket of 20,000 was led in a march by the TUC away from the factory, leaving the scab bus to get in without any opposition. It took considerable persuasion by members of the strike committee to get the hundreds of Yorkshire miners to agree to leave the picket lines on the gates and go on the march.

At this time, the postmen put the

blacking back on, despite the court decision. The UPW executive forced them to call it off under threat of expulsion, and fined four officials hundreds of pounds for organising the blacking! APEX ordered the strike committee to call off the mass pickets and pin their hope on an official government inquiry and on a House of Lords appeal court ruling on whether ACAS could impose a decision on the management forcing them to recognise the union. Not surprisingly, the owner simply ignored the Scarman inquiry which ruled in favour of the strikers, and the House of Lords supported the Grunwick management.

As strike leader Mrs Desai said after going on hunger strike outside the TUC in protest at their lack of support:

'Official trade union action is like honey on the elbow: you can smell it, you can see it, but you can never taste it.'



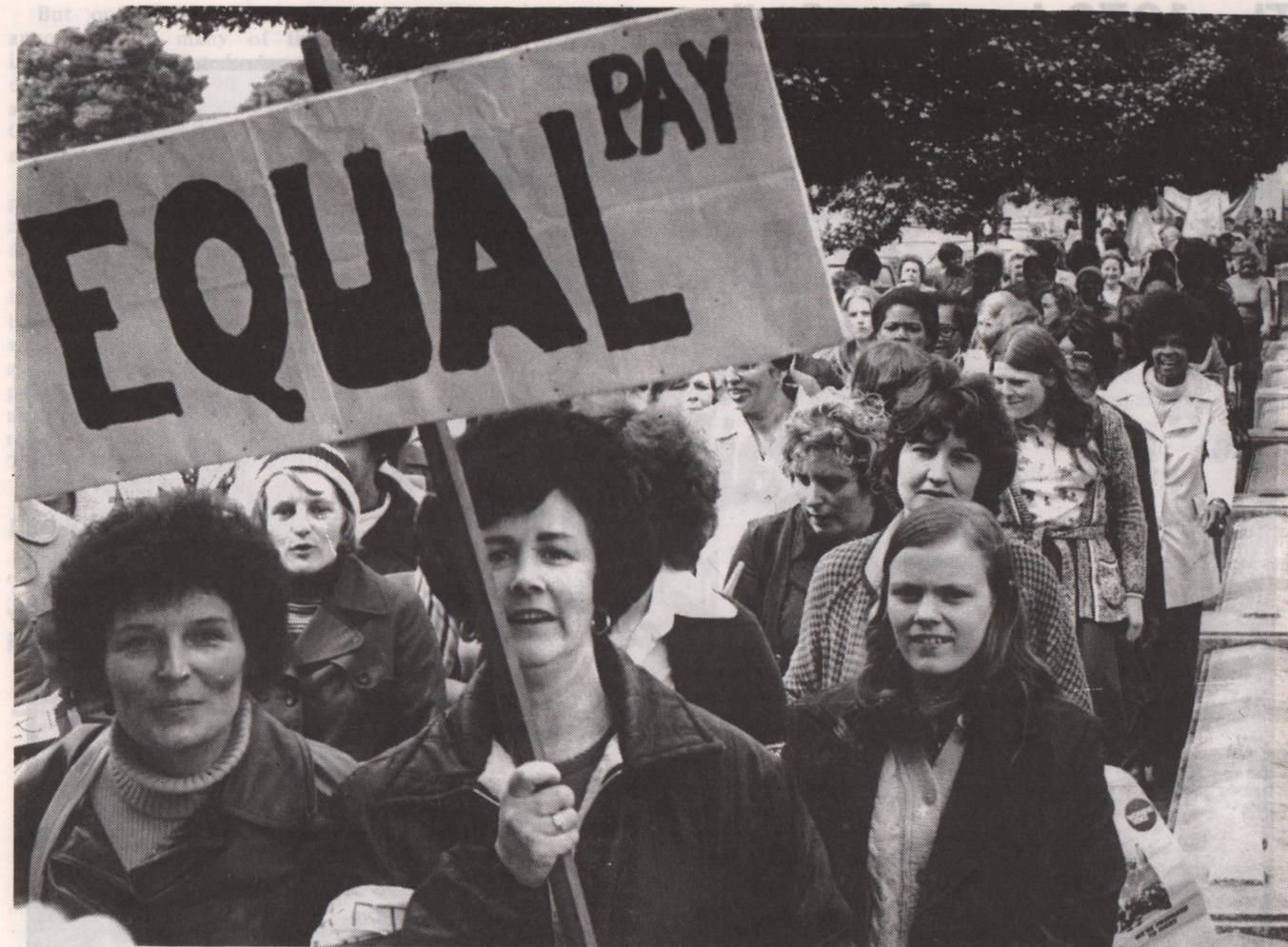
Towards the end of a long struggle.. Members of the Grunwick strike committee on hunger strike outside TUC headquarters in November 1977. Despite fine words at TUC conference, TUC leaders had done nothing to support them, and had actively opposed solidarity action by other workers. (Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report)

### LESSONS:

Don't rely on trade union leaders or officials, or the TUC, or Labour MPs to win your battles. They'll always pull out if the going gets rough. Whatever they promise in the way of support, always remain sceptical. Use whatever support they do give, but always keep control in the hands of the rank and file.

Don't rely on courts, tribunals, the Arbitration Service (ACAS) or special government inquiries or Courts of Inquiry to win your struggles. Much more often than not, you'll lose. And that's one of the clearest lessons of the steel strike.

Perhaps the most important lesson to come out of Grunwicks – and we've seen it before in the miners' strike in 1972 at Sattley coke works and in the struggle to release the 5 dockers held in Pentonville Prison – is the potential strength of mass rank and file mobilisation and picketing. Solidarity wins. Sectionalism loses.



'We Won' – the power of the women at Trico. (Photo: Chris Davies, Report)

# Trico

In the face of outright opposition from a majority of men working in the factory, and from some of their husbands, women at the Trico windscreen factory in West London held out for 21 weeks in the summer and autumn of 1976, to win a total victory in their battle for equal pay.

During their strike, they worked hard to build up considerable support in the community and nearby workplaces. And they refused at any time to have anything to do with the Industrial Tribunal judging their case. The Tribunal ruled against them – but they stayed solid and won.



A member of the Trico Strike Committee knocked down by a scab lorry - one of 5 that tried to break the picket line, aided by the police. (Photo: C. Davies, Report)

### LESSONS:

To win major struggles these days, you've got to be prepared for a very long battle. That requires high morale, and maximum support in the community and from other sections of the working class.

Don't rely on tribunals to win struggles. In the first four months of the Equal Pay Act, out of approximately 4,000 complaints about equal pay, 1754 went to an industrial tribunal. Of these only 18 were successful.

## The 1979 Low Pay Strikes

Photo: John Sturrock (Report)



The first three months on 1979 saw the bitterly fought low pay strikes in the public sector. As action by hospital workers, school cleaners and dinner ladies, dustmen and other local authority workers spread in support of their demand for a £60 minimum wage and the 35 hour week, the media vented their wrath in a campaign of unparalleled

hysteria. NUPE was labelled a 'fascist union' by the Daily Mail, and the extreme right-wing leader of the Electricians' Union, Frank Chapple, called hospital workers 'terrorists' in a Sunday Express article.

From the beginning, the public sector union leaders refused to call all-out strike action — instead leaving it to local areas

and sections to take whatever action they saw fit. The inevitable result was that the strike was very patchy. In the best organised areas — for example among local authority workers in Hackney and in Camden (both in London) — there was determined action which led to employers making concessions: in Camden, they won the whole claim.

But overall, the outcome was disappointing for many of the workers involved. The union leaders recommended acceptance of a 9% offer, plus £1 on account for full-time workers pending the Clegg Commission 'comparability' study, and nothing on shorter hours.

Low paid and part-time women in particular didn't gain much from the strike; the Clegg Commission recommendations gave the lowest grades (90% of whom are women) the lowest rises. In fact, the interests of women were very badly represented in the claim itself, which took no account in its demand for a 35 hour week that many women in the public sector are part time workers who already work less than 40 hours, and receive very low hourly rates. Roughly 75% of the membership of NUPE (the

### LESSONS:

The need for a nationally co-ordinated rank and file movement within the public sector unions — fighting with an openly socialist perspective, and taking a full part in the struggle for women to build their power in the unions and where they work.

## Lucas Aerospace

In 1971, workers at Lucas Aerospace factories around the country were faced with massive redundancies due to 'rationalisation' and a recession in the aircraft industry. 600 jobs had been lost at Willesden in London, where an extremely militant and bitterly fought occupation had failed to prevent closure. They realised that to prevent further closures, a new strategy was needed. As one of the workers at Willesden said:

'We realised that the morale of the workforce very quickly declines if they see that society, for whatever reason, doesn't want the products they make. We therefore evolved the idea of a campaign for the right to work on socially useful products. It seemed absurd to us that we had this skill and knowledge, and that society urgently needed equipment and services which we could provide, and yet the market economy seemed incapable of linking the two.'

A Corporate Plan was then drawn up, co-ordinated by the Combine Committee which they'd formed to link up white

union with the largest number of members involved in the action) is women, but they are totally under-represented at all levels of the union. There's no doubt that this weakened the struggle.

Other divisions also took their toll: 'One of the worst problems we've got is inter-unions rivalry — especially between NUPE and the G&M. In our hospital we held a meeting last week of all four unions to try and stop these squabbles. And lack of information is a real problem. There could be a strike down the road and we'd only hear about it after it was over.'

(Margaret Carlin, NUPE nurse, Glasgow Stobhill Hospital, quoted in *Socialist Worker*, 10/2/79)

Although there is a growing shop

collar and manual workers at all Lucas Aerospace sites in Britain. The Plan was drawn up through discussion in every factory — combining ideas from top technologists to semi-skilled operators on the shop floor. Through a detailed questionnaire, the workers were asked what sort of products they could build, and also as 'consumers' in society, what sort of products they felt were needed.

The results were amazing — over 150 different products which could be made on existing machinery: portable life support units for patients suffering heart attacks; a portable and cheap kidney machine; a combined battery and petrol-powered engine which will cut fuel consumption by half and last 20 years without maintenance; solar energy heaters for homes; a Hobcart to enable Spina Bifida sufferers to move around.

The Company at first refused to even acknowledge the plan for three years until, in the face of stiff resistance to its plans to restore profits by closing three factories and sacking 2,000 workers at

stewards' movement within NUPE and the public sector generally, this inter-union rivalry and the lack of national and local co-ordination resulted in the better organised areas remaining isolated from each other, and unable to support the weaker areas. And this absence of a strong nationally co-ordinated movement of the rank and file made it much easier for union leaders like Alan Fisher to brush aside calls for all-out strike action.

It also meant that there was no organised force within the strike putting over socialist answers to the real worries facing many of the low paid public sector workers. The most pressing of these was the fear that if the employers conceded the full claim, it would lead to a massive loss of jobs — especially part-time jobs — harder work, and worse services.

the beginning of 1979 it agreed to examine the Plan. From the time the Alternative Plan was devised, there have been no enforced redundancies. It's done a lot for the morale of the workforce, and the whole plan is excellent propaganda for what life could be like under socialism — the workers' creativity that could be released. But the Plan has run into strong opposition from the right-wing in the unions, with the result that the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions has put every difficulty in its way.

For further information about the Lucas Aerospace Workers' Plan and about the relations between the Confed and the Lucas Combine, we'd recommend *Revolutionary Socialism No.5: Interview with Mike Cooley*.

and *Diary of Betrayal* by the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards' Committee — available from CAITS, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex (40p).

### LESSONS

Plans like these for the production of socially useful alternative products are a direct challenge to capitalist rationality, and show the importance of introducing socialist ideas in the struggle. As long as they involve the whole workforce, they can be a crucial boost in fighting closure — where the self-confidence of the workforce is the key to winning a militant struggle. But Workers' Plans must never be seen as an alternative to militant tactics.

# Massey Ferguson Triumph Speke; Courtaulds: Struggles against closure

For almost ten weeks in January 1977, the Massey Ferguson tractor plant in Coventry was taken over and occupied by its 1,200 assembly line workers. It was a struggle over productivity, manning levels, piece work rates and against the suspension of the section most immediately involved. They won a total victory — but only after the occupation turned into a militant strike when the Company obtained a High Court writ against the occupation. From the first day, the occupation was run on the basis of mass participation with weekly mass meetings and weekly news bulletins, regular occupation or picket duty for every worker and frequent meetings of line stewards and their strike committee.

'The mass meetings weren't what many factories normally get — a speech from the convenor and no chance for the lads. The meetings were chaired by one of the most active stewards, and there was always a good discussion with perhaps 30 blokes speaking from the floor.' (Massey shop steward)

This tradition had been fought for over the years by militants and socialists. It enabled them to get over what could have been a crushing blow to morale — the enforced ending of the occupation. And the JSSC were able to win support in 1980 for a one day strike in protest against the closure of the Massey plant in Knowsley near Liverpool:

'When the workers at Knowsley first heard of the closure threat they placed an immediate embargo on the movement of finished products out of the factory. Then they called a delegate conference of all Massey-Ferguson UK plants which supported a resolution proposing no movement of work from Knowsley. When

the first lay-offs were announced the immediate response of the workforce was occupation.

The stewards are aware of the need for the full support of the workforce and ensure they are informed of all developments through, amongst other things, mass meetings of up to 300.' (Big Flame, April 1980)

They also picketed and leafleted other Massey plants, but at the Manchester plant, after initial support the workers voted overwhelmingly at a mass meeting to accept work from Knowsley with no management guarantees. The Manchester stewards bear a heavy responsibility for this. In Coventry the stewards leafleted the workforce to explain the issues and took collections for Knowsley. In Manchester this was not done, nor did the stewards take any recommendation to the mass meeting. But the Knowsley workers weren't prepared to allow these management attempts to divide the workforce nationally go unchallenged. So they started militant picketing of the Manchester plant.

Compare this with the struggles against closure at the Courtaulds plant in Skelmersdale in 1976 or Triumph Speke in 1978. At Skelmersdale, the Union Action Committee relied on heavy lobbying and Government intervention (including nationalisation) to save their members' jobs. The Government did nothing. Meanwhile, the stewards did nothing to involve the rank and file — probably because the rank and file had long lost trust in them. In a document put out by the joint union committee at the plant, they talked about 'the pressures representatives had to tolerate from shop floor workers.'

'Shop stewards had to take many rebuffs from their own members for accepting new agreements . . . and had the extremely difficult job of selling the changes in work practices wanted by management.'

In the same document, the union committee attacked: 'extremists among the rank and file; and though these people are a minority, they feed on bad union/management relations in order to poison the minds of the less militant.'

At Leyland Triumph at Speke in Liverpool, there had been a 17 week strike against severe manning cuts immediately prior to the closure announcement. But during this strike, there was only one mass meeting, and no involvement of the rank and file. All power was delegated to the stewards:

'I think that some of us are a bit inclined to want to do things by ourselves if you know what I mean — without the membership. But when you come right down to it, you can't do bugger all without the members. You certainly can't fight a closure.' (Steward from Triumph Speke)

This *delegation of power* which is another part of traditional trade unionism was crippling when the crunch came. The stewards weren't able to involve the rank and file, especially when Leyland came up with an increased and very divisive offer of redundancy money. And they had other problems too: the Leyland plant at Canley, Coventry voted to accept the transfer of the TR7 from Speke. (Canley has since been scheduled for closure.) And they got no support from union leaders or from the Labour government who they spent a lot of time lobbying.

## LESSONS:

Only the most militant tactics can win struggles these days. But militant tactics without rank and file support are a non-starter.

Mass participation in a militant struggle is one of the keys to victory.

It's a long and hard battle to turn an apathetic and demoralised workforce into one that's active and ready for a major fight. It involves a fight for:

- \* No secret meetings between stewards and management
- \* Regular report back meetings on all sections
- \* Frequent mass meetings
- \* Regular workplace bulletins from the shop stewards' committee and the trade union branch
- \* Branch meetings in work time to make it easier for everyone, particularly women, to attend.

To fight closure and redundancies, there needs to be very high morale. Where a redundancy scheme is involved there's got to already have been a tradition of mass participation in struggle built up. There has to be a feeling of real loyalty, solidarity and class consciousness among the workforce to make it worth sticking it out. Otherwise people go for the money.

It's no good convenors and stewards complaining that 'the workers are apathetic and won't fight — they just want the redundancy money' if those convenors and stewards have themselves not fully supported *every* previous struggle in the plant on wages, manning, safety, racism, discrimination against women.

## Bringing it all together

### WAYS OF INCREASING OUR CHANCES OF WINNING AT WORK

The lessons of these struggles add up to a new approach to organising at work. It won't *guarantee* victory — there are no simple solutions. But as long as these lessons are taken into the work place, into trade union branches and shop stewards' committees, then we'll stand a better chance of winning. These are the main points of the strategy:

#### Rebuild work place organisation

Rebuild work place organisation where it's been undermined by participation schemes and repeated defeats. Fight for the democratisation of the unions at all levels, against the tradition of not getting the rank and file involved and against sectionalism.

#### Go on the offensive

For more pay and less workload; shorter hours and more jobs; better services and more housing — no matter what the employer says he can afford. Stop fighting on management's terms — reject their right to make a profit off our backs.

#### Socialist politics

You can't win struggles these days without a strong and united rank and file *and* socialist politics. When increased wages and better conditions hit profits or eat into public sector cash limits, employers will threaten us with loss of jobs. Faced with economic slump, they'll try to throw thousands on the dole. Without socialist politics, you have no argument to mobilize people against this. The fight for a socialist health service, for the development of plans for alternative production are an important way of taking the offensive. Since capitalism can't meet our needs, we have to fight for a better system — and that's a part of all

working class struggle against the employers.

#### Start preparing in every workplace for fights against loss of jobs

Today, no workplace is secure as employers try to restore profits or meet cash limits through closures, cuts, redundancies, staffing cuts, productivity deals, and new technology to undermine working class strength.

#### The key demand is 5 hours off the week with no loss of pay

#### Militant tactics and mass involvement

To fight against closures and cuts and for better wages and conditions requires mass involvement, high morale, militant and imaginative tactics, and a campaign to get widespread support in the community, from other workplaces and from the unemployed. You can't produce these things out of thin air just when they're required. That's why you have to prepare right now for these struggles — fighting against the normal trade union traditions of trusting your leaders to do everything for you.

#### Fight divisions in the working class

Give real support to immigrant workers and women who're fighting the racist and sexist divisions of work and pay. We should be fighting against differentials. Link up the unemployed with those at work in the struggle for more jobs, higher pay and for the 35 hour week.

#### For combine committees and international links

We've seen the importance for winning factory closure struggles that there's solidarity between different factories in the same company — refusing to accept

transfers of work from any plant threatened with closure. So we support company-wide combine committees, preferably involving manual and white collar delegates and with a real base in the rank and file. In the same way, it's now urgent to start developing links between workers in the same industries. The rank and file combines linking Ford workers, dockers, brewery workers and rubber workers in Europe are good examples. Although it won't be easy because of the political repression in some of those countries, these links must also extend to the Third World.

These are the lessons from struggle. We've got to find new ways of organising and fighting against a capitalism that is drastically restructuring itself against our interests, our needs and our power. Nowhere is this clearer than in the struggle against new technology. At present, no clear answers and lessons have emerged in this crucial struggle to prevent the bosses undermining our strength. That's why we have included to examples in this chapter. However, we'd offer the following guidelines to fight for new technology on working class terms:

\* Total opposition to new technology where it results in work which is damaging to physical or mental health because of its intensity, or where it gives employers unprecedented control of the work process and the workforce.

\* Acceptance of new technology only where there is no loss of jobs at the workplace (whether it's through enforced sackings, voluntary redundancies or 'natural wastage') and where the benefits of the increased productivity are shared entirely by the workforce — through a shorter week and higher basic pay.



Who wants to work on an assembly line? These lines at Triumph Speke are now silent. The factory closed in early 1978 without a fight. The result of traditional trade union politics? (Photo: Angela Phillips, IFL)

# Ch 6. Fighting for Unity

## How we can organise against Divisions

Anyone working in a reasonably large workplace knows that most of the divisions in the workforce are caused by differences in money and workload. Alongside this go differences in working conditions — for example between staff and hourly paid workers.

How can we fight these divisions? We don't think we'll get very far by just shouting 'unity' at the different sections

of the working class. For a start, in our experience it's unusual to find groups of workers who're relatively better off supporting those who come off badly. Occasionally it does happen — for example at Grunwicks, or when the Yorkshire miners went on strike in support of the nurses. Fighting for this kind of powerful solidarity will always be a part of the struggle for greater unity.

But right now we'd place equal importance on supporting the right of worse off sections of the working class to organise themselves independently, and start the fight for unity on their own terms. We're right behind the idea that assembly-line stewards at Ford should hold separate meetings to fight for a line-workers' allowance, better conditions and equal overtime with off-line workers; we think that the unemployed should organise themselves to fight for their needs; we support the low paid in their demand for a narrowing of differentials and a guaranteed minimum wage.

In supporting all this, we are sometimes accused of splitting the working class. That we deny. The working class is already split up and divided. By helping to build the strength of different sections of the working class, militants are making the most important contribution possible, since there can only be real unity when all major sectors of the working class are strong enough to ensure their own demands are taken up.

### What this means in practice

In every workplace, militants should start by making an analysis of how the workforce is divided, and go on to work out how to start an effective campaign by the people who're losing out. It may be small things — a campaign for rotation of jobs, where the work is not fairly shared out, or for the jobs to be shared out equally; or an overtime rota; or for manual workers to enjoy the same fringe benefits and conditions as the staff. Too often socialists just ignore these problems as though they were unimportant. But for management — they're the mechanism of control.

Photo: Chris Davies (Report)



Photo: Dave Evans (IFL)



No support from white workers at Imperial Typewriters during the 1974 strike. That's the importance of black workers organising independently to build their power.



Tearing apart the working class:



Women at Tetley Tea prepare to march for equal pay. May 1975. (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)

If there's a racial or sexual division of work — with black people or women doing the lowest paid jobs, or only certain kinds of jobs — this should be brought out into the open through mass leaflets and straightforward discussion in the stewards' committee and the union branch. When struggles by women for equal pay, equal opportunities, nurseries at work or against sexist abuse and discrimination do start — and when struggles by black people fighting their

specific oppression at work also start, the job of militants who're not directly involved is to give full support, and argue for solidarity among the rest of the workforce.

These struggles are on the increase. Black militancy is growing. This is clear from the wave of strikes by Asian workers in the midlands in 1974 (like Imperial Typewriters) to the actions of black youth in Leeds, Notting Hill, Lewisham, Southall and now Bristol against the police, to the riots at Ford Dagenham, to the strike in East London factories against racist attacks in the streets, to the struggles at Grunwick, Booth's Gin, Maple Mill in Oldham and today at Chix.

At the beginning of August, Asian workers at Maple Mill in Oldham came out on strike for better conditions — like meal breaks — and against speed ups that had been brought in splitting white from Asian workers. Racist supervisors at Oldham encouraged these divisions. The strike was won in a week. It was supported by some white workers, but many scabbed. Now the strikers have also forced the union to agree to their electing twelve shop stewards, and to provide translation facilities.

(From a report in *Big Flame*, September 1979)

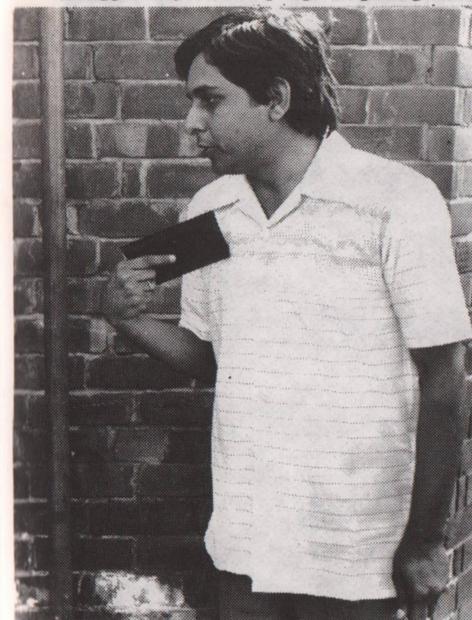
This is what black self-organisation means, and we should be right behind it. In the same way, it's crucial to fight for:

- \* women's caucuses
- \* women's officers in the unions
- \* all union meetings in work time.

And obviously we fight for positive discrimination in favour of women and black people for all full time union posts. For example, for women in NUPE, many of whom are part-time workers on very low pay and without many of the benefits attached to full time work, this is vital — otherwise their interests get left behind as in the 1979 wage settlement.

But neither racism nor sexism can be fought only in the workplace. They're both wider social and political problems with deep roots in the way people think. Racism has a lot to do with our history of British colonialism. And underpinning sexism is the traditional role of women as unpaid workers in the home. That's why the broad independent movements and struggles of women and black people are so important. For example, the campaigns of the Women's Liberation Movement against the sexist way women are seen, for the socialisation of housework and for men to do their fair share, for a women's right to choose whether or not to have a child, and for a guaranteed income for all women as of right. Struggles by women and black people outside the workplace have a major impact inside the workplace:

'The most important thing in making the atmosphere more militant in this plant was the Southall riot. Hundreds of Asian workers here went on strike — accompanied by a handful of white and West Indian workers — and fought against the police riot in their area. They felt it to be a victory — and their new strength



racism on a Bolton street.

(Photo: J. Sturrock, Report)

and confidence was soon felt in disputes in the plant.'  
(Shop steward, Ford Langley)

**Organising with the unemployed**

Today, there is the *potential* for a mass movement of the unemployed. In areas like South Wales, there is real anger — that was clear when Keith Joseph visited the area during the steel strike. If that anger could be organised right across the country, then the unemployed could become a powerful political force.

But unemployment is now less of a risk to the bosses and their system — both politically and socially — than trying to hold down workers' wages directly through an Incomes Policy. That's why the bosses now feel free to use mass unemployment as their way of disciplining and controlling the working class — and holding down wages. In other words, that's why they've gone over to monetarism.

In the 20's and 30's in Britain, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, as well as organising the famous Hunger Marches, also organised lightning attacks on factories working overtime and paying below the union rate for the job. They'd take over the factory, stop all machines and stay in occupation until the boss agreed to cut overtime with no loss of pay, to pay the union rate and to hire more workers.

Over the last few years, there have been two examples of campaigns against unemployment: the Right to Work campaign and the Campaign Against Youth Unemployment. Both have shown the possibility of getting a lot of unemployed people involved. But neither has met up to the challenge of building a permanent, strong mass organisation to fight unemployment. For three reasons. Firstly because they are primarily front organisations for a political party — one for the SWP, the other for the CP. So they're not independently controlled by unemployed workers with the aim of building a broad based autonomous mass movement.

Secondly, they never developed strong



*The 1978 Merseyside Right to Work marchers carry their message to the gates of the Fairweathers site. But is the Right to Work Campaign tied too closely to the SWP?*

local roots — based on consistent work among the unemployed and among workers fighting against loss of jobs in an area. Both campaigns rely on occasional national demonstrations — to TUC or Labour Party Conference — to get publicity: local organisation is seen as secondary to the needs of the national campaign. Finally, they've never organised successfully around the direct needs of the unemployed for more money on the dole. This has got to go alongside the fight for more jobs.

In our view, a movement of the unemployed can only be built by taking

up issues like the recent cuts in benefit, and by developing a strong local base in as many parts of the country as possible. In this connection there are some important developments: the formation of branches of the Unemployed Workers' Union in Newcastle and Spennymoor and TGWU branches mainly for unemployed workers in Liverpool. Together with local Claimants Unions and Right to Work groups we're certain that an effective mass movement could be built, linking up with workers fighting closures, redundancies and productivity deals, and having a powerful political impact.



*Southall April 1979. Neither racist nor sexist divisions in the working class can be fought only in the workplace.*

# Ch 7. Building Workplace Organisation

## Developing Rank and File Power

The whole strategy we've outlined in the last chapter depends on one thing: work place activity. This might seem obvious, but unfortunately the political and practical skills for winning a real rank and file base are given a very low priority by many socialist organisations.

Instead their main concern is to teach their members how to win leading positions in trade union branches and shop stewards' committees — without their necessarily having the support of the majority of workers — and how to recruit new members to their organisations. Their justification for this is that the most serious problem facing the labour movement is the lack of 'correct' leadership with the 'correct' programme of political demands.

We reject this approach. We say that the only political programme that's worth having is one developed *inside* the class struggle. It's too easy to blame every single defeat on our union leaders. All too often problems at the top of a union are a reflection of problems at the bottom,

among the rank and file. Reactionary and pro-management ideas, sexism and racism *are* real problems on the shop floor, and it's no good socialists kidding themselves that they can all be solved by changing leaders.

### Mass work in the workplace

The main aim of this pamphlet is to stress that working class resistance will not work unless the nuts and bolts of that resistance — workplace organisation — is got right. After years of social democracy, the priority must be patient rebuilding of work place organisation.

What does this mean in practice? The first principle is to talk to people — to find out the everyday problems, grievances and struggles facing the various sections of the workforce in their everyday lives. Then we've got to show how these problems can be understood from an openly socialist perspective. This perspective includes not only those political issues whose effects are experienced immediately at work and in the surrounding community, but also those

wider political issues such as inflation, energy policy, the lack of investment, which have a more hidden but equally drastic effect on working class life.

When action by a group of workers does start over an issue, our job is first to publicise and explain what it's about to win maximum support and counter the lies coming from management (and sometimes from the union too). Secondly we've got to bring out into the open the *anti-capitalist content* of what's going on. Many of these struggles directly pose the question of *power*, challenging management's 'right to manage.' As workers start to fight for their needs, they come up against the logic and organisation of capitalism, and it's at this time that they see the point of socialist ideas. As a steel picket told the *Guardian* in the 10th week of the strike:

**'I never really bothered about politics until now. I never realised there were two classes. This government has shown me that there are.'**



*Celebrating their power: the Trico women's Victory Conference in October 1976. (Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report)*

Photo: John Sturrock (Report)

### Mass leafletting

Mass leaflets are one of the most important weapons of mass organising. They're directed at the majority of workers and therefore immediately involve them. They can help organise solidarity for sectional struggles — explaining why it's happening and countering the propaganda of management. They can build support for the actions of other groups of workers — a local hospital or factory closure for example. They can be used to start arguing for alternatives under socialism — a people's health service, the production of alternative products such as those proposed in the Lucas Combine Committee Alternative Workers' Plan. Most important, they can put into an *anti-capitalist* perspective all the day to day problems and struggles which are the concern of the workers.

**PAY CLAIM LATEST BEWARE A SELL-OUT**

With four months to go to our pay claim, the national union officials and convenors have already begun preparing the sell-out. At a rowdy meeting in London on Monday, convenors and senior shop stewards from all Ford plants in Britain met with national trade union officials to finally decide our pay claim — which goes to the company in November.

And to the amazement and disgust of many senior stewards — particularly from Southampton, Halewood and Swansea — the convenors and union officials refused to name any target figure for the pay claim. They're just going to approach the Company cap in hand, and see what the company offer.

There's only one way to describe the claim the convenors are putting forward — a woolly, vague load of waffle. These are their 5 points:

- a substantial increase linked to the cost of living
- a shorter working week
- line workers' allowance
- better pensions
- longer holidays.

**UNDEMOCRATIC**

The words "a substantial increase" might sound good, but they should not fool anyone. Because it's well known that in trade union language it's a clever formula for saying nothing — for refusing to say how much money you're willing to fight for.

When some Halewood lads tried to put an amendment calling for...



1972: A mass movement of workers wins! In protest against the jailing of 5 dockers under the Industrial Relations Act, work has stopped in every port, production of all national newspapers has ceased and the London food markets have closed down. Two days later the government backed down and ordered the release of the dockers.

But to be effective, leaflets must come out regularly — not just when there's a major issue or big struggle. They should be short, punchy, humorous and well laid out. It's also important to involve as many militants as possible in writing, checking and rewriting leaflets.

### Political work in the unions

We have stressed the importance of political work among the mass of rank and file workers. But that doesn't mean that we think that work in the official structures of the trade union movement — union branches, district committees, trades councils, stewards' and representatives' committees — is of less importance.

In our opinion, every socialist militant trying to organise at work should be active in their union branch. We'd encourage any militant who's built a real base to stand as shop steward or branch officer. We're against militants getting themselves elected into positions without mass support — either because no-one else wants to stand or because hardly anyone bothers to vote. Socialism is about extending workers' democracy, not about manipulation. We also see it as a vital part of the work of any effective rank and file group to win increasing influence in the stewards' committee and the union branch.

What should we be fighting for? Union democracy is key. We cannot hope that

people will defend the unions until they feel that they are *their* unions. From top to bottom — General Secretary to shop steward or rep — there are undemocratic traditions which must be changed. This is now so bad that many members are cynical not only about outside officials but about convenors and stewards/ reps as well.

So in the stewards' committees, we've got to lead a fight against this. This means fighting in the committee for full support for any section in dispute over staffing or manning, safety, pay, conditions — even if they're 'in breach of procedure.' We've got to try to get stewards to see the unification of the workforce as a number one priority. We should be arguing for regular section meetings, mass meetings and a shop floor bulletin. Finally, in stewards' committees we should be encouraging links between stewards of the same company or industry both in Britain and abroad.

Union branches are the base for the campaign to democratise the national structure of any trade union — fighting for all officials to be elected to office and subject to regular re-election. The trouble is that most union branches are themselves bureaucratic and lifeless affairs, and participation is not made easy for

women, black or young workers. We've got to fight for branch meetings in work time, and to make them relevant and lively for the members. We should be inviting outside speakers and getting films to show. Our overall aim must be to build a tradition of open political discussion and debate in the workplace — starting first with the political content of the struggles connected most closely with the workers in that branch, and generalising to all other political issues from there.

### Broad based rank and file groups

In any reasonably sized workplace, in all probability the number of revolutionary socialists will be tiny. But nevertheless, within the workforce there'll be a clearly defined *left* (the militants), the *centre* (the moderates, those who waver) and the *right* (scabs, company men and women). Our job — through mass work — is to find and organise the militants and to increase their power and influence so that the left can win over the centre and isolate the right.

That's the importance of broad based rank and file groups within a single workplace, within one company, within a whole industry and inside a trade union. Today, there's a growing number of organisations like these: Building Worker,

the Ford Workers' Group, a group on London Transport, Rank and File Hotel and Catering Workers, the Collier group, NALGO Action, Fightback, Engineers' Charter and left-wing caucuses in many unions.

There's three points we want to make about groups like these:

1. These groups must be broad based and non sectarian. Too often rank and file organisations are just a front for one particular socialist organisation or party. That kind of organisation never really grows because workers are rightly aware of being manipulated.
2. The groups have got to be openly socialist. Throughout this pamphlet we've argued that wage militancy won't get us anywhere unless it's combined with the idea of building a working-class offensive against the way that capitalism is re-organising itself against us.

3. It's no good having a group that's just a clique of socialists, cut off from the rank and file. The main reason for building rank and file organisation is to carry out mass work which requires hard, consistent day to day organising. It means building an organisation with growing credibility, that workers can *rely on* to be there supporting them whenever there's a struggle.

### A socialist rank and file movement

How can we build a socialist rank and file movement with real authority in the working class?

1. It has to be built by bringing together organisations which have already established a strong base:

- \* rank and file groups within workplaces and industries
- \* democratic shop stewards' committees
- \* left-wing caucuses in the unions



We need a mass movement combining the power of the rank and file with socialist politics that mark a real break from the reformism of our trade union leaders. (Photo: J. Sturrock, Report)

- \* local anti-cuts campaigns
- \* broad-based national campaigns against unemployment, racism, cuts in public spending, wage restraint.

At present, few of these organisations do have a real mass base, or an open commitment to socialist politics. So our first priority must be to develop a tradition of mass work and socialist agitation in these organisations.

2. It must be genuinely broad based and democratic, not just an industrial front organisation for one particular socialist group or party.

3. It has to be openly internationalist in outlook, helping rank and file workers make direct links with workers abroad.

How does the Rank and File Movement organised by the Socialist Workers' Party compare against these points? The first thing to be said is that it is absolutely the best example of all the recent attempts to build a grass roots workers' movement. But it does have serious problems.

First, it has no real local roots in the working class. Many of the local and sectoral rank and file groups associated with the SWP Rank and File are very weak with no base. Secondly, the Rank and File Movement has always been too dominated by the needs of the SWP. It was brought into existence as a national organisation long before the necessary groundwork had been done on the shop floor or in stewards' committees, union branches and rank and file groups — or before sufficiently strong national caucuses had been built up in a wide range of unions. There were too many token delegates from union branches and stewards' committees who in truth represented very little — so the Movement has never had the authority to call even limited action. Its steering committee and conference have always been stage managed by the SWP rather than being truly democratic.

Finally, the Rank and File Movement has restricted itself to fairly narrow 'economic' demands and defence of trade union rights, while leaving the SWP to take up the 'political' issues. So Rank and File has never been an openly socialist movement. As we've explained, in our view today this split between 'trade union' and 'political' questions is today itself a reformist one, and it certainly won't help us beat the Tories.

But in saying all this, it's important to stress that there are very positive aspects of the Rank and File Movement. For example, it's clearly concerned to build the confidence of the mass of workers. It hasn't been obsessed with attempts to change or 'expose' leaders as a solution to everything. We think that if the SWP could learn some of the lessons we've outlined above — in particular respecting the independence of the movement — then the Rank and File Movement could be transformed in the longer term into what's needed. If such a movement could be successfully built, it would be a major step forward in breaking the monotonous cycle of alternating anti-working class governments, first Tory then Labour.

THE FORD WORKERS' GROUP (COMBINE): HOW ONE RANK AND FILE GROUP PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE.



Example of how one rank and file group using mass work tactics was able to make a big impact: the role of the Ford Workers' Group in the 1978 national Ford strike

The Ford Workers' Group was founded in April 1978 specifically to co-ordinate the fight for a claim that was worth striking for: £20 and 5 hours off the week with no productivity deal. That involved a campaign in all the stewards' committees, in trade union branches and on the shop floor.

The organisation didn't come out of the blue. Its first meeting was called by three workers' groups which already had a long history: the Ford Langley Action Committee, the Ford Dagenham Workers' Group and the Ford Halewood Big Flame Group. All three groups were already well known in their plants because of regular mass leafletting and an important role in some of the big guerrilla strikes by assembly line workers fighting unpaid lay-offs and speed ups.

So that first meeting brought together a wide range of militants from nearly all the main Ford plants. Most were independent socialists or militants on the shop floor. But among those in political groups and parties were members of the SWP, Big Flame, IMG, Militant, a small Marxist-Leninist group, and dissident members of the CP. The whole atmosphere was non-sectarian, and that's the way it has continued ever since. I should mention that right from the beginning, women were involved in the group. Most Ford workers are blokes, and we made it clear that we thought it was important to get wives and girlfriends involved.

The first thing we decided was TO GET THE CLAIM RIGHT. Throughout the Social Contract, the convenors and officials had deliberately worked out woolly, divisive claims *behind the backs of the membership* which weren't worth fighting for. They didn't want a big claim – to take our wages back to 1974 levels – and a UNIFYING WAGE DEMAND. That's why we were for an across the board money claim which would narrow differentials – not a percentage rise which

would give more to the higher paid grades and less to the lower grades.

Then we were arguing for 5 hours off the week with no loss of pay. We argued for this, and not 35 hours because some plants already work 37½ hours – so we thought it would unite us better. And the most important thing we were stressing was NO PRODUCTIVITY DEAL – it would mean harder work, worse conditions and more unemployment.

These were the arguments we used in a big campaign of mass leaflets in every Ford plant in the country to win support for the claim on the shop floor. We produced a wage claim badge, and sole thousands. And we co-ordinated a fight in every stewards' committee and union branch where we had supporters to push our claim through. Finally this resulted in us getting it through the convenors' committee – by 13 votes to 12! The shop floor campaign was a big success and when Ford made their 5% offer – within the government's guidelines – there were spontaneous walk-outs in Southampton, Halewood and Langley.

During the strike we tried to build up independent rank and file activity – through regular pickets and mass lobbies of the negotiations. To be honest, that was difficult because there was not much picketing to be done. Ford is a closed shop so no-one was going in, and we got total solidarity from dockers, drivers and train drivers.

We also put out a weekly strike bulletin – the only way the rank and file got any information except through the press, because the convenors held no mass meetings at all. In the bulletin, we put over the latest news, mobilised pickets, and we kept arguing for the full claim form a socialist point of view: the importance of winning shorter hours to get less unemployment; how we were fighting for all other sections of the working class against pay restraint; why we should support British Leyland workers even though their company made a small loss.

But the most radical thing was the action of the Ford women's group which was part of the Ford Workers' Group. In the middle of the strike, the TV tried to organise a back-to-work campaign among Ford workers' wives. With a small group of wives, they called a demonstration in Southampton – and to their great surprise they were hugely outnumbered by a demonstration in support of the strike by wives and girlfriends of Ford workers. It stopped the media campaign dead in its tracks. That shows the importance of getting our families and friends behind the claim right at the beginning – preventing them dividing us up.

Jack Brown, Secretary of the Ford Workers' Group

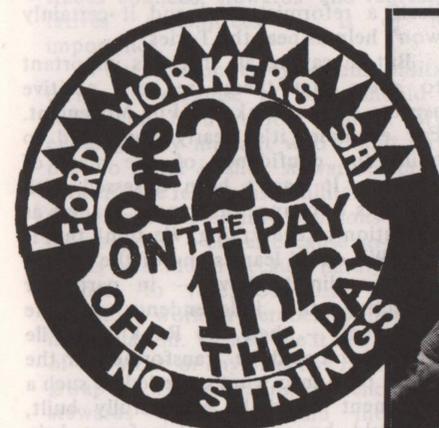


Photo: Chris Davies, Report.

# Ch 8. Defeating the Tory Offensive

## Rank and File Power and Socialism

One thing is certain. We won't beat this offensive by relying either on Labour or our trade union leaders to lead our struggles. After all, this offensive *started under Labour* – with the major cutbacks in public spending, the massive rise in unemployment, the encouragement to scabs by Callaghan to cross picket lines, the free hand given to the police to smash picket lines and harass black people and their campaign that a woman's place should be in the home.

The point that we've got to hammer home in every workplace, in shop stewards' and reps' committees and at all levels of the trade union movement is that Labour is no real alternative. Even in opposition they've refused to commit themselves to the complete repeal of the Employment Act or to restore the Tories' spending cuts.

### The Labour Left

And history has repeatedly shown that it's a mistake to place all your hopes on electing new, left-wing leaders like Wedgewood Benn. Barbara Castle was a leader of the Labour Left. She introduced 'In Place of Strife' in an unsuccessful attempt to smash working class power in 1969. Michael Foot was the great hope of the Labour Left – but on becoming Deputy Prime Minister he defected to the Callaghan camp. Wedgewood Benn was himself a cabinet minister throughout the government, with no evident record of great dissent. And as Energy Minister he helped to push through the divisive productivity deal in the mining industry which stopped a major clash over the Social Contract. We confidently predict that unless his politics have changed fundamentally in less than one year, he'll go the same way as Castle and Foot.

### Our trade union leaders

Equally, there's no chance that the trade union leaderships will mount any serious challenge to this offensive. We only have to think back to the last Tory government:

- \* Union leaders let the post office and power workers get beaten without offering any real solidarity.
- \* They registered under the Industrial Relations Act with few exceptions – despite TUC policy.
- \* They did nothing to support the three jailed building workers – the Shrewsbury three.
- \* It was only a mass *unofficial* strike movement that got the five dockers out of Pentonville Prison in July 1972.

Under Labour, the trade union leaders were *actively* involved through the Social Contract (of which TGWU leader Jack Jones was the main architect) in organ-



Happy families. Jack and Jim share a joke at our expense. Under Labour, trade union leaders were actively involved with the government in holding down working class living standards. Jack Jones was architect of the Social Contract. (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)

ising *against* working class attempts to get better wages and conditions. The restrictions on picketing in the 'Concordat' between the Labour government and the TUC were in many respects worse than those in the Employment Bill, showing that union leaders fear rank and file power almost as much as the Tories.

It's no mystery why trade union leaders behave in this way: it's their job. Trade unions exist to get the best possible deal for their members in capitalism. The problem is – if workers win all their struggles for better pay, less work and better conditions, capitalists go bankrupt and workers end up on the dole. Our solution is to fight for a better system. But union leaders have 'solved' this problem by pressing for better wages and conditions only when the employers can 'afford' them.

So, trade unionism accepts the existence and the ground rules of capitalism – the exploitation of workers by bosses. The aim of union leaders is not to *win* struggles, but instead to *compromise*, using mass industrial action only as a threat or a bargaining counter. That's why they're against any sections of the rank and file developing independent strength and organisation.

Over the past twenty-five years, successive governments have seen the potential stabilising influence of 'responsible' trade union leaders. They've given them knighthoods and ermine. More important, they've drawn them increasingly into major government committees

'trying to make British industry successful.' So it's hardly surprising that the AUEW has supported the Edwardes Plan for 'rescuing' Leyland, or that Len Murray spoke these words to a chorus of boos at the TUC demonstration on March 9th 1980:

'We say to the Government: "get round a table with us. Let's together sort out the problems of this country's economy and get it working."'

For all these reasons we say it's not enough to build your whole industrial strategy around the perspective of changing right-wing union leaders for 'left wing' leaders to *do the same job*. This strategy – favoured particularly by the Communist Party – has nearly always failed. Both Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon were 'left wing' candidates in the TGWU and AUEW – supported by the Broad Left. We have to begin to understand that it's the pressures on these men because of the way their job is defined that lead them to turn against the working class.

Obviously, we think it would be much better for the working class if trade unions were all led by people with similar politics to Scargill. But the fact is that they would only get there because of growing rank and file militancy. And the only way to prevent even people like Scargill going the same way as all the others is strong pressure from a powerful rank and file. At present, this isn't happening. In fact some of the *right-wing* union leaders have a large amount of support in their unions: in elections over the past three years, right-winger Terry



Arthur Scargill leading the miners at Grunwick. (Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report)

Duffy beat 'left-winger' Bob Wright in the AUEW Presidential election, and in the TGWU, Moss Evans (a 'moderate') got far more votes than Alex Kitson — the Broad Left's candidate.

In our view, trade union leaders represent all of the weaknesses and none of the strengths of the working class in this country. That's why we can't rely on them to lead a struggle against the Tory measures. The only way forward is to rebuild rank and file power and militancy.

#### Defy the law

Take the Employment Act. Lobbies,

marches and leaflets — even one day stoppages — spread the word and demonstrate opposition, but they didn't stop the Act becoming law. So some socialists are arguing that we should force the TUC to call a General Strike. We think that's wrong. We're all in favour of a General Strike if there's a growing and powerful rank and file movement calling for that kind of action — and capable of sustaining it in the likely event of a sell-out by the union leaderships. That is not the situation today.

Instead, we've got to take a longer



Engineers and miners shut the Saltley coke depot during the '72 miners' strike.

view. Now that the Employment Act is law, the only way it's going to be defeated is for rank and file workers to *defy the law* and get overwhelming support from all sections of the working class. We believe that it's only by *organising* along the lines described in the previous three chapters that we can move towards such a situation.

#### Conclusion

There's only one way to defeat the ruling class offensive. That's by building a mass movement which combines the power of the rank and file with socialist politics that mark a real break from the reformism of the trade union and Labour leaders.

In the past eight years, we've seen the potential political power of the rank and file — the miners and dockers during the Heath government, and the Ford workers, lorry drivers, hospital workers and local authority workers under Callaghan.

But if that power is used simply to return a Labour government unconditionally, then we'll have achieved nothing. We'll be back in the old cycle of anti-working class Tory government followed by anti-working class Labour government.

So over the next four years — or however long this Tory government stays in office — we've got to begin to prepare the ground for a break from this cycle. That means preparing people for the anti-working class policies of the next Labour government, and starting to build a mass movement which represents the organised political independence of the rank and file from Labour. *In other words, a socialist rank and file movement.*

# Ch9. About Big Flame

## The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation

This pamphlet has been about organising at work. But we've made references to revolutionary organisations. What exactly are the connections between the two?

In Britain today there are many revolutionary socialist groups. They all share the aim of demolishing the power of the employers over us, and organising a new society in which working class people will have power and control over the wealth. Why then so many organisations? Basically, there are differences in the socialist movement over two questions: what kind of society we're trying to create, and how to get there. We know that people find it confusing and off-putting to see so much fragmentation. But we still think there are overwhelming reasons why militants should try to discover more about these organisations, make a choice and join one. Here are some of the reasons:

**1. It gives you an idea of what communism might be like; it starts you thinking about many new things.**

Whereas capitalism appeals to the anti-social side of people's nature — greed, individualism, thinking only of yourself — socialism and communism appeal to the social side: to solidarity, support and co-operation. The best of the revolutionary organisations try to 'practice what they preach' — their members treat each other as equals, who are not status or power hungry for themselves, and who are actively opposed to sexism, racism and anti-gay prejudice.

Being a member, you'll also be in a better position to learn from, and contribute to the body of theoretical knowledge which is the rock on which any socialist group must be built. However, theory is not a holy writ. All members should be able to take part in the democratic process of adding to and changing theory.

**2. It helps you make a break with the politics of compromise.**

There's no doubt that work in the unions and in the Labour Party is important. But in the long term, on its own, such work limits you to the *defensive* perspective of these bodies. A revolutionary organisation puts you in contact with a wide range of militants who share the same aim — not of getting the best deal in a bad society, but of fighting for a new society where there's no exploitation of men and women.

**3. It provides support and breaks isolation.**

As a socialist or militant, you're more likely to be out on a limb at work. Among your mates, you're probably most likely to get involved in 'aggro' with management. You may be labelled as a 'commie' by management, and the label is picked up and used against you by some of the workforce. The victories are

usually few — and there may be long demoralising periods of no struggle at all.

Belonging to a socialist organisation gives you a longer-term perspective — of working towards working class unity, slowly, but surely. It enables you to understand why a defeat has happened. Surrounded by militants and comrades in similar situations, you realise that it's the world that's insane, not you!

The organisation can also provide practical help, ideas and the benefit of the experience of others to help you produce a leaflet, a branch bulletin, show a film, discuss something you've read or a new document your management have presented to the stewards' committee.

**4. It helps you see beyond your immediate problems to see the need for change in society as a whole, and it gives you an international perspective.**

Capitalism operates as a whole social system — part of the socialist organisation's job is to help link up the various groups and forces fighting to change society. Take the example of women working in factories or hospitals. The fact they're on the lowest grades and get the worst rates is caused by the position of women *in society as a whole*. So no organisation which has a workplace as its only focus (e.g. a union branch) can do much about the super-exploitation of women in the workplace, *unless* it makes links with those social forces fighting for the liberation of women in the wider society e.g. the women's liberation movement.

Becoming a member of a revolutionary organisation can also help you develop an internationalist outlook. Time and again, the bosses have thrown workers into battledress to fight their brother and sister workers from another country in defence of their bosses' interests. The slogan of all revolutionary socialist groups is 'workers of the world unite', and most socialist groups have international links. These can have very practical results too. For instance during the steel strike, contacts made through socialist groups helped striking British steelworkers to raise support from rank and file steelworkers in several other countries.

**5. At a much later stage in the class struggle, political organisation has a key part to play in leading the working class to seize power from the capitalists.**

#### So what about Big Flame?

Many people are put off left groups because they are small, or because they're often dogmatic and self-important. So why should Big Flame be any different?

We don't claim to be free of all problems — but we're trying to find answers to some of the important ones:

- We say class first, party second. Revolutionary organisation must be the servant of the class struggle, gaining its strength through its efforts to help create mass organisations of the working class, and *earning* the right to give a lead. Class power and party power grow together.

- We believe in the need for the political independence of the movements, campaigns, and rank and file groupings we work in and with. The women's movement, black organisations, industrial rank and file groups must be free to develop the struggle for the needs of their sections of the class.

- We try not to be dogmatic or sectarian. All revolutionaries have a lot to learn. We'll work with anyone or any grouping as long as we agree on the particular question on which we're to work together.

- Our politics starts not from abstract principles, but from the real needs and everyday struggle of working class people.

We know that there is little we can *write* to convince militants to work with us or to join us. Many organisations *say* they put the class struggle first. We know that the only way of convincing militants is in what we *do*. Therefore we say to anyone reading this: work with our members in the Ford Combine, in Fightback, in trades councils, in health and safety committees and on shop stewards committees, and join us in the debate about this pamphlet. Then you can decide how genuine our claims are. You can also find out more about what we have to offer, and about our politics more generally. Our first priority is to develop a political dialogue and to carry out political work together with our sympathisers — asking you to join comes after this, not before.

