

# Big Flame

## JOURNAL

## NUMBER 1

Quarterly - Winter Issue

25p.



“WE MUST GROW TOUGH WITHOUT EVER LOSING OUR TENDERNESS”

### ARTICLES ON —

Portugal: workers fight back.

Rent strike: the women's struggle  
on Tower Hill.

Taking power in everyday life.

Shop floor power at Fords.

Confrontation in industry '69 - '74.

**For**  
**Working class power & Revoluti**

by a comrade  
nam Group and  
me.



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## JOURNAL

WINTER 1974/75

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WE WON'T PAY—Women's Struggle on Tower Hill.

PORTUGAL: WORKERS FIGHT BACK

AUTONOMY AND THE SOCIAL STRUGGLE

BREAKING THE CONTRACT—Shop-floor Power  
at Ford Dagenham.

CONFRONTATION: THE STRUGGLE IN  
INDUSTRY 1969-1974

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**Errata:** the photo on the fifth side of the Tower Hill article has the wrong caption. This should be with the picture on the title page of the article. The correct caption is: '1972. Picket of Birds Eye, Kirkby industrial estate. Workers who took time off to join the Unfair Fair Rents demonstration had been sacked. Women on the estate called people out to the picket with loudhailers, and were joined by building workers and dockers. All the men were reinstated.'

Printed by



# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE JOURNAL

**INTRODUCTION** This is the first edition of the Big Flame Journal. The decision to produce it results from the need to make our political ideas more widely available, and to adopt a more rigorous approach to analysis and practice. The developing crisis not only makes this task more urgent but also more difficult. Everywhere people are having to re-examine their politics. Well-trying forms of struggle, used by the working class successfully in the past, are being countered by a concerted capitalist offensive.

## The Crisis

The "social peace" and economic growth which marked the fifties and early sixties have given way to a deepening economic and political crisis. At the root of these developments lies the inability of capital to resolve its contradictions in the face of the increasing strength of the proletariat, both in the industrialised and in the underdeveloped countries. The stability given to capitalism by imperialism is shattered. In capitalist economies everywhere unemployment is rising fast and economic growth has stopped. Internationally there is the likelihood of a world slump, with Britain and Italy having the weakest of all the western capitalist economies. At the same time the enormous expansion in productive capacity since the Second World War presents us with real possibilities for building socialism. This is the situation in which we are now operating.

## THE BIG FLAME JOURNAL

The articles in this journal give an idea of some of the theoretical positions we have been developing and of the way we have been organising in specific situations.

**Confrontation—Struggles in Industry, 1969-74** introduces a concept which has been central to our political development—working class autonomy. Autonomous struggles are those which cannot be used by capital for its further development. They are struggles in which the needs of workers are clearly separated from the needs of the capital. Starting from the position that the class struggle is the main determinant of the development of society, we try to identify the objective content of working class struggles. In Britain, as in Italy, it is particularly clear that it is the growing power of the working class that has provoked the severity of the crisis.

**Autonomy and Social Struggle** deals with some of the changes brought about in everyday life, primarily outside the factory, as a result of changes in capitalism since the war—the growth of consumerism, the way that education, health, housing have all been tied more closely to the needs of the system. It tries to show the way that the concept of autonomy from capitalist development can be used in analysing the content of the new struggles, social and personal, which have resulted from these changes. Big Flame, as a developing group, still has to work out its view of how these struggles should be interpreted. This article should be seen as one contribution to this analysis which has produced controversy inside Big Flame.

Two articles give an idea of our practice in different situations:

**Breaking the Contract—Shop-floor Power at Ford Dagenham** details the high level of shop-floor struggle over the past two years and gives some idea of the way we work in industry—our practical activity and method of analysis of a specific class situation.

**"We Won't Pay"—Women's Struggle on Tower Hill** does the same in its analysis of the role of women during the 14 month rent strike on a housing estate near Liverpool. The article gives an account of the problems encountered in organising during the strike and the way we are organising in the area in the period since the strike ended. In particular it looks at women's struggle, which has a central role in unifying and building the autonomy of the whole class.

**Portugal: Workers Fight Back** is both an account of the first six months of class struggle since the coup of April 25, 1974, and an attempt to understand it. We analyse the particular content of Portuguese class struggle and counter-pose our approach to abstract calls to build the Portuguese revolutionary party. Not because we are necessarily hostile to the creation of the party, but because it avoids the essential questions: how, what kind of party, and under what conditions. We attempt to identify the tendencies which are pushing towards the unification of the working class, and those which aren't. Only on this basis can a realistic assessment of the balance of forces be made and a revolutionary strategy drawn out.

## ABOUT BIG FLAME

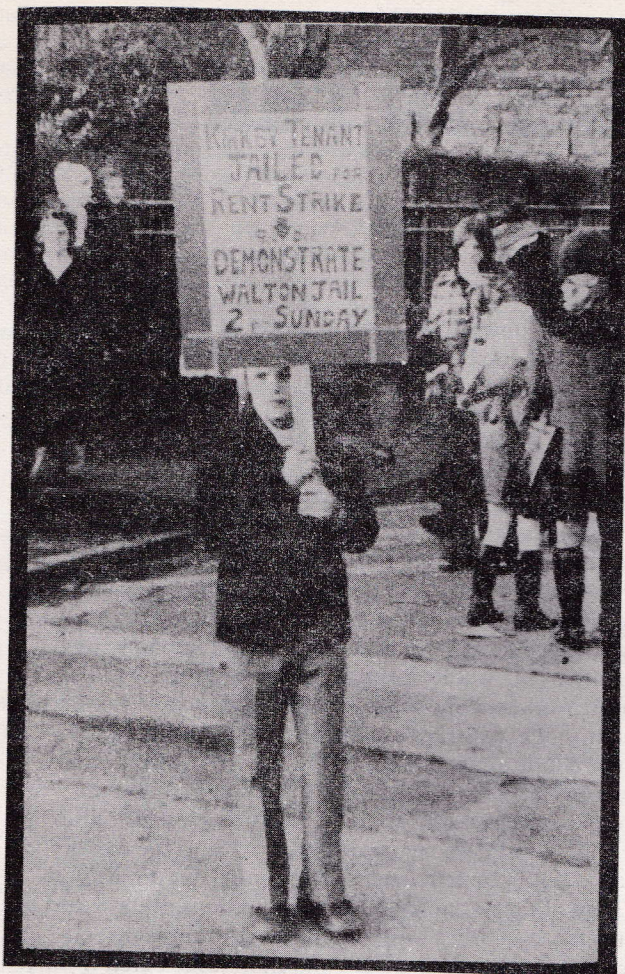
Whilst we recognise the necessity for political clarity the articles in this and future editions of the Journal will show some inconsistencies. When Big Flame was formed in Liverpool in 1970 it was not defined primarily by fairly rigid theoretical positions. Rather we started, above all, from the belief in the need for a mass practice inside the working class rather than, for example, working mainly through stewards' committees and union branches. We have believed in the absolute necessity to *develop* politics in relation to practice. In this we have the perspective of creating a general political organisation capable of being directed by the needs of the class struggle in all its forms. At the same time we regard the necessity for the autonomous organisation of women and black people, and the importance of social struggles as fundamental.

In the development of our politics we have been influenced by the class situation and the politics and practice of certain of the political groups in Italy, where our fraternal group, Lotta Continua, is the largest of the revolutionary organisations.

In this country as elsewhere, with a fast developing recession, the working class is faced not only with a severe attack on its living standard through inflation but also an assault on its strength throughout society. This is a political attack on a political power, and the working class is facing fundamental questions about the nature of society and about its own role in future developments. In this situation the need for all revolutionaries to seriously re-examine their politics and practice is becoming more and more urgent.

January 1975





# 'WE WON'T PAY' -

## Women's Struggle on

### TOWER HILL

(a new housing estate near Liverpool)

This article has been written by women in Big Flame who are part of the Tower Hill women's group. We've written it to explain why and how we are active on Tower Hill, and to describe some of the ideas of the women's group. It is not a complete description and analysis of the rent strike.

#### TOWER HILL

Tower Hill is 10 years old and still growing, the newest part of Kirkby Lincs, built round an industrial estate of 200+ factories. It's typical of many new housing estates, thrown up on the edge of the city for the victims of slum clearance and overspill. As everywhere, families and communities in Liverpool are split up through housing policy, and on the new estates people have to rebuild friendship and solidarity.

Tower Hill tenants did this quicker than most new estates through the rent strike which lasted from October 1972 to December 1973, a long, hard, mass struggle which marked it out from other areas also fighting the Housing Finance Act. Through this struggle the working class on Tower Hill could begin to re-unify itself, against the fractures created by capitalist 'development'.

In these notes we talk about one part of the struggle on Tower Hill, then and now. About women's struggle and its central role in unifying and building the autonomy of the whole class. This is the question we in Big Flame were helping to organise round

during the rent strike, and which is still central to our activity there.

#### WOMEN ON TOWER HILL

Tower Hill is a young estate, built for the grown-up children of the rest of Kirkby. Many of the families have children under 5. Because of this the women on the estate were hit hard by the rent rise, and it was their struggle as much as men's. But it's not just important that they were involved. We also have to see what women brought to the struggle and what **more** they **could** have brought from their own experience as women under capitalism.

When the left and bourgeois papers talk about the crisis and the living conditions of the working class, very little is said about the specific material situation of housewives, how they fight back, and how they are also a hidden force behind, for example, the wage struggles of men. Everyone comments on price rises and the housewives' budget. But only the women's movement and some other women in struggles have really got down to analyse the central struggle of housewives like all workers, for more money, less work and more freedom to live well and happily. If this analysis is lacking, the specific needs of housewives, and therefore all women, are submerged and forgotten.

For housewives, the crisis means more work, less money- the two things go

together all the time, whether or not you are also in waged work. Cuts in state spending on health, schools, services plus price rises, all mean more work. Dole money or low wages means more work. You can't buy labour saving food, you mend clothes instead of buying them, you can't get out and enjoy yourself.

As the ruling class tries to cut our living standards, they bank on the sting being taken out by the housewife, who's supposed to just buckle down, work harder and make ends meet. When hospital beds are cut and patients sent home quicker, the sick are returned to 'the community' to be cared for. While back in the hospitals women doing the same jobs as housewives, only for a wage, work harder as nursing staff are cut. When nurseries are closed or never built the children still have a place at home - for free. And always, the housewife has to parcel out the budget, scrimping and saving through strike, lay-off or a normal waged week. Of course some men too do this work at times, but very few men are put in the role of 'housewife'.

Increasingly, unemployed men, young people and people convicted in the courts are made productive as cheap or even free labour to do these jobs in the community that the state won't pay for - seeing after the old, the sick, the young. In the same way housewives have always been used as a way of making the working class share out its own poverty.



On Tower Hill, with high unemployment, rundown conditions, no facilities, wage freeze and inflation, the £1 rent rise was the straw that broke the camel's back. Everyone. And the women refused to just make ends meet. They kept the money and fought to keep it.

But this didn't mean that the point of view of housewives was always put forward in the policies and discussions of the rent strike. The point is not just women being involved but that they have something particular to say and to win. If this is not brought out the content of the struggle becomes less unified and autonomous.

## TOWER HILL BASE GROUP

The Tower Hill base group is one of 5 in Merseyside Big Flame. It started in December 1972 when some women on Tower Hill asked us to help start a womens group there.

Base groups are set up for two main reasons. First, different questions and problems are raised by the experience of different sections of the class. Unity and a strategy for the whole class cannot be built by submerging these differences. Most important, the independent organisation of women, immigrants and blacks is central to a process of unification. It not only asserts their particular needs and ensures these are not submerged, but can actually reshape class consciousness and be a major force for autonomy.

Linked to this, sections of the class can at times act as a reference point for the autonomy of the whole class because of their particular relation to capital. For example, throughout Europe, immigrant workers and other workers on mass assembly line work in the car plants have begun to express autonomy from capitalist organisation of work - against grading, work, division of labour, hierarchy, delegation, trade union mediation and for the money to live separated from production for capital.

In a slightly different way, because so far we haven't clearly defined and used our power in a mass way, women have begun to assert social, sexual, political, economic autonomy from the needs of capitalist development. And so we're beginning to reshape the objectives of the whole class.

Second, revolutionary organisation in this country has for a long time been external to the mass of people in struggle. This is true of all existing groups, however many working class members they contain.

Linked to this, all revolutionaries can become detached from the women and men they're with every day - even if you're working class, if you work in the same factory or live on the same estate. This is a problem in revolutionary development everywhere at all times.

The labour movement and the left have been built on the strength given by the capitalist division of labour to the male, white industrial working class. But both are weakened politically by sectionalism, racism and sexism. Both have often been out of step with the struggles of the rest of

the class, and even from the mass struggles of the workers inside their own sphere. These struggles can often politically transcend them.

Big Flame base groups are set up to confront both these questions. They are set up by small groups of people, who both are and aren't already struggling inside that situation, to work in a continuous, daily way in specific workplaces, housing areas of kinds of struggle. We try to build a close relationship with other militants there, mutually learning and teaching, instead of commenting from the outside or just building paper membership. This way our experience and understanding of different kinds of struggle is deepened and our theory tested and rooted in Merseyside. We can also offer our own experience of struggle in other factories, colleges, offices, shops, womens groups, claimants unions, and explain why we are revolutionaries and what that means in a particular situation.

The base group acts as an organisational focus, bringing people together who want to organise, whether or not they are in Big Flame. It also organises in a mass way, and the Big Flame members try to build it as a reference point for the development of mass autonomy and organisational forms that strengthen it.

The base groups work independently, and are controlled by all the militants inside them. The Big Flame members are guided by the militants in their base group and also by the strategic perspectives and theory of the organisation as a whole.

We went to Tower Hill to start base work with other women in struggle. We wanted to work in a way which showed the falseness of separating 'womens struggle' from 'class struggle' - and to bridge the gap between the ideas generated in the womens movement and the mass struggles of women.

We didn't go to Tower Hill just because there was a rent strike. We had been involved in the partial rent strike in Halewood, and had been actively supporting the tenants on Tower Hill - writing articles in the newspaper, joining the road blocks and house pickets, helping to organise joint meetings between different areas. Through this we met women on Tower Hill, who were learning about their own struggle and

wanted us to start a womens group with them. There was the basis of a really mutual relationship. So although we lived in Liverpool, had no children and some of us were ex-students (all of which raised questions we had to work out in practice) we were all women in struggle whose experience had led us to similar ideas.

On Tower Hill during the rent strike the womens group was our 'base group', only this time set up mutually by members of Big Flame and other militants. So it was not a Big Flame group. This article has been written by the Big Flame women to explain our perspectives, although its based on discussions in the womens group as a whole.

## TOWER HILL WOMENS GROUP

For many women on Tower Hill the rent strike was a first taste of collective struggle, a time when they made friends and overcame the isolation and passivity forced on them by life as housewives on the estate.

The women who started the womens group were all among the most active. At the same time they were aware of their own problems in being active while still having responsibility for the housework, and especially the children. So they knew why other women were less involved. Men's attitudes to women and women's ideas about themselves could make them passive or nervous. Also women often couldn't get to the meetings, either because they worked evening shift or were in with the kids. So women often missed the chance to discuss policy and activity. They also thought the struggle should be widened in the hope that more women would get involved if it took in more issues that directly concerned housewives.

But we were all uncertain which direction to take. There were 10 of us (4 from Big Flame). We started with door-to-door leafletting and big open meetings with 30 to 40 women. In the leaflets we simply raised issues and in the meetings we failed to give any direction. We were trying to avoid taking on a leadership role that would prevent other women having their say, but in the end we just added to the confusion. Other women were even less confident than us about suggesting activity.

At the same time we failed to start



Rent strike demonstration on the estate



discussion about the rent strike. This was a mistake, based on wanting to be an open group, including women not on rent strike.

Gradually the meetings fell away for these reasons and because of practical problems. But that first phase hadn't been a total failure. Through working in a mass way we'd brought together women, some of who had been isolated before, and we were understanding our struggle better.

As a consistent, ongoing group which met regularly we were likely to stay small. But other women would be involved in different ways, with the womens group as a valuable reference point. For example, in autumn '73 some women organised road blocks for safety barriers and came to us for support, even though they didn't want to come to meetings. And some women had informal meetings on their block which we were involved in. The womens group could help give continuity and development so these particular campaigns and discussions didn't just come and go.

A main problem however was the separation of the womens group and the rent strike and Action Group. This was partly because we were unclear. We thought that if women weren't on rent strike, or not actively involved then we should organise around other things separately to involve them. We weren't clear how we could organise as women in a way that drew the rent strike and other struggles together, from our point of view.

But this was also a result of developments in the Action Group. Generally, we failed to build the collective confidence and strength to make our ideas a part of the Action Group policy. Either we failed to put our ideas across clearly or we were just knocked back. And alot of this was just the usual problem of not being used to speaking in meetings, and being easily silenced by the confidence, and even hostility of some men.

We were also discouraged by the view put forward by some men that we were being divisive. Even though we knew that the womens group was simply trying to break divisions that already existed between militants and other tenants, between men and women etc. Divisions which are not thought of as such because they are accepted as the natural order of things. The hostility of IS made this worse. They failed to understand us, or even try to, politically and so could only assume we were troublemakers. We mention this only because IS, as a revolutionary organisation which claims a vanguard role and which played an important part in the rent strike has a responsibility to at least attempt an understanding of the role of women in struggle. Instead, they resorted to private and personal criticism against the womens group and Big Flame.

The result of this was that when we were most confident or most in agreement with the actions of the whole Action Group we tended to let the womens group fall off and failed to do mass work which would have built our relationship with all women on the estate. When we were weakened and



'A main problem . . . was the separation of the women's group and the rent strike and Action Group.'

isolated in the Action Group we turned to the womens group and tended to withdraw from activity with the Action Group. So our practice in both became separate and therefore both were weakened.

Obviously another factor affecting us was that as a small group of women with young children we had a lot of work to do just maintaining the homes and families, and just organising in a most basic way to have meetings and see to the kids collectively. Even when we were all in the background of the Action Group none of us was ever "doing nothing".

We still think it was right to have a womens group. It wasn't the cause of the political separation - that existed already. But the womens group didn't become strong enough, inside the AG meetings or on a mass level, to overcome it.

## RENT STRIKE & ACTION GROUP

This section is a summary of aspects of the rent strike from the point of view of the womens group. We want to make it clear that we're not trying to reduce everything that happened to the womens group, and we're not saying that there was always just disagreements in the Action Group. We hope that Tower Hill tenants will write about the rent strike as a whole. Here we're just drawing out elements in what happened that were important to us.

For months before the increase some people had been preparing. Doing leaflets, posters, holding meetings. This included some of the present womens group, IS and other tenants. The Unfair Rents Action Group was the political and organisational focus of the rent strike. Initially hundreds went to the weekly meetings, as they did at the end. But most of the time there were about 20-30 people who went regularly.

Big Flame came to identify with one perspective, expressed by the womens group and some men, which we thought was closest to developing some of the most important elements of the rent strike.

When we say this we're not discounting other people or other ideas least of all the mass of people who created the rent strike. The starting point of all Big Flame's analysis and intervention is always the mass struggle, the situation and needs of those involved. Because of this we link ourselves inside the struggle to those ideas and ways of organising which are most likely to strengthen mass initiative, activity and political autonomy.

We also think that, because of their material situation, women are both a potential force for unifying and developing struggles in this way and also held back and weakened unless they organise their power collectively. So we identified with the womens group both as a focus for women on rent strike, an indication of the interests and potential of all women, and because that group of women was guided by the interests of the whole working class on Tower Hill.

Just to be clear, this didn't mean a rigid separation of men and women. The womens group didn't always speak with one voice. We didn't always say the same things as other women. Men also often shared our ideas. Nor did we always say the right things.

The total rent strike was itself a fantastic move towards political autonomy. And it lasted a long time because of the activity and forms of organisation that grew out of this. But autonomy can't be reduced to super militancy. What was important was that the rent strike welded together the daily struggle of people on the estate into a united fight against the state and the interests of capitalism. This is crucial. When the working class starts to assert its own needs directly against capitalist needs, and when in the process it refuses the mediation of Labour Party and bureaucratic channels, then it begins to pose the question of revolutionary change and power. Not as an abstract future goal, but as integral to our struggle now, as we live it every day.

But we have to be clear what this means, especially for the hundreds of people on the



estate who wouldn't have described their struggle as political, let alone revolutionary. The womens group remained conscious of the fact that the political content of the rent strike lay in what it meant in the daily life of people on the estate - not in abstracted rhetoric. The fact that it was a fight against the state didn't make it 'political' in some abstract sense. It went that far because the tenants were clear what their interests were and would fight to the end. When women said they needed the money for new shoes for the kids, and would fight for it - that was the political content of the struggle. No rhetoric was necessary. And there was a chance for those who were consciously revolutionary to be politically united with everyone else in that struggle. It is very easy to generalise through the work that women do especially. Wages, prices, industrial and social struggle are all mixed up together in the work we do.

**'I'm going to spend my rent & you know where it'll go. I'm going round to the shop to buy all the food I've not been able to buy over the last 6 months. I could pay my gas or leccy, or I could buy the kids new shoes'.**

As time went on however, more rhetoric crept into discussion, especially from those who were most used to giving direction to the rent strike. The fight was important because it was against 'a vicious anti-working class piece of legislation'. What that actually meant was less clear. It never seemed to mean that women and men were both fighting for their interests, because the specific interests of women were hardly recognised by most of the men. Put like this the working class was empty words, pretending a unity which actually subordinated half the people.

But this can't be explained as an isolated point. It came out through discussions.

For example, there was disagreement about how to relate to other struggles on the estate. In fact, what the rent strike was about. The womens group suggested that the Action Group organise round other conditions on the estate. Looking back we were probably unclear about this and failed to explain. Other people were right to be wary of becoming a social work agency, or of the struggle becoming fragmented or overloaded when there was so much to do.

On the other hand it was a question of the content of the rent strike itself. Some people obviously thought the question of conditions on the estate was unrelated, irrelevant and petty. If so, it suggested a limited and abstract view of the political importance of the rent strike.

It's not abstract to talk about the political implications of the Housing Finance Act as a major piece of ruling class legislation. But

it was equally important to place this in the context of ruling class policy as a whole, **as people were experiencing it.** Not just by relating it to the Industrial Relations Act, as many people did, but also by including the experience of men and women on the estate. This would have been more likely to unify than fragment the struggle.

**'I didn't think I was capable of doing it. But I'm not surprised now because women are going from strength to strength now. They've made a stand on one thing and they are going to go on fighting' When I look back-stuck in the house and just letting things happen- I wouldn't like to be like that again. I'm surprised I could take a stand and not be scared, because it's a big issue this- it's your house, the roof over your head and you've been brought up to look after that.'**

There were other differences over the course of the rent strike. Months before the final confrontation, we proposed regular mass leafletting of factories. There was a policy to gain industrial support by approaching shop stewards committees, union branches with speakers from the Action Group. We felt more long-term mass work was necessary to gain that support and understanding. On Merseyside and everywhere there were splits between the policy of total and partial rent strike. Many tenants were against total rent strike because they thought you just had to pay rent for a home. Prejudices against Tower Hill could be exploited - they're all lazy, drop-outs, hippies who won't work and won't pay for anything. The other areas of Kirkby were all on partial.

So we thought we should talk in plain language, direct to the shop floor. We felt we could talk in a way that people might understand - worker to worker, tenant to tenant at shop-floor level. This idea was rejected. Some of the trade unionists argued that workers weren't interested, and would never support Tower Hill.

But the policy continued of going through the 'right channels'. Unfortunately, this left the initiative to those union structures that most often adopt the politics of mediation with management and passive delegation from the shop floor - and we include shop stewards committees. Tower Hill was showing a mass initiative and a political autonomy which exists also on the shop floor but is supposed to be controlled by these structures.

In Fords, one of the factories approached by the Action Group in this way, Tower Hill hit a blank wall. The initiative was left to the wrong people - the stewards and convenors who have systematically sat on struggle in the factory. Big Flame did some mass leafletting there, and helped organise gate collections. But there was no

general direction given by Tower Hill to this work and it happened in isolation. Sections of workers who were prepared to support Tower Hill had no idea what they could do short of all-out stoppage, which is what Tower Hill seemed to ask for. And there wasn't the unanimous support to achieve that.

This reliance on procedure also expresses a cynical belief in the passivity and lack of political consciousness of the mass of workers. The long term goal of generalising the struggle in a mass way was ignored and long term work for support was sacrificed in the hope that somehow the union would get the workers out. So shop floor workers had access to nearly nil information or political argument that might get through to them. But somehow they were expected to come out.

Too late, very near the end, the Action Group took up the idea. But the point of it was long gone, and the leaflets could on suddenly demand support after the struggle had escalated to such a point that even more people were opposed to it. And the state chose its ground well - just before Christmas.

We're not saying the situation would have necessarily been better if our suggestion had been taken up earlier. But there was a better chance of getting support that way. And even if workers had not come out, they might have been a bit wiser for the Tower Hill struggle. We also think that we might have got across to more people if more tenants on Tower Hill had been involved in talking to them, and if the guts of the rent strike had been put out on a mass level.

As the rhetoric grew there was less room for discussion. When the first threats of arrest came the womens group helped hold a special block meeting. It was like the early area meetings which had fallen off but which we'd agreed should be restarted. Talking to people in the shops we knew that a lot were nervous and had no contact with Action Group discussions which would give them more confidence. The women were accused of 'panic-mongering' and that there was nothing to worry about. Presumably this was genuinely intended to stop panic breaking the rent strike. But we knew the only thing that would stop panic was discussion, preparation and defence. And getting more people involved in this instead of being isolated at home. The rent strike couldn't hold together if militants just told everyone things were OK.

**'When you talk about it with some of the women, they say; 'I wish I could be like that, I have not got the nerve'. But it only takes once & you get a taste.'**





Demonstration Outside Walton jail

Then the court orders threatening arrest started. But only when the final orders came did preparation really start. We were among those to suggest avoiding arrest with road blocks and pickets. This was decided against but with little discussion. More and more individual men substituted brave but unrealistic rhetoric for discussion. It was hoped Tower Hill would be another Pentonville 5 but there was no discussion of whether this was possible, or how the situation had changed since that victory.

The momentum of the Action Group was dictated by the urgency of the situation. But more important by how some people defined what was urgent and what wasn't. In the last week we said, as a matter of urgency, that a collective playgroup be set up during the day so everyone who wanted could be involved. This was met with the accusation, by an IS member, that we were 'bickering'. In a large mass meeting the kids made a noise and men told the women to take them out. The simple question of organising it so that all the women didn't have to leave was treated as 'women's liberation rubbish'. All these things were statements by individual men in the heat of the moment. But what comes out in the heat of the moment reflects divisions which have been hidden by so-called united action, which usually means burying the interests of whole sections of the class. This 'unity' is what the loudest voices impose on the situation and the pattern of domination, by men over women, is laid down by capitalism.

**'A woman's supposed to be stuck in her back kitchen all her life with a ball and chain on her ankle. And she daren't step out that door and apeak her own opinions. She's just not allowed her own opinions'.**

## LIVING IN STRUGGLE

Everyone who was actively involved in the rent strike went through a whole new experience that was exciting and disrupting. Women who were active had to change their lives at home and as in all struggles there could be tension between activity at home and outside it.

This was one thing the womens group was formed to confront. To give women the mutual support and political basis to deal with these changes.

Men too face this problem but because of their situation and the division of labour their attitude is inevitably different. Men can sometimes see it as a straight choice between family responsibility and political responsibility. They can often be involved in union or group activity quite easily, unless the woman also wants to be or unless his activity affects the home. If the family is disrupted in this way, when the woman also wants to be involved or demands that he take more responsibility for the home, he can often see it as a choice. And if he chooses 'politics' he's likely to think his wife is reactionary.

For us this is a serious mistake. Women on Tower Hill didn't make this separation once involved because the rent strike was so bound up with their struggle at home, as housewives. If their home life was disrupted it couldn't be abandoned for 'politics'. There had to be political solutions to housework and the changes people went through. The division of labour between men and women had to be challenged and collective support had to be forged. Collective childcare was needed in some form as a political solution to the isolation of women. Many women could not become more involved because these problems weren't worked out and they had to find personal solutions.

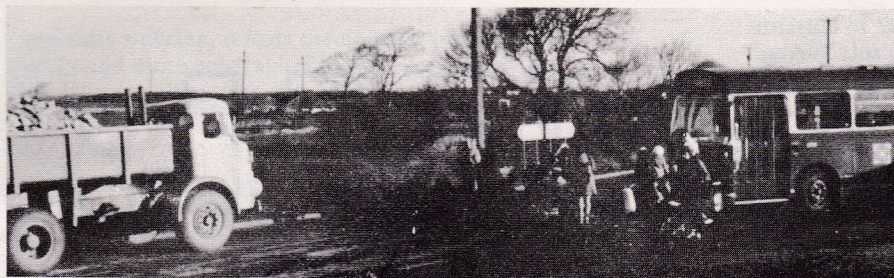
**"Women get frustrated but they're told it's only a natural thing. It's typical of women and it'll pass. And maybe her man comes in and he's nice to her that night and her frustration passes. She's told all she has to do is sit there, be a great mother - that's an outlet. Anything else frightens her. As soon as she tries talking to her man or her sister, when anything goes on, they laugh at her - 'that's not your worry'."**

**"We had to shame her because her man didn't want her to get involved. She's quite militant now. She says: 'When I listen to you I can go to him and I'll say this and that and the next thing'."**

Attempted solutions are never easy and never guarantee the immediate and equal involvement of everyone. But a communist perspective which contains a recognition of the needs of all those involved can make the process of change less painful and be more likely to strengthen the struggle.

We knew before the Cowley wives organised that any struggle has direct repercussions on the work of the housewife and the balance of forces in the family. Historically womens interests have only ever been put forward and acted on when women organise their power together. Just as the working class has never found personal individual solutions against capitalism, but has to forge its own solidarity and collective organisation.





**50 Women block the road around Tower Hill estate to make the council create safety barriers between their young kids and the lorries and buses.**

Of course women are and will be divided on class lines. But its precisely in the interests of working class power that women must organise together - for themselves and so for the class.

**'I'll keep fighting because I have to. I've been fighting myself for 10 years, trying to find out where I was going' And it's not been easy because I've been frightened.'**

## AFTER THE RENT STRIKE

We don't see the Tower Hill defeat as a sign of the weakness or secondariness of struggle in 'the community'. Nor as a defeat purely and simply.

In those two years both the strengths and the weaknesses of our class were shown. The Shrewsbury building workers were jailed. In '73 various struggles against Phase 2 were isolated by bosses and by the political and organisational limits of trade unionism.

But inside all these struggles there were signs of an emerging potential force - political autonomy from capital and unions.

This was shown on Tower Hill in the '72 miners strike and amongst sections of workers inside otherwise defeated struggles. However small and transitory it is this development which must be built on.

Tower Hill fought on the most difficult ground of all, outside the traditions of the labour movement and outside the more generally understood struggles of the factory floor. It took on the state where for a long time the working class has been at its weakest.

This weakness can't be reduced simply to the lack of industrial support, or the fact that it wasn't an industrial struggle, as if power lies only in the act of stopping production. That weakness is the lack of class-wide consciousness and use of power. The power to impose a political line against capitalist development. The source of power can lie in any section of the class, if it can be generated throughout the class.

But Tower Hill got knocked back. Once the mass struggle was called off the Action Group rapidly fell away. The previous demand 'no arrears to be paid' was dropped and little was done to organise a collective

fight with the council over arrears.

A handful of us, the womens group and a few men restarted the Action Group. We refused to withdraw from activity in the middle of defeat because there was much more than that to build on. The rent strike had been part of a much wider struggle. The next few months were an uphill but the perspective behind carrying on was right. We continued to have a mass line, to organise mass activity rather than individual or isolated negotiation with the council. We organised mainly round safety barriers, planning to widen this out to organise generally round conditions on the estate.

But compared with the rent strike mobilisation very few people became involved and this was demoralising. Those of us in Big Flame argued that we couldn't expect more so soon after the rent strike. Many people felt they'd got nothing out of that except debts. We had to analyse and understand the situation on the estate, what people were thinking about and work from that. Obviously it was easier for us to take this position. We hadn't been so directly involved and defeated in the rent strike. There was a danger that we'd expect a repeat of the rent strike mobilisation when it was impossible and attack other tenants for not joining us. This would turn us into the worst kind of leadership. We had to ride the tide, be prepared for mass struggle but also prepare to work in a way which suited the new situation.

The Action Group meetings are now few and far between - called when necessary and not out of habit. If needed it can do propaganda work and be a focus for struggle. But at the moment we need to be clearer on what basis we initiate activity.

The women's group has changed in the same way and for the same reasons. But there is more chance that it will be able to act as a continuous focus for women on the estate because of the varied and flexible ways it can organise with other women in the present situation.

A central problem is always how to relate continuous activity of this kind, in this kind of situation after a mass struggle, to the development of offensive mass work. We don't claim to have all the answers, but at least we still have the possibility of working it out, in practice, with other militants on Tower Hill.

The Troops Out group has since involved many of the same people and in some ways has replaced the Action Group as a political

focus for militants on Tower Hill. This has problems while it continues in isolation. It cannot substitute for the Action Group in the struggle on Tower Hill itself. And it will be an uphill struggle for TOM to develop mass influence and activity.

## BIG FLAME

In this situation Big Flame has an important part to play. In the months since the rent strike we've become clearer about our role as a political organisation, part of but not submerged in organisations on Tower Hill. We have proved our activity can't be reduced to recruiting paper membership, or to using struggle for our own organisation. We maintain our involvement in activity on the estate whether or not we recruit. We are open to criticism and show our aim is to support and develop mass autonomy.

But we also maintain our political identity. We have a great deal to learn but also a fair bit of experience to offer other militants in struggle. We are more open now about wanting others to join us. And about thinking that Big Flame is a useful focus in Kirkby. During the rent strike we played down our role as a political organisation, partly to avoid seeming to 'compete' with IS which was known inside the rent strike. It was a mistake and would be even more so now. Big Flame can only be useful if it is known, openly involved and states its political position.

We're now starting a Kirkby news bulletin. We hope this will draw together militants who are isolated throughout Kirkby, and be a voice for any new developments. Having articles which locate the national situation in local struggles we can begin to discuss with other militants a strategy which is relevant to the area. As Big Flame inside this we can draw on our experience in the rest of Merseyside and nationally, and make ourselves known and accessible on a mass level as an organisation which will be part of and give support to struggles in Kirkby.

The bulletin is no magic formula. But it might help create a focus which overcomes the ups and downs of struggle in the area. Militants can still maintain contact and have some involvement in struggles even if their own factory or estate is quiet for a while. And lessons can be drawn out in a more general way.

Big Flame has itself developed new forms of organisation to deal with the unevenness of struggle. We have established branches in north and south Liverpool and in Kirkby which can act more flexibly and more superficially over a wide area than the base groups. We'll continue to have base activity on Tower Hill, and central to this will still be our involvement with women on the estate. But we must also be prepared to respond to other struggles in the area, and relate them to that base activity. And it must be possible for us to continue organising and be accessible to others when that particular base area is not mobilised in a mass way.



# PORTUGAL:

## WORKERS FIGHT BACK



*This article does not see itself as a complete introduction to the situation in Portugal. In particular, it says very little about the events in the 'colonies' that contributed an important part to what happened inside Portugal. We would like to thank the Portuguese Coordinating Committee for the help they gave us.*

Announcing his resignation on September 30th, General Antonio de Spínola proclaimed:

"We are not on our way to building the new country Portugal hoped for ... the construction of a democracy is not viable during this systematic assault by political groups against the foundations of our institutions and structures ... in flagrant violation of the April 25 Movement ... in this atmosphere, crisis and chaos are inevitable."

Allowing for understandable bitterness and exaggeration, Spínola's estimate of the situation contained an important kernel of truth. The last five months left Portugal teetering on the brink of political and economic crisis.

"Unemployment is mounting fast and the balance of payments, after years of comfortable surplus, is slipping into the red" recorded the Financial Times.

"Investment projects, both domestic and foreign, are being held over ... the 'revolution' has reduced the previous growth rate of around four per cent to around zero - or even below".

To cap it all, Spínola himself, an important ally of big business and guarantor of capitalist stability, had been forced to resign in circumstances which represented a significant shift in the balance of forces towards the working class. The coup d'état of April 25 had been completely run and controlled by the Armed Forces Movement. By September 28 events had changed and the working class had moved to the centre of the stage. It was working class mobilisation on the barricades of Lisbon which tipped the scales and forced Spínola and his right-wing colleagues out of the ruling Junta. In doing so it had slipped, at least momentarily, beyond the control of Portugal's fragile political institutions.

In six months Portugal has moved a long way. A year ago the country looked like one of Europe's most stable regimes; it is now an open question whether or not the ruling class will be able to effectively contain the country's working class mobilisation and aspirations.

### Who wanted the coup?

Resistance to the coup of April 25 was derisory. Almost overnight, the machinery and support for a fascist regime which had endured for nearly half a century, dissolved. The desire for political change seemed to be unanimous throughout nearly every sector of society. How could a regime which only a day previous seemed to be so secure, undergo such a rapid collapse?

The short answer is that it had been losing credibility among its most powerful supporters over perhaps a decade.

### The revolt of the Armed Forces

On March 15 1974, Prime Minister Caetano, succumbing to pressure from the ultra-right, dismissed his military chief Antonio Spínola. Whatever the official pretext, the whole country knew that the regime's anger had been provoked by Spínola's book, "Portugal and The Future", published the previous month. The book expressed a view common in the armed forces that the colonial question could not be solved by military means.

It was a partial reflection of the fact that the war situation was taking a desperate turn. In September 1973 the PAIGC, now in control of about two thirds of Guinea-Bissau, felt itself strong enough to declare a republic in the liberated areas which almost immediately won the recognition of 84 UN member states. To all intents and purposes the war was over there.

In Mozambique, FRELIMO forces were threatening the crucial rail link between Beira and Rhodesia - and thus the economies of both countries - as well as overspilling into supposedly secure tourist areas. Reports in the foreign press spoke of Portuguese army units refusing patrol duty. And just as telling about the soldiers' disenchantment with the war was the evidence of Portuguese commando atrocities supplied to journalists by junior officers.

Fear was spreading throughout the Portuguese forces that not only were they likely to lose the colonial war, but that in addition they would become the scapegoat for a political failure by the govern-



ment. Senior officers were increasingly concerned by the signs of a breakdown of morale and discipline, anxious that the army might, like the US Army in Vietnam, declare war on itself in a delirium of fragging attacks on NCO's and officers. (*Fragging was the term used to describe the grenade attacks on US Army officers by their angry privates and corporals - which became endemic during the Vietnam war, while the US Army was there in force.*)

Moreover, the more onerous military service became, the more noticeable became the contrast between the living conditions of the troops and the white settler society they were defending.

Finally, the decrease in enthusiasm for the war among the officers partly reflected their own social background. Many professional soldiers were lower middle class and the sons of the better off peasants and small farmers who had seized, when they joined up, one of the only avenues of social advance offered by a traditional society with a primitive educational system. As such they were particularly resentful of the wealthy settlers and profoundly concerned with their own professional advancement.

The final straw was the government's decision in 1973 to ease the shortage of junior combat officers by granting ex-student officers parity of seniority with the regulars after a crash training programme. This struck a severe blow at promotion prospects for the regulars and unleashed the anger which provided the spur for the creation of the Armed Forces Movement (AFM). In this context, Spínola's book and then his dismissal came as a bombshell which politically conscious elements within the army were able to seize upon. Many of the ex-student officers had graduated at the height of the late 60's and early 70's and their political consciousness had matured in the course of campus battles with the police. Another important influence on the army was the propaganda work of the liberation movements which was astutely directed precisely at the contradictions the soldiers saw themselves to be in, fighting in the colonial wars. Prisoners of war were well treated in the often advanced medical facilities created in the liberated zones.

## The Economy and the War

Economically, the colonial wars put an end to the fascist policy of economic self-sufficiency. In exchange for military aid, without which the war could not have continued, Portugal was forced to liberalise the rules governing foreign investment, at home and in Africa.

Initially, foreign funds were channelled into existing Portuguese companies.

Later they went into creating new foreign owned subsidiaries. These changes were politically momentous and ultimately, on April 25, were decisive in determining the course of events. The economic transformation brought about the progressive dislocation of the fascist state from its bases of support inside the ruling class. It split the bourgeoisie.

The external sign of these changes was the dramatic growth in the importance of manufacturing industry and the equally dramatic decline in the importance of the land was accompanied by the eclipse of the traditional political centrality of the owners of the large southern estates, the *latifundia*. Their pre-eminent position of economic power was being eroded, gradually.

The fate of the *latifundia* was not unique; to some extent it was shared by small and medium sized business, much of it being absorbed by the growing strength of native monopolies, especially by financial elements.

Overseas the colonial bourgeoisie was overshadowed by the development of new industries based primarily on the extraction of mineral wealth and controlled by foreign capital - Gulf Oil of America in Angola, Companhia de Diamantes de Angola (UK, US, Belgian and South African capital). In short it was those sections of the national bourgeoisie most threatened by foreign capital, which gave greatest support to the war effort.

To understand why other sectors of the bourgeoisie, represented in particular by ten or so monopoly groups which dominate Portugal's industrial employment, moved against the regime, we need to look at the problems they faced. The case of Companhia Uniao Fabril (CUF), one of the largest, is illustrative.

The fortunes of CUF and Spínola were closely linked; the latter was governor-general in Guine-Bissau, a kind of wholly owned subsidiary of the former. Moreover, Arcadia,

the publishers of *Portugal and the Future* is one of the 100 or so firms in the CUF empire. CUF had been pushing for political change at home and abroad for some time, something which reflected its growing interest in the EEC, and the decreasing importance of the economic ties between Portugal and the colonies. (In terms of imports and exports, Britain does more trade with Portugal than the colonies do. The bulk of colonial investment is increasingly foreign. Portugal failed to enter the imperialist epoch in the sense that it never had a large surplus to export to the colonies, so that its relationship with Africa depended on retaining a classic colonial relationship).

Three problems concerned companies like CUF. Firstly, it was increasingly clear that Common Market entry was essential in order to gain access to a bigger market than the largely underpaid 8½ million population actually in Portugal. But continuation of the war was a constant source of foreign hostility.

Second, the State could not support both the rising cost of the wars, and lay down the infrastructure of development. The regime's policies meant that most firms would never be strong enough to survive foreign competition. Like many large companies, CUF for example, was compelled to create its own employee housing, health facilities and training schemes.

Thirdly, fascism guaranteed in Portugal low wages and a large reservoir of labour power at the disposition of the employer. For mobile foreign capital the attractions were obvious. But so were the drawbacks. In particular it: a) held back the expansion of consumer demand. b) encouraged labour intensive and low productivity operations. c) Compelled thousands of often the most valuable workers to go abroad. Coupled with the size of the armed forces, this was beginning to cause a shortage of young skilled male workers, and contributed to the growing bargaining power of some workers.



*Soldiers lead away a member of the secret police who narrowly escaped a lynching by the workers. April 1974.*



A secondary aspect of the regimes's policies was its inability to provide any legal framework for bargaining. Caetano's attempted liberalisation of the state trade unions following on the enormous strike wave of 1969 had exploded in his face when leftists threatened to take over the leadership of the unions. So, industrial relations in the 70's tended towards confrontation between the state and the workers.

Inflation, meanwhile, was impelling broader sections of the working class into struggle, around an increasingly generalised series of demands. Employers wondered how the strike wave which began in December 1973 would culminate, given the rumours in circulation in the early months of 1974, in a massive show of strength planned by secret workers' organisations for May Day. Ironically, the regime's propaganda about communist schemes for a general strike, can only have added to employers' fears and prompted them to consider the urgency of a solution to the problem of industrial conflict.

By April 1974, key sections of the bourgeoisie had lost confidence in the regime. When Spínola moved, he had the backing of the major monopolies.

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### April 25 - The strike wave

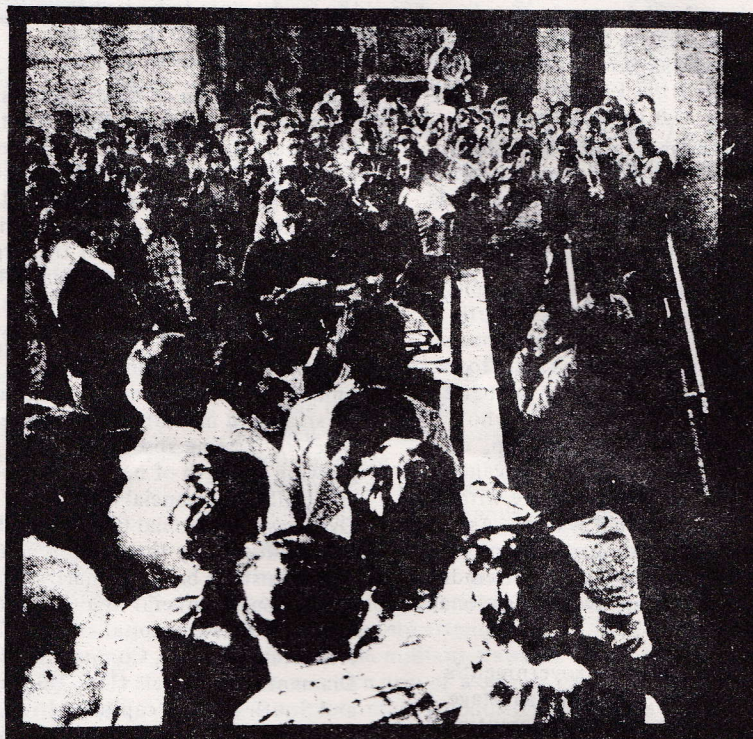
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The coup of April 25 was followed by a week of huge demonstrations and marches through the streets of the main cities. The PIDE (secret police) were chased and rounded up and anti-fascist purges began in the civil administration. It was a week of festivity and rejoicing. During these days the size and strength of the anti-fascist movement left an important impression on many people's minds.

May Day, conveniently only one week after the coup, marked the beginning of a significant change and advance in the situation. It was celebrated by a massive march - estimated at one million people - through Lisbon. It marked the point at which the working class began to take the popular anti-fascist feeling, and their new freedom, off the streets and into the factories and workplaces. While mass actions continued on the streets, the primary focus of the struggle shifted. It's no accident that on May 2 the workers of the state airline company TAP demanded the resignation of the entire administration, or that on the same day, workers on the *Diário de Notícias* - Portugal's largest newspaper - succeeded in expelling their editor, a fascist collaborator. Or that on May 4th, Timex workers began to demand the purging of their factory management.

The following strike wave was built around the campaign for 'saneamento' (purges) and demands for better wages,

conditions and hours. It was reflected in literally hundreds of workplaces; at its height, there were reported to be 32 occupations, 60 strikes, and a further 40 partial strikes - all at one time. In many cases workers went on strike first spontaneously, and only afterwards formalised demands.



A meeting of the state airline workers demanding the resignation of the administration.

The strikes started on the Lisbon underground, quickly followed by steel and the railways. May 4 saw the beginning of mass occupations of empty and partially built houses in Lisbon, by some of the 300,000 families living in the cities' shanty towns. At its peak, seven or eight neighbourhoods were dominated by the occupations and about 4,000 empty houses were taken over. On May 22 the *Financial Times* reported:

"Almost every major firm has been faced with employee claims since April 25."

These included workers' takeovers of a radio station, the Portuguese state airline, and most of Portugal's hospitals - particularly in Lisbon. The Lisbon transport workers successfully sacked all but one of their managers.

Finally, during the last days of the month Lisbon was without mail, bread or public transport. During this period one of the more important struggles took place at the Timex watch factory in the suburbs of Lisbon.

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### Strike and occupation at Timex

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The Timex factory - part of a multinational combine - was opened in late 1970; like many similar light engine-

ring factories it employs a majority of women.

The average age of the women is between 14 and 20. Wages before April 25th. were around Esc. 2,000 per month.

On May 4 a general meeting of the whole factory was called by five engineers to elect a workers' committee. A member of the committee recounts how things developed:

"The meeting elected delegates from every section of the factory, the number of delegates depending on the size of the section. The majority of the committee was made up of women.

"The meeting also outlined a series of demands. First and most importantly, there was a demand to purge six members of the management, three supervisors, an assistant manager, quality control manager and the woman in charge of the canteen. Everybody felt very strongly about these people - they had come to represent the repression that had existed in the factory. It was this demand which really united us and for the first part of the strike we concentrated on it exclusively.

"Many people were, in any case, looking for an excuse to strike. In February we had a two day stoppage which management bought off by dividing off the best organised and most experienced section of the factory."

"But more important than the settlement, an incident during the strike brought home to a lot of us the relationship between Portuguese



workers and the multi-national owners of the factory. The European boss of Timex - a Frenchman - arrived to see what was happening. At one point while he was inspecting the shop floor he got into an argument with a foreman. He ended up by kicking and hitting the foreman in front of a lot of people. The significance of the incident - the attitude of the foreign bosses to the Portuguese - was not lost on them. After this a leaflet was put out secretly in the factory saying that the Frenchman "would never never again be allowed into the factory".

"On May 9th there was an all-night sitting of a meeting between representatives of management, the workers and the Armed Forces Movement. Management stuck out firmly against the purges. The Armed Forces delegate finally presented a compromise solution to a mass meeting at 3 am. The solution was rejected and the strike began.

"During the night violence against some of the management was only narrowly avoided. At one point, management representatives put round a rumour that workers were destroying cars outside the factory. It was an attempt to turn the Armed Forces delegate against us.

"The first phase of the strike lasted five days. During this period another compromise solution was worked out, which involved the sacking of the six managers, pending an enquiry by the Ministry of Labour. This was accepted and we went back to work. The enquiry has never taken place yet.

"During the following week - in which production was constantly halted by work to rules - we formulated our next set of demands over pay, hours etc. We saw the demand for a 40 hour week as crucial; something which couldn't be lost through inflation. At the end of the week - May 21st - we went on strike again. The second strike lasted a month until June 23rd.

"At the height of the strike we organised a march from the factory - which we occupied on June 4th - to the Ministry of Labour, about 10kms away, which 2,000 people took part in."

### State Repression

Elsewhere in the country similar actions were going on as strikes built up to a peak in June. On June 15th, workers on *Diario de Noticias* took over the paper and locked out the management and editorial staff, demanding the dismissal of pro-fascist writers and executives. The paper was produced under workers' control.

June 17th saw a national strike by 30,000 postal workers. The strike - strongly opposed by the CP - was the most serious national stoppage

since April 25th. Several days later working class pressure forced the government to nationalise the Lisbon waterworks, following a dispute between management and workers who occupied the offices in central Lisbon. Military police had to intervene to release directors. For a week the company operated under workers' control.

The last week in June, however, saw the tide begin to turn in favour of the government. State repression began to build up; the postal workers strike was broken after government plans for the militarisation of the postal services. The strike leaders, in calling it off blamed the "divisive manoeuvres of the Communist Party" and its allies. Well they might. The CP had earlier organised a mob who stoned the central post office shouting: "Get back to work - you're threatening democracy."



June 17 - Postal workers on strike in Lisbon "A threat to democracy" - CP.

Several days later the armed forces intervened for the first time in a dispute to break the merchant seamen's go-slow. In the same week the Government published new press laws which threatened editors and publishers with large fines and possible imprisonment for printing 'subversive' articles. The *Timex* worker takes up the story again:

"In the last week or so of our strike it became increasingly difficult to keep people together. The Government and the Communist Party, the press and the TV, all turned against us. There was a lot of anti-strike propaganda. The postal workers had just been 'driven' back to work by a combination of threats and propaganda.

"We found it increasingly hard to get our views across to people. At the beginning two radio stations supported us, but they moved away from us as the strike went on. In the last days groups of people close to the Communist Party and the Armed Forces Movement went to the homes of workers and argued that the strike was

against the national interest. People began to doubt themselves and their convictions. To cap it all, we were getting short of money.

"Finally against the wishes of the workers' committee, management forced through a secret ballot on a compromise deal. Fifty-five per cent voted to accept, forty-five per cent voted against. The result caused uproar, and a new general meeting was immediately called for the following Monday to review the situation.

"At the Monday meeting, people came with placards calling for the continuation of the strike. The feeling of the meeting was that the strike would continue. But then, to everybody's surprise, the vote went against us. There was considerable anger. Nevertheless, we succeeded in doubling the wages and reducing the working week to 42½ hours."

### The Communist Party

A large part of the responsibility for the dampening down of the strike wave lies at the door of the Communist Party. It's no coincidence that the first systematic state moves to break a strike - the postal workers' strike - came at the same time as virulent CP anti-strike propaganda. A party statement about the postal workers read:

"We are facing a conspiracy of the most reactionary elements which have been dislodged from their positions of power by the April 25th Movement. These groups, with the help, unconscious or conscious, of groups of adventurists from the so-called left groups, are trying to push towards a situation of economic chaos, hoping to destroy the democratic conquests already achieved."

The Communist Party's actions created space for the state and the Right to mobilise. It legitimised in the eyes of many workers the right of the state to move in. A similar campaign against the revolutionary left had the same effect, providing cover for right-wingers to start attacking demonstrations and members of the revolutionary left. This, ironically, gave the Right the confidence to begin attacking the CP itself in some places.



Emblem of Partido Revolucionario do Proletariado - one of the groups of the Left attacked by the CP.



Throughout this period the CP has had a fairly clear strategy. Back in the first days of May, the Party had called for an alliance with the military junta and pledged itself to combat 'adventurist extreme-left groups'. Its aim was, and still is, to stabilise the present situation at the level of constructing a bourgeois democracy, and to win for itself a place in the administration. It has constantly argued that the time is not ripe for a socialist revolution in Portugal, and has argued against any moves which might provoke a right-wing backlash.

## The Economy, Purges and Wages

July saw the strike wave begin to drop away, partly as a result of naturally burning itself out, partly because of increasingly systematic state repression, and partly because of the growing groundswell of anti-strike propaganda and agitation. Not in time, however, to prevent the downfall of the first provisional government.

The strikes had created serious problems for the Portuguese ruling class and brought important gains for the working class.

The economy was in deep trouble. The Economist wrote of this period:

"It looks as if by the end of the year Portugal's inflation rate, fuelled by huge wage demands, will be running at 60%."

The Financial Times went on in more detail:

"The average pay increase since April 25 is reckoned to be about 20% but in some sectors like textiles, the jump has been as much as 100%. In other sectors of private industry, separate minimum wage guarantees have been obtained for as much as Esc. 7,000 per month.

"As if this wasn't enough, productivity itself has declined abruptly since the coup - a leading private bank found in a May/June survey of business opinion that the per cent of companies whose activity was below normal had jumped from 20 to 50% in the two months since the coup. Many believe that the feared recession has already arrived in Portugal."

In some companies there had been serious encroachments on 'management's right to manage'. For example at Timex, workers had won a demand that there should be no sackings without the agreement of the workers' council. More generally, anti-fascist demands for purging, undermined and subverted authority relations in the workplaces. In demanding purges, the working class made no distinction between those who repressed them in the name of a fascist regime and those who did it in the name of capitalism. The list of 'fascists' to be purged grew daily. Anyone who obstructed the process was added.

It is not accidental that the demands for purges were the demands most fiercely resisted and fought by the

employers. They were also strongly opposed by the CP, who tried to confine purges to the civil administration.

In a period when the Portuguese ruling class had been seriously weakened and the balance of forces had swung sharply in favour of the working class, the anti-fascist struggle became clearly anti-capitalist. The logic of the balance of forces pushed the situation beyond anything the government was prepared to accept.

The strike wave also revealed another important development. It showed that the Portuguese working class was breaking down the divisions between different sectors of the workforce - men/women, low paid/high paid, skilled/unskilled - and beginning the slow process of working class unification.

This was reflected in demands for equal pay for women, a minimum wage for all workers and large across the board wage increases for all; demands which overcame the divisions between workers and were capable of rallying the entire workforce.

This gradual unification, in turn, reflects the fact that industrialisation in Portugal is very recent - predominantly within the last ten years - and sectionalism has not had time to become entrenched. Furthermore military dictatorship brings with it an identity of interests among all workers - shop floor, administrative and technical. All have been hit by one of the highest inflation rates in Europe, and all have been prevented from organising to defend their interests. By its nature the Portuguese working class is saved some of the splits and divisions which characterise older working classes - as in Britain.

This unification of the class had its parallel at the level of organisation.

## Unions and Workers' Councils

Despite a fairly high level of unionisation, (around two-thirds of the workforce) the coup created an important power vacuum between the traditional fascist union apparatus and the newly mobilised rank and file, which developed and spread faster than the trade union machine could possibly contain. This organisational vacuum has been met in several ways. One has been to create new unions. According to the Financial Times:

"Guesses as to the number of 'unions' now operating range from between 300 and 400".

Many of these are tiny organisations representing special interest groups which have previously been unrepresented or under-represented.

The official trade union movement has also run fast to catch up with the wave of rank and file mobilisations by creating a series of union (factory) delegates, and infiltrating the spontaneously thrown up factory councils. As a whole, though, this rank and file movement has moved too fast for them.

As a result, in dozens of workplaces, a system of workers' delegates and councils has been thrown up, separate from the union delegate structure. They have played a central role in unifying struggles.

Today there is some confusion about them. In many cases there is no clear distinction between union delegates and workers' delegates; they may overlap in terms of personnel; during a struggle the workers' council may be amalgamated with the union delegates. Certainly the two parallel structures are not products of clearly understood or felt ideological positions and in





many cases it seems likely that the workers' delegates will be collapsed into the union delegate structure.

Against this background of growing working class strength, and the virtual paralysis of central government, the Prime Minister, Palma Carlos called for measures which would put more power into the hands of Spínola. He said that unless this was done, the country would continue to slide towards the 'left and chaos'. He was opposed by the Armed Forces Movement, wary of any move which might precipitate a return to military dictatorship. Palma Carlos resigned, saying the country was unworkable. On the surface - a victory for the left.

## Second Provisional Government

If the fall of Palma Carlos was precipitated by the working class, the character of the second provisional government was very much the creation of the Armed Forces Movement. They opposed Spínola's suggested new Prime Minister, and put their own man, Gonçalves in. Overseas, they escalated the de-colonisation programme forcing Spínola to quickly announce independence for Guinea and Mozambique.

This further escalated the crisis for those sectors of the Portuguese ruling class with large interests in the colonies, who were unprepared for a neo-colonial solution (ie economic exploitation without the need for direct rule) and incapable of standing up to foreign competition on their 'home' territory.

Domestically, however, the AFM was still uncertain which way to move. Its programme of establishing a constitutional democracy left it worried by both the growing confidence of the working class and the tendency for sections of the ruling class to look again for a military solution. Moreover the AFM was divided amongst itself on what to do. As a result, it left the situation to Spínola, who set the tone for the new administration in a speech in which he roundly condemned 'lawlessness' and referred to acts of "insubordination taking place everywhere - that can no longer be ascribed to spontaneous reactions."

The first important demonstration of the new toughness of the government came a week later over the first weekend in August. The government ordered the closure of three newspapers, including the organ of the Socialist Party, in retaliation for reports the papers carried of an MPLA solidarity meeting. [The MPLA is the largest Angolan liberation movement.] The papers were only allowed to start printing again after threats of strike action by other journalists.

Two weeks later (August 15th) the government banned a demonstration in solidarity with the MPLA. When

the ban was defied, police opened fire on the demonstration, killing one and injuring many others. It was the first death of its kind since the coup.



Lisbon demonstration in solidarity with the colonial struggle.

At this stage important sectors of multi-national capital began to pull out. In an attempt to meet this threat the government announced an economic strategy which included support for small and medium size undertakings and guarantees and stimulation of investment, with particular reference to foreign investment. It was backed up by new strike laws, outlawing occupations and sympathy strikes and included a compulsory cooling off period.

Meanwhile the working class had its own answer to the flight of capital. At Applied Magnetics (an American firm), the workers occupied the plant for three months when the company tried to close it. At the end - before leaving the factory - they announced they would destroy machinery and material that was not sold, so that it couldn't be moved to another country for a repeat of the same process. There were similar occupations at the French clothing manufacturer of Sogantal and at the French factory of Charmineau.

But the period of the second provisional government was particularly marked by two fairly isolated disputes which showed both the strength and weaknesses of the Portuguese working class movement.

In late August, workers on the Lisbon daily newspaper *JORNAL DO COMERCIO* (Portugal's oldest newspaper), occupied their offices, demanding the purging of the editor Carlos Machado, who had 'mismanaged' the paper and collaborated with the old regime. They had been demanding his sacking since May, when they handed a document listing his managerial mistakes to the Ministry of Labour. The *JORNAL DO COMERCIO* pays some of the lowest wages in the newspaper industry and the

workers showed in their document that if the company couldn't afford to pay higher wages, it was because of mismanagement. Finally, after failing to get satisfaction from the Ministry of Labour, the workforce occupied the building. After a week of occupation, during which they were denounced by the government, the unions and the CP, the army was called in to evict them. The strikers then mounted a round the clock picket.

During the ensuing 24 hour solidarity strike by workers on other newspapers, the CP's own paper *AVANTI* concluded an editorial devoted to the strike with the following slogans.

"We must courageously stand up against solidarity strikes. We must firmly oppose strikes hostile to the government. We must firmly oppose strikes demanding purges."

For three months the CP had been supporting "limited" purges as a central demand. Now, for the first time, it came out clearly against them. *AVANTI* explained that it was ridiculous to hold out for purges now which were in practical terms irrelevant.

At about the same time (August 27th) an even more important strike broke out amongst maintenance men employed by the Portuguese airline TAP. The strike, over pay and conditions, was in direct defiance of the government. Immediately troops encircled the airport. The CP condemned the strike, accusing left-wing groups of acting as pawns for counter-revolutionary forces. After four days the government declared the strike illegal under the new strike law, and moved in the COPCON, the security units of the AFM. The airport was placed under military law and the workforce "militarised". This meant they faced court-martial (a very serious offense) if they didn't return to work work.

Three weeks later the maintenance crews threatened a second strike in protest at the way the first one had been broken up. Immediately the airport was placed under strict military surveillance (September 23rd) and occupied by special paratroops, organised into a TAP Command. Seven or eight leaders were taken away to headquarters by the soldiers; soon afterwards some 3,000 workers staged a demonstration demanding their release. After sometime the men were allowed to go home, but





were told to return for further interrogation. The following day TAP workers were joined by delegations from the Lisnave shipyard and postal workers in a demonstration through the streets of Lisbon, in protest against the arrests and military occupation of the airport.

These disputes are important because they stand out against a background of increasing calls for national unity and attempts to demobilise the situation. For both the bourgeoisie and the working class the question of the time became: could they be isolated or would they become new rallying points? In the case of TAP, the rally of September 24 through the streets of Lisbon had become in a small way a focal point for the Lisbon working class.

These disputes were also a threat to the coming elections, which need to take place in an atmosphere of peace and stability, if they are to gain acceptance.

We now know that during these weeks very similar thoughts passed through the minds of important sections of Portugal's ruling class, which became increasingly alarmed at the inability of the provisional government to come to grips with the country's problems.

A new right-wing ruling class bloc began to emerge, composed of extreme right-wing political groups and important sections of capital. It later became known as the notorious "Silent Majority". Out of this bloc came a desperate plan to try and move the country sharply to the right - re-establishing the authority of the state and Spínola, and de-fusing the popular movement.

The events leading up to the climax of this plan on September 28 - and its failure - are well known. The massive preparations by the Right for a march of the "Silent Majority" through Lisbon on September 28; the planned attempt by extreme right and fascist groups to stage a counter-coup in Lisbon under the cover of the rally; and the popular anti-fascist mobilisation against this. The civilian barricades on the roads into Lisbon and the rounding up of right-wing and fascist sympathisers during the night of the 27th, leading finally to the resignation of Spínola and his replacement by his old friend, General Costa Gomes.

## The Future

On the surface, the events of Sept. 28th to 30th have provoked very little change in Portugal's political life. Spínola has been replaced by another old fascist in the shape of Costa Gomes. The CP at a recent one day conference (Oct 20) pledged the Party to fight "both extremes of the political spectrum".

"The main aim of the conference was to adopt a new constitution ... and to prepare policies leading to the elections for the national constitutional assembly in March."

For many people Sept 28 was merely a continuation of April 25; a further step in the progressive purging of old fascist collaborators, and towards the establishment of a parliamentary democracy.

"It's what should have been done on April 25 only 6 months too late" was one typical view.

Portugal's ruling class must now fall back on a social democratic solution. The political parties of the centre left - particularly the Socialist and Communist Parties - will be supported in their efforts to win the trust and confidence of the working class. Only then will they be in a position to pull it into the general effort for national reconstruction.

Stunts like the 'National Day of Work', called in early October, are designed to bring this message home. Costa Gomes explained the Day of Work as follows:

"We wanted to stimulate the effort that the country must make to reconstruct and develop the national economy. The importance of this initiative is symbolic .. we must work hard, and it's absolutely fundamental that we must have the total co-operation of all."

The government, aided by the AFM, is making maximum political capital out of the victories of April 25 and the strong and widespread anti-fascist feeling. The current slogan of the AFM, repeated incessantly over the radio and TV, is:

"Not Russian, Chinese, Cuban or Peruvian; Our revolution is a Portuguese revolution".

It has met with some success. When soldiers first went to TAP to break the strike, they were clapped. Spínola and Costa Gomes - both right wing quasi-fascists - command considerable respect. When Costa Gomes was appointed President, the reformist parties mobilised a mass demonstration outside the presidential palace. According to one newspaper:

"It was an extraordinary sight; rows and rows of store-keepers, workers from the ship-yards, civil servants, and the middle class in evening dress, applauding the general".

Stacked against the ruling class, however, are the country's economic problems, which are mounting. A necessary part of a social democratic solution is the cash and time to buy off working class aspirations and militancy. The key question remains: can an under-developed country like Portugal find these, at a time of global economic crisis and inflation?

The country's present economic situation is grave; businessmen need a boost in confidence and wage restraint. But will attempts to impose this, polarise the situation and break up the inter-classist, anti-fascist alliance that prevails now? The economy is very dependent on foreign capital, technology and know-how; but what price will international capital demand and to stay in Portugal?

Portugal's bosses also face a working class, which, though still poorly organised, has become familiar with the feeling of its own power. We've tried to show how during this period it has slowly and usually unconsciously, developed its confidence and unity. This class unification is the basis on which the Portuguese

revolutionary movement will grow.

Today, the revolutionary left in Portugal is still small and inexperienced. None of the groups yet shows the possibility of hegemonising even sections of the working class. That process is a long way off. In this situation any tendency to fall back on the simplistic solution of calling for the formation of the Portuguese Revolutionary Party is hopelessly misjudged. The role of the left today is to understand the tendencies which are pushing the Portuguese working class towards revolutionary unification, and to support and build on them.



Lisbon April 1974

## Armed Forces Movement

Finally, any discussion of the future must take into account the Armed Forces Movement. Since April 25th it has clung to its fundamental programme of decolonisation abroad, and constitutional elections at home.

The domestic situation has, however, begun to cause deep fissures inside both AFM and the armed forces. In early September a clear division between the Spínolists and the CP supporters began to emerge inside the AFM over how to cope with the working class. With the ejection of Spínola, this has been patched up, though the basis of the split, primarily between the right in the AFM and the large social democratic centre, remains. Also, since April 25th, the CP has been hard at work building a base inside the Forces; to this extent, and only to this extent, is it possible to say the CP has learnt from the Chilean experience.

Underlying this, the upheaval since April 25th has opened up class divisions within the armed forces.

"Over 70% of the ranks are workers and peasants reluctantly undergoing 4 years military service. The pay is abysmal and the conditions bad."

Agitation in the ranks has, according to one report "forced the AFM to mobilise 2,000 officer members in a frantic campaign to control the ranks."

How important this development becomes, remains to be seen. In the long term the Portuguese revolutionary movement will need the rank-and-file of the armed forces.



# Autonomy & the Social Struggle

by some members of East &  
West London Big Flame

In this article we present an analysis of revolutionary politics outside the industrial factory.

We are concerned to understand the relationship between struggles in the 'community' (e.g. squatting, housing), in everyday personal relationships, in education, the media, service sectors such as hospitals, — between all these and fights around the point of commodity production. We can regard all these areas as involved in the reproduction and maintenance of labour power for capital, and in the creation of consumer markets necessary for the survival of capitalism. We do not regard struggles in these areas as either split off from or subsidiary to struggles inside the industrial factory. This does not mean, however, that we think that all or any struggles in these areas are of equal significance; the potentialities of mass anti-capitalist struggle emerging in any particular area will depend on the historical period.

Our analysis comes from a consideration of changes in capital that have taken place since the second world war, and of working class initiatives and responses in this period, including our own formation as revolutionaries. This analysis is preliminary, and is part of a continuous process of discussion and clarification within Big Flame.

Because struggles outside the factory have previously been regarded as subsidiary, there is a whole hidden history of working-class resistance to be understood and learnt from. This article presents a framework for such an understanding.



St. Pancras GLC Rent Strike 1960

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## THE WELFARE STATE

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The period between the two world wars was one of bitter class struggle, economic slumps and booms, mass unemployment, revolution and fascism. By the end of World War II a restructuring of the relationships between the working-class, capital and the state had taken place.

The period towards the middle and end of the war — despite wartime regulations — was one of increasing working-class anger and militancy, e.g. among miners, women workers in the engineering industry, and in the mass squatting movements of the homeless as the troops returned. The war made possible the restructuring of capital in Britain — the growth and massification of the engineering, aero, and motor industries in part based on the wartime arms economy, and the growth of monopoly capital and U.S. imperialism's expansion in Europe. This provided the economic basis for a new 'prosperity'.

This re-organisation of capital allowed it to provide for some of the demands of the working-class. The social legislation and provision of this period can be seen in part as a response to these demands — demands which had been made unsuccessfully during previous periods. These 'benefits' have in turn been used by capital in its attempts to keep the working-class tied in the process of production. There are several ways in which this has happened.

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## CHANGED USE OF THE WAGE

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Before the war, every time capitalism had hit a crisis point, the employers used to respond by *cutting wages* and thereby reducing their costs. But this only made the crisis worse, as people couldn't afford the goods produced. *The changes in the industrial policy of the ruling class after the war, revolved around the changed use of the wage.* In the post war period they were to use wages as a means of driving the system forward. They tried to use worker's needs for a higher standard of living to develop a mass consumer industry, to promote competition, to stream-line the system and concentrate its capital resources in fewer hands.

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## CONSUMERISM

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The Keynesian economics of the post war boom tried to integrate the working-class within the system by tying the class more closely to its own aims — not only through the use of the wage as a motor for production, but through the improvement of welfare benefits and their use to stabilize capitalism, through the promise of upwards social mobility via rising wages, mass education and the use of the immigrant workforce for lower-grade jobs; through the consolidation of the nuclear family as the unit for domestic bliss and sexual consumption; through the promise of freedom contained in the 'permissive society';



through the promise of better living conditions in the postwar housing schemes; and through the promise of more consumer goods as the domestic market for manufactured goods was developed and credit became readily available. The boom enabled the capitalists to offer more because they had more; it looked as though everyone could have their home, their family, their car, and their television — 'you've never had it so good'.

These promises were made in the belief that social democracy and a growth economy could satisfy the needs of the population and lead everyone to a happy, class conflict-free society. At the same time the ideology concealed deep inequalities and continuing hardship for many people, and a developing disillusionment with and resistance to the new forms of social life.

Working-class demands for health, education, equality, sexual freedom and economic security were being manipulated in capital's interest — and people developed their own, at first personal and subconscious, mechanisms of resistance.

## RE-COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING-CLASS AND DE-SKILLING OF WORK

Another change has been in the actual composition of the working-class in industry. One of the great strengths of the working-class in the previous era was its use of skill. The early labour movements were based on, and led by, skilled workers. They had pride in the job, and a consciousness of themselves as producers; the demand for 'workers control' grew naturally from their situation, and they utilised the necessity of their skills to gain a large degree of control of the work process, limiting capital's power. To break that control, the ruling class had to gradually *de-skill* many sections of the work force, subordinating workers to machines they controlled, so they could dictate the pace and conditions of work. This process, which grew out of the assembly line and the car factories, has now spread to traditionally skilled jobs like ship building, and even further beyond, to many white collar jobs destroying the meaning of work for more and more people. The nature of this work has also meant that women and immigrant workers have become an important part of the de-skilled workforce, bringing in a different consciousness to that of the white male worker and thus posing new forms of struggle. This is not merely a question of the changing balance of sectors within the class but a decisive change in its character and activity e.g. black immigrant workers have little of the "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" hangup.

Forced to be shit workers they reject the idea of job satisfaction, or responsibility at work. Women at work, because they have to do two jobs — one at home and one at work — can also bring in demands like socialised free childcare into the workplace and see how one week's wage rise is next week's price rise, because they have to do the shopping.

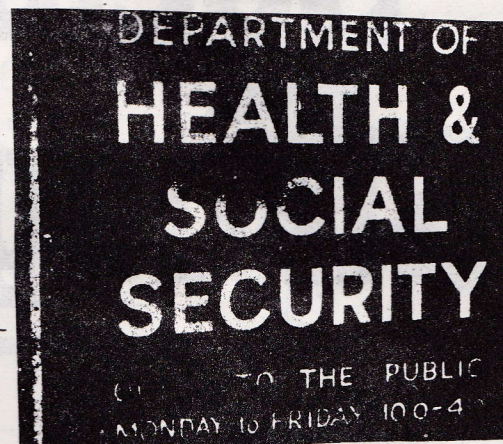


## STANDARDISATION AND MASSIFICATION IN SOCIAL LIFE

Social institutions such as schools, hospitals, new housing estates, were tied closely to the production system. This was partly achieved by applying the mode of that production — standardisation, profitability — to life outside the industrial factory, thus creating the *social factory*.

Education is rigidly structured to reproduce the class system, any creative involvement beyond primary level is lost in a morass of exams, grading, streaming, and cramming. At a higher level, it becomes increasingly tied to business; dependent for money for research — churning out the standardised robots the system requires. Hospitals are increasingly run on factory lines, it's cheaper that way: patients are treated like machines only

not quite so valuable, babies are produced by induction to fit in with the day shift and the consultant's rounds — it's cheaper than employing more staff or providing better facilities. The welfare system also increases the power of the state; by introducing a comprehensive policy of national insurance, pensions, social security benefits it also made sure that the non productive sectors of the economy were under its control, influence and discretionary powers. Through the welfare system, social workers, health



visitors and baby clinics, the welfare state has *attempted* to maintain the family as an instrument of capitalist production.

The principles of universalism which Marx had seen being extended into factory life were now being extended into every area of social existence.

None of these changes were met without protest. As much as people were anxious to move out of their slums and overcrowded homes, they resented the authority who uprooted them without consultation. Local councils engaged in this 'good work' were unable to understand the hostility they generated as 'us' and 'them' spread to include the bureaucracy as well as the bosses. Many refused to leave their old homes and communities and had to be forcibly evicted.





and bought out. But we have to recognise as political not only such overt acts of resistance but the slow, subversive undermining of respect for traditional standards in social life, which social democracy had made clearly a part of the money market.

Attitudes of pride in the house have to change when you have no sense of belonging in the house. The wallpaper starts peeling: "why don't the council fix it?" These subtle changes in attitude are the core of a new resistance - the basis of a new balance of power.

## CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

During this period the family changed in many ways. It has always been the place where women produce and service labour-power.

The needs of industry and keeping costs down has also led to the break-down of the old working class communities, putting people at the mercy of the planners who have created vast estates which through their very structure tend to isolate people and bind them tighter together inside the immediate family. The family is an institution which is the centre of social production itself, where women

The growth of the welfare state, the break-up of the old communities and the development of new housing estates, the new waves of migration and immigration in response to the relocation of industry, all reduced the economic dependence of people on their families - particularly old people on younger ones. At the same time as wider family ties were loosened, people were forced to look to their immediate families to satisfy all their emotional needs. These changes have particularly affected women, often isolated in their homes, with the highest rates of suicide and depression. At the same time, the break-up of the traditional family and community structures has loosened the hold of traditional morality.

## THE END OF THE ILLUSION

The postwar boom and the promises of the welfare state were only a temporary truce. The struggles of the working class and peasants in third world countries, together with the growing strength of national bourgeoisies in those countries relative to the United States, Japan, the EEC and Britain, began to threaten the supply

At the same time the general decline in the rate of profit in British industry led to the export of capital to countries where the rate of profit was higher and to investment in other areas in Britain where money could show a quick return, like commodity speculation (which again put up the price of basics) and property speculation which led to more expensive housing - higher mortgages for those of the working class who could afford to buy a home, and higher rents. The promises of the postwar rehousing fell short as the reality of living in the new estates did not live up to expectations: communities were broken up and people experienced the isolation, cramped conditions, and generally anti-human design of the new high-rise developments. This was exacerbated by the crisis in the social services. The promise of satisfaction in the family also failed to materialize.

Mass education since the war had held out the promise of upwards social mobility and increased job status and satisfaction to many working-class and lower-middle class kids; it also seemed to promise to middle class women that they would have equal opportunity with the men. The frustration of these aspirations and the realization that the schools and universities were little more than production lines for the labour power required by capital led to a change in the consciousness and a growth in the militancy of students; at the same

time schoolkids who experienced the same contradictions - exacerbated in the cities by cutbacks in government spending and the shortage of teachers - reacted with truancy, indiscipline, and school strikes.

All the other promises of the postwar period have in one way or another fallen short: the promise of a better life in Great Britain for immigrants who found themselves landed with worse jobs and pay and housing than white workers, and found themselves the scapegoats for social anger; the promise of sexual freedom and satisfaction which became increasingly contradictory to the needs and structure of the nuclear family. Also, the need of capital to extend its markets has led to areas which were



produce and service for free the human labour power that the factories and offices need, where the woman is therefore subordinate, dependent on the husband and accordingly often antagonistic to his struggle at work. It is the centre where obedience, self control and the repression of sexual desire are perpetuated, where the children are disciplined for the cruel world of work and competition under capitalism. The family also serves as the incentive for keeping up commodity consumption: people work to get things for their home and family and are encouraged to find their identity in their family rather than in their class. This makes it more difficult for class solidarity to develop. The relationships within the family act as a harmless buffer and safety valve from the world of competition outside.

of cheap foods and raw materials on which the boom depended. And internally the need for the state to control our social lives was the result of working-class strength in this country pushing and struggling for a better life, thus continually threatening economic crisis. This was reflected in the continuing balance of payments crises of the 60's.

The industrial militancy and new demands of the working class in Britain led to the capitalists trying to recoup the profits they lost through wage rises by the use of inflation (and rising prices) as a weapon against the working class. Manufactured goods which have a higher rate of profitability because they are more capital intensive have not risen in price as much as more basic labour intensive items like food, transport and housing which hit housekeeping money hard.





previously private, such as emotional and sexual relationships, being increasingly turned into commodities. The growth of porn movies, sex supermarkets, the sale of vaginal deodorants, and the continuous use of sex in advertising mean that instead of the joy and satisfaction they are promised, people are made to experience themselves more and more as objects, usually inferior to the sexual ideals that are held in front of them. The emotional and sexual repression built into the structure of the family and education continue to contradict the promise of social freedom held out by ads and TV.

By the end of the 60's British capital is caught in the contradiction of a developing resistance to the social factory in the family, in schools, universities and colleges, in the rebellion and 'drop out' culture of young people, which creates demands for more and more public expenditure; and an international escalation of the struggle in the factory — a refusal to 'be productive' or to accept less than a yearly increase in real wages. The state is caught within this contradiction: in order to maintain private industry it is forced to pour money into the private sector — which means it has less to put into the public sector which will keep things ticking over adequately to service production. As a result there is a *social crisis* — housing, education, childcare, health services, are all examples where the breakdown is occurring; and there are renewed emphases from the Right on traditional values of family responsibility and 'community' care to fill the gap, e.g. the attack on abortion. In addition this period has increasingly seen the use of inflation as a way for capital to recoup from the working class in price increases what it loses in the factory. The result of all these developments is a decisive change in the nature of the class struggle, as new sectors of the population have felt the rub and have been drawn into the struggle in new ways, sometimes in a major role.

## RESISTANCE IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

These developments in the welfare system have affected the conditions experienced by workers in the public service sector. Previously the jobs of nurses, teachers, social workers etc. tended to be seen as a vocation, where you didn't mind being underpaid because you were doing "good work". But what has happened in recent years, for example in the hospitals, is that cutbacks in spending, job regrading, deskilling and the factory-like nature of the work has made those employed there feel more and more like ordinary "workers" having to work harder and harder with supervisors always on their backs; the rundown of resources and

increased breakdown of services has made it more difficult for them to feel that they are doing a good job or even a job worth doing. A similar change in consciousness has taken place among teachers and social workers who have the jobs of patching up the mess in the homes and schools, and among other workers who have been expected to accept poor pay and conditions in the name of doing a public service. The result has been a number of actions by service workers: the strikes by nurses, hospital auxiliaries and technicians, civil service workers, postal workers, and council employees, and the recent militancy of teachers and playgroup workers. There have even been actions by junior hospital doctors and junior management at the BBC, where a similar public service mentality is beginning to break down. As there has been a considerable growth in the public service sector and in the service sector generally (clerical and secretarial jobs, retail and advertising, night cleaners, transport, etc) and as these service sectors have become increasingly massified within the social factory, they now represent an important section of the recomposed working class and can be expected to play a significant part in future struggles.

## AUTONOMY

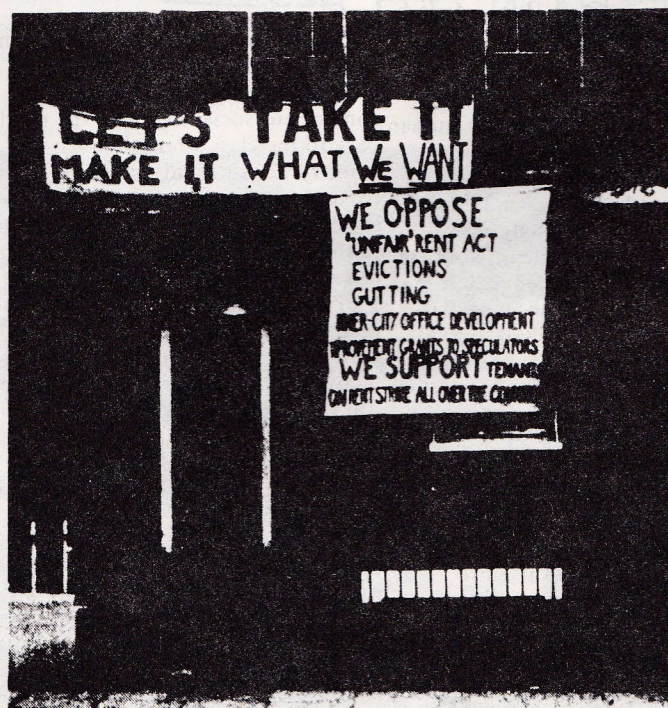
We would say that on the whole, the Left has failed to grasp and learn from these changes, or at least *their consequences for political theory and practice*. When the world-wide capitalist crises re-emerged in the 1960's, they were left with the old slogans and programmes; unrelated to the new relations between capital, state and working-class.

The new form and content of struggles need to be governed by the concept of *working class autonomy*. Autonomous struggle happens when people fight back against the *new ways that capital is developing*.

Refusing to let their needs, demands and organisation be used by and incorporated into the system, *fighting for our needs on our terms — not capital's*. Therefore the autonomous struggle must understand and fight against the new relations of production. This means fighting back in a way which is not just a defensive reaction, which although anti-capitalist initially, is not autonomous because it puts forward no alternative way of developing the struggle, a way which capitalism cannot use against us.

Such refusals — the refusal to accept the role of housewife; the refusal to accept discipline at school, or the content of school 'work' itself; the refusal to be sexual objects; the refusal to accept bad housing and the run-down of hospitals; the refusal to accept means-tests, or to pay rent by running up arrears; such refusals are not 'merely passive' but are the bases on which ongoing autonomous organisation will be built.

Sometimes the response of the working class has been on an individual or spontaneous level e.g. vandalism, shoplifting and the growth of petty crime, taking drugs, getting into rent arrears, buying a freezer so you can get meat wholesale, etc. But there is a potential for collectivity in the structure of the estates and cities, and in many cases the response of the working class has been collective and class conscious, even if limited and starting in some cases from a social democratic perspective. For example, the response of the working class to dearer and worse housing and living conditions has been rent strikes, mass squats, road blocks to stop traffic





where children need to play, and demonstrations against poor transport facilities. In many of these struggles women have come to the fore. Rising prices have been fought by campaigns against supermarkets and by food



co-ops. The general rundown in welfare benefits has been fought in a variety of ways: campaigns to prevent the closure of a local hospital or school, or against part-time schooling, for better childcare facilities, for unemployment benefit through the claimants unions, and for better conditions by those who are institutionalised e.g. patients in mental hospitals and prisoners. The intensified struggle around sexuality and personal relations has been manifested in strikes against anti-sexual shift hours, women organising against wife-battering and for abortion, the sexual rebellion of teenagers, etc. The students' and women's movements, which emerged in the late 60's, have opened up whole new areas of struggle because of the particular contradictions which they experience. They have shown that the way capitalism seeks to control our conditioning and our consciousness is as crucial to its survival as the other more obvious forms of control it exercises over our lives.

This understanding has been reflected in struggles for different education, different relationships, and different forms of health treatment which give us more control over our bodies. It has also thrown up new forms of organising in particular the small leaderless group in a network.

All these struggles that have developed are autonomous in the sense, that they assert *our* needs as opposed to the false needs that capital tries to impose on us; *our* need for children's playspace as opposed to capital's need to house us as densely and uniformly as possible; *our* need for basic necessities as opposed to short-lived consumer goodies; *our* need for an education which is relevant to our own needs and development, not to the needs of our future employers.

In the industrial situation, the politics of autonomy means the assertion of our own needs as against the needs of the bosses. We don't *need* to become wage slaves, but under capitalism we have to because we need money in order to live. Capital doesn't need people, it needs human labour power. In fact people as people often interfere with its smooth running. If you want to stay in bed with someone you love, you'll be late for work. If you get friendly with your workmates you'll resist being moved around. If you feel under the weather you have a day off. Sometimes you just don't feel like working at all. But to fit in with the needs of capital we



have to surrender our identities as people and become just labour power, that's what we get paid for. It's obvious that enjoying your life and working ten hours a day at Fords are contradictory, but the contradiction is obscured as soon as you identify yourself not as a person but as a worker, as human labour power, trying to sell your labour for the highest price you can get. So we have rejected collective bargaining procedures and productivity deals which have offered us more money for more work; and we have rejected the role of the unions as mediators and go-betweens in setting up these deals. *Our* aim is to earn more and work less; it is an aim which directly opposes the needs and threatens the survival of capitalism.

It follows from our analysis of the changes, that we reject the rigid distinction between 'political' and 'economic' struggles. Yet it is on this basis that most of the left works. They see the day to day struggles in the factories and the communities as sectional, defensive, inevitably reformist, 'economist' etc. Politics for them is an outside process to do with parties, governments, demands directed to the State, with socialist ideology and so on. But the old categories are redundant once the State becomes collective capitalist, extending the tentacles of production into social life, and attempting to incorporate and use the class struggle and the wage as part of the way the system develops. The day to day struggle has become *political in itself*. This doesn't mean that it is automatically revolutionary, or that people automatically reach a higher form of class consciousness. But it does mean that revolutionaries must find ways of advancing demands and ways of fighting that go *beyond* the defensive sectional way the daily struggle is fought, to turn what is already political into a class-wide revolutionary challenge to capital, moving constantly towards socialism. Autonomy is the revolutionising of the daily struggle and the assertion of the total separation of working class interest from the 'national' capitalist interest. It means a political perspective which stops apologising for its disruption of capitalist society and *starts organising the disruption*.

The difference between 'revolutionary' and 'reformist' cannot be made in many instances at the *level of demands*. This again reflects the split between politics/economics, defensive/offensive. The fight for collective childcare on an estate or a health centre can be revolutionary or reformist. It depends on *how it's fought for*. Working class struggles cannot be measured purely in terms of the objectives achieved or demanded — it is a question of what is learnt in the process of struggle. Revolutionary understanding will be learnt and consolidated in the way people organise if the struggle is fought autonomously.





Organisational autonomy is just as important as political content. It comes from people directing and controlling their own struggles, and fighting them on a *mass level*, rather than delegating the struggle for representatives to fight for them, or allowing the struggle to be directed by reformist organisations, who will fight in only a partial or defensive way.



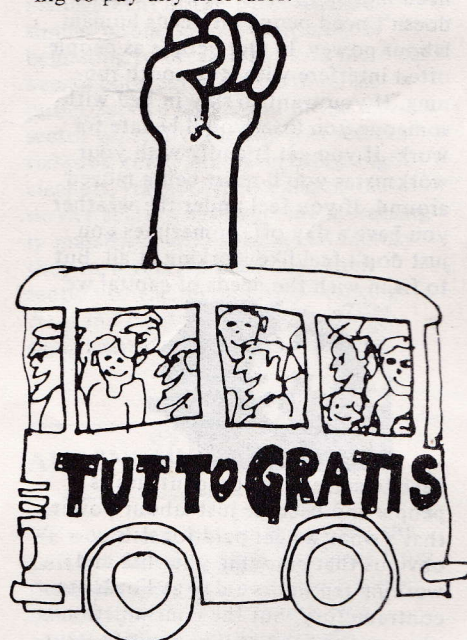
Miners and students at Essex, 1972

Life inside and outside the factory are not separate components; particularly as capitalism moves towards a world-wide slump, struggles in one area crucially need the support of the other. The rent strikes, the students occupying their colleges, the mothers blocking the road — all might need the different power and experience of industrial workers. But the successful strike, the successful factory occupation, the struggle against the dole, is increasingly one that goes, and *must* go, beyond the gates — that reaches into the community — involving people whose interests are naturally allied to theirs. The miners showed us what a socialised struggle is; the miner wives were organised, the community involved and utilised as power bases to conduct the struggle from. Of course, during this social crisis many people are just going under; many women are just cracking up under the strain, or looking towards some fascistic ideology for the solutions to breakdown — witness S.P.U.C., the Cowley wives incident, the support for the National Front in areas of poor housing and education facilities . . . The white male worker can no longer afford to ignore the needs and potential power of these sections of the class.

This is not to say that the immediate interests of all exploited classes are the same, or that they can be 'argued' into supporting one another. It was probably immediately necessary for the Cowley wives to organise together *against* their husbands' refusal to talk to them and to recognise them as having any role in their struggle. Only after this could any kind of unification take place *against the company's* provocation and failure to provide a regular income, whether there was work for the men or not.

We can get a sense of how autonomous struggles in the social sphere could spread and develop in this country from the example of Italy, where there have been a series of mass squats, and where whole communities

have got together to make collective payments of electricity bills and to fix bus fares *at their own prices*, refusing to pay any increases.



We can see from Chile how the working class in a revolutionary period has to be prepared to take over and run for itself all areas of social life from food distribution to education as the ruling class resorts to economic sabotage and withdrawal in its attempts to regain control. It is in this period that the forms of organisation of social and factory life emerge that express our real needs.

## WOMEN'S AUTONOMY

We have to recognise the ways in which the working-class under capital is divided against itself in a hierarchy of labour-power. This means that autonomous movements of exploited groups are an essential pre-condition to the strengthening of the class struggle as a whole.

The history of the womens movement is the history of consolidating all the individual actions of women into a combined attack against the way that we are specifically exploited in the capitalist hierarchy of work. In the beginning, many of the struggles seemed unrelated, and diffuse. The womens movement had its origins as much in the equal pay strikes and claimants unions, as in the more middle class emphasis on changing personal roles and relationships, trying to deal with the contradictions of "equal" intellectual training and motherhood. With the growth of the womens movement, the expression of mass activity, the link between these seemingly different womens struggles became more clear. With the strength of the movement, women had the confidence to analyse from their own experience in struggle, what is the







# WOMEN DEMAND WAGES

relation of womens labour to capital, and how can we effectively organise against it. Women have seen how these struggles are connected.

For womens work is essentially the same — whether waged in the home, or unwaged outside. The job of servicing people — getting them together enough to go back to work — is the same for all of us. All working class women do the work of reproducing labour power — cooking, washing, mediating emotional tension, mediating sexual tension of family members after a horrendous day at work.

This sexual division of labour where womens work is strictly defined and usually unrecognised is not new under capitalism. Capital has just reproduced it stronger and more formally in its hierarchical division of work.

Because of this, Big Flame understands that the struggle of women, - for collective childcare, contraception and abortion, against rent and food increases for healthier relationships, more wages - is not divisive or diffusive of working class struggle, and necessary for the unification of the class. The same is true for other autonomous movements that reflect the hierarchy of labour - notably those of black people and gay people. We know these movements are important, but because the writers of this article haven't had direct experience of these struggles, we prefer not to make a tokenistic attempt to explain them.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT MUST BE REVOLUTIONISED

It follows from all this that we don't make the same distinction that many left groups make between "politics" and "everyday life". It's important to see the links between economic and personal life and to recognise that people's daily experience of capitalism determines their political consciousness and their political actions. What we mean when we talk about revolution is not just a change in the ownership of the means of production but a total transformation of all social relations, and what we want to transform we will have to fight to transform. Unless we are continually aware what we are fighting for, and flexing our muscles in those kinds of struggles, we are left with a very economic and mechanistic view of revolutionary struggle — and the best that could come out of that is an economic and mechanistic revolution. The strength of the autonomous struggle lies in people recognizing the oppression of capitalism however it affects them most acutely, and getting together to fight for their own needs. The definition of a revolutionary struggle is not limited to a struggle which confronts the bosses on the shopfloor, but is any struggle which builds up the solidarity, strength and communist consciousness of the working class, while at the same time

the power of the bosses is reduced and their power to encroach in our lives is lessened.

The fact that we in Big Flame do not separate politics from everyday life means that we do not set ourselves up as "political experts" above the class struggle and handing down tablets bearing the "correct political line" to masses who need our guidance. We have continually a lot to learn from the masses about what they experience and how; it's important to see the ways the working class is finding of organising and fighting back, and to draw out the revolutionary potential in them. Our role as revolutionaries is to help strengthen those elements of the fighting back which are revolutionary — not to dictate to working class people about how they should fight with dogmatic guidelines drawn from different or past situations which may not be applicable. There is a tendency among left groups to act our own lives apart — the "missionary" trip, as if the revolution was something we need to do for other-people. This approach leads to dry, mechanical thinking, not rooted in our own experience or anyone else's, and theory mystified, placed above us in the realm of "economics" instead of in the sphere of daily life. But people will not swop one set of bosses, experts, authority figures and moralisers for another, even if they call themselves revolutionaries.

To avoid this, it's important to have a sense of how we as revolutionaries are part of the struggle and part of the masses; historically our



involvement in the politics of Big Flame grows out of our struggles as women, as students, claimants and workers mostly in the servicing institutions (schools, hospitals, media, etc.). Seeing what we need to fight for ourselves helps us to understand the autonomous struggles of others; and also makes us want to fight for what we want to change now, as well as for long term objectives. The fact that liberation only comes with socialist revolution does not mean that we have to wait till then before we start to free ourselves.

This fundamental perspective has been grasped by the independent movements, and their struggles have forced us to re-examine ourselves, our attitudes to race and sex, the ways we live and relate to each other and the ways in which we see the struggle developing. The years since the late 60's have seen the growth of many

movements, few of them self-consciously 'political', which have represented a subversive challenge to law, morality and behaviour in general: alternative films and law centres, underground newspapers, collective living and childcare, etc. Many of those movements have remained individualistic or static in isolation or reached the dead end of 'exemplary' politics — we can't smash the family simply by building alternatives to it. But we have a lot to learn from these movements. Without setting up another set of uniform oppressive standards for the way we live, *the revolutionary movement must itself be revolutionised*. We want to revolutionise our own lives, not as an answer in itself, but to help us develop a sense of what we are fighting for and to have some kind of foretaste of the possibilities life could have after capitalism. The struggle is

long and hard, and we need to be reminded that this life which the capitalists make us hate, can be beautiful. Unless our political involvement is enjoyable, unless being active means affecting how we live, unless it offers real advantages, it is not worth doing, for us, or for the mass of working people. Our autonomous struggle is to affirm, not only in what we fight for, but in how we fight, the right of everyone to a communal social life, free from necessity, a life which is collective, free and creative, healthy and happy.



## WHAT THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH SAYS ABOUT BIG FLAME

# Shop-floor power bid at Ford's

THE Ford management's offer of a new pay and regrading deal could help re-establish the authority of the unions in Dagenham, Halewood and many of the company's 22 plants in Britain.

This is what really has been lost in the last three years of recurring strife. The latest unofficial strike in the press shop has brought all car production to standstill and by tomorrow 28,000 of the 54,000 Ford workers in Britain will be laid off.

A surprise move by Syd Harrold, who is a

## AS THE UNION CAVES IN THE FIGHT BEGINS

Fire-raising? A headline from a "Big Flame" news-sheet.

as August they were on an unofficial strike over the question of discipline. The unions' district officials and shop stewards, who it sees as the first if lowest, rampart in the system.

Big Flame, using shop floor jargon and crude shop floor humour, identifies itself with the lowest and most disaffected worker — "us poor sods," is a frequent phrase or as they're sometimes known "Ford casual workers" from the frequency of lay offs.

On the Ford shop floors political warfare has intensified remarkably in the past year. The plants have been turned into political battlefields by industrial agitators. The battle is highly concentrated at Dagenham and Halewood.

The lower and most vital layer of company management, the foremen and supervisors, are totally demoralised. As recently as August they were on an unofficial strike over the question of discipline. They alleged that company policy was failing to back up their floor authority by turning a blind eye to unruly behaviour on the lines. The incidence of assaulted foremen has been increasing.

Its slogan is an apt one in direct relation to its literature which is almost too incendiary to be believed, with every incident over small seized as an agitation vehicle for war on the bosses and capitalism.

The pamphlets disclose a central editorial guidance and reveal intelligence faster than a month's union bulletins. These exchange and are often more than a month behind events. Literature at Halewood often tells of events in Vauxhall, Luton, the day before.

Mr. Moss Evans, Transport and General Workers' Union car chief, and Ford plants chief, joint negotiator, is dubbed "Jack Jones's errand boy." The social contract is a "social con-trick." "Refuse," "Reject," "Demand" are recurring head-line leaders.



# BREAKING THE CONTRACT

## SHOP-FLOOR POWER AT DAGENHAM

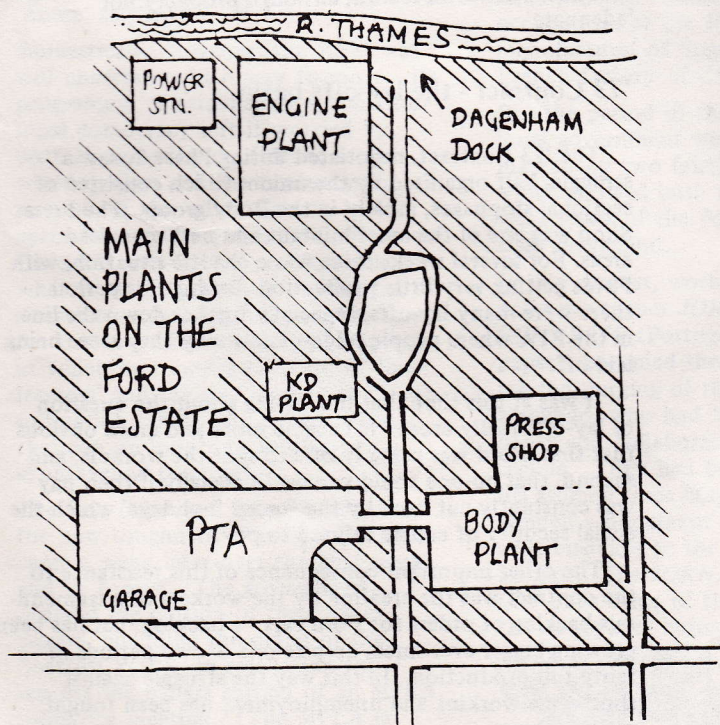
In September 1974, Ford workers made the headlines in the run-up to the General Election, with the 3½ week Press shop strike which was successful in breaking their own contract only 7 months after it started. The Ford strike was one of many strikes that pushed the balance of class forces more in favour of the working-class at this time. Most of the problems facing the Ford Motor Company centered on Dagenham. This analysis of the events leading to the breaking up of the contract is written by the Big Flame Ford Dagenham Group, which has been active since the beginning of 1973.

Ford Dagenham is the biggest factory complex in Britain with 27,000 workers employed in many different plants. It is situated on the eastern edge of London and has its own dock on the Thames, its own railway, power station and foundry. There are three main plants:

The Engine Plant - which is one of the biggest engine plants in the world. In a record year it produced 1.25m. engines, or one engine every 27 seconds.

The Body Plant, consisting of the Press Shop (where panels are stamped out), Sub-assembly (where parts of car bodies are welded together), and the Body in White (where the shell of the car is finished off).

The Paint, Trim and Assembly (PTA) where the car is painted, has all its interior fittings put in, and where the rest of the car is assembled - engine, suspension, seats, etc.



Approximately two-thirds of the workforce in all three plants are immigrants from the old Empire. Of these about two-thirds are black - mostly West Indian - and the rest are mainly Indian and Pakistani. Of the white workers, many of them are migrants from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the under-developed areas of England.

It has always been the case at Dagenham that most of the workers were migrants or immigrants, though the predominance of black workers has only occurred since the late '60s. This composition of the workforce has a fundamental effect on organisation at Dagenham, as has turnover which is now about 50% a year. The workers come from all over North, East and South London, as well as from places outside London, as far away as Southend. Journeys to work of 15 to 20 miles are commonplace.



## Our approach to organising -

The Dagenham Big Flame group has been working continuously at Dagenham since the beginning of '73. The work grew naturally from the work of the group at Halewood, near Liverpool, which has been working there since 1971.

Our starting point has always been to understand and analyse what we consider to be the direction and content of the struggle of the working-class at Dagenham. The form this struggle takes is complex and often contradictory. What we try to *identify* are the actions and demands that break with a reformist perspective, and then *generalise* them throughout the whole of Fords - to other sections, other shifts, other plants. No-one else does this - except very occasionally.



If there is action in one part of the factory complex, there is a general lack of information about what is happening. The grapevine is not always accurate, and rumours are rife. The fundamental job we are doing at this stage is to provide facts and analysis about every struggle in the complex. There is no other reliable way most workers can find out what has happened somewhere else. There is no contact between stewards of the different plants, and even within the same plant communications are bad. Only a few stewards regularly contact the steward on the opposite shift



## Leaflets.

Our main presence at Dagenham has been through our leafleting. In the leaflets we try to present both information and analyses of the situation, trying to probe the intentions of the company - in particular how they can use these situations to their advantage and turn them against the workers - and trying to offer a possible strategy for fighting the bosses and increasing working class power at any given time.

The situation and the possibilities change completely from week to week - even from day to day. It's essential to be right inside the struggle in order to have any possibility for analysis and presenting tactics and strategies.

In all this work we are analysing the actual content of the class struggle, which involves a wider view than even just a factory-based analysis. So we do not pose 'correct lines' or 'revolutionary demands' that come from a revolutionary programme from some other historical period. Through a regular presence in the struggle and the frequent leafletting at the gates, our object is to spell out the political meaning, in a revolutionary way, of the already political demands of the shop floor. (e.g. the recent wage demands which were based on need, on the shop-floor's own sense of power and timing, and politically set against the social contract). Explaining capital's strategy in the present situation is part of this attempt to politicise the fight in Fords.

## BIG FLAME FORD SPECIAL

NO. 2 DAGENHAM JULY 1974



**BODY, PTA, & ENGINE PLANTS**  
**LAY-OFFS**      **HOME LIFE?**  
**SAFETY**        **STRATEGY**  
**UNIONS**       **TACTICS**

Our intention is also to help to develop the emerging forms of organisation, which is why we emphasise what we see as the strengths and weaknesses of the struggle in our leaflets, and why we try to generalise actions which will strengthen the class.

These may variously be the form of action being taken by individual sections (e.g. the blockade of the final lines in the PTA which took place in July '74, see below), or the demand for 'eight hours pay, work or no work', which arose from the Body Plant shop floor in September '73, or the strong feeling for more money which was evident in the summer of '74.

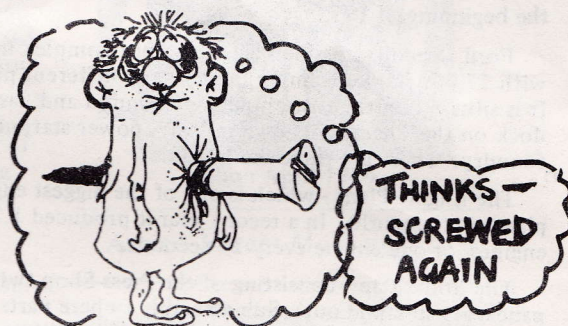
Our work is with, and among, the rank and file. We do not try to formally lobby and put pressure on the unions, either in the plant - the stewards and the convenors - or outside, the district and national fulltime officials.

But in fact, twice in the last year the unions have been forced to adopt nationally, demands which arose on the shop floor, and which Big Flame helped to generalise. When the shop floor begins a determined fight, and as it spreads, the unions are forced to follow in order to maintain their legitimacy, and also to try to maintain control.

These two occasions on which the unions followed were, first, the fight over lay-offs, for a guaranteed week's pay, in the Autumn of 1973 - which was later described by Moss-Evans, TGWU Chairman of the Ford negotiators NJNC, as the 'keystone' of the claim for February 1974. Second was the demand for more money 9th September 1974, which forced the unions and the company to re-open the contract - and which in doing so smashed the wage guidelines of the social contract.

## Background

Ford workers have been, at least since the war, the lowest paid of British carworkers, always being way behind most rates in the Midlands - the pace-setters for the industry. The gap since the fifties has, in fact, been widening, helped in the early '70s by the classic sell-out of the 9-week national strike in 1971. In 1971 the settlement was £8 over two years, in 1973 (Phase 2) £2.40 and in 1974 (Phase 3) £2.60. When Phase 3 was abolished in July 1974 the basic day rate (excluding thresholds) was £38 for 40 hours for lineworkers (B-grade - the dominant grade). Meanwhile, Chrysler, Coventry, had just settled for £53.57 basic - nearly £16 above the Ford rate.



Ford of Britain has, not surprisingly, been for many years the strongest motor company in Britain and in 1974 is the strongest part of the Ford empire worldwide. (It is the largest Ford Company outside the U.S.A.). 1974 profits for Ford GB were a record, although probably not 'adequate'.

## '73 Contract - the lay-offs begin.

The '73 Contract, negotiated during Phase 2, saw a struggle, half organised by the union, which consisted of sectional stoppages, mostly in the Body group. The Press Shop was one of the most militant and best organised areas. For several weeks there was a chaotic situation, with Fords getting very little production. During this period there were many lay-offs, especially further down the line in the PTA where people seldom knew why they were being laid off.

It was at this time that the feeling about the question of lay-offs really arose. It became more and more obvious that first, Ford was using lay-offs to split the workers, and second, that no-one could survive financially if their pay was constantly cut back by the forced 'holidays' which the social security of course refused to pay.

The other important consequence of this resistance to the contract was the creation by the workers of a tremendous backlog of orders for Ford cars - a backlog that has been growing bigger ever since, despite one or two periods of fairly full production. In this way the struggle against short-time working and unemployment has been fought at Dagenham.

A 'SENSATIONAL' medical report revealing the effects of stress on Ford production workers has been kept secret since its preparation 12 months ago.



## Con-rod con-trick

In July 1973, just before the summer shut-down, Ford ran out of con-rods for their engines because of a strike at their sole suppliers, Smethwick drop forging. Ford took a classic course: it provoked a strike - of Ford drivers over their insurance - and laid off the whole of Dagenham and Halewood immediately, without pay. Fords almost always tries to use the time workers really need money, i.e. before the summer holidays and before Christmas, to provoke trouble in order to win some victory when the workers are weakest.



## Body Plant riot!

This time, however, the company's tactic, although successful in the short run, rebounded considerably in the longer term. After the summer shut-down everyone was really angry at the way they had been treated. On the night of August 29 Fords had laid the shift off for one hour and got away with it. (The reason was supposedly a dispute in the paint-shop.) On the night of August 30 Fords tested the water and tried again.

They announced the lay-off at 11.50 p.m. - too late for a lot of people to get home. A lot of workers did leave, but 300 men from the B-shift Body in White lines decided they'd had enough. They went to the supervisors offices and blockaded them in. Quite a few windows were smashed. And after an hour's lock-in the management conceded the demand and paid the full shift, despite the fact that no work was done.



## The Guaranteed Week's Pay

The lessons of this experience spread very quickly. The demand for a guaranteed 8 hours pay NOT work, arose from the shopfloor. It was very quickly generalised to A GUARANTEED 40 HOURS PAY EVERY WEEK - WORK OR NO WORK among all the lineworkers in the Body and the PTA. (The PTA had, up to September '73, experienced 43 lay-offs that year.)

At the same time that the demand was taken up, the idea spread among most of the lineworkers that the only way to fight lay-offs was by refusing to leave the plant when the lay-off was announced. It was immediately learnt that while still inside the factory there was a tremendous power which came from the presence of hundreds of angry people. There followed 3 weeks of frequent lay-offs, which provoked a major riot in the PTA.

## Riot in the PTA - September 1973.

A mass meeting was called after the lay-off, and began at 9 a.m. Wednesday morning in one of the canteen buffets upstairs in the PTA. The meeting was packed out, with many workers who don't usually attend mass meetings also present - West Indians for example usually boycott mass meetings. The fact that many West Indians attended this meeting made a different situation.

Meanwhile the Paint Shop had started the lines in protest against being laid off, although this didn't last more than a few minutes. Paint shop workers then went over and occupied the plant managers' (Hitchcock's) office, demanding that he attend the mass meeting.

The garage was still working, which caused a lot of anger in the meeting going on in the buffet - the Convenor responded to demands to stop them working with - 'Don't you want to work?'

So most people left the meeting and marched down to the garage, and began smashing cars and tools. People still working in the garage were dragged out of cars, radios were turned on for music, car doors were locked and keys thrown away.

After a while people went back to the meeting and found some older workers who had stayed asking Hitchcock some questions. But nothing was resolved. So over a hundred workers marched on Hitchcock's office again, tearing down pictures of company bosses hanging in the hallway.

The situation was completely out of the control of both the company and the unions. There followed three weeks during which the PTA was locked out several times and attempts were made to get back in. Fords - possibly as a



provocation in order to regain control of the situation - sacked a black worker, Winston Williams, in the Body Plant. The Body Plant union obliged the company by dropping the guaranteed week demand and fighting only over the sacking. Meanwhile the PTA union ignored the sacking and continued to demand a guaranteed week's pay. So with the two key plants split, indicating the absence of any organisational expression of the interests and actions of the workers, it was possible for the union to put the guaranteed week demand into procedure, from which it has yet to emerge.

## The significance of the struggle against lay-offs.

Although nothing was won at the bargaining table it would be absolutely wrong to see the outcome of the struggles that autumn as a defeat. In fact the guaranteed week struggle was temporarily resolved in the workers favour. The PTA introduced an overtime ban that cut production to about a third for a period of two months. And Ford became scared to use lay-offs in case they provoked a riot. So Ford did not use lay-offs for several months after the Autumn of '73 and on November 12 1974 when Ford tried to discipline a man on the A-shift Body in White lines and attempted a lay-off, the section rioted, doing a fair amount of damage.

The struggle against Fords use of lay-offs and for a guaranteed week's pay has been wages ever since; the lay-off fight in particular was crucial in laying the foundation for the shopfloor strength which was eventually sufficient to break the contract in Autumn 1974. If Fords had got away with laying people off, and so splitting the work-force whenever they wanted, then it would have been impossible to get together any level of organisation in any section. The struggle over lay-offs was, and is, of major importance politically to the workers at Dagenham, because it is one of the key determinants of the relative strength of the shopfloor.



## Autumn '73: the wash-up fight begins.

At the same time as the lay-off fight, another struggle was developing over wash-up time - a struggle centred on the Body Plant lineworker. In essence it meant forcing from Fords a recognition of workers needs against the needs of production. It meant the recognition that Fords steals more time from workers than just the time spent on the job: from the time spent in the traffic on the way to the factory to the time spent exhausted in front of the TV, too tired to enjoy anything else. It meant working less hours - ten minutes at the beginning of the shift, ten before lunch, and ten at the end of the shift. In fact the Body Plant has always been strong in this respect, with scarcely anyone working hooter to hooter, as is the case with the PTA. When one section had won this wash-up time, another section put in for it, and imposed various restrictions on work such as an overtime ban and non-co-operation.

The torch-solderers (who work with lead - a dangerous and dirty job) were the first to win wash-up time in August 1973. Shortly after, the doorhangers, who work next to the solderers, put in for it but failed, initially, because they did not adopt a united policy on both shifts.

By the time the doorhangers won the wash-up time in April '74 the general situation in the Body and the PTA was outside of Fords control, with production nowhere enough to meet the demand for cars. Because of workers general resistance to the needs of capitalist production, Ford had to do something to regain control of the situation.

### Summer 1974.

Several important elements made up the political situation at Dagenham in the summer of 1974:

I. a chronic shortage of labour - more people left than came; and most of those who came to Dagenham, tempted by the lying ads, left after a very short period, disgusted by the work and the pay, held down by successive wage freezes. Currently, according to the only figure Ford has given, there is a 50% turnover of labour each year in the PTA. The figure for the Body group would be similar.

II. a general rejection of work at Fords - refusing any identification and co-operation with production needs.

III. a rash of small sectional disputes - many on the wash-up issue, which, along with 'technical problems' meant that Ford virtually never got a full shift's production.

### Wash-up goes into Procedure

On May 21 the fenders, who work next to the doorhangers, started going for the wash-up, across both shifts, by walking out after the shift had started. Fords was forced to come up with the offer of wash-up money to stop more and more sections taking the time.

Instead of the workers starting work ten minutes late Fords said they would pay half an hour extra at overtime rates if they clocked on ten minutes early, and out ten minutes late. Also they were supposed to work to the hooter at lunchtime and get paid ten minutes of the dinner period. It was worth about £3.50.

This was the first time in memory that Ford had offered more money in any form between contracts, and the significance was not lost. The wash-up money was only for lineworkers but several 'grey' areas just next to the actual lines came out demanding, and often getting, the wash-up.

### Action Groups Forming

But equally important, this period showed a development of actions by groups of rank and file workers. These groups exist around the plant in many sections. Usually they consist of a nucleus of, say, five or six people who all

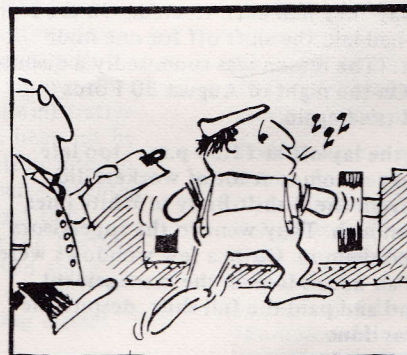
work in one section. They see each other every day, and often socially outside the plant. From time to time 'offensive' actions are organised. This form of organisation is normally completely outside the steward structure, especially when it comes to carrying out the actions. Even if the stewards is sympathetic, which some are, if they took part they could well face the chop, either from the company or else from the union hierarchy.

The groups, though they generally wouldn't think of themselves as a 'group', reflect the racial composition - more often than not - of a particular section. It has been important that in some sections in this period there has been a breakdown in the normally fairly rigid racial divisions that exist. This has been especially true where black workers are already informally organised.

All these things gave, and still give, Ford workers a tremendous objective strength - a strength that has not found a conscious organisational expression. It is certainly something that cannot be organised by the unions, even though they still exert a strong influence.

By May '74 the situation was well out of control of the company and the unions. In April the door-hangers had won the wash-up time by putting on an overtime ban on both shifts. Other sections had given them crucial support by saying that if Fords refused to give them overtime during the doorhangers' action they would ban new starters.

The ban on new starters has been used on several occasions at Dagenham since Autumn '73, when it was particularly effective, with an overtime ban, in the PTA. The ban on new starters not only cripples Ford's production schedules, with the shortage of labour and high turnover, but also costs the workers nothing.



There is a growing awareness that it is not sufficient just to organise in your own section. You have to be able to link up with other people in different parts of the plant as well as on the opposite shift and in other plants. Here is one action where the fight was spread through a group consciously organising and taking the initiative. Big Flame put in a leaflet to the shift suggesting various things that could be done. This leaflet helped our militants and supporters and anyone who agreed with what we said to organise and support actions that night.

### PTA Blockade over lay-off - July '74

The fight for wash-up money was still going on and early in July the roller test repair men in the Garage struck for wash-up - a token strike for one day. They were one of the 'grey' areas demanding to be classified as lineworkers so that they would get the wash-up money. All other workers in the PTA were laid off.

The next night A-shift workers in the final assembly refused to start working, and crowded down off the line, onto the shopfloor, demanding full lay-off pay, for the previous shift.

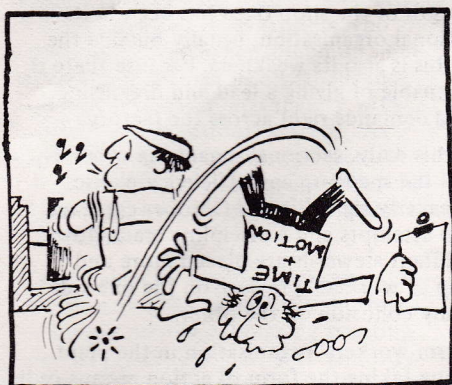
The night convenor showed up but couldn't speak until he'd taken his tie and suit jacket off and looked less like a boss. He quoted the Blue Book, and was drowned out; he



siad everyone should go back to work; eventually he gave up and went home for the night.

Workers then marched round the final assembly trying to get support, singing 'we shall overcome'. All other workers were still on full pay without working, and were mostly reluctant to join in. So the marchers went off down the line and blockaded the roll-off area, preventing finished cars being driven off. They stayed there all night, with management standing by helplessly, not daring to lay anyone else off. All other workers stayed on full pay all night, doing no work.

Posters made out of paper floormats were made up by the blockaders, with slogans demanding full lay-off pay. Dayshift workers coming on shift stood around gaping at the scene of posters hung over cars, workers sleeping in a big barrow, blocking one line, and a huge spanner jammed in the other line. The demand for pay for Tuesday night wasn't won, but in a real sense workers felt it was a victory. This was borne out shortly afterwards, when after a walkout by window-fitters, management didn't lay off the plant for fear of a similar kind of action. And once again workers remained inside on full pay, without working.



### Foremens' strike - August '74

It was obvious to anyone inside the plant that things were not going to be quiet in the autumn. It was clear that everybody wanted more money, even though they didn't know how they would get it.

In the first week after the holiday, the foremen went on strike, for two days. The strike was **very** political. They demanded instant dismissal of any worker who punched or threatened a foreman. This was the result of a foreman having got beaten up after he had pushed a worker too hard. Fords was unable to give foremen instant powers of dismissal, because the wages offensive was growing fast, and more and more sections were prepared to act over a range of issues. The foremen's complete lack of authority at Dagenham is part of the fruits of recent struggle. (Only since the latest agreement has been signed has Fords begun to 'correct' this situation.)

During the first day of the strike in the PTA, a Thursday, no work was done, with workers on full pay. The company dared not lay off. So workers went off to local pubs, played cards, went 'shopping' for radios etc. - over 30 radios disappeared that day, and a fair amount of sabotage went on as well.

### Workers Control at Dagenham - workers' style

The company, with the convenor's agreement, then decided to have a try-out of a little 'workers' control'. The stewards - particularly in the PTA - largely supported the idea, saying that workers should work 'to prove that we don't need the foremen'. A lot of stewards went round the PTA organising the lines and 'good' workers were selected from each section to lead the operation.

However, PTA B-shift refused to work and were in turn laid off. This they fought against successfully the next week and they got paid for most of the lay-off. On A-shift there was also resistance to working - the attitude was 'why should we work - management caused this' and 'why should we work when we don't have to? i.e. when there's a good excuse not to and we get paid anyway.

The existence of two strategies came out clearly in this situation. The first - the strategy of 'workers control', coming from the union officials, who don't work on the line and sometimes don't work at all; the second - the one that is sometimes open, sometimes hidden, in the struggle of the shopfloor itself, - the struggle against work - the struggle against the assembly-line, against the organisation of work, against hierarchy and authority on the factory floor.

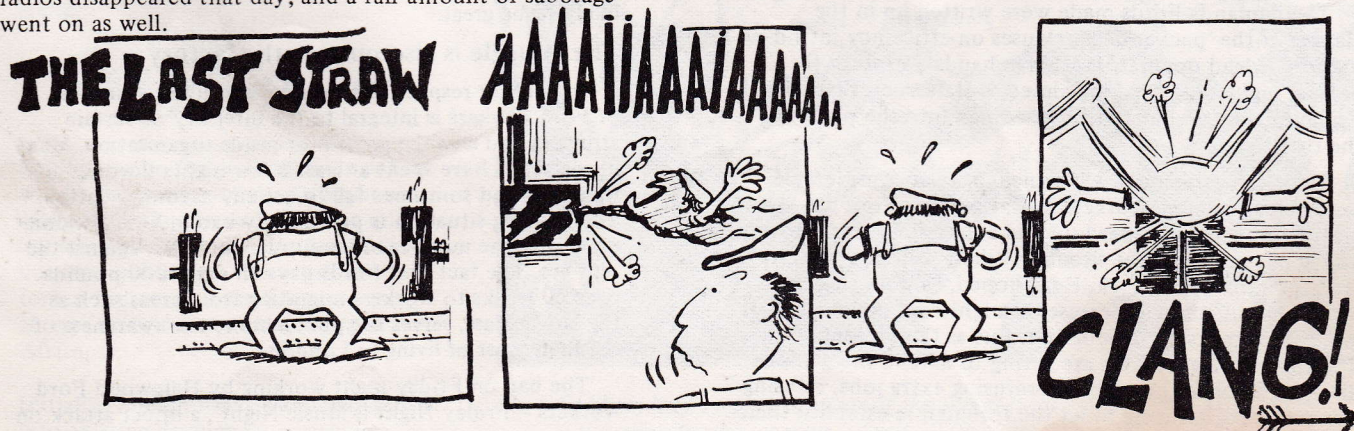
The first is part of capital's plan to re-cuperate the class struggle (see Benn's workers control), while the second is the actual content of the class struggle that capital is trying to recuperate. The following comment from a Halewood worker expresses some of this: 'We want to get higher and higher wages so in the end we get rid of assembly line work altogether.

### Run-up to press shop strike.

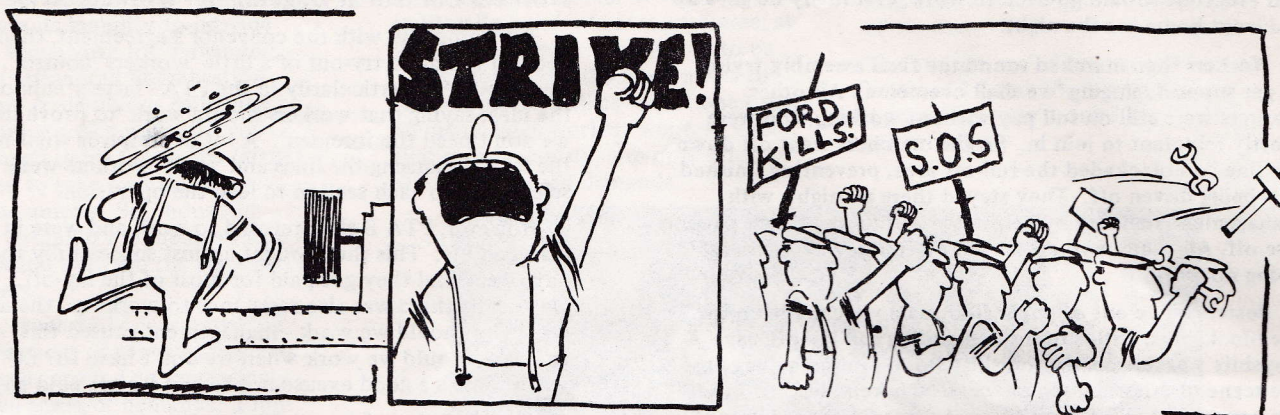
The situation over the summer was one of steadily increasing shop-floor actions and insubordination, a build-up of power which was only interrupted, not disrupted, by the three week shut-down. Only two days back, there was a strike in the PTA demanding the £10 weekly extra being paid too migrant workers from Newcastle. Skilled workers began pressing a demand for £5 interim, and the Press shop began their campaign for an increase in shift allowance with a one day strike, so all three shifts could meet together, and one week later an indefinite strike.

All these sectional wage demands added to the wash-up demand spreading among off line workers spelt chaos for Fords national wages policy. Given also the labour shortage of 2000 at Dagenham, with fewer workers starting than leaving the strength of the shop floor was much greater (in the sense that production was forced lower, and even really insubordinate workers couldn't be sacked.) Fords saw an almost 'total disintegration of its work force' (company quote).

The gains of the struggle against work inside the plant, a struggle organised by insubordination, disregarding foreman's orders, sometimes driving them out of some areas, sabotage of cars and machinery aimed at winning more free time, huge gaps in the lines resulting from disputes, slow downs and sabotage - meant that







production was forced to very low levels.

The net result of all this was plants producing at 50% of capacity at Dagenham during this period. For Ford, the car company in Britain with highest capital investment (£6000 per employee) this was disastrous. The backlog of orders steadily mounted, an incredible situation for a car company to be in these times. So while the production crisis stemming from the oil crisis and falling sales hits the world car industry, Ford UK couldn't even get enough cars to sell.

In 1973 Ford had lost 150,000 cars through stoppages, according to the company's annual report. It's because of this insistent attack on production that Dagenham workers are unlikely to be made redundant for some time to come. Compared with other car workers across the world they are in a relatively stronger position.

The essential content of workers' struggle at Dagenham is thus a struggle against work (wage-labour). The capitalist and union ideology of the value of work, of 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work' is rejected in a daily, ongoing and massive way at Dagenham. The socialist content of the struggle is asserted in the ways that people unite to fight against the ways that the company exploits them. Refusal isn't just a passive process.

### Press Shop Strike

The Press shop struck in September over their shift allowance. They were out for three and a half weeks on a demand for, essentially, £4. It was a well prepared action based on a long-standing grievance which was heightened by the line workers winning wash-up time. It was a solid strike which ended in unity as it began, after this demand had been more or less won.

But it was during this strike that Ford seized the opportunity, forced by their production crisis at Dagenham to offer an interim increase, and make demands of their own in an attempt to save its national wages structure. This offer astounded the union officials whose idea of a claim was much more modest. They were further astounded because here was Ford's management offering to break the contract themselves.

### A new agreement?

The demands Ford made were written up in the clauses of the 'packet deal', clauses on efficiency, introduction of lead operators (charge hands), a return to normal night shift working aimed at Halewood's ban on Friday nights, and introducing women into the plant for the first time.

Since the agreement was signed - against considerable resistance from line workers at Dagenham - Ford has lost no time introducing speed-up and a discipline crack-down, taking advantage of the situation where 200 new starters are beginning every week. Ford hoped, as well, that in offering a substantial increase, it might cool down some of the daily attacks on production. But as the present situation reveals workers are acting to defend the gains of the shop floor in this respect - refusing extra jobs, refusing manning cuts, refusing to let the foremen re-establish their

authority, vigorously defending workers' own relief systems, and even the right to sabotage, and let the jobs go down the line.

### The outlook for organisation.

While the strength of the shop floor has been in its informal and sectional organisation, usually outside the union structure, this is also its weakness, because there is no organisation capable of giving a lead and organising united actions and demands right across the factory.

However it is this daily, sectional organising which is being used against the speed-up and efficiency classes which the union eagerly signed in the October contract. With the speed-up attempts and a discipline crack-down beginning, the militant stewards are placed more and more in a vice grip of workers' pressure on the one side and union company collusion on the other.

In the short term workers' organisation in the plant is likely to continue taking the form of action groups or line workers' 'committees', formal or informal. But the struggle to build a much wider organisation - an organisation which is cross-section, cross plant and cross city - is a long-term one, as is the struggle to overcome racial divisions. But this is increasingly urgent if Ford workers are going to successfully resist the political and economic attacks made on them and defend the gains of the recent period. In the future traditional trade union defensive action is going to be totally inadequate against an offensive which takes in every area of society.

Indeed one of the meanings of the so-called social contract is that capital, having been unable to knock back the working-class purely through wage restrictions, is now concentrating increasingly on attacking the standard of living and quality of life of the working class through inflation, savage cuts in social spending and repression - all areas in which militancy in the factories over the issue of wages alone is scarcely adequate. The raising of 'political' and social issues inside the factory is of the utmost urgency.

Events in British Leylands Longbridge plant where Irish workers were attacked following the Birmingham bombing show both that politics is already inside the plants and that the danger of avoiding such questions are likely to be great.

### The struggle is also outside the factory

In another respect, the housing and living situation of Ford workers is integral to the intensity of certain struggles and also the growth of inside organisation. Many new starters have spent at least a few nights sleeping in their cars and sometimes fail to get any accommodation. The housing situation is particularly bad in East London - especially the number of landlords 'on strike' against the rent act. The fact that Ford pays an extra 200 pounds over 20 weeks to workers migrating from areas such as the North-East, serves the punch home the awareness of the high cost of living in London.

The ban on Friday night working by Halewood Ford workers - 'Friday Night is Music Night', a direct attack on



night shift working, reveals the demand for a better quality and more enjoyable life. Workers chose the right to enjoy themselves either at home or on the town, over Fords 'right' for production.

### Our group

The Big Flame Ford group is made up of both inside and outside militants, who meet on a regular basis. This composition of the group is particularly important, as we don't on the one hand see the class struggle as being only factory based, nor on the other hand do we think an organisation should orchestrate the shop-floor struggle from the outside. In trying to build such a group we are attempting to break with both sectionalism and vanguardism.

The group not only focusses on the content of the shop-floor struggle, although this is a starting-point, but also attempts to analyse the strategies of the state, the company and the unions. We are also building up our international contacts with carworkers in Italy - Fiat-based at Turin, Detroit USA, and Canada. Not only do we share experiences and analyses of the situation, but we are trying to put together, with these other groups, a picture of the state of the world motor industry; all this as a forerunner of building organisational links between car-workers internationally.

Our contact with Fiat workers, through Italian revolutionary groups like Lotta Continua have been particularly valuable in helping to understand the struggle at Ford - as since the Hot Autumn of '69 Fiat workers have led the way in formulating a revolutionary working class politics. Information about workers demands and shopfloor organisation and tactics, along with knowledge of how Fiat has responded, with massive re-structuring (automation, mobility, etc.) is of great value to us.

In all our work we are aware that there are big differences between Dagenham and other industrial situations. Even Dagenham and Halewood are very different, as are the various plants at Dagenham.

Our perspectives on refusal of work, the role of the unions, and workers autonomy emerge most clearly in a

situation of 'advanced' assembly-line production. But much of this picture will be at least in part true of other industries and other situations.

For the immediate future it is of the utmost urgency that we continue to develop understandings as the struggle is shifted by the fast-developing crisis; a crisis in which the working-class has only one contract - a contract with itself.

### East London Big Flame Dagenham Ford Group

The Big Flame Ford Groups, at Dagenham and Halewood, are anxious to develop their contacts in other motor firms. We produce, as part of our ongoing practice, regular documentation of the situation at Fords.

We think exchanges of information are vital, and we are willing to supply people working in and around the motor industry with our material, including leaflets. Anyone wanting to do this, or anyone interested in working with us or wanting more information about the Ford Dagenham group should write to 79c, Anerley Rd., London, S.E.20.

"We see this whole society rests on workers, and this whole fuckin' society is controlled by this clique who aint produced nothing in their whole lives - bankers, stockbrokers, insurance men. It's parasitic, vulturistic, cannibalistic and is sucking and destroying the lives of workers everywhere - and we must stop it because it's evil . . ."

( A Detroit carworker)



### Notice

18 November 1974

On Wednesday 13 November about 120 employees engaged in violent demonstrations in the office areas while discussions were being held with the Convenor and Shop Stewards. Subsequently, about 40 entered the Operations Manager's Conference room and engaged in more than an hour of verbal abuse.

Whilst only a small proportion of employees were involved all employees are warned that, in the event

Whilst only a small proportion of employees were involved all employees are warned that, in the event of any future demonstrations of a similar nature, those identified will be liable to be terminated from the Ford Motor Company.

P I Staley  
Plant Manager  
Stamping and Body Plant

WORKERS REPLY - BOLLOCKS!



# CONFRONTATION:



*Flying picket of miners confronts police at Dawabridge docks during the 1972 Miners' strike.*

## THE STRUGGLE IN INDUSTRY 1969-1974

The period since the late 60's in Britain, as in other industrialised capitalist countries, has seen a sharpening crisis to which there seems no immediate end - no easy resolution for the working class. It has reverberated through the ruling class, and through the revolutionary organisations.

We have clearly moved out of the 'social peace' that had predominated since the Second World War, leaving behind us the Keynesian state - the state of the expanding economy, of full employment, and of the incorporation of the class struggle as the motor of capitalist development - cast aside now by capital and the working class alike as a temporary and inadequate cloak to conceal the struggle of the working class to find its revolutionary identity.

### Economic Background

Britain is, along with Italy, the weakest point of capital's development in Europe, and has been for many years. The parallel between the two countries is very great - although, of course, the crisis in each country has its own characteristics and emphases.

The crisis has an economic aspect, and a determination of its characteristics (and possible resolution) by the offensive struggles and resistance of the working class. These two components of the crisis work dialectically in relation to each other. At any one time, one may be more important than the other. To unravel the basic relation is fundamentally a *political* question, the answer to which will not be found by a simple empirical observation of events, but by the political interpretation of events according to a sound analytic basis, and a real contact with and involvement in the class struggle.

We are now faced with a fundamental change in the nature of the state - either a move to 'socialism' or 'communism', or to corporatism and repression. These are the options now being fought for, and it is a situation where revolutionary politics are crucial and can make a decisive impact.

### Outline of a political approach

The key determining force in society is the class struggle. The 'discovery' of Keynesianism was that the class struggle could be, and had to be, *used* by capital to

restructure capital, to rationalise it and act as the motor of its development. The working class has resisted and struggled against capitalist development, which meant little more than its own increased relative exploitation.

In this struggle the working class has struggled against work as such under capitalism, against productivity, against the capitalist use of the working class. In its struggle against work, which hits at the core of capitalist and trade union ideology - the value of labour, 'A fair day's work for a fair day's pay' - the working class has been seeking, successfully in production, to establish its autonomy from capitalist development. Absenteeism, going 'sick' etc. is part of this general struggle against exploitation. Although generally unorganised, these are nevertheless conscious forms of struggle and do not reproduce capital, thus hitting profitability.

Capital, historically, when confronted by a working class which it cannot deal with through its present options, attacks the working class by changing its composition, through technological and structural change in the place of work, and by destroying the communities in which the working class has developed a strength. This process we call *class decomposition*. But with every effort to decompose the working class by capital, the working class *recomposes itself*, through capital, at a higher level. So what often appear as reforms by capital, for capital, are also advances for the working class because they narrow down the remain-



ing options open to capital for attacking the working class. At the present time it is crucial to analyse the margins for manoeuvre available to capital today.

In this way we can see that the prime determinant of the underlying movements in society are determined by the class struggle itself, in relation to the workings of the 'laws' of the capitalist relations of production - not by its so-called representatives, the union leaders and political parties. In this process, General Elections serve to illustrate, and marginally affect these changes at a state level - where the ruling class is seen to jostle amongst itself, occasionally fighting, as to which strategy to adopt at any one time, in order to reorganise capital and to resist any encroachments made by the working class. As a result of these struggles, the state will emphasise either its repressive or reformist function.

The relation between the ruling class, the unions and the working class is a complex dialectic which one can never resolves satisfactorily, in a simple empirical sense, short of revolution. It is the political analysis we make of events, and in particular the part played by the working class in determining these events, which decides our approach to practice, organisation and theory. As such it is the starting point for a political programme and analysis, not a finite definition of a political position.

### Britain in the 60's

To understand the current period in Britain we have to return to the 60's and, in particular, the defeat of the Labour programme on incomes restriction, 'In Place of Strife', in 1969. The Labour Party, which had been called to power in 1964 to tackle the 'backwardness' of British capital, had set on an aggressive policy of restructuring industry so as to impose the defeat on the working class that the individual capitalists were incapable of making.

The refusal by capital to invest in this country, and the direction of its investment abroad, had been operating since the Second World War. The working class had imposed on capital a low rate of productivity growth which was exacerbating capital's inherent inadequacies in organising production 'rationally'.

In the 60's the state operated as the leader of capital in the drive to reorganise and concentrate itself more quickly, so as to have a stronger base from which to tackle the working class, which in Britain has probably been stronger in production than in any other country. This was the era of productivity deals and mergers, with Labour initiating the reorganisation of the British-owned part of the motor industry with the formation of British Leyland in 1968 and the electrical industry through the GEC takeover of English Electric and AEI.

Throughout this whole period, capital had to establish a strategy which could restore its rate of profit, to make Britain a place where capital could invest again. The strategy had two sides: the working class had to be persuaded to identify itself more

with the needs of production; and it had to be repressed to lower its standard of living. During this period, although the relative rate of exploitation increased, and probably quite substantially, it was not sufficient to provide a solution to capital's problems. From the late 60's through the early 70's we see a deployment of most of capital's classic armoury - state control of wages, unemployment, inflation, stagnation.

In the key productive sector of Britain, the Midlands engineering industry, the post-war period had seen the working class in that sector, organised at the work-place through the shop stewards, impose on capital a crucial divorce of wages from productivity. This was 'wage drift'. This work-force, the skilled and semi-skilled workers in engineering, was the key vanguard of the working class in the 50's and early 60's. Their struggles, although almost always localised and sectional, acted both to provide a wage-beacon for the rest of the working class (e.g. parity and comparability claims) and to provoke a crisis in the organisation of British capital.

Capital can always pay high wages, indeed it is willing to do so, providing it gets adequate productivity and rate of profit. In the early 20's this was Henry Ford's policy - 'Fordism'. But the workers' use of the piecework system, which had previously been used to fragment the working class and compensate for the low organic composition of capital, so preventing the development of the unity of the working class, had been turned against capital by the working class.

### From Piecework to Measured Day Work

The state with Harold Wilson and Wedgwood Benn at the head, instigated the reorganisation of BMC, through its takeover by Leyland in 1968 - and one of the aims was to replace the existing piecework system by Measured Day Work (MDW). This was to offset the parity and comparability demands which were developing throughout industry, especially at Fords.

This reorganisation at Leyland began immediately, and by 1974 is all but complete. The ruling class had no choice in this because the working class, through the shop stewards, had to a large extent taken control over productivity and wages and the productivity was not sufficient to match the wages. Although in one sense the workers were managing their own exploitation, the return for capital was not adequate to make up for the lack of investment in that sector.

This political elimination of the piecework payments system, signalled at Leyland, marks the end of 'workers' control' as a fact and as a political ideology in Britain. As capital had, after the first World War, decomposed the revolutionary work-force of skilled workers whose principal demand was for workers' control, by reorganising the production process (eg. the introduction of the assembly line and the deskilling of jobs), so British capital now had to decompose those powerful sectors - like Leyland - through the elimination of the basis of their power. The piecework system had to be abolished and replaced by MDW.

### Stewards

This is the material basis for the elimination of the stewards of these sectors as a revolutionary force, and once on MDW, the process continues. With increased investment and automation etc. the production process is 'improved' technologically. This technology is used and introduced precisely to attack the traditional form of working class organisation in Britain - the shop steward acting as a representative of the shop-floor. But as technology is refined, the flow of production is improved - a process hastened by the very success of the work-force in using the previous organisation of production against the needs of capital.

But as a result of this there is less room for anyone to negotiate the conditions of the job on behalf of the work-force. The room for negotiation is smaller because conditions are being determined more and





more by 'objective' technological functions e.g. the speed of the line.

At this point the steward has two choices: either to rejoin the workers and participate in the democratic, mass organisation of demands which represent the workers' real interests and are autonomous from the development of capital, i.e. demands that capital cannot recuperate and use as a basis for capital's further development; or else to get more and more dragged into activity through the union, rather than on the shop floor, trying at best to use the union for good motives. This latter option has up to now been the dominant one.

If the steward accepts this latter choice - and most do - then the steward's presence in the day-in, day-out conflict at the point of production is lessened, and more and more the steward will only surface where the union itself, nationally and regionally surfaces - at the time of the annual or bi-annual wage claim, or at the time of official union 'political' strikes, when it is the union convenors and stewards who will man the pickets.

Another lesson for the employers from Leyland is that wages themselves are too dangerous to be left up to the workers themselves to negotiate. Hence the trend which is nearly complete throughout industry, for negotiations to be at a national level, a thing which the unions have long wanted and which the employers have been willing to give, indeed anxious to give. The autonomy of the working class is as much a threat to the unions as to the employers.

Again, though, dominance of national negotiations on wages is something that the working class can turn to its own advantage. In any eventuality the working class has to unite itself politically, and this will serve that end. The working class has already adopted what are, at present, uniting demands of big wage increases, regardless of productivity and profits, and across the board wage rises, not percentage rises which maintain differentials. The sectional demands of small groups of skilled workers for the restoration of differentials are no longer dominant, and will be less and less viable as the working class seeks its unity. The recent attempts to return to local bargaining in a few industries and the attempt to bring back incentive schemes in the mines must be seen in this light.

The replacement of piecework by MDW happened first in the state sector, the mines, in 1966, with the National Power-loading agreement. Local negotiation in the pits was replaced by national negotiation. The NCB reasons for it, typical for the abolition of piecework, were stated in the NCB's 'Report and Accounts' -

'1. Piecework was becoming increasingly inappropriate as a means of payment for men on mechanised faces where productivity depends less on physical effort than on the utilisation of machines.'

'2. Agreements based on piecework needed constant revision and renegotiation and they were the source of many stoppages and disputes in the industry.'

'3. Deployment of men can be more flexible than when earnings varied from face to face, and with a standard shift *wages can be more effectively controlled.*'

'4. The agreement considerably changed long standing practices and habits.'

This agreement was, on the face of it, a defeat for the miners - as the redundancies for this period show - but it provided the basis for the incredible strength, unity and political leadership which the miners have given the working class at the beginning of the 70's. This national, political leadership could not have occurred under piecework.

The same phenomena - decomposition and recomposition - were happening in the docks and in shipbuilding, again at the instigation of the Labour government. All the key poles of working class strength were attacked.

In shipbuilding the owners had refused to invest since the war, not because they were shortsighted and greedy, wanting to keep the money for themselves (as some of the left has suggested i.e. the concept that management was bad), but because they couldn't get a return on their money. This was because of the workers' autonomy from the needs of production and productivity, and their control in their place of work, which had made the skilled shipyard workers amongst the best paid workers in the country, and certainly the best paid in their region.

The strength of the shipyard workers was the focus for the working class strength on the Clyde and on the Tyne and Tees, and for Protestant workers in Belfast - and this is the key factor in the 'underdevelopment' of these regions i.e. capital's refusal to invest there over a long period. The focus of working class struggles against the underdevelopment of these regions has - apart from Belfast - always been the shipyards themselves, but the strength was in fact, more a *general* working class strength based as much in the community as in the place of work. This was the basis for the resistance to the attempted closure of UCS by the state in 1971, rather than the work-in itself. It emerged clearly in the rash of strikes in Glasgow in the Autumn of 1974 which broke through the 'Social Contract'.

### 'In Place of Strife'

The state in 1968, in a period of ever more intense class struggle, turned to incomes policy i.e. keeping wages down through state enforcement, hoping to inflict that political defeat on the working class that would enable capital to regain the initiative it had lost throughout the 60's. The defeat of 'In Place of Strife' pointed to the difficulties facing the ruling class in this period, difficulties they have been unable to solve since then. It also indicated the growing strength of the

working class and its growing autonomy from the needs of capital, from capital's development.

By locating the forces that defeated 'In Place of Strife' we can begin to understand the main factors at work in determining developments in Britain, developments which are closely paralleled in other industrialised, capitalist countries.

'In Place of Strife' was defeated, to all intents and purposes, within two months of its publication as a Bill, in January 1969, by the 3½ week long Ford strike in March that year. Ford had attempted in its offer to use a blackmail of financial 'penalty clauses' and a 28-day cooling-off period to prevent stoppages. As such Ford was acting as the leader of the employers and the state - a role it has fulfilled on many other occasions. If Ford could make the principle of sanctions stick, then so could everyone.

At the time, the Ford unions negotiating team (NJNC) was controlled by the right and it accepted an offer containing the penalty clauses. But after quite a lot of agitation by the stewards, convenors and some union officials, Halewood Transmission Plant walked out. This was quickly followed by the rest of Halewood and most of the rest of Ford UK. After 3½ weeks, during which the strike was declared official by the AUEW and the TGWU, Ford was smashed in this first national strike to hit Ford UK.

Of course, attempts were made to make the final deal look a compromise, but the significance of the events was immediately grasped by the ruling class. The *Economist* wrote on 22 March 1969:

'It is an alarming prospect .... the fact that the settlement was finally agreed in the DEP was a defeat for everyone except the militant Ford shop stewards and their protectors like Jones, Birch and Scanlon. It was a defeat for Ford Management's attempt to ensure continuity of production. It was a defeat for moderate trade union leaders who wished to honour properly-negotiated agreements. It was not so much a defeat as the ritual burial of the Government's Incomes Policy.....' (Quoted in F. Silberman's 'The Ford Strike'. In Trade Union Register, 1970. p225.)

To look at the intricacies of a dispute such as the Ford strike in '69 in order to find out why it had such a potent effect is wrong. For example, during that strike the right wing NJNC was replaced by a left-wing NJNC, and Scanlon and Jones had just become leaders of the AUEW and T&G. But these replacements of union officials do not determine the class struggle. Rather they reflect it and only marginally effect it. We have to be able to locate what are the underlying class forces. The strike was so effective, not because of the industrial force it exerted, but because it represented as a focus, the political power of the working class, which was unified, temporarily, behind it.

An intensification of class struggle never happens in one country at a time. The 20th Century has seen several periods when the international cycle of struggle is intense and potentially revolutionary precisely



because of its international nature. 1969 was at the beginning of just such a cycle, which started with the occupations of the factories in France in May '68 and the explosion of working class violence in Italy in the same year, which was to reach a spectacular level in the Hot Autumn of 1969. This cycle of struggle has since continued unabated and, in fact, is intensifying and spreading. In the UK, capital's problems were being met by an increasing, class-wide response with the spread of the revolt in '69 to the low paid and traditionally unmilitant groups, mainly in the state sector - nurses, dustmen, firemen, teachers and the long-dormant miners.

After the defeat of 'In Place of Strife' the state clearly had to change its tactics. This is the position from which to approach the state's 'swing to the right', embodied in the first 21 months of Conservative government, from June '70 to March '72 - the period of the lame duck.

### From 'In Place of Strife' to 'Lame Duck'

The period after the Ford Strike was characterised as 'the revolt of the low-paid'. The state throughout its campaign to push through the incomes policy had constantly used the argument that only through an incomes policy could the low-paid get a big wage increase - low wages were caused, supposedly, by other workers earning too much. However it was precisely the low paid sectors' demands for wage increases well outside the prescribed limits that indicated the working class' refusal of the blackmail and, in essence, their growing autonomy from the interests of capital.

Throughout the 60's the increase in productivity in British manufacturing was almost the lowest of any industrial country. And at the same time hourly earnings in Britain in the second half of the 60's rose faster than almost anywhere else, despite the fact that during this period the Labour government had a more or less continuous 'control' on wages. Taking these two things together 'wage costs per unit of output rose very much faster in the last five years of the 60's in Britain than in any other industrial country.' (M. Barratt Brown: T.U. Register, 1970. p312). Although these comparisons between countries never give proof of a trend, these figures, considering the weak position of British capital at the beginning of the 60's, illustrate the problem the ruling class was facing. This combination of slow growth in productivity during stagnation of the economy is not merely symptomatic of the malaise, but plays a major causal part in the crisis.

Clearly the state had to change its tactics in order to attain a much higher organic composition of capital and a more productive work-force. The ruling class, through the Conservative government elected in June 1970, withdrew from 'reformist' posturings and opted for a more openly repressive policy directed against the working class.



*Mass demonstration by post office workers during their strike in February 1971*

As far as the structure of industry was concerned, whereas the Labour government had chosen to accelerate the reorganisation and concentration of capital through state planning and financial intervention, the Conservative government attempted to achieve the same result by refusing to intervene, saying the so-called laws of the free market should operate. Those firms which could not survive of their own accord would go to the wall - the lame duck policy.

The entry into the EEC was an essential part of the programme at a political as well as an economic level, to hasten and assist in the concentration of capital, at the expense of the smaller and less efficient firms, and of course, of the working class.

As for wages the Conservative government tried to enforce low and declining wage rises in the public sector, so giving a lead to private industry. It introduced the Industrial Relations Act, which provided a state framework for control of the unions and the working class whilst also providing a framework for repression. This was coupled with the dismantling of many welfare benefits, a process which had been already started by the Labour Government.

It is important to stress the basic continuity in purpose between the 'reformist' policies of the Labour government of '64 - '70 and the Conservative government of '70 - '74. The restructuring of the economy had meant an increasing number of unemployed during the late 60's. This developed rapidly, as deliberate state policy, through '71 until the miners' victory of early '72 defeated the strategy. By January '72 over 1 million were unemployed officially,

though in fact, the real figure, of those who could make themselves available for work but weren't, was much higher - probably 2½ - 3 million.

But through all this, not only did the class struggle not abate but it continued to intensify, refusing the blackmail at every turn. Although not every struggle was a 'victory', the class situation was marked by a universal and growing willingness to fight. Whilst the ruling class had always been aware of the strength of its adversary, the working class itself was now recognising and using this power.

The spread of the struggle throughout the whole of society was swift. Strikes were no longer so sectional or localised - they were often national and more and more openly political. The working class was not only willing to fight the boss but was also willing to take on the state. From now on sectors such as the council manual workers (1970) and the postmen (1971), which had previously hardly ever taken industrial action, staged major class confrontations of exceptional unity, though still not free from the shackles of union control.

### 1971 - The Postal Workers' and Ford strikes

Early '71 saw the sell-out of the longest and most solid strike ever of the postal workers, who were out for 7 weeks, and the Ford workers, who were out for 9 weeks. The postal workers' strike ended with the massive 'betrayal' by a right wing union and the sabotage during the strike by the official union movement who refused solidarity action and financial support. The ending of the Ford strike was a more subtle demolition job on the rank-and-file that only the union Left could





*Mass meeting of Foundry and Engine shop workers at Ford Dagenham vote to join the unofficial strike - February 1971.*

achieve. They were able to impose on the workforce one of the central embodiments of the Industrial Relations Act, which they were supposed to dislike so much - the secret ballot. And also a 2 year contract, 'American style', inspired by the head of the UAW in the States, Woodcock, who managed to achieve, with Jones and Scanlon, what Henry Ford II himself, with Heath, had earlier failed to do by intimidation and threats to move work abroad.

Although a major set-back for the Ford workers' demand for parity, this strike was not a major defeat for the working class, certainly not the defeat the State was looking for - because during the struggle the unity and determination of the workers was immense. It was a foretaste of what was to happen in early 1972 with the miners' victory. Even if the working class was unable to control its struggles successfully and transform its unity into practical gains, the political force represented by these and other disputes was not lost on anyone.

### The 1972 Miners' Strike

The miners' claim for 1972, drawn up in the openly political climate that pervaded all industrial matters in the summer of 1971, was the first concrete indication of the conscious direction the working class was taking. Gone was the claim in percentage terms which had predominated during the 60's. And the claim was not simply in flat-rate terms for all workers, as is becoming more and more general in the 70's. What the miners demanded was a bigger wage increase for the lowest paid grade, the surface worker, than for the higher paid underground worker, and all amounts demanded were very large - a wage increase divorced from productivity.

The miners became the representatives of a united working class, the political working class, and embodied consciously for the first time, the autonomy of the working class that had been developing most acutely since the late 60's. Although superficially a classic trade union national strike, it was rather a most sophisticated use by workers of the union. The key political strength of the strike, which shows very clearly that it had nothing at

all to do with trade unionism, was not so much even the flying pickets but rather the workers' general refusal to go back to work in the pits unless they got all their demands - more money or no coal. They made it absolutely clear that they were prepared to see the mines shut rather than not get the money, and the pits are almost the sole work available in mining communities. This was the basis for everything else. The strength came not from the desire for the money, pure and simple, but from the refusal of the work.

The miners had experienced since the war the most drastic run-down of manpower of any industry in the UK - and this process continued through the 60's. Between 1964 and 1969 employment in mining dropped from 600,000 to 400,000. This had been presided over throughout by the union and the restructuring process and decomposition of the work-force in the mines and in the communities involved in the replacement of piecework by MDW in 1966 - the Power

Loading Agreement. Productivity increased greatly with mechanisation and redundancy through the 50's and 60's, but in 1971 it stopped and has since declined, indicating the major change in the attitude towards work in the mines.

During the early 70's the traditional low level of investment - because of low return - in British industry had accelerated and by 1971 there was a conscious political strike on investment by capital in order to deny growth, and so a growing standard of

living to the workers. This was backed by the state's refusal to intervene in the economy. Unemployment rocketed throughout 1971. This was the reply of capital to the strength of the working class - the capitalist stagnation of the economy. No development short of workers' defeat.

This was the blackmail that was rejected by the miners. The contrast with the work-in at UCS, which had started in July 1971, was total. There, the workforce, under CP leadership, was persuaded to re-adopt the ideology of the value of work. It was this ideology that the same workforce had implicitly rejected previously during its development as a wage beacon for ship-building workers, particularly at the other yards on the Clyde, in the 60's. This was itself the reason for the state reorganisation of the Glasgow shipbuilding firms in 1968, the formation of UCS, and for the lame duck decision in June 1971, in order to eliminate the basis of that strength, through the decomposition of the workforce.

They fought the threat of redundancy by 'occupying' the yards and continuing to work on the ships. The wages of those declared redundant were paid out of collections among the trade unions. The idea was to show everyone that the workers were eager to work, and that the shipyards could be profitable. The work-in dragged on through the rest of 1971 into 1972,



*Police attack pickets of the third day of picketing at Saltley coke depot near Birmingham, during the February Miners' strike in 1972.*





with no effect on the state, but with the demoralisation of the workers. The work-in and token occupation were inadequate, with a hostile ruling class, to defeat the state plan.

On 10th February, 1972, a mass 'picket' closed the Saltley coke depot on the north side of Birmingham. This was achieved through the active intervention of midlands engineering workers. 40,000 of whom were on strike in support in several factories. Thousands of these workers joined the miners to shut the depot. Although organised through the unions this action was a tremendous show of the class unity that the miners had welded around them. Support for the miners was total among the working class and it was also considerable throughout most of society. The very few exceptions, like the scabs who tried to drive the lorries out of Saltley, were dealt with by a show of force and the threat of the working class use of violence. This threatened not only the state but the reformist unions themselves. In the future the state could not risk another Saltley.

Saltley marked not so much a turning point as a great political clarification. The balance of power in society shifted decisively in favour of the working class. From now on the state was to intervene once more in the economy, and immediately after Saltley the UCS work-in was the first to

benefit from the miners' reversal of the balance of power - and unemployment went down rapidly in 1972. The state adopted a different tactic - an accelerated and more co-ordinated use of inflation. What the state and employers had failed to achieve in the workplace, they attempted through inflation. They sought to inflict a major cut in the standard of living of the working class.

### **From the Miners' strike to Phase 1 - the Working Class on the Move.**

The period between the miners' victory and the imposition of the wage freeze, Phase 1 in November 1972, was not, in fact, marked by any remarkable acceleration in wages. What characterises the period is the universal awareness of the growing power of the working class, and the period was punctuated by important displays of the working class use of violence and hostility to the unions. The weeks before Saltley saw a marked step up in the war in Ireland and the state's planned terror - the shooting of 14 unarmed civilians in Derry on Bloody Sunday. The international dimension of the class struggle was not lost on the ruling class, which in Britain was faced with two intractable problems - the successful defence by the Republican working class of their communities in Ulster, and the refusal of the British working class to be intermediaries in capitalist development.

The state was, and still is, faced with the most potent and revolutionary unification that of the British and Irish working classes. Ireland is, in many ways, the key to the development of a revolutionary situation in Britain and the state has to do everything in its power to keep struggles in the two countries isolated. For example, most recent Industrial Relations legislation has not applied in the 6 Counties.

After the miners' strike the state, which from June 1970 had avoided relations with the TUC, now had to recognise and attempt to use the power of the working class through recourse to the unions - the only body that could possibly control and recuperate the class struggle within the limits of capitalist development. From early 1972 the main tactics in the capitalist strategy are determined more and more by what the unions say.

But the problem is that the unions not only have to convince the ruling class that they can control the workforce that they are supposed to represent, but that they have to actually produce the goods. The problem was that the ruling class had recognised that the unions had failed to do this in the 60's. But given the present relation of class forces they had no other option but to hand over power to 'organised labour'. This process had a continuity up to and through the formal



change of state power in February 1974 to the Labour Party and, within the labour party, to the left wing and, more particularly the unions.

The problem of the unions' lack of control over the working class and the working class's growing autonomy from the unions exploded for all to see in the summer of '72. The political power of the Industrial Relations Act was killed by the miners' strike. And it was buried shortly after by the railway workers who had the only secret ballot and cooling-off period that the state attempted to impose, and still voted all the more solidly for action.

## "THE 1972 DOCK STRIKE"

In the summer of '72 the dockers destroyed the penal sanctions in the Act. The state, in a final defence of the IRA Act, arrested five dockers' stewards in July '72, who had refused to lift their flying pickets in the battle against restructuring of dockwork through containerisation and the decomposition of its workforce through this technological restructuring and the abolition of piecework. The events around the arrests again showed the tremendous political unification in the working class.

As during the miners' strike support was widespread and a wildcat general strike was under way. Outside Pentonville prison another mass, potentially violent picket was set up and for a short time a small no-go area was established. When after the speedy release of the dockers the strike was sold out, the violence was directed against the union. Jack Jones was mobbed and the T&G headquarters occupied by militant and revolutionary dockers. In the aftermath, the CP-dominated stewards committee was voted out, indicating further erosion of the working class's faith in its traditional organisations. What is significant in all these events is the growing participation of wide sections of the rank-and-file in the disputes.

Throughout the 60's and 70's the working class's autonomy from capitalist development and the accelerating demand for more money, divorced from productivity and profitability considerations, became the dominant force in the class struggle. From now on the ground the unions and the stewards acted on, the mediation of the 'bargain' between labour and capital, the sale of labour power as a commodity to capitalists, is being swept away, because the unions' basic operating premise, the value of labour, has been surpassed, through the intensified class struggle, by the working class, as a class. From now on wages are not being determined by any 'objective' working of the market relation, but by the political power of the working class compared to the political power of the ruling class.

This is the new situation that is becoming clear in the 70's and is the concrete reason for the continuing undermining at the workplace of the role of the union and the necessity for the working class to develop their own forms of organisation

and a new level to fight on, so that it can, as a first step, translate at the 'bargaining' level the political power it has developed in society. The lack of these conscious, autonomous methods of organising explains the apparent contradiction we have in the early 70's—the tremendous political strength of the working class and the fact that it is suffering a severe cut in its standard of living, at least until the strong wage offensive of summer and autumn '74 began to halt the process, an increasing rate of exploitation and more severe repression in every part of society.

Autonomous developments in organisation were in fact already present in the working class at the beginning of the 70's and they manifested themselves in the miners' and dockers' strikes of early and mid-'72. The lessons from the miners and dockers were learnt fast by the rank-and-file and the late summer saw, during the building workers' strike, the combined use of the flying picket and working class violence.

## THE 1972 BUILDING WORKERS' STRIKE

The strike was the strongest in the midlands and north-west and the rank-and-file building workers, with a right wing union and little public sympathy, took control of their struggle and organised flying pickets to stop scab sites from working. The campaign was marked by a high level of violence to property on the sites. This threatened to shatter the ruling class/union lie that the working class never uses violence, and if it does it's certainly never political but always 'criminal'. This use of violence has been threatened at Saltley and taken up in the summer by the dockers' mass flying pickets to non-registered ports, when films were shown on TV showing dockers beating up policemen.

The state and the unions immediately understood the significance of this growing use of violence, a development that cannot be isolated from the continuing successful defence by the Republican working class of their communities in the six counties. The state, in response, set in motion its repressive forces and initiated the systematic prosecution of 24 North Wales building workers, the Shrewsbury 24, whom it accused of organising the violence. This clear intimidation to militants was, of course, backed up entirely by the unions. The dedication of the state in making the prosecutions stick and the whole wave of arrests on picket lines that have followed cannot be seen simply as an attack on the so-called 'right to picket' but as a direct recognition by the state that in the current situation they have to halt and isolate the working class's use of violence against the state's agents and property.

## PHASES 1 AND 2

After the decisive victory of the working class in '72 the state turned to in-

comes policy and intensified use of inflation. They had to do this in the short term in order to regain some political initiative for themselves and to restore some credibility to the unions. In order to show the working class that the unions' leaders have some function they have to be shown as counterposed to the state, to give the impression that the government/TUC negotiations have some real effect and purpose. In '71 and '72 as a bargaining straw, despite the fact that no one operated the Act after '72. The state's re-introduction of a statutory incomes policy in autumn '72 had the same effect.

Phase 1 was a freeze on wages lasting six months from November '72 to April '73 and was followed by Phase 2, with a limit of £1 + 4% on weekly wages, which lasted another six months, till November '73. During this time the only sectors that staged fights were the gasworkers, hospital manual workers and white collar government workers, groups who had never taken industrial action before. Although successfully controlled by the unions these disputes did give rise to some rank-and-file organisation, and they were a foretaste of the struggles in hitherto unmilitant sectors that were to develop more strongly in '74. No one broke the limits of Phases 1 and 2, and the state's use of inflation saw a continuing decline in the living standard of the working class, but it did nothing to solve capital's problem of how to regain the upper hand, how to defeat the working class decisively.

The ruling class knows from experience that statutory incomes policy can only be a short-term tactic unless the working class can be broken politically. This is because after a while the state has to lift the incomes control in order to avoid a politically more explosive wage drive while the control is still on. When they lift it they are anyway faced with another wage explosion, which they might, however, be able to channel through a return to 'social democracy' and reforms.

In the wage claims of the winter of '72-3 the miners, like every other key sector, held their fire. In this period of Phase 1 and 2 the working class in the key sectors, confronted with the problem of how to defeat the state policy, seemed aware that they didn't have the necessary organisation and preparation to win. But this is not to say that the working class was unwilling to fight.

For example, at Ford the workers, organised by the union, adopted a policy of sectional strikes. This was the 'guerilla strike' or 'articulated strike' policy, learnt by the unions from their Italian counterparts. This was developed to channel and drain off militancy whilst maintaining union control and avoiding an open clash with the state. As long as the control remains in the hands of the union these struggles will result in demoralisation. This is what happened at Dagenham. But during it there were many indications of anger and militancy, coupled with an understanding of the weak position the rank-and-file are in, whilst the fight is under union domination.



## PHASE 3

By the autumn of 1973, when the state introduced Phase 3, the political situation was fairly clear. Once more the principle issue for the state and the working class is the miners' wage claim. Phase 3 was drafted precisely to give the state its only hope to buy off the miners. This was the 'relativities clause' which enabled the miners to 'catch up' with others because of the so-called increasing 'social importance' of coal as a fuel, helped at the time by the 'oil crisis'.

The miners' strength and unity was even greater for the '74 claim than in '72. In the ballot for a strike the vote in favour was virtually 100% amongst the manual workers. With such strength the state could not afford anything like Saltley to happen, and from the time of the ballot the result of the strike was not seriously in doubt. No one could see the miners losing, but there was a lot at stake and the conservative government's response was highly political, with the immediate declaration of the 3-day week—a strategy that certainly could not be justified in 'economic' terms.

The state plan at this stage had two parts: first, to use the 3-day week to conserve fuel and to undermine support for the miners, hoping to avoid, or give the impression of avoiding, defeat through a compromising deal; and, second, to isolate the political significance of the miners, with the support of the unions and 'special case' ideology, so that other sectors would not follow the miners with pay awards outside the Phase 3 limits. When the miners' executive finally called the strike, Heath did the last thing he could to defeat the miners politically, by calling a general election on an anti-worker and anti-left platform. The miners, acting on behalf of the working class, forced home the victory of '72 and, such was their strength, they didn't even have to fight to achieve it. They brought down the Conservative government with a show of strength.

After the elections the unions took more and more direct control over the running of industry, with the major state industrial policies being drawn up by the unions. The state had failed to halt the political development of the working class and the ruling class had no option other than to hand power over to the unions, the only agent of social control which could influence the working class.

## IMPERIAL TYPEWRITERS STRIKE

In the early summer of '74 the organisation during the 13 week Imperial Typewriters strike in Leicester equalled that of the miners. In a hitherto "quiet" factory hundreds of Asian workers—40% women—held meetings every day throughout the strike. Despite the fact that most of the white workers, with the National Front intervening, scabbed on the strike, the

political achievements more great.

Many myths were shattered, pointing the way in several areas for the whole working class. First, the fact that it was women who constituted half those active in the strike; second, that it was Asians who were the force behind the strike—this is the highest point so far in the coming to the fore of immigrant workers in the class struggle; third, the strike wished, and had to involve, the entire Asian community—this was the basis of its strength. This total community involvement is also the material root of the strength of the miners in Britain and of the Republican—and Loyalist—forces in the six counties.

The most powerful working class forces in Britain and Ireland maintain their political power because it is based on the whole class in a given area and not just a section of the class, eg. the workers in a factory, mine etc. Possibly and hopefully black communities in Britain will develop their strength as a reference point for the whole class, as happened in Leicester at the time of the Imperial Typewriters strike and after, when the struggle quickly spread through other factories employing Asians in the town.

Chauvinism over the last issue and racism are two closely related areas which show clearly the absence, to any great degree, of conscious, revolutionary politics inside the British working class at the present time. Both the existence and development of a strong black working class and the rapid building of a solidarity campaign on Ireland through the Troops Out Movement are two crucial ways in which can be tackled the imperialist consciousness which exists even in militant and revolutionary elements in the working class, and so help break the working class out of its current isolation, through its concentration on factory issues alone.

## THE SUMMER, AUTUMN & STRIKE WAVE—1974.

The summer of 1974 saw a big wage explosion, with Phase 3 abolished in July. Not only was there a class-wide development of rank-and-file organisation but also a success on the wages front, at a most crucial time, sector after sector: postmen, nurses, railway workers, car workers, oil refiners workers etc.

The events in Glasgow in September and October were another indication of the tremendous possibilities there are for the working class. There, upwards of 25,000 people in over 20 different factories went on strike for more money in the biggest strike wave to hit one town in memory.

What is more, struggles are now, significantly, taking up social demands, such as the private, pay-beds issue in the hospitals, and this will be a growing area of battle between the working class need to take over control of society for its own ends and the union leadership's desire to show that it can manage and make profitable the capitalist economy.

## THE "SOCIAL CONTRACT"

The "Social Contract" is the formal response of the state and the unions to the strength of the working class in the previous period. The fact that almost no section of the ruling class was able throughout 1974 to support a statutory control on wages is a result of the working class's strength. The "Social Contract" itself is, to all intents and purposes, more myth than reality, but the generalised offensive against the working class—through inflation, cuts in social services, education and housing, and through increased repression, as in the anti-Irish laws of late '74—is certainly very real.

In production the ruling class, as ever, is using the crisis politically to hit workers. First, by using the union leadership to try to boost productivity and the rate of profit by attempting to make workers 'identify' more with the needs of production, though talk of "workers' control". But reformist and workers' control ideology is going to be difficult to impose on workers whose principle source of strength, historically, has been precisely their rejection of capitalist work ideology.

And the second area, and the more serious, is the general attack on workplace organisation. This comprises a concerted drive to reduce manning levels and to attack workers' resistance to mobility within the plant, through the implementation of, and threats of, redundancy and short-time working.

With this happening it is essential for workers not to be conned into defensive responses, accepting reformist, 'political' solutions offered by the trade union leadership. It is necessary to fight the threat posed by the redundancies, not by working harder and more efficiently—this will only result in the quicker arrival of short-time working—but by resisting mobility of labour in the plant and cuts in manning levels, and adopting measures to cut down production. It's no accident that workers, such as at Fords, with "bad" work records over the past two years are in a strong position, in the present recessionary situation, with regard to employment and the availability of overtime, precisely because they've managed to keep down production.

Whether the working class will be able to resist the capitalist offensive in the present period remains to be seen. Certainly the fact that the class was able to mount a wage offensive in 1974 capable of maintaining living standards against an ever increasing rate of inflation is important. However at a time when most people in society are aware that for the first time for over 50 years that 'Socialism' is on the agenda, the organisations and politics in the working class and in the left have to be able to deal politically and organisationally with every facet of the developing situation before real advances can be made and a serious challenge to the capitalist state mounted.

This article was written by a comrade active in the Ford Dagenham Group and in East London Big Flame.



## ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE

This journal has been put together by all Big Flame groups - in East and West London, Birmingham, Manchester and Merseyside.

We intend to use it to develop and argue out the political ideas and perspectives which together make up our politics in Big Flame. We expect that in their development, many of them will - within broad limits - be changed, modified and re-assessed.

The magazine will reflect the disagreements which exist within Big Flame. We think that this is important - openness and lack of dogmatism are a part of our politics. There is a tendency within the revolutionary left groups in Britain to hide, and worse, to repress disagreements and debate in the interest of preserving what is often a phoney facade of unity.

This is the product of a tradition of sectarianism and competition between groups which has obstructed open debate, and the free development of revolutionary ideas. It has led to dogmatic, often boring and trivial discussion between and within the Left. This has helped to create an unimaginative, poor and under-developed political, revolutionary culture in Britain.

We hope that the magazine will help in the process of changing this. We invite contributions - and we'd particularly welcome comment on the articles (though we'll maintain the right of deciding whether or not they are published).

Among the articles which are planned for future issues - Origins of the crisis; the struggle in Ireland - our work in the Troops Out Movement; the autonomy of women; towards a revolutionary film culture; organising in hospitals; a report from Italy; a critique of Trotskyism.

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