

PART 2

HOW WE CAN START WINNING



PART 2

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## PART 2: HOW WE CAN START WINNING

### Introduction - we've got to start organising

In the first part of the pamphlet, we've emphasised the reasons why we're not going forward as a movement. Why we're losing many struggles and only half winning the rest. We've emphasised the widening divisions in the working class. The growth of reformist and reactionary ideas. The link between the Labour Government and the trade unions.

But there's another side to the picture. There is growing discontent among workers about continuing wage restraint. In some unions there is a rift between the rank and file and the leadership. There are struggles all over the country against the cuts in public spending. Black and Asian workers are pursuing their fight against racism and against low wages and lousy jobs. Women are fighting equal pay battles.

And given Labour's appalling record, it's not surprising that increasing numbers of workers are looking around for alternatives. Many are looking to the left. Revolutionary socialist candidates polled over 50,000 votes in the 1977 TGWU election for General Secretary, and have also done well in other unions.

Clearly there is an unprecedented possibility for revolutionary socialists to make a political impact in industry, in the public sector and other workplaces.

To make the best of these possibilities, the most important thing for any socialist militant is to begin to organise. To help organise resistance among the mass of workers (not just among shop stewards and convenors) to wage restraint, harder work, manning cuts, redundancies, cuts in public spending, closures etc. For us in Big Flame, this means more than trying to sell our paper, or recruit individuals to our organisation. The priority is to build a broad, anti-capitalist movement among the rank and file, and to help workers organise to win struggles.

Saying this doesn't mean we think every militant reading this pamphlet should be setting up action groups or joint shop stewards committees etc. Hopefully some will. But we recognise that different people have varying amounts of time, confidence and skill. Some people will be stewards or branch officials, some will not.

But, in beginning to rebuild a movement, every contribution is important, however small. It may be just talking to the people around, lending copies of socialist and progressive books, newspapers or magazines. It may be trying to produce a leaflet for everyone at work about a grievance in a particular department - or about a section who're already involved in a struggle. It may be getting people together for a fight in the shop stewards' committee or union branch.



Whatever the contribution, it should be made with the aim of strengthening the confidence and the solidarity of the mass of workers - not just to influence workers' representatives behind the backs of those who have elected them. Socialism is not about manipulation: it's about extending democracy.

Obviously, it's difficult for any militant to do these things alone. Isolation is demoralising. So one of the first priorities of organising at work must be to bring together the militants - to discuss what's going on in the union branch, the shop stewards' committee or its equivalent, and what's going on at the base - on the shop floor, in the hospital wards, at the coalface etc. Providing there's a degree of political agreement, such a group - however small - can make a real impact in supporting struggles, organising in the union branch, developing fighting policies and making a presence for socialist ideas.

What we're saying is that we won't start winning unless militants start organising to win. But militancy alone isn't enough either. We're facing a difficult situation. We're up against the government, the bosses, the mass media and the unions. So we've got to have the right strategy and good tactics. That's what the rest of the pamphlet is about.



## SECTION 1 : Going beyond trade unionism

The message of this section is simple. What we're saying is that to start winning again, we have to go beyond the limits of trade unionism. That's the basis of our strategy. A recent struggle which shows exactly what this means and why it's true is the recent defeat of the struggle against the closure of the Shelton steel works in Stoke. In June 1978 the fight against the British Steel Corporation was lost, and 1,600 jobs disappeared.

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

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

- member of Shelton trade union action committee

Time and again struggles are lost because they are fought on management's terms. The Grunwick struggle was lost when it was taken away from thousands of workers picketing the gates and carried into the Courts - just where the Grunwick management and the National Association for Freedom wanted it. Struggles against manning cuts and redundancies have been lost at Leyland, Chrysler and Ford because union officials, convenors and stewards have accepted the need for their employers to make higher profits. And so on.

Fighting on management's terms is the essence of trade unionism - as we showed in Part 1. Our strategy for winning is to go beyond this. In other words:

- \* To fight only on our terms - for more money, less work, more power and less divisions in the working class - and against the needs of bosses for more profits.

This means supporting struggles for much higher pay, against productivity or bonus deals, manning cuts, harder work, voluntary or enforced redundancies, and against all unpaid lay-off's - even if capitalists threaten closure or collapse if they give in to these demands.

- \* To prepare workers for the consequences of winning these struggles! As we've seen, when profits are hit by workers winning struggles, bosses will hit back with redundancies, closures, divide and rule techniques and new methods of production to undermine working class strength.

To win these major struggles requires mass involvement,



high morale, militant and imaginative tactics, and widespread support of other working class people. It's a hard job, but it's better than giving up the struggle and going backwards - which is what mainstream trade unionism recommends in the face of this bosses' blackmail.

An essential part of fighting these attacks is to begin to build a rank and file movement for a socialist alternative. Only in this way can we avoid negotiating on management's terms. We have to say: if capitalism cannot meet our needs, we have to struggle for a better system. What we're saying is that if we're to start winning, we have to begin to build a mass anti-capitalist movement.

- \* To fight against the way capitalism divides the working class - by skill and trade, by race and sex, between employed and unemployed. Trade unionism accepts these divisions as natural - and even organises workers according to the tools of their trade and nature of their product.

Our aim must be to find ways of overcoming these divisions. That means supporting the struggles of immigrant workers and women against the racial and sexist divisions of workload and money. We should be fighting against differentials and demanding across the board money rises, or - better - higher rises for lower paid grades. We need to link the struggles of the unemployed with those at work around the slogan: "less workload for those at work - more jobs for the unemployed".

And we have to look for ways of building links between workplace organisation and those in the communities.

- \* To reject reformist ways of fighting. This means rejecting Arbitration, Courts and Tribunals as an alternative to mass action. It means developing a tradition of mass participation in struggle - with workplace bulletins, regular section meetings with the shop steward, mass picketing or mass occupations, and frequent mass meetings. Finally it means rejecting sectionalism in favour of solidarity. We have to begin to look outside our particular section or workplace for support for our struggles. And we have to be prepared to offer our solidarity to other struggles.

We are convinced that using these guidelines, we can start winning again. This will almost certainly lead to conflict with national union leaders and moderates at all levels of the unions. Militants will have to be prepared to fight out these battles inside the structures of the trade union movement.

We want to emphasise that when we talk of "going beyond trade unionism" we don't mean that militants should ignore the unions and work exclusively outside the trade union movement. In our opinion, every socialist militant should be active in their union branch. And we'd encourage any militant who has the time and confidence to stand as shop steward or branch officer. Inside the trade union movement, it's of great importance to fiercely argue for policies, demands and ways of fighting that go beyond the traditional limits of trade unionism. Equally it's important to fight for more democratic control of full time officials, and to



elect more militant representatives. All these things can help workers win their own struggles - by removing a few of the obstacles that are often in the way.

Having said all this, we also want to emphasise that there's much more to organising than just working in the unions. For a start, most union branch meetings are boring, lifeless affairs attended by only a tiny minority of workers, and often totally unrepresentative of the whole workforce. Our concern is to develop the confidence, organisation and understanding of the mass of workers - not just a small minority who go to branch meetings. So, for example, it can be very useful for a group of militants from a workplace to get together and start a regular workplace bulletin, outside of the control of the union. This is especially true if the union branch or stewards' committee is dominated by "moderates". The bulletin can provide information about what management is planning, give the latest news of struggles in the workplace and in the area, and begin to put forward a socialist alternative - rooted in the experience of the workers in that workplace.

Another example might be an anti-cuts committee - involving workers from hospitals or schools due to be closed down, people from the local area, and representatives of union branches.

There's another reason why working in the unions is not the whole answer. It is because as the working-class in the very long term develops its power and begins to challenge the power of capitalism, it will create new, mass organisations through which it can express that power. And those organisations will not be trade unions. In Russia in 1905 and 1917, those organisations were the Soviets. In Italy and Germany in 1919-20 it was the Factory and Workers' Councils. In Chile in 1972-73 it was the Cordones Obreros. And in Portugal in 1975 it was the organisations of Popular Power.

These are organisations of the working-class against capitalism. What we call autonomous organisations - because they are expressions of the autonomy of working class needs (for more power, more money and less work) from capitalist needs (for more profit and more control). Trade unions are organisations of the working-class within capitalism. They are expressions of reformism.

Obviously, we're a long way from the situation where it will be possible to create autonomous organisations of the working class in Britain which have any real stability or power in the majority of workplaces. However, occasionally workers will create - in struggle situations - an organisation which goes beyond trade unionism. For instance, at the Ford Langley truck plant in June 1977:



"The struggle started when about 600 of us - mainly line workers - were laid off without pay because of a dispute at Dagenham. The management gave us one hour's notice before sending us home. So, led by only 3 stewards, we held a mass meeting on the gates, and decided to put a 24 hour picket on the gates - to close down the rest of the plant.

We were demanding a guaranteed 40 hours' pay, work or no work. And the picket worked well. We turned over 40 delivery trucks away on the first day. The Convenor and Deputy Convenor began to get very agitated about our direct action - because it was so successful. The union branch and stewards' committee were led by moderates and they had a policy of not fighting unpaid lay-off's, and keeping as many people working as possible by co-operating with management.

Our policy was - if there's one person laid off without pay, everyone should be out. Eventually, the union became so hostile to the picket that they supported a management plant to bring in all the trucks we'd turned away during 5 days' picketing at the weekend. All this resulted in the formation of the Ford Langley Action Committee - an organisation of militant workers and a few left-wing shop stewards (all mainly lineworkers)."

Jack Brown (Ford Langley)

For the moment, this kind of thing is going to be rare. But it's very important, and militants have always got to keep the possibility in mind. And we have to be aware that in the struggle against capitalism, it's inevitable that mass autonomous organisations will be created, and we've got to be well prepared to help in the process - for the simple reason that these are the organisations which will win the struggle for socialism and be the new instruments of working class power and government.

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How we can start winning (cont.)

Section 2: Fighting unemployment - closures; cuts in public spending; redundancies.

Mass unemployment is Enemy Number One for the working class. In Part 1 we showed how it's the single most important factor in weakening our struggle for better conditions, more money and less work. In fact it's simple blackmail:

At Courtaulds in the early 70's, this problem almost became a joke. Every time the management, under their "socialist" chairman Lord Kearton, wanted a change in productivity, production methods or wage rates, they simply announced closure of the factories involved. Then, after negotiation with the unions, the plants were kept open - with, surprise surprise, higher productivity, different production methods and wage rates.

Unfortunately, many workers and quite a few militants are completely unaware of the way that unemployment affects them. So people work overtime whenever possible, and - as in the mines in some areas - accept productivity deals rather than face a hard fight for higher basic wages.

We have to show how these are short-term solutions which will just mean things get worse in the long run. Even government surveys see a permanent pool of over 2 million unemployed well into the 1980's, with perhaps job-creation type schemes as an eternal sticking plaster for unemployed youth. Some reports predict 4 or 5 million unemployed. So we have to build a campaign about all this - against the loss of even one job from productivity deals, "natural wastage", manning cuts or overtime working. An imaginative campaign using mass leaflets, socialist films and socialist theatre in every workplace where militants can organise.

But the most important thing is active resistance. And we start with the hardest problem facing workers:

HOW TO FIGHT CLOSURES AND ENFORCED REDUNDANCIES (IN FACTORIES, HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS, NURSERIES) -

Every single struggle against closure and redundancy in the past couple of years has shown two main things. First, the key tactic is occupation - and despite all the media scares about the Criminal Trespass Act, it is still perfectly possible to carry out a prolonged, militant and successful occupation legally (though we shouldn't worry too much about bourgeois law in any case). And secondly, to even begin a successful and active fight, you have to have a workforce in which there's a lot of unity and high morale. To go back to the struggle at Shelton steelworkers:

"Before the closure was announced, there was demoralisation in the plant - especially among the production workers, most of whom are members of the I.S.T.C. - the main union - which has certainly not fought for their interests.



Its time seems to be taken up appointing worker directors for British Steel. The I.S.T.C. have smashed their members' morale by agreeing to a productivity deal which lost them 20% of their basic wage and made them much more dependent on the productivity bonus. But production has been falling since it's controlled by iron ores supplied from Scunthorpe and ISTC members were ending up with 57% of the wage they were getting last year. Not surprisingly, they are not leading the fight against closure."

Member of Shelton Action Committee

LESSON:

To fight closure there has to be high morale. There has to be developed a tradition of struggle among the workers. So every struggle, however apparently trivial, has to be fought hard. And it's no good convenors, stewards and militants complaining that "the workers are apathetic and won't fight - they just want the redundancy money and to get out" if the convenors and stewards have not fully supported every previous struggle in the plant on wages, manning, safety, racism, discrimination against women etc.

Redundancy Payments

A second problem which mainly affects factory closures is the way that redundancy payments (under the Redundancy Act) can divide and buy off workers. Redundancy payments are paid according to length of service - so when closure of the Leyland Triumph plant in Speke was announced, some of the longest serving workers were offered up to £6,000 while people who'd been there a couple of years were only going to get a few hundred pounds. Inevitably, this split the workforce, and some people were tempted by the money.

We have to campaign against this acceptance of Redundancy money without a fight. For a start, we have to establish the principle that no worker has a right to sell his or her job and keep another person on the dole. Socialist should campaign for a policy in the trade union movement that workers from a workplace that has accepted redundancy money without a fight, or an individual worker who has accepted voluntary redundancy should not be allowed a job in any 100% union shop for a period of one year after accepting the payment.

We also have to point out that Redundancy money doesn't last if you can't get a job. There's no possibility of everyone owning a sweet shop or newsagent! In 1977, one in every four unemployed workers in Great Britain had been out of a job for more than a year. And if you do get a job, studies show that a large proportion of workers who're made redundant and who do get jobs take a drop in wages. A study of the experiences of workers made redundant at Rolls Royce in 1971 found that:

- \* Redundant workers who got new jobs took a £4 a week drop in wages, even though they



had only been on average earnings at Rodls Royce.

- \* Only 13% of the workers made redundant actually got better wages in their new jobs.
- \* The older workers made redundant came off by far the worst - their average drop in wages was nearly a third.

Source: Fryer, RH "The Industrial Journal" 1973 p 9, quoted in the Conference of Socialist Economists Workers' Enquiry into the Motor Industry.

These were workers who had actually managed to get other jobs. Nowadays, many workers won't. As one worker from a Vickers factory on the Tyne which is threatened with closure told 'Big Flame':

I have another ten years to do. At the age of 56 it will be very hard to get a job in the trade. And ten years is a long time even with your redundancy money; if you don't get a job within a year, it's a mere nothing. It's not just the older ones like me who will suffer. I feel sorry for the young ones with families, who've taken on commitments. With unemployment like it is up here, they've little hope of a job.

LESSON: Apathy develops among workers both when workers are sold out in struggle by stewards or convenors (or union officials) and when workers are not fully involved in their struggles, despite the support of their leaders for their demands. This was one of the main problems at Triumph Speke, where, previous to the closure decision, there had been a long strike over management attempts to cut manning and mutuality agreements. During weeks and weeks of all out strike, there was only one mass meeting!

The only way to beat the Redundancy Act is to have already developed a spirit of mass involvement and solidarity among workers before the threat of closure is on the horizon.

#### Involving the whole community

Struggles against hospital and nursery closures have underlined a third lesson which has not been learnt in most factory closure battles - the need to build up support in the community and other workplaces. In Hemel Hempstead, there has been a long struggle fought for a new hospital, which is desperately needed. The campaign sought out wide support, and when it called a mass demonstration on a weekday, hundreds and hundreds of factory workers, local authority workers, health workers, teachers and schoolchildren joined the march - paralysing factories, schools and services in the area.



Among the first and most successful struggles against hospital closure was the occupation of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (the EGA), the only hospital for women in London. But not only did the workers occupy the EGA. They went out and made contact with shop stewards in other hospitals and nearby firms. They got the backing of Trades Councils, community groups and women's groups. They realised that to win, they would need the maximum amount of solidarity and support. So they explained to the patients, to previous patients and to local residents why they were fighting the closure and the cuts. They helped to make films about their occupation - made by a socialist film group - and showed it in union branches and hospitals all over the country.

And their tactics were militant. They occupied, staged mass pickets, blocked roads - and when the Health Minister announced a closure date, workers at other hospitals went on strike. Through these tactics at the base, they forced the unions to act more militantly. And all this succeeded in preventing closure - so far. The EGA workers pointed the way in using these type of tactics. Two other London hospitals occupied shortly afterwards - among them Hounslow Hospital which has since launched a national campaign against the cuts: "Fightback".

#### LESSON:

A struggle against closure has a much greater chance of success if it has widespread support outside the workplace affected, as well as inside. This is as true for a factory struggle as a hospital facing closure. A mass campaign in other factories and in the community against the higher unemployment resulting from the Triumph Speke closure - which had the potential of resulting in even token action by workers and militant demonstrations - would have done wonders for the morale of the workforce.

#### Tactics and demands in fighting closure:

In the first phase of the present struggle against unemployment (1969-1974), revolutionary socialists and trade union militants used a fighting slogan with a long history in Britain: "Demand the Right to Work". But the movement also began to use a new tactic - OCCUPATION. It's hard to believe that this tactic wasn't in use in Britain until 1971 because now it's a regular weapon. And a very useful one. It gives workers power and control over plant and machinery, and it's also good because the mass of workers can get involved in the struggle. Particularly under the Tories, the many factory occupations built up a huge resistance to closures and unemployment. But they couldn't really win. The angry demand for the right to work could only ever act as a thorn in the side of Capital and the union leaders in their negotiations.

And - as we saw from the example of Courtaulds - the demand for the right to work doesn't always cut across capital's plans. At Upper Clyde Shipbuilders for instance, the right to work was granted, but on new and harsher terms. At Fisher Bendix on Merseyside, it was granted when a new owner took over the factory - but two years later he tried to close it down again.



Capitalism was still the name of the game - even though it was being pressured. But at that time, the crisis was less severe - so it did at least appear that we were winning some partial victories.

In recent years, however, there have been few even partial victories. Whole factories close down - even if they've been occupied. For example, Thorn Electric in Skemmersdale. It seemed that to start winning, there would have to be an escalation in demands and in tactics (like in northern France where steel workers in the town of Denain have fought running battles with the riot police - throwing up barricades, throwing molotov cocktails in an effort to occupy the police barracks. They're fighting against Government plans to introduce 20,000 redundancies in French steel plants - and what's worrying the Government, the bosses, union leaders and even some leading members of the French Communist Party is that the battle is completely in the hands of the rank and file, and out of the control of the unions).

In Britain there has been no such escalation of tactics. But a new thread of struggle has now come onto the horizon: the fight to work on our terms to provide goods and services which the working class needs.

#### TWO EXAMPLES

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

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

A Corporate Plan was then drawn up through discussion in every Lucas Aerospace factory - combining ideas from the highest level technologists to semi-skilled operators on the shop floor. Through a detailed questionnaire, the Lucas workers were asked what sort of products they could build, and also as "consumers" in society, what sort of products they felt were needed. The results were amazing. Over 150 different products which could be made by the same workforce using existing plant and machinery.



The range of products was staggering: portable life support units for patients suffering heart attacks; a portable and cheap kidney machine; a combined battery and petrol-powered engine which will last 20 years without maintenance, cut fuel consumption by over half and reduce pollution; solar energy heaters for homes; and a Hobcart designed to enable Spina Bifida sufferers to move around.

The Company at first refused to even acknowledge the plan - for three years until, in the face of stiff resistance to its plan to restore profits by closing three factories and sacking 2,000 workers, at the beginning of 1979 it agreed to examine the Plan. But so far, since the Corporate Plan was devised by the workers, there has not been a single redundancy.

#### THE SECOND EXAMPLE: Towards a Socialist Alternative in the Health Service

Some of the struggles against hospital closure have not simply been fought defensively against this or that cut. They've been fought as part of a struggle for a better and socialist health service - a people's health service.

For example, at the EGA, the workers have talked about the need for more hospitals where a woman can be certain of being treated by women medical staff who are sympathetic to her needs. Again at the EGA, since the occupation began they've put more emphasis on preventing ill-health, so they've provided space for a screening service for healthy women, to check up for problems before they become serious.

Many of the struggles in the NHS have been fought against the closure of small, community hospitals. Managements argue that these are inefficient. But many patients and many workers prefer these hospitals - because they're friendlier and less bureaucratic. They argue for more community hospitals with more staff and better equipment.

Quite obviously, demands like the Lucas Corporate Plan, or plans for a health service designed to meet working-class needs are not going to win just because they make sense and are "rational". That is well down the list of the bosses' priorities. Such demands can only be won through the most militant struggle. But it is a way forward because:

1. It challenges capitalist rationality. It challenges the idea that thousands of builders are on the dole when thousands of people need houses. It challenges the idea that hundreds of people die each year of kidney failure because there are no kidney machines - when thousands of workers who can design and build kidney machines are about to be sacked.



2. It is a rejection of the simple demand for the Right to Work, which is too easily and too often interpreted as the right to work at any cost (even if it means lower wages, harder work, worse conditions). Our demand should be for the Right to Work on Our Terms - at the best rates of pay, with the manning we want, in the conditions we think fit, making products we can believe in. This is a rejection of the capitalist criteria of social values (based on profit) and instead puts forward values based on peoples' needs. These are very hard to argue against.

This is very important because instead of workers being on the defensive - it can put the bosses on the defensive: "how dare you put thousands of us workers who're perfectly capable of building kidney machines on the dole, when you know very well that hundreds of people die from lack of a kidney machine?"

3. The fight to work (on our terms) on alternative products opens up another very important possibility: of fighting to keep jobs in which the work process itself could be changed and perhaps made more enjoyable. This pamphlet has often referred to one of the most glaring facts about the working-class: that basically we hate capitalist work - the boredom, the unsocial hours, the lack of real purpose. Most people work without pride - for the money and the company of mates. If you can, you skive. If you can get away with it, you rob.

All this is kept hidden by the official "Labour Movement", whose rhetoric and image is still based on the artisans and skilled craftsmen of the past who had good reason to have pride in their work. But today, the truth is that there is an instinctive rejection of capitalist work inside wide sections of the working class. And this hatred of stupid work constantly undermines the "fight for the right to work". And - as happened at Triumph Speke - this is one of the factors that encourages people to "get out of the mad house" and take redundancy money without a fight against closure.

#### Conclusion:

In fighting closures and redundancies, we need to use the most militant and imaginative tactics possible. Occupations, mass picketting, mass demonstrations causing maximum disruption (as the steel workers have done in north-east France), occupations of other factories or administrative headquarters owned by the same company - or occupations of office blocks and hospitals in the same health area. But we have to go beyond demanding simply "The Right to Work". We want "the Right to Work on Our Terms". And where possible, we should develop a socialist alternative - like the Lucas Plan or the demand for a working-class health service. This keeps up the morale and unity of the workforce and can put management on the defensive.



SECTION 3: Fighting unemployment - productivity and bonus deals; manning cuts; "natural wastage"; attacks on "restrictive practices".

The working-class in Britain is currently facing a major onslaught from politicians, from the mass media, from bosses and from many trade union leaders (such as the detestable Frank Chapple) to force us to work harder. Keith Joseph (Tory shadow industry minister) took up the theme three years ago - talking about "overmanning" and "restrictive practices". Since then it's been taken up vigorously - and the need for manning cuts, increases in productivity and an attack on restrictive practices has effectively become the industrial programme of the Labour Government.

Just how serious has been the impact of all this can be seen from the following quote from the "Guardian":

A package deal which involves a 12 month "no strike" agreement is to be introduced at six Tyne ship repair yards. The deal described as "an historic breakthrough" has been worked out by the Tyne Repair Group and union representatives of the six yards involved.

It also involves the disbandment of demarcation lines, full mobility of labour, more flexibility on ships' crews working, full monitoring of company results and moves towards industrial democracy ....

Mr Bob Glass, district delegate of the Boilermakers' Society said: 'We intend to make it work in the interests of everyone concerned'. Joe Smith, secretary of the shop stewards' negotiating committee said: 'There is no doubt that this is the biggest breakthrough made in this industry'.

- September 8th 1978

According to the company, as a result of this deal they were hoping for 25% more orders - which they would be able to complete without hiring any extra labour. In other words, people would be working 25% harder.

It's easy to see why the unions agreed to the new conditions: it offers a temporary guarantee against unemployment (by taking work from other repair yards in Britain and abroad) and it offers a little more power to union officials. They have bargained workers' power over the job against a little bit of job security. They have accepted the bosses' problem - to make profit and cut labour costs - as their own.

So the first lesson - as always - is to say: "We don't want our jobs at any price". Their blackmail is the dole queue. We have to play their bluff and tell them we'd prefer to be on the dole than giving up our rights.

"At least we've got parity on the dole!"

- Swan Hunter boilermaker made redundant after they'd lost the Polish shipping order following their refusal to sign a "no strike" agreement.



This doesn't mean we should accept the dole as a solution. What it does mean is that a successful struggle against attacks on "restrictive practices" will often result in managements resorting to redundancies or even closure. So in fighting these kind of attacks, it's important to bear this in mind, and start early preparations for a struggle against redundancy or closure.

#### A. ORGANISING AGAINST A PRODUCTIVITY DEAL

The idea behind any productivity deal is straightforward - to get more work from less workers, and to ensure that only a tiny fraction of the extra wealth produced goes to the workers involved. In other words, productivity deals are just a legal form of robbery. And that's got to be our basic argument against productivity and bonus deals. They might put a little extra money in our wage packets - but more often than not, it means a lot of extra profits in industry, and in the public sector it means it's ever easier to cut back expenditure.

"Last year's productivity deal has already paid for itself three times over" - Sir Derek Ezra, Chairman of the National Coal Board.

Productivity deals are also dangerous because they divide a workforce. Inevitably there are going to be individual jobs, or whole sections, where it's easier to reach the productivity targets. So different sections will be earning different amounts of money, and will come to have very different outlooks. For example, in the mines it's generally true that the coal faces in the Nottinghamshire mines are easier to work than Yorkshire. So Nottingham is in favour of productivity dealing and against an all out strike for a big increase in the basic. Whereas Yorkshire is generally more opposed to productivity dealing and in favour of a struggle on basic rates.

#### Get the Claim Right

The first stage in fighting any potential prod deal is to get the wages and conditions claim right. As we explained in section 1, the bosses don't mind paying higher wages as long as any increase is tied to an increase in productivity. That way they can pay more money and increase their profits (which is the only reason they're in business - to rip us off). Over the past couple of years, it's been particularly clear how productivity deals have been used to deflect struggles against wage restraint and the Social Contract.

The clearest example is again what happened in the mines. With their demand for £130 for faceworkers, the miners were likely to come into direct confrontation with the Labour Government in early 1978 over Phase 3 of the Social Contract. Despite a decision by the NUM annual conference against all productivity deals, and despite a national ballot of all miners which also went against productivity deals, the right-wing dominated NUM Executive allowed the Coal Board to go ahead with its productivity deal - which effectively headed off the struggle for the increase in basic rates.



So the first stage in fighting a prod deal is to get the claim right - to make sure that a large money increase on the basic rates is the first item of the claim, and that any prod deal is specifically excluded.

"At Ford's this year (1978), we - the militants - had to fight an almighty battle with the right-wing, and with members of the Communist Party on the national convenors' committee. They wanted a vaguely worded claim - "compensation for the effect of inflation and a rise sufficient to ensure an increase in Ford workers' standard of living during the period of the contract". In other words, they didn't want to name a specific figure - because they knew this would increase their members' expectations, and lead to a fight with the Labour Government, which they wanted to avoid at all costs.

This left the door wide open for a productivity deal. So we fought through every stewards' committee and every Ford union branch to get the claim we wanted: £20 on the pay, 1 hour off the day and no strings. After a long fight we won, and this claim was adopted. And it resulted in the long strike in October and November."

Secretary, Ford UK Workers' Group

#### The Arguments We Can Use:

Getting the claim right is no guarantee of not ending up with a productivity deal, as we've seen from the example of the miners. But it's a good start. From then on, right through the period of the claim it's essential to hammer home the message in leaflet after leaflet and meeting after meeting:

- \* A productivity or bonus deal means something for nothing for the bosses.
- \* Higher productivity will mean more people on the dole - at a time when there's already  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million on the dole. We should be looking for ways of sharing more equally the burden of work in society - not forcing some people to work even harder when others have no source of wages.
- \* Many productivity or bonus deals do not involve the introduction of new machinery or new technology to make the job easier. They just mean a speed-up of work, in other words HARDER WORK. Inevitably this'll mean we get more tired, get sick more often, and have more accidents at work. Ford of Germany has twice the number of accidents per million man hours than Ford UK. And - according to the Yorkshire Area National Union of Mineworkers, since the introduction of productivity dealing in the pits in 1978, the accident rate in the mines has shot up.
- \* Where an increase in productivity is going to result from the introduction of new technology, our response should be clear: no labour saving machinery without a reduction in the working week with no loss of pay. This is exactly how the Post Office Engineers won a  $37\frac{1}{2}$  hour week in September 1978 - by refusing to allow the



installation of the new electronic exchanges. Exactly the same tactic can be used in any situation - from hospitals to small components factories to large car plants.

Our argument is straightforward. Over the years we've seen improved technology and productivity resulting in greater output, fewer jobs and thousands on the dole. And working class people are working harder than ever. But new technology should mean a better life for all - with more leisure time, and no-one on the dole. That's why we argue for a shorter working week.

- \* The bosses and their media say that without increases in productivity matching those in Japan, USA and Germany, British industry will become increasingly uncompetitive and eventually go to the wall.

This is exactly the same argument used by the coal mine owners in the 1920's when they were trying to cut wages: "If I can't lower the price of coal produced in this pit by cutting your wages, then I'll go out of business because coal from other pits is cheaper".

Of course they're ignoring the fact that they and their shareholders are making a massive profit, and living at a far, far higher standard of living than the coal miners. They're conveniently forgetting that this is a class society. And they're saying that just because workers in one area or one country have accepted lousy conditions - so should we all - otherwise they'll make less profits than they could elsewhere.

Our answer to these arguments is simple. We're not against new technology or increased productivity in principle. But we are against increased productivity when it is at the expense of the working-class, and it only benefits a small minority. What we're saying is that the only answer to these arguments from the bosses is a political response. We have to start talking openly about a socialist alternative - a classless society where the benefits of increased productivity will be shared equally.

For the miners, the answer to the competition between different pits and different areas was national organisation. In the same way, we've got to start working in the long term for international working-class organisation.

#### The "Attendance Bonus"

Ford, Vauxhall, Perkins Engines and Thorn Electric are among companies who have in the past year offered a so-called "attendance bonus", paid weekly to workers who have perfect time-keeping and no days off. Again it's a way of heading off a straightforward fight over basic rates.

- \* If they can "afford" to pay a £3 or £4 "attendance bonus" then they can "afford" to pay it on the basic rate.
- \* It'll mean people coming in to work when they don't feel well - or when one of the family is sick and they shouldn't go in.



- \* It'll mean people losing a lot of money just because the car won't start, or there's a traffic jam, or the lift doesn't turn up, or the bus is late or cancelled (why the hell should we suffer in our pocket just because they're cutting back bus services??).
- \* We should be paid a lot more for the hours we do work - not penalised for hours we don't work.
- \* It'll mean more people on the dole. Inevitably an "attendance bonus" will cut absenteeism, so they'll cut any labour pool used to cover absenteeism.

The fundamental point is that we should defend absenteeism. We are not slaves. We have a right to work when we want - not just when they want our labour. We're not machines.

The "Attendance Bonus" offered by Ford to its workers is even more pernicious. It will be paid only to workers who work the full 40 hours and who take no part in disputes. This is an attempt to introduce severe financial penalties against anyone or any section that takes unofficial action on struggles over safety or health, or manning or discipline. If anyone is involved in this kind of action - then they'll automatically lose the attendance bonus - even if the dispute lasts only a couple of minutes. Clearly this will mean that people will be even more willing to work in dangerous conditions, and do nothing about it. It'll mean that building a tradition of solidarity and struggle will become even more difficult.

#### B. ORGANISING AGAINST MANNING OR STAFFING CUTS AND "NATURAL WASTAGE"

All over the country, in workplace after workplace, workers have been experiencing staffing or manning cuts. In hospitals, there are massive staff shortages: nurses, porters and other ancillary workers, technicians and even doctors are just not replaced when people leave. Exactly the same kind of thing has been happening in many industries:

Where I work, the way they're cutting down the workforce is just not to replace anyone who leaves. They move someone else onto the machine, supposedly temporarily. Then there's another change, and another change. That way you don't notice it. And because people are being moved round, they don't know what the previous worker was expected to do - so they end up doing more.

Worker at CAV in Acton, London

More blatant than this are the manning cuts that are often introduced in the months before a management is preparing to offer a prod deal or bonus scheme - the idea is that it will be impossible for workers to raise output substantially, and therefore to substantially increase their wages.

#### How Can We Fight This Kind of Thing? A Few Tactics and Demands:

WORKERS' COUNCILS - At Brookwood Hospital in the south east, workers have found their own solution to understaffing: a workers' council! Management at the hospital have consistently refused to employ more nurses. Out of an establishment of 805, only 420 staff are



employed. On many occasions there was only one trained nurse in charge of three wards!- Finally, the hospital workers decided they would run the hospital more efficiently and without all the aggravation of management. A Workers' Council was formed which simply took all the power out of management's hands. Within weeks they had won action and recognition of many grievances. Another workers' council has been set up covering two psychiatric hospitals in Banstead and Horton. The Executive Council of the Workers' Council has been set up to deal with wages, administration, medical supplies and staffing.

NOT COVERING JOBS FOR PEOPLE WHO LEAVE AND ARE NOT REPLACED: This is one way of effectively fighting natural wastage and manning cuts. Along with rejecting arguments about profitability, productivity and "overmanning", this is the best way of hitting back at managements which want to cut manning without paying redundancy money. It means keeping a detailed list of everyone who leaves and what job they did - because management will sometimes transfer someone else on to that job for a short time - leaving another job not covered, before a general reorganisation of production hides what has happened and results in a speed up, or harder work.

RESISTING MOBILITY OF LABOUR: Mobility of labour means workers being moved from job to job within their workplace, at the whim of management. There's nothing wrong with mobility as such - after all, most jobs are so boring that any kind of change can be welcome - as long as it is organised by the workers eg job rotation so that everyone has a go at both easy and hard jobs.

But the bosses use mobility of labour as a weapon against the workforce, in their constant effort to break any control of the job that we've developed, to break shop floor organisation and to increase productivity. Mobility is inevitably the first step to manning cuts and the dole queue: it can be used in many ways to restructure the workprocess in a total way and thus "bring to light" so-called "surplus labour", or to break up a single militant group of workers. The effect is always the same:

- \* individual workers feel "dislocated" by being moved away from their mates and from a job they knew well and had 'under control' - and which they could control over the foremen/women over. This leads to passivity and apathy.
- \* militants moved out of strong sections into weak ones are made easy targets for victimisation.
- \* it's easier to be coaxed into doing more than the accepted rate of work for any particular job when you're unfamiliar with it, and anyway know you might be moved the next day.
- \* all these things mean a general weakening of job organisation, which is exactly what management want.

In larger workplaces, mobility can be formalised as a labour pool. These are often established when the job is being changed, or a new product or new method of production is being



brought in, or when output is lowered. Workers in the pool are allocated jobs on a day-to-day basis. Again, the labour pool system is just another short cut to manning cuts and redundancies - in this case through "natural wastage". With workers being moved all over the place one week, leaning on a broom the next, workers in "pools" are gradually "edged out" - while the ones that are left work harder than ever.

So it's clearly essential to fight for a policy in shop stewards' committees and T.U. branches against mobility of labour and against labour pools. Instead, a policy of work sharing should be fought for (so that if output falls or new processes are introduced, everyone share a reduced burden of work).

Mutuality: The principle of mutuality has been fought for by workers in a lot of industries for donkeys years. And many sections have won good mutuality agreements, written and unwritten, that definitely help the struggle against manning cuts and "natural wastage".

Basically, mutuality means that before management can do anything - like change work methods or manning levels - both employer and workers' representatives have to agree. In the motor industry, stewards have tried to extend mutuality to cover issues like line speeds and manning levels. If management introduces a new kind of payment system, then all workers should insist that mutuality applies on all aspects of wage determination - e.g. whether work study is used; job timings; length of breaks. To extend the principle of mutuality is to cut into management's sacred "right to manage".

Not surprisingly, managements are not very happy about mutuality. Ford have always resisted its introduction, and where it exists - for example, Leyland - management are trying to get rid of it. In fact, the degree of mutuality that exists in a company is a good indication of the power balance between the workers and the bosses.

Status Quo: This is the second major principle worth fighting for in any new procedure agreement. Having an agreement in which the status quo applies until procedure is exhausted means that if management wants to initiate changes, and workers object, then whilst this disagreement is being discussed (i.e. going through procedure), workers have the right to continue working under the existing conditions.

Where there is no "status quo" agreement, managements have a virtually free hand. This is exactly the situation at Ford, where - according to the procedure agreement between the unions and management - Ford can for example drastically cut manning on a section without consultation or agreement (i.e. without mutuality) and if workers object, they have to work under the new manning levels for up to 3 weeks while negotiations take place, during which time they're not allowed (by both union and management) to take industrial action!

The new national engineering agreement, which came in during 1976 does have a "status quo" clause, but this is the exception in industry, and millions of workers are not covered by any "status quo" agreement.



Fighting Manning Cuts by Mass Insubordination (i.e. organising the Struggle against Work):

We should say here that in Big Flame our general principle in choosing what tactic to use in industrial action is:

MAXIMUM DAMAGE TO THE BOSSES - MINIMUM COST  
TO US.

Sometimes it can be far more effective, and far less costly in loss of wages to ourselves, to stay inside our workplace and cause maximum disruption - rather than walking out on strike. In particular, this is often one of the best ways of fighting manning cuts/staff shortage. What we're talking about is organising the natural hatred of work which most workers feel to some extent.

For the majority of workers, work in this society is not a creative, enjoyable and worthwhile activity. It's a grind. Something that's forced out of you. So, people struggle against work. There's many varieties of this: doing the job badly, sabotaging equipment, fiddling the clocks, lateness, going home at awkward times, working slow, "not hearing" the foreman, absenteeism, going sick when there's nothing wrong with you but you're sick of work - we can recommend all these varieties and many more!

This isn't because we're lazy like the bosses try to make out. It's because we don't like being ripped off, we don't like being treated like morons, we don't like being thought of as extensions of machines and we don't like doing stupid, boring and pointless work for the benefit of someone else who lives off our work.

This instinct - the rejection of work - is in all of us who have to do this kind of work. Not everyone does anything about it. Some people are simply too scared. Some people are under too much financial pressure. Some people are bought off by supervisors, who give them plenty of overtime or a light job.

But despite all these pressures that management try to use to smash the struggle against work, it still goes on, day after day. It's one way of hitting back at the bastards. The trouble is - it's a very individual solution. But when it is organised and all the individual actions are brought together, it's a very powerful weapon indeed:

1. DOING THE JOB BADLY, BUT ACCORDING TO RULE - as long as everyone does this together, it can work wonders in a manning or staffing dispute, or in a struggle against natural wastage. It might mean doing one's job very, very carefully - checking everything, cleaning and re-cleaning; it might mean leaving parts of the job unfinished if the tools or equipment aren't absolutely perfect. The possibilities are endless.

It might even mean co-ordinating mild sabotage section to section (e.g. hiding key equipment, or making it temporarily unusable) so that production is rarely able to run smoothly, although only one section is affected at a time. In the face of this kind of thing, management will either give up in exasperation, or dig



in their heels and lock you out. Nevertheless it's an ideal tactic because - unlike a strike - IT HURTS THEM MORE THAN IT HURTS US.

2. CO-ORDINATED STRIKES (GUERRILLA STRIKES): this is another way of hitting them hard, without it costing us as much as an all-out strike: in any case, an all-out strike at a time of falling sales and lower output might be just what the bosses want.

It can happen like this: sections organise to take days off completely unannounced and with no warning to management. The action is co-ordinated with other sections to maximise disruption. It means that only a small section loses money whereas the management is losing large amounts of production every day, but still have to pay the mass of the workforce. Of course, this only works where the work of the various sections is inter-dependent.

#### Notes on Time and Motion (Time Study or Work Study)

Most workers know that time study is a fiddle. It's a so-called science invented by bosses to give a "fair" assessment of the amount of work workers are supposed to be capable of doing. In fact it's about as scientific as witchcraft.

It has two assumptions. The first is that any worker should work at full stretch every available minute of the working day. The second is the idea of the "average man or woman" against whom the worker who's being timed is judged. Hitler decided that the Aryon race was "superior man" but no nut has had the nerve to say they've discovered "average man" - nobody except time and motion experts.

What happens is that the time study expert times every tiny action a worker makes repeatedly, maybe 20 times for each action and gets an average time. All the timings for each of the actions are added up, to give an overall average time for the job. Then comes the witchcraft. The expert then "estimates" (i.e. guesses) whether the person who's being timed is working faster or slower than the "average man" and by how much. In most cases, it's decided that the operator was working slower than the "average man", and so timing on the job is reduced from the measurements that the expert actually took - by whatever the expert happens to feel it should be reduced. And they call it science!

Although it's a total fraud, time study is important to us because it's in widespread use - and because on the shop floor it has a (false) aura of being scientific and objective. For management, time study is one of the ways in which they get the maximum amount of work out of a minimum number of workers. So when the time study engineer comes round, you can be sure management are preparing the way for manning cuts and harder work.

How can we fight this?

1. If you want your job retimed, try not to go for it alone. Wait for some of your workmates to go for it as well: as a group you're always stronger.



2. When you're being timed you have to be very careful and disciplined: you have to work consistently at a speed that you think is reasonable for the job, as opposed to what the boss wants (a robot). Leave out all the short cuts you've learnt yourself to make the job easier. And look for ways of making the job harder without the time study expert (who doesn't know the job as well as you) being able to know.
3. Make sure your steward is there when you're timed. If they forget to get the steward, make them do it all again.
4. When the timings for everyone are complete, get the steward to call a section meeting and expose time study for the fraud it is. Explain that this "science" views human beings as machines and has as its objective making them work like one.
5. Use the same arguments with management, and fiercely challenge the time study expert's estimate of how hard you were working compared to "average man". Ask to meet "average man". You're on strong ground here.

Another big fiddle connected with time study is the allocation of "rest time" for the job. According to the National Institute for Time Study Engineers, all jobs should be allocated a "rest time" - also arbitrarily guessed by the expert. The idea is that you get a couple of seconds rests in each minute to relieve your muscles after a heavy lift, or to relieve "mental fatigue" in a repetitive job. Often this rest time simply gets forgotten, or it's ridiculously little. The point is that it's another completely phoney area of this "science", and because of that, we're in a strong position to argue over it. \*\*

Overall the main thing to remember when dealing with time study is that it's a total con. It's in no way objective. After all, who pays the wages of a time study expert?

\*\* The question of "rest time" has been so contentious, and has caused so many disputes, that some companies have simply allocated a block "rest or relief" time. At Ford, all line workers are given half an hour relief time a day. But many Ford workers believe that this is personal relief time - the only time they can go to the toilet etc. In fact it's quite different. It's a resting time from the job. Personal relief time should be on top of this.



#### SECTION 4: Fighting unemployment by organising the unemployed

There's a common feeling on the British Left that the unemployed - even when there's 2 million of them - have little power. This is often based on the experience of trying to organise Unemployed Workers' Groups or the Right to Work Campaign. These are thought useful in giving support to individual unemployed people, and acting as a pressure group on the trade union movement. But in their own right, the unemployed are seen as having no independent strength.

There's no doubt that organising with the unemployed is difficult, because there is rarely a collective focus - except the occasional mini-riot or action inside the dole office. The unemployed are usually into a whole series of "practical" but unreliable and individual solutions: robbing, betting and working on the side. And unemployed men often push the worst burden onto their wives: drinking money stays ahead of the housekeeping.

But to be out of work in itself is not necessarily to be powerless. The idea that power equals the ability to strike is a mistake that ignores the full experience of the struggle of the unemployed. In Britain in the 20's and 30's and in Italy in 1976-77, the unemployed showed considerable independent political power. Whether it's through mass demonstrations, riots, occupations of dole offices, the unemployed can seriously disrupt the political stability of a country and make an impact.

In the 20's and 30's in Britain, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, as well as organising the famous Hunger Marches, also organised lightning attacks on factories working overtime and paying below the union rate for the job. They'd take over the factory, stop all machines and stay in occupation until the boss agreed to cut overtime with no loss of pay, and pay the union rates. In this way, they made solid links with employed workers - links based on mutual solidarity, not on the basis of one side begging the other to act.

In Italy in 1976-77, the unemployed workers' movement grew into a mass movement, particularly in the south, using similar kinds of imaginative tactics. They spearheaded a new Left opposition to the Government's unemployment strategy in Italy, and in doing so wrung a number of unbudgeted concessions from the State. In 1977, the Naples unemployed leader Nunno Pinto was elected to Parliament at the General Election, and he continues to act as a spokesman and organiser for the Italian masses.

The point we are making is that the unemployed do have considerable potential political power - providing they're organised and are openly disruptive. Two years ago, Healey was warning of "rioting on the streets if unemployment continues to mount". That prediction has come true in France, but here there's been precious little, despite growing dole queues. Unemployment is now less of a risk for the bosses - both politically and socially - than at any other time of mass unemployment. That's why Callaghan felt free to threaten us with "monetarism" - a policy of high unemployment - if we smashed the 5% wages policy. It's also why mass unemployment is Thatcher's economic policy.



Clearly socialists have got to make a priority of building a mass organisation to fight unemployment. In our view, neither the Right to Work campaign nor the Campaign against Youth Unemployment has been able to meet this challenge. For three reasons. First because they are primarily front organisations for a political party - one for the Socialist Workers' Party, the other for the Communist Party. They were set up not principally to build the power of the unemployed or to build a broad and non-sectarian campaign against unemployment. Rather, they were developed to maintain the credibility of those organisations politically - by showing that they were doing something about unemployment.

Secondly, they never developed strong local roots - based on consistent work among the unemployed and workers fighting closure or redundancy in an area. Both campaigns are mainly national campaigns - concerned to get publicity for the anger of the unemployed; local organisation is seen simply in terms of the needs of the national campaign. Finally it's clear that without a definite political perspective, there is no chance of building credible struggle and organisation. Anger and militancy on their own will not work.

#### Building a workers' movement to fight unemployment

Any mass movement must be built around the needs of the unemployed, and the needs of workers fighting closures, manning cuts, enforced and voluntary redundancies, "natural wastage" and productivity or bonus deals. Its aim must be to organise struggles with the aim of winning demands, not just creating publicity (though there's nothing wrong with creating publicity - it's just that this shouldn't be the sole aim). We think these are the key demands:

- \* more money for claimants
- \* 35 hour week with no loss of pay
- \* the fight for decent, well-paid jobs (The Right to Work on Our Terms)
- \* a programme of building nurseries, hospitals, community centres, public laundrettes and council houses, schools and sports facilities. A programme of repairs to council housing
- \* resistance to closures and redundancy by all means possible
- \* opposition to manning cuts, productivity or bonus deals and excessive overtime.

It's a glaring indictment of the system that so many are on the dole at the same time that our communities are in such need of building, improvement and repairs. We are told that this is inevitable: that the "country" has to create the wealth before "we can spend it". This is a typical piece of deceit, since from the point of view of dividends, profits and interest rates, this country is not at all poor. One of the most glaring examples of this is with council house spending - where councils cut back on building and repairs, increase our rent and rates and yet are paying millions every year in interest repayments to the money lenders.



Socialists have to relate to this very sharply through demands and struggles to force councils to stop all interest payments and to use the money for the benefit of the community. There are thousands of struggles locally that repeatedly point to this perspective: campaigns for free nursery facilities or youth clubs; struggles against the run-down of direct works departments; campaigns for better housing.

The 35 hour week is crucial. It directly meets the needs of workers with a job for less work with no loss of pay - an inflation-proof gain if we win it, because once we've got it they can't take it back by raising prices. It also directly meets the needs of the unemployed for a decent, well paid job. So it's the key demand for making a link between the struggles of the employed and the unemployed.

"We want a 35 hour week. Over the years we've seen improved technology and productivity resulting in more cars, fewer jobs and longer dole queues. The time has come now for a shorter working week. Our demand would create 3,300 jobs at Ford plants - jobs for which those in the dole queues are desperate."

from: 'Fordworkers: Our Case' issued by the Ford UK Workers' Combine (unofficial) in September '78.

The demand for 35 hours is now official policy of most unions, and the TUC, and has the "sympathy" of even the most right-wing union leaders. But as a demand, it's open to different interpretations. Certainly the right-wing see the demand only where it can be accompanied by an adequate productivity rise, to compensate capitalist exploitation. That's obviously no use to us. If the demand for 35 hours is to unite employed and unemployed, then it must be at the expense of the bosses.

But it's clear that developing a 35 hour week campaign is very difficult. If there's a choice between fighting for more money or for shorter hours, most workers will always choose more money.

Probably the main weakness in the fight for the 35 hour week is the lack of any mass campaign against unemployment to involve thousands of unemployed working class people in militant action. Only this could make unemployment into a class issue in the forefront of all workers' thoughts. In Big Flame, we're not pretending that we know the trick that can create such a mass movement. But we are certain that in order for it to be built, it will have to address itself directly to the needs of claimants for more money - through higher unemployment and social security benefits. Secondly, it will have to support and encourage militant struggles against closure and redundancy etc. Thirdly, it will have to be much more than a party front: ideally it would be launched nationally on the basis of a strong local struggle and organisation. For example, the trade union branch based on the Triumph Speke No. 2 Plant in Liverpool - which was recently closed down - is very well placed to launch such a broad campaign, dealing with fighting closures and redundancy (which they tried to do), fighting manning cuts (which they were out on strike over for weeks just before Leyland announced closure), struggling for the 35 hour week, and campaigning for a decent standard of living on the dole (the situation they are now in).

Such a campaign remains one priority for the working class, and initiating it is a job for the revolutionary left.



Section 5: Winning a wages and conditions claim

There's no doubt about it. The three years from 1975 have been disastrous on wages for all of us. Wage restraint under the guise of the "Social Contract" has been very difficult to fight, and section after section of workers has been defeated.

The dying months of 1978 have been a bit better. Ford workers, tanker drivers and BBC technicians have all smashed through the 5% Phase 4 wages policy. But it's not all rosy: the bakers were smashed; Leyland workers accepted 5%; Vauxhall workers voted to take no action on their claim.

The Ford strike achieved a great deal in one respect. It forced the festering crisis in the Labour Party on wages policy out into the open, and the Government was defeated at the Labour Party Conference. It created an atmosphere which made it impossible for the TUC Executive to accept a new agreement with the Government on wage restraint which had been worked out by Ministers together with the TUC Economic Committee. And finally it resulted in the defeat of the Sanctions policy associated with the 5% wage limit in Parliament - after the Government imposed sanctions on Ford following the end of the strike.

But for many Ford workers, the result of the strike was not seen as a victory.

We were in the strongest position we'd been in for years. Because of the strike, Ford dealers in Britain had absolutely no new cars to sell. And because of the solidarity from dockers, transporter and train drivers, practically every major Ford plant in Europe was at a standstill as a result of them not getting parts from Britain.

But it was just as the strike was beginning to hit Ford really hard that our negotiators caved in, and recommended a deal which was far less than half of what we were asking. It gave us nothing on the shorter week, nothing on unpaid lay-off's and it contained an "Attendance Bonus" which was tied up with the infamous penalty clauses. These will mean that everytime there's an unofficial stoppage, we're going to lose £3.80 - which will mean it'll be much more difficult to get support for struggles on manning, safety, victimisation.

Secretary of the unofficial Ford Combine

The aim of this section is to learn the lessons of the past defeats and partial victories - so that we can start winning. But what is becoming increasingly clear is that there's a real danger that victories won on wages could easily result in attacks on weaker sections of the working-class. Already Callaghan has threatened a policy of mass unemployment and even greater cuts in public spending, should Phase 4 be smashed. And this is in any case the stated policy of the Tories. So in talking about how to start winning on wages, it's essential to start outlining a working-class political alternative to these policies. That's also what this section is about.



## A few lessons from wages struggles 1975 - 1978

### 1. Get the Claim Right

Time and again over the past three years, sections of workers have found themselves stuck with a claim that was just not worth fighting for. Usually these claims have been cobbled together behind the backs of the mass of workers involved, without any reference to mass meetings - or without even the chance of stewards influencing the claim. For example, in 1977 the Ford Convenors' Committee put in a claim for a 15% rise - this at a time when the Government incomes policy was 10%. When Ford offered between 11% (for the mass of semi-skilled workers) to 14% (for skilled workers), there was no chance of a fight against wage restraint.

This kind of thing doesn't happen accidentally. For example at Ford, it happened because there are political forces in the Convenors committee that wanted at all cost to avoid a fight that might jeopardise the Labour Government. These political forces were led by Communist Party convenors, and strongly supported by Labour Party "moderates". And they met very little opposition - because until this year, the left at Fords was totally disorganised.

SO THE FIRST LESSON IS THAT MILITANTS HAVE GOT TO GET THEMSELVES ORGANISED - ON THE SHOP FLOOR, IN TRADE UNION BRANCHES, IN SHOP STEWARDS' COMMITTEES, IN CONVENORS' COMMITTEES, IN POLICY MAKING TRADE UNION CONFERENCES - TO FIGHT FOR A CLAIM THAT ITSELF IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR, AND WHICH IS THOROUGHLY DISCUSSED AT MEETINGS INVOLVING THE WHOLE WORKFORCE..

It's got to be a claim that achieves maximum unity. One of the most important lessons from these years is that sectional or divisive claims get nowhere. Only a united fight can possibly hope to develop the strength and solidarity to win these days. Any section that tries to go it alone on a sectional, divisive struggle will soon get isolated and demoralised. You only have to think of the defeats of skilled workers at Leyland, Lucas and S.U. Carburetors - all of whom were pursuing claims that would have increased their differentials over other workers - which compare badly with the unity that has been developed at Ford behind the claim for £20 across the board.

SO WE ARGUE FOR A BIG RISE ON THE BASIC RATE - NOT A PERCENTAGE INCREASE WHICH SIMPLY GIVES MORE TO THOSE WHO ALREADY HAVE MOST AND LESS TO THOSE WHO ALREADY HAVE LEAST - A DEFINITE AMOUNT OF MONEY ACROSS THE BOARD (ie the same for each grade). PERCENTAGE RISES - NO WAY!

How much? In our view, this should be based entirely on workers' needs, and on what the majority of workers would be willing to fight for: not so high that most people would see it as an absurdly impossible target, and obviously not too little. A good guide is to set the claim £5 or so higher than what would be necessary to get wages back to their 1974 purchasing power.



For example, the purchasing power of a B Grade Ford worker's wages (an assembly-line worker) has gone down by £17 since 1974. So militants in the unofficial Ford "Combine" pressed for a £20 claim. Similarly, the purchasing power of the average teacher's salary has gone down by just over £85 a month over the same three years.

The important point is that our claims should not be set according to the ability of our employer to pay. And they shouldn't be based on company profitability (how much would nurses get?). The reason for this is simple: we'll never win if we fight on management's terms. Management's concern is to maximise profits - to pay shareholders, directors and to pay interest to moneylenders - in other words to rip us off.

We have to start fighting wage claims with a class-wide consciousness: even if one company or industry is not particularly profitable, capitalism as a whole is still generating profits, exploiting our labour, ripping us off. There are still bosses and workers. And as far as we're concerned, as long as there's one parasite living off the labour of others and with a standard of living higher than others and with control of the wealth that's produced - then there is the reason for struggle.

For low paid workers, the struggle for a national minimum wage is crucial. At present, the public sector unions are demanding a £60 a week minimum - which is obviously too low, especially as a negotiating demand. It'll still mean people taking home less than £40 - even if the claim was won in full - and doing endless hours of overtime just to get a living wage.

5 hours off the week with no loss of pay. This is likely to become the key demand in wages and conditions claims over the next couple of years. This is already happening in West Germany where (at the time of writing) steel workers are out fighting for the 35 hour week as their main demand. So far it's been difficult to build up a major campaign among workers in this country. Partly this is because major employers have been absolutely intransigent against the demand for the shorter week - and workers know this. For example, Paul Rootes - head of Ford's Industrial Relations - told the union negotiators bluntly - "you can stay out 'till Christmas 1979, but we still won't budge on the reduction in working hours".

It's also because the reality of permanent mass unemployment has not dawned yet on many workers. This is likely to change. Whatever the outcome of the General Election this year, there's almost certain to be a shift towards monetarist policies. Both Labour under Callaghan and Healey, and the Tories under Thatcher and Joseph are committed to these policies, which will mean a sharp rise in unemployment. On top of this, there'll be increasing unemployment resulting from the rapid introduction of new technology, and from the increasing tendency of the bosses to shift investment in manufacturing industries to cheap labour countries.

What's clear is that to start winning a shorter week, the left will have to give it a great deal more priority. There'll have to be a real campaign among the rank and file - and serious attempts to form industry-wide alliances of shop stewards committees



to co-ordinate the fight for the 35 hour week. It became absolutely plain during the Ford strike that only an all-out struggle throughout the whole motor industry at the same time could hope to force a shorter week. Immediately after the Communist Party convenors at Ford had led the negotiating committee in capitulating to Ford at the end of the strike, the "Morning Star" came out with a militant front page by these same convenors talking about the need for a 35 hour week motor industry alliance in 1979. For them, that's just militant talk. For the militants and the Left, we've got to ensure that it happens.

No productivity dealing: no strings attached. The importance of this demand is already outlined on pages 15 and 16. But it's vital that militants should fight a campaign among the rank and file to get these words in the claim itself. Time and again, union officials have been able to sell a productivity deal to the rank and file on the basis of the money it will bring them - without regard for the consequences.

A guaranteed week's pay every week - work or no work. Every worker in any industry which is liable to short time working or fairly frequent lay-off's knows the importance of the guaranteed week. It's a demand that clearly separates the needs of the working-class (for more money and less work) from those of the bosses (to pay us only when they've got work for us, and then according to how much work we do). The demand has arisen particularly in the motor industry, where any dispute in a components supplier (whether it's the same company or another company) rapidly leads to lay-off's of the assembly-line workers. After a long period of struggle, most companies now give lay-off pay (normally 80 or 85% of a flat week) for those lay-off's which have resulted from disputes in factories not belonging to that Company. But they refuse any lay-off pay for lay-off's caused by disputes in a factory they do own.

But this demand applies to all workers - whatever their industry. It's a demand for full pay when sick, and for paid maternity and paternity leave.

## 2. Fighting for the Claim.

As we've said before in this pamphlet, in 'Big Flame' we're not concerned about just winning a struggle, but on how it's won. Our concern is to strengthen the confidence, solidarity and power of the mass of workers. And for this to happen, it's essential that as many workers as possible are involved fully in their struggles, and feel responsible for the outcome. Increasingly, in any case, mass participation is one of the main ways to make victory more possible. One of the biggest lessons of recent years is that we can't rely on our leaders: we can only rely on ourselves.

There's a long tradition in the British Labour Movement of deciding everything behind the backs of the mass of workers. It's very easy for militants to fall into this habit: putting up (and occasionally winning) resolutions in badly attended trade union branch meetings, or stewards meetings, or a regional TU committee etc. without reference to what the mass of workers think or want.



This kind of manipulation can get short-term results, but it is often disastrous in the longer term. So often the left and its policies have been discredited simply because they weren't fought for first among the rank and file.

#### THIS MEANS:

- \* Start a fight in your trade union - at all levels, in the branch, region, district and at national conference - to make sure every claim is discussed and voted on in democratically run mass meetings. Obviously, to be effective, all militants will have to be organised together to fight this campaign.
- \* While fighting "behind the backs of most workers" for a decent claim, it's essential to keep as many workers informed and involved in what's going on - through local leaflets and newsletters or a national leaflet or newsletter if the militants are well enough organised. Inevitably, this will mean bringing the political differences in the unions concerned out into the open - explaining why militants are fighting for a big, across the board rise, why we're against increased differentials, why we're for a shorter week - and why the other political forces might well be against some, or all of these things.
- \* When the claim has been decided, discussed, amended and voted on, a real grass roots campaign has to be launched to publicise the claim among the whole membership - and to prepare for action. Of course, the union is the best equipped organisation to do this, and militants should do everything in their power to try and get this to happen. But unfortunately, more often than not, nothing will happen. And then militants will have to take on that task themselves.

Even if the union does launch a campaign for the claim, it may well be necessary for the left to put out leaflets and make badges of its own. Partly this is because - even at this stage in the struggle - there are going to be differences (the need to prepare for militant action, the need to seek support among other workers and in the community, to involve our families in the struggle), and partly because we know that at some point in the struggle, whatever they're saying at this early stage, the union leaders are going to cave in. So it's necessary right at the beginning to establish an independent voice for the left.

### 3. Getting ready for ACTION

As we've seen in Part I (Why we've been losing), one of the most important reasons for the defeats in wages struggles has been that section after section of workers have fought for very similar claims, but in total isolation from one another - with no-co-ordination. When different sections of the working class do get it together to support one another, the result can be devastating - as we all found out when the engineers and car workers from Birmingham marched to support the miners at Saltley Coke depot in February 1972.



Of course, it's a well known fact that cats take to water about as easily as most trade union officials (at all levels of the movement) take to building this kind of solidarity. Occasionally, it does happen: for example in the public sector alliance led by Alan Fisher of NUPE which at the time of writing is about to take on the 5% wages policy. But such examples are few and far between. (And even in the case of the public sector alliance, all the suggestions are that the unions intend to organise week long rotating strikes of different sections - thus ensuring that no section takes really crippling action).

So, usually it's going to be up to the militants to agitate for this kind of solidarity: to gradually build a campaign which will force stewards, then convenors, then officials to form real alliances.

In the meantime, there's a lot militants can do - preparing leaflets and bulletins explaining the claim to other workers, and for distribution in the community. Particularly important will be making contacts with workers in industries that could be helping by taking direct solidarity action - drivers, dockers, seamen, rail workers, and airport workers. In the fight for the shorter working week, it's going to be essential to make links with the unemployed - either through local Claimants' Unions, the Right to Work Campaign or the Campaign against Youth Unemployment.

This is also the time to make preparations for involving the wives/husbands or boyfriends/girlfriends of the workers who are about to take action. Time and again during industrial action, the mass media tries its usual "divide and rule" tactic by finding someone (usually it's a wife in the case of a struggle involving mainly male workers) who's against the strike and who is willing to lead a "get them back to work campaign". This happened during the 1969 Ford strike, then in the 1974 strike at the Leyland Cowley factory in Oxford and most recently in Southampton in the third week of the Ford strike. Fortunately, militants had already prepared for this possibility:

We'd started the Ford Women's Group right at the beginning of the strike - trying to involve male Ford workers' wives or girlfriends, and the minority of women working at Ford. So when, simultaneously, the TV and local papers in Southampton and Liverpool "happened" to find a couple of Ford wives in each town who were willing to lead an anti-strike campaign, we were ready. They called a demonstration in Southampton, through the local TV and ITN main news. So we counter-organised and on the day we pro-strike women overwhelmingly outnumbered them. Of course the TV tried to ignore us, so we then did a flying visit to the local TV stations and radio stations in Southampton, and corrected their lunchtime news bulletins in which they implied we were students. The end result was that the anti-strike campaign never seriously reared its head again.

- member of Ford Women's Group (associated with the "Combine").



This is also a time for building support among working class people in the communities around the workplace; something that is so often forgotten in preparing for strike action (or any other industrial tactic like occupation).

For public sector workers - like hospital workers, bus drivers, council workers and post office workers - developing links with "consumers" or "users" can be crucial. For a start, many of these "consumers" are not classless beings like the media makes out. Very often the people who're going to be hardest hit are working class people who most often use these services. Not many bosses go by bus! So it's important to try to start winning the sympathy of fellow workers who use these services early on - by giving out leaflets, talking, holding public meetings.

The day before a one day strike at Hammersmith Hospital in London over undermanning and staff shortage, one of the kitchen junior chefs got hold of the menu cards that go out each morning to all patients and duplicated a message on the back explaining that industrial action was going to happen the next day, why it was going to happen and how patients would not be put at risk, and would still get meals. For this he was disciplined by management, but won a very sympathetic response from patients.

In the same way, it would be possible for bus drivers to leaflet all their passengers - and to post notices on bus stops warning of action and explaining why. Even better would be for bus drivers and conductors to continue to work but to refuse to collect fares. This would hit hard at management, while being to the advantage of the passengers.

#### 4. Choosing the tactic

There are three useful guidelines which can help to decide what tactic to use in fighting a wages/hours/conditions battle:

- a. Maximum damage to the bosses, minimum loss to us.
- b. It's important to choose a tactic which makes it difficult for management to isolate, victimise or demoralise individuals or groups of workers. The best tactic is one that makes it easier to maintain solidarity and the morale of those taking action.
- c. It's no good choosing a tactic which the majority of workers are unwilling to accept because they see it as "unrealistic" or "adventurist".

Most frequently, these three simple rules will add up to a decision to go for an all-out strike. This has clear advantages: it's an accepted tactic; it's easy to identify and try to control the scabs; and by holding regular mass meetings and providing regular bulletins (as well as having a picketing rota involving everyone) it is possible to keep everyone together and maintain morale.



But there are the well known disadvantages of the all-out strike too. It costs us a lot of money - while the bosses can more easily hold out without suffering too much. This is particularly true of a multinational corporation, which might even be able to swap production around to other factories (in Britain or abroad) to minimise the effects of the strike. Secondly, it is difficult to keep people involved. The picket line tends to get fairly routine, with long periods of boring inaction. So people drift off and get a job on the side, paint the house, watch TV and get isolated. And that's where the third danger comes in - from the mass media. With the workforce dispersed to their homes, they're easy prey to the vicious campaigns that the local press and radio and the national media can whip up. And they're open to be influenced by individual letters sent by management to their home address.

All this can be guarded against - by extensive picketing rotas, regular mass meetings and bulletins, plenty of activity and a militant social security claiming committee which involves workers in militant tactics. But these problems should be born in mind.

There's no doubt, however, that the main problem is the cost in lost wages of all-out action. Obviously, good blacking action by sympathetic groups of workers can make a strike expensive for the bosses. But there are alternative actions which are much more costly to the boss than to us:

1. Guerrilla - or rotating - strikes: the idea is that different sections in a workplace will stop work for a couple of hours at a time, on a rota kept secret from management. The sections have to be strategic, in the sense that their stopping work will stop production throughout the workplace. The pattern might be like this: section A stops work for two hours. They get taken off pay but everyone else is "available and willing to work" so although there's nothing for them to do, they have to be paid. This is followed by two hours normal production, then section B stops work - and so on. Very few people are losing money - but the boss is losing half of all the production.

The main problem with this is that it takes a great deal of organisation, and it's suitable only for certain kinds of workplace - notably assembly line factories. Also it's not an accepted tactic.

2. The work to rule or overtime ban: again, the work to rule can hit management very hard without much cost to us. The trouble is, very often it's management who have written the rules. But it can be a lot of fun - double and treble checking equipment and machinery, working exactly to the letter of the rule book. However, a real problem with this is that it depends very much on the individual - on how far s/he is prepared to go. And time and again, this kind of action collapses when the weakest and least militant workers start giving in to pressure from supervision. It's not the kind of action that uses the strength of the most militant workers as a focus for the rest (in the way that a picket line does, for example).

In our opinion, the overtime ban is only a good tactic where it's effects are going to be dramatic: we've seen it's potential in the mining industry and the post office. Very often, though,



it is merely a token gesture. And it in no way involves the whole workforce in joint activity through which they can get a sense of power and solidarity. The quality of action by the miners when they were on overtime ban (a quiet time) and when they were on strike (a time of flying pickets and mass action) illustrates this difference.

### Occupations as a tactic

Occupations gained prominence as a tactic in the struggle against redundancy and closures. But of the 300 or so occupations since 1971, over two thirds have taken place over a whole range of other trade union issues - pay, conditions, pensions, victimisation, equal pay .....

These are the advantages:

- \* It keeps the workforce physically united since everyone has to keep the premises occupied - it makes communication easier and means that there are people available all the time who can go out to speak at meetings, leaflet other workplaces etc.
- \* It provides the workforce with a "campaign headquarters" from which they can build the struggle - office, meeting facilities etc.
- \* Because the workforce is in control of the premises, the problems of scabbing by management or reactionary workers cannot occur - and it's probably the only effective offensive tactic against management attempts to lock out the workforce.

Just as in an all-out strike, it's crucial to ensure maximum involvement in the running of the occupation - through setting up gate-duty rotas, security rotas, entertainment committees - and through maximum involvement in the political decisions that need to be made.

For almost three weeks in January 1977, the Massey Ferguson tractor plant in Coventry was taken over and occupied by its 1,200 assembly line workers. It was a struggle over productivity, wage rates and against the suspension of workers fighting that struggle. They won a total victory - but only after the occupation turned into a militant strike when the Company obtained a High Court writ against the occupation. From the first day, the occupation was run on the basis of mass participation with weekly mass meetings and weekly news bulletins, occupation duty for every worker one day in two and daily meetings of line stewards and their strike committee.

Despite the Criminal Trespass Act, it is still very possible to use occupations as a tactic, where the tactic has the support of the workforce. Under this Act, the police still have no right to enter an occupation and make arrests unless - \* violence or the threat of violence has been used to secure entry where another person/s are present opposing entry \* people are trespassing with an offensive weapon \* a breach of the peace is about to occur \* a bailiff or sheriff is being resisted or obstructed. Occupations themselves are not illegal - and it's important that this is made more widely known in the movement. For further information, read "Whose Law and Order" from CACTL: 01.289.3877.



## 5. Keeping people involved during the action

Picture of a typical strike in Britain: five or six people on a ragged picket line, everyone else at home. This is the unhappy reality of industrial action. And it's disastrous: the mass of workers learn nothing from the strike; they are at home, and getting all their news and views about their action from TV and papers - so they're very open to influence; they have no sense of the power and solidarity that can develop; it inevitably puts much more power into the hands of the officials; it is demoralising for those that are taking an active part (and who are often giving up the chance of a short-term "job on the side").

This tradition of non-participation is well established in Britain and it's difficult to break. Obviously, if the tactic chosen is occupation, then the problem's going to be a whole lot easier. But even in a strike, careful preparation can result in much greater participation:

- \* Before the strike begins, prepare a leaflet explaining the importance of picketting, and with space for people to write their name, address, phone number and whether they've got a car or minibus. This last point about transport is vital. Getting people together during the strike - for picketting, meetings, demonstrations etc. - is very difficult. Without a list of people who have transport, it's impossible. From the names and addresses, try to organise a picketting rota to cover the first week of action - prepare this before the action starts.

- \* Picketting the gates can become very routine and boring during a long strike, especially if there's a closed shop, in which case there won't be many scabs trying to get in. If the action is biting, and the negotiations are deadlocked, there won't even be many drivers trying to deliver - because their bosses won't want to pay for wasted journeys. It's important for the Left to break the routine of picketting; among the tactics that have in the past proved successful are:

- + mass lobbies of the negotiations
- + delegations to visit other factories, hospitals, depots and workplaces
- + mass leafletting of other workplaces
- + regular socials during the strike - free for strikers and their families, charging entrance for others.

And given that all wage struggles are today directly political - coming up against Government incomes policies, it's going to be very important to try to force the union to call mass demonstrations in support of the claim and against wage restraint. It's unlikely that at present in most industries the militant Left would alone be able to call such a demonstration. Only strike committees, convenors' committees or national union leaders have sufficient authority. But if the union does call such a demonstration, the Left has



has a big job to do: publicising the demonstration, trying to involve as many other sections of the working-class as possible, organising banners, placards and the right slogans.

- \* Keep workers in touch throughout the strike - through a regular strike bulletin. During the 1977/78 Firefighters' strike, "Rank and File Fireman" produced a twice weekly strike bulletin which went to firestations all over the country. In London, militants at Battersea fire station even started a radio station - using the fire service's own equipment! And during the Ford strike, the "Combine" put out a weekly "Ford Strike News". They were produced every Wednesday afternoon and evening - distributed by rail to 20 Ford plants around the country that night - and given out on the queues for income tax rebates and strike pay each Thursday morning. 15,000 copies of each edition were handed out! The leaflets gave the Left immense credibility (in the end even the union had to respect the "Combine") and played an important role in co-ordinating mass pickets, lobbies and action against Social Security offices. It was also a way for the Ford Women's Group to communicate with workers' wives.

#### WHAT ABOUT INFLATION AND ALL THAT????

It's official! 1984 has arrived 5 years early - and with it "Newspeak", the new official language of Whitehall, politicians and the bosses. Try this: "It is still the firm intention of Her Majesty's Government to hold down inflation" - Callaghan speaking in Parliament after the defeat of the 5% - Sanctions policy. Of course what he actually should have said was: "It is still the firm intention of Her Majesty's Government to hold down workers' wages". But that he could not say. It is still (just about) not an acceptable thing for a leader of the Labour Party to say. And it's certainly not acceptable for him to admit that such a thing as "working class" still exists in Britain.

So what's happened is that the word "inflation" is repeatedly substituted for "workers' wages" - and the trick works a treat.

Undeniably, people are worried about inflation. No-one wants to live in the much talked of "age of confetti money". So there's no doubt that in all leaflets, bulletins and pamphlets put out in preparation for, and during a wages struggle, we've got to deal with these problems. And the first thing to hammer on the head is this over-simplified equation of "inflation" and "rises in workers' wages". So what is the truth?

- \* There is no simple link between wage increases and inflation. When politicians and bosses pretend there is, they're lying.
- \* There are many equally important factors. For example, the huge rise in oil prices (which can't be blamed on massive wage rises for oil workers, because they didn't get a rise), and large increases in the price of many commodities on the world market. Some (but not all) of these increases can be blamed on speculation.

Costs of production are also increased during a slump or recession - when expensive machinery is under-used or even unused, while still depreciating in value.



- \* But it is true that wage increases do contribute towards putting up the bosses' costs of production. The bosses then have a choice. Either they can reduce profits and/or cut the salaries of the directors, and the host of senior and junior managers who do very little except keep us in our place. Or they can increase prices. Obviously, if they can get away with it, they'll increase prices.

The important point is that they have the choice. Given however, that we live in capitalism - and that capitalism depends for its survival on its ability to extract profits from workers, it's hardly surprising that bosses will do everything they can to hold down wages and keep up profits.

What we're saying is that as long as there is no redistribution of income and wealth between the ruling class, the middle class and the working class, then increases in workers' wages will contribute to inflation. The aim of incomes policies are:

1. to increase profits
2. to make sure there is no redistribution of wealth and income towards the working class
3. to hold down costs of production so that British companies can better compete with foreign based companies without cutting their profits..

Incomes policies of one kind or another have been a constant feature throughout the last 17 years. The only recent period free of controls, 1974 - 5, was a result of the two successful miners' strikes which broke through Heath's wage restraint. It's important to say, though, that the bosses are willing to pay higher wages as long as they're more than matched by increases in productivity. If that happens, their costs of production stay the same, while workers have more money to spend on buying more goods. So what the bosses are primarily interested in now is higher productivity as part of the restructuring of British industry necessary in a world of increasingly tight markets and multinational competition. It's no accident that all incomes policy since Wilson's pay freeze of 1966 has been linked to productivity.

So this kind of incomes policy is crucial to the future of capitalism.

But in the past couple of months, there have been a number of important partial victories in the struggle against Phase 4 of this Labour Government's Incomes Policy. So we have to start asking a very important question: WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE SMASH PHASE 4? The answer is fairly easy to predict. Either there will be a rapid inflation (and with it a weakening of British based companies' competitiveness) or an alternative attack on the working-class to force higher profits and higher productivity. Such a policy would be carried out by strong controls on the amount of money in the economy, on credit, and on public sector spending - which would mean non-profitable companies, and companies that had low productivity would go bankrupt. Such a policy would lead to mass unemployment as companies close down and public sector workers are slung on the dole.



## FREE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING - A LOUSY SLOGAN & NO ALTERNATIVE

So if we smash Phase 4, one way or another the bosses are going to counter-attack. Because as long as the employer can carry on putting up prices, or increasing our productivity, he can recoup what he loses in wage rises. But eventually, this spiral must end. Our aim is not "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work", but the abolition of wage labour - an end to the system in which one class exploits another for profit.

Free Collective Bargaining is a lousy slogan because it in no way deals with, or anticipates, the bosses' counter-attack. It doesn't say, for example, "redistribution from the bosses to the working class". It doesn't attack the idea of profit. It doesn't stop bosses recouping their profits through higher prices. It doesn't raise the question of greater unity in the working class through greater equality - larger rises for the lower paid.

And this last point is a real problem under Free Collective Bargaining. What can easily happen is that poorly organised workers, or those with little real industrial power, are forced to accept low settlements - while well organised and powerful groups of workers fight for better deals. In this way inequality and differentials within the working-class can actually be increased during Free Collective Bargaining - and this has what has started to happen in the last couple of months of 1978 and early 1979.

The real danger is this: if the Left doesn't come up with a better alternative, then the right-wing and the moderates in the unions and in the Labour Party are going to use the opportunity of the bosses' counter-attack to launch a major offensive in favour of wage restraint. It's easy to imagine what might happen. If inflation is allowed to rise - they'll be talking about "confetti money" and blaming ~~xxx~~ the wage rises in 1979. If, on the other hand, the bosses choose unemployment as their weapon of retribution, then they'll be telling us: "we warned you - one man's wage rise is another man's job". All this will lead to a new clarion call for the revival of the "Social Contract". And, by fighting under the slogan "Free Collective Bargaining", we'll have lost.

## THE ALTERNATIVE

There is a working-class alternative to all this. Our perspective has to be A REDISTRIBUTION OF INCOME AND WEALTH AWAY FROM THE RULING CLASS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS TOWARDS THE WORKING CLASS. What we're saying is that wage increases and increased expenditure on health, education and welfare services should come from profits, and by cutting the standard of living of the middle and upper classes. And accompanying this perspective is the struggle for MORE EQUALITY AND MORE SOLIDARITY IN THE WORKING CLASS.

This is the only way that the current wave of strikes and struggles can find a clear way forward, and survive the counter-attack from the right. What this means is:-

- \* NO WAGE RESTRAINT
- \* NO PRODUCTIVITY OR BONUS DEALS
- \* NO TAKING BACK WHAT WE WIN THROUGH HIGHER PRICES OR UNEMPLOYMENT. WE'LL FIGHT BOTH.



- \* LESS MONEY FOR DIRECTORS, MANAGERS, SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS, SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS ETC. - MORE FOR THE WORKING CLASS
- \* LARGER RISES FOR LOWER PAID WORKERS. A REDUCTION IN DIFFERENTIALS.

These kind of ideas already exist in the class struggle: "I'll have Mr Callaghan's 5% and he can have mine" - Hackney local authority manual worker on 'World In Action' (January 8th '79). Workers know that there are huge disparities of income and wealth. We know that during the long periods of wage restraint, they still do well, with extra "perks" - another free car, a zero interest mortgage, a holiday for the family abroad. The class struggle has always been - just under the surface - about ~~xxxx~~ redistribution. Now we've got to make it openly about redistribution.

What we're talking about is a socialist and working-class alternative to Incomes Policies and Free Collective Bargaining. The working-class must begin to realise that in a period like this of crisis in advanced capitalism, the fight for wages and against mass unemployment is a political fight. It is a fight against individual employers and against their state. The days of "free collective bargaining" - free of state interference - are over. The state will co-ordinate a counter-attack in one form or another. We will have to fight at a new level. It's no point trying to vainly go back in history. This is the time for political alternatives.

These kind of perspectives have got to be a regular feature of all the leaflets and bulletins that go out during the strike. Any period of struggle is a time when people are beginning to ask questions - beginning to see things more clearly. It's a time when the Left can start providing some of the answers. But to have any credibility, it's got to start doing that from a record of being inside the struggle, answering the questions that arise concretely from the struggle.



# ADDENDUM TO SECTIONS 2 - 5: The demand for nationalisation

For years, the socialist movement in Britain has raised the slogan "nationalisation" or (better) "nationalisation under workers' control", particularly in struggles against the rationalisation of an industry involving closure or mass redundancies. And it is now being raised by militants at British Leyland who - in response to Leyland management's reply to their wage claim that "there's no more money in the kitty" - are demanding the nationalisation of all the components manufacturers and Leyland distributors who are making vast profits off the backs of Leyland workers.

They see this as the first step to the nationalisation under workers' control of the whole British motor industry. And they accompany these demands with the fighting slogan "open the books".

We must answer the threat of closure by exposing the fraud if it is a bluff designed to pressure workers into accepting a company pay offer and by the counter threat of the occupation of the plant if it is a real threat.

The employers will say that they need to economise to compete with other car firms - we must demand the opening of the books of the firm concerned and of its components suppliers as well as the rest of the motor industry.

Let us see why they can't maintain jobs and wages. If they prove their case, then the whole motor industry should be nationalised without compensation and under workers' management and made part of a planned economy.

- statement of the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement (led by the Workers' Socialist League, a Trotskyist organisation), published in their paper "Socialist Press"

You may have noticed that the demands "nationalisation" or "open the books" have not appeared frequently - and certainly not as the key demand in fighting unemployment or for a wage claim in the previous four sections. No doubt, Big Flame will be bitterly attacked for that by other socialist groups for whom these demands are more strategically central. So we should make it quite clear that we are in no way opposed to the slogan "nationalisation under workers' control" or the demand "open the books". We just don't give it the same emphasis - and we make the following points about it:

1. For a long time in the socialist movement, nationalisation has been equated with socialism which has been equated simply with having a centrally planned economy. As such, nationalisation has been used as an ideological and transitional demand - and not in situations where it always realistically winnable.

Our first point is that we do not equate socialism with widespread nationalisation, achieved step by step inside the existing capitalist system. Socialism is much more than



that. It means a revolution in all relations of production. And that is not going to be achieved by workers forcing the capitalist state to nationalise wider and wider sections of the economy, but by workers taking action and broadening their power and control themselves. The struggle for nationalisation under workers control is only a part of the struggle for control of society and the state.

Secondly, we are opposed - in general - to raising demands which we know to be unwinnable, as a means of "educating" the working class and raising political consciousness. We have no objection to putting forward long-term perspectives, but very often "nationalisation" is put forward as an immediate demand by socialists as though it was winnable. We believe that workers are no fools, and can see straight through this kind of deceit. It's in any case demoralising to put forward aims which are unattainable, and playing these kinds of games is very damaging to the Left as a whole. Frequently, these demands have been proposed by revolutionaries when more immediate and simple demands are not being won. What's the good of demanding nationalisation of British Leyland when the Left hasn't even got the support to lead a struggle on wages?

A classic example of this was the IMG's decision to demand the nationalisation under workers' control of Grunwick. No doubt all socialists (and certainly us) would agree that this would have been a desirable outcome. But to raise that slogan when we couldn't even stop the scab bus going in was unrealistic.

2. The experience of workers in industries that have been nationalised has not been rosy. Frequently, it has been a case of handing an industry run by weak employers who have not been able to smash working class resistance in that industry over to the state. The state has then proceeded with massive nationalisation and sackings - often supported by the unions on the grounds that these measures are "socialist" and part of "economic planning".

Even revolutionary socialists tend to see nationalisation as a way of bailing out an ailing industry or company - to be demanded only when workers are threatened with closure, redundancies or refusal of a wage demand on the grounds that it will lead to sackings. That is clear from the last paragraph of the statement from the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement on the previous page.

For us, a nationalised industry should be regarded as any other enterprise in capitalism. It is part of the capitalist infrastructure. It is part of a system of exploitation, profits and interest repayments. And it should be treated as such.

3. Adding to the demand for nationalisation the words "under workers' control" is an important improvement. But it has yet to be achieved. And what would it mean under capitalism? Most probably, that workers would manage their own exploitation. In a nationalised industry, the state is the paymaster. As long as the state is a capitalist state, control will remain with the bosses.

Occasionally, nationalisation under workers control will be a realistic demand that can contribute to the development of workers power and organisation. As the struggle becomes more intense this will be increasingly the case. Until then, it cannot be the central demand.



## Section 6: Fighting for Health and Safety at work

### 1. Why it's so important to militant socialists

Workers have never been content just to fight for more jobs or higher wages. And for us in Big Flame, the struggle against the intensity of work and the conditions under which we work is very important:

- \* Health and safety are issues where we directly challenge management's "right to manage" where this means their imposing unsafe conditions on us
- \* The overall attempts at speed up, manning/staffing cuts, productivity increases, greater shiftwork and the spread of work & time study to new areas, all raises health and safety issues (for example, the productivity bonus scheme in the mines)
- \* Nuclear power, asbestos, lead in petrol are all PUBLIC issues which have drawn attention to health and safety
- \* The changing nature of some health hazards - especially the massive growth of chemicals in use - means the old methods of fighting hazards via the compensation lawyer are useless. By the time it is proved that a particular chemical causes cancer, the victims are incurable
- \* At a time when struggles over wages and jobs are increasingly being defeated, health and safety is an issue we can WIN. It obviously shouldn't be seen as a substitute for such struggles, but can help keep up the morale and workplace organisation in fighting trim
- \* The Safety Representatives Regulations 1978, where used correctly, can be useful in tackling problems
- \* The deaths, injuries and bad health that is imposed on us by working under the capitalist, profit-oriented, organisation of society is both a clear example of the system's priorities, and is something we can do something about RIGHT NOW (in a small way).

The state and the employers have recognised these facts and have organised to stop us using them. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 is based on a "common interest" approach to problems. Conference speeches and a couple of unions (noticeably ASTMS) apart - trade unions at the official level have responded with ignorance and apathy.

It's only at the workplace level that there have been a growing number of disputes and activities. Some of these have taken a very determined form.

LESSON: Several factors make health and safety a central issue for workplace militants. But the opportunities will go begging unless we actively organise around the issue.

### 2. How NOT to organise around health and safety

Except in the very strongest workplaces, health and safety organising will, to some extent, be based on your legal rights.



These rights include: -

- \* The right to elect safety reps who have legal rights to inspect the job, get information and develop a factory policy. They do not have a cast-iron right to stop the job.
- \* The right to use the Factory Inspectors and to apply the whole body of safety law to be found in the Factories Acts, Health and Safety at Work Act and so on.
- \* The right to have a safety committee and to have a safety agreement.

This all sounds pretty useful. BUT there are many pitfalls with the way things are working out in practice:

1. The safety reps. In many workplaces, shop stewards have simply been renamed and nothing has changed. In other workplaces safety reps have been appointed who are not shop stewards and not accountable to the shop stewards' committee or union members in general. In both cases, it is normal for the activities not to be reported back to the membership. And it's often seen as "another skive" by the members. Without training, facilities and time off, the job can't be done properly. Yet if the training is simply in collusion with the management (class collaboration) and the facilities are off the shop floor, and the time off simply takes you away from the membership, nothing is solved. This is too frequently the case.

2. Using the Factory Inspectors and the Law. In almost all workplaces the temptation is to use the law. There are plenty of cases where inspectors have come in and backed workers' complaints to the hilt. It is often much easier to get action threatened or implemented if the company are "breaking the law". But there are dangers as well:

- \* the law is not made by people who have to work in bad conditions. Factory Inspectors have ignored bad conditions as often as they have stopped them. Asbestos is a prime example. The Factory Inspectors' powers are limited, prosecutions rare, fines pathetic and their standards too low.
- \* relying on the Inspector can replace relying on ourselves. In many workplaces, instead of taking collective action, we "wait for the Inspector" (which can take weeks) and put off stopping the job. Not only does this weaken our sense of strength and power, it can also mean working in dangerous conditions until the Inspector comes in. And what if the Inspector says an unsafe job is safe (it has happened)?

3. Safety Agreements and Procedure. Many unions have rushed into safety agreements and procedures without even checking whether they are better than the minimum legal rights in law. Others have signed national agreements without consulting the membership (as usual). But the main danger of most Safety Agreements is the way they can stifle action over health and safety. Where the existing grievance procedure is the channel for health and safety, this is usually an elaborate delaying system. In other places, the "safety committee" is itself the delaying procedure. Companies are very keen on safety committees as it is very easy to foster the "we're all in this one together" attitude. The more coffee and biscuits, the less safety action. This "safety participation" is normally even worse than using the ordinary grievance procedure. In British Leyland, they



have even tried to use the participation machinery for safety.

The whole effect of both systems is to remove safety from being one of the issues that workers are prepared to take action on. You end up either waiting to "exhaust procedure", or "waiting for the Factory Inspector" or "waiting for the safety committee" (a long wait this one).

Worst of all, we can end up with full-time safety reps or safety convenors who are sucked into the company and are little more than an arm of the company safety office.

LESSON: The mere existence of new laws and safety reps will not of themselves guarantee that safety improves. On the contrary, unless great care is taken, safety and safety reps can be removed from the control and vigilance of the shop floor into its own "procedure". It will then suffer the very same faults that many other aspects of trade unionism does at present.

### 3. SOME WAYS TO WIN

Throughout this pamphlet, we emphasise the importance of involving the membership and not relying on anyone - stewards, convenors, officials, MP's or lawyers - to do the job for us. To that list can be added safety reps, safety committees and factory inspectors. And we say that despite the fact that among the authors of this pamphlet are safety reps, shop stewards and officials. This is not to say we should not use the law or become safety reps. Not at all. But we must be aware of the dangers, try to avoid them, and try to use those positions to stimulate direct action.

The rest of this section is divided into three: (A) the principles to work on (B) organising at work (C) taking things further.

(A) The principles to work on. There are four of these:-

- i. Safety is a class issue. Out of a mountain of facts and quotes we choose this one from the Chief Alkali Inspector speaking in December 1970 and quoted in Pat Kinnersley's marvellous book "The Hazards of Work" (p.30):

"We have the knowledge and apparatus for absorbing gases, arresting grit, dust and fumes and preventing smoke formation. The only reason we still permit the escape of pollutants is because economics play such an important part in the word 'practicable' in the expression 'best practicable means' and most of our problems are cheque book rather than technical".

There is no joint interest in safety where production and profit are concerned.

- ii. We cannot rely on the state. This was discussed earlier. Parliament, Judges and the Factory Inspectors may curb rogue employers, but they will never place safety before profit for industry as a whole. The law may be used but



not relied on.

- iii. We cannot rely on the trade unions at an official level. For years the trade unions relied on compensation lawyers to improve safety - a dismal tactic. They still accept that there is a joint interest on safety, and still insist on channelling "safety grievances" through procedures that have been built up to curb other forms of militant action. Where good union pamphlets (GMWU, ASTMS) or officers exist they may encourage safety awareness, but this is the exception. The TUC has gone so far as to forbid its employees taking part in the local area health and safety committees that are springing up - for example (the best of them) the Coventry Health And Safety Movement CHASM.
- iv. Only direct action allied to good information will improve health and safety. Some ways of doing this are discussed next.

#### (B) Organising at Work

Whether or not you are a safety rep (and we think you should become one if you can be elected to the position), this is what you should press for:

1. The safety rep should insist on 4 key rights. These are (i) the right to a three monthly inspection of the section using checklists (ii) access to all information on safety in the company's possession especially all manufacturer's notes, exact chemical composition of materials and all accident and health statistics (iii) a library (somewhere on the shopfloor) containing books, pamphlets, company data (as in ii) and all official publications - plus typing, printing, filing and meeting facilities (iv) off-site day release training conducted by the Workers' Educational Association or union-approved bodies. Full details of these rights are contained in the HMSO publication "Safety Representative Regulations 1978" (35p).

2. Maximum information to the membership. Each rep must report back to section meetings regularly as well as on particular problems. A workplace safety bulletin should be started either by all the reps, or by those in one department - or even unofficially by militants - depending on the situation. The union side of any safety committee must publish its own version of each meeting. A safety bulletin is the only effective way of spreading information to all members. Without a bulletin and report back meetings, safety becomes the property of a few experts and not of those in danger.

3. Tactics. Information, inspections and training will all help. But on the whole, it will be pressure that brings results. It's impossible to lay down detailed tactics for different situations, but these are a few broad guidelines:

a) When tackling a safety problem, try to get as much information as possible. If the company refuses to provide it, you may have to get it outside work. Some union officials may be useful, but most not. In most areas, it should be possible to have access to a local health and safety committee or sympathetic scientists - especially at colleges. Some factory inspectors may be useful here.



With chemicals, the key thing is the chemical make-up. With machines, the Factory Acts are most important: quite a lot of processes are covered by special regulations.

b) If you feel strong enough, stop the job. If the job is clearly unsafe, then under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at work Act, workers must "take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself (!) and of other persons who may be affected by his (!) acts or omissions at work". This may not get you payment for a stoppage (it has in some factories) but it will certainly panic most employers. When stopping the job in such situations, it may be worthwhile offering yourselves as available for "suitable alternative work" so long as earnings are not affected. In cold weather, for example, leave the cold areas but say you are available for work in areas where the Factories Acts are not being broken. If there are none, continue the stoppage.

c) If you aren't strong enough, try other pressure. If you are fairly sure of your ground, bring in the Inspector. Don't do this on a 50-50 case unless you have no alternative. Make sure the complaints are all in writing, dated and given to management. The more delays that take place, the more report-back meetings you should have. Get as much technical information as possible. Ask for your own advisors to come in (this will normally be refused - but what are they hiding?). Get any relevant articles photocopied. Make sure you use your right to meet other safety reps from the same workplace to see if higher standards or similar problems exist in their sections. Find out what the standards are at other local workplaces or parts of the same combine or local authority - and publicise them if they're better.

d) Remove the hazard at source - no! to personal protection. Try to break out of the situation where management have the initiative through demanding that everyone wear their earplugs, face masks and safety glasses. These should not be needed in 95% of cases if the root cause is tackled. Do not allow the terms of debate to be how much workers should be disciplined for not wearing protective clothing whilst nothing is done to remove the root cause - noisy machine, poor extraction, useless guards etc.

e) Threaten outside publicity. This may be a useful threat. Indeed the threat may be more lethal than any eventual article. The same may apply to bringing the Inspectors in - the threat may be more effective than the visit.

f) Improve your Safety Agreement - if you have one at all. It's difficult to generalise, but the following must be borne in mind:

1. If the agreement being offered contains no more than the legal minimum you may be better off without one and just relying on your legal rights.
2. Try to negotiate a special procedure which cuts out the delays and enables you to go straight to the managers' level on any urgent safety problem. Don't allow safety to get bogged down in a long drawn out procedure.



3. Steer clear of safety committees. Militant safety reps may be able to use them for a while, but they suffocate progress.

4. Stress the powers of the safety rep as embodied in the regulations. Try to improve these by having more frequent inspections, more thorough ones, more detailed information and the right to bring your own experts in.

5. Make sure your legal right to have factory-wide safety rep meetings is safeguarded so standards can be levelled up, and experience exchanged.

g) Don't forget that it's not just safety reps who have rights - every worker has rights under the Safety Acts. Any worker has the right to bring the Factory Inspectors in, and also the obligation to avoid dangerous jobs under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work Act. Every worker is entitled have all the relevant safety information about their job. Insist you get it.

h) Read Pat Kimmersley's book "The Hazards of Work" (Pluto Press) This is the best introduction to the subject. Safety is one issue where knowledge is itself a weapon.

i) Contact - or start - a local health and safety committee. Addresses from the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, 9 Poland Street London W1. This can really help your workplace activity - and help you to pass on your experiences and what you've learnt to workers from other workplaces.

NB This section, for reasons of space, neglects a number of problems - in particular those of Crown employees. Sorry!

LESSON: Relying on your workmates, action and good information is the key to success. Use the law and any agreements - but stopping the job is ultimately the only effective method. It's the only language they understand.

\* \* \* \* \*



SECTION 7: Building Working-Class Power in the WorkplaceIntroduction

The class struggle is always a struggle about power - as any militant knows. Whatever the issue - wages, victimisation, safety, manning - in the end what's behind the struggle is the question of power: we're challenging their right to manage. Compared to the power of the huge multinationals and the banks, the power of the working-class in this society is very little. But even this is too much for the bosses. There's a lot of talk in the press these days about "Trade Union Power". And Thatcher is saying that "the balance of power has swung away from the employers towards the unions".

Of course, she's right to have noticed that organised workers do have power. We have the power to stop all road transport, to stop all rail and air transport, to close down factories, mines, hospitals and schools. We can bring this country to a standstill. Our power is to stop, shut, close down. It's a negative power that lasts the duration of a dispute. And when we go back to work, we're still bossed around, have to ask to go to the toilet, told the manning levels and how hard we have to work, we're disciplined, victimised and given "good jobs" or "bad jobs" - all on the whims and according to the rules of foremen and managers.

We have little or no positive power. To decide what should be produced or what services should be provided - by whom, for what and how. Workers are still seen as "labour" - to be managed, manipulated and controlled. We're not a part of civilisation. The mass of workers at work have little power and little dignity.

For us, socialism is about building working-class power. Which means struggling against the power of the bosses to control and manage us - and in the end, struggling against the existence of bosses as a class (because their sole reason for existence is to have power over us). So, an important measure of the success of a struggle is whether it has resulted in a greater sense of collective power among the majority of the workforce, and a determination to struggle for more control, more equality and greater dignity at work.

The Need for a Mass Rank and File Movement

Trade Unionism as a whole in Britain is not concerned with developing the power of the mass of working class people against the bosses. It accepts the status quo - the class division of society, and just barter with the bosses over wages. And, as we've seen in Part 1 of this pamphlet, because they accept the status quo, the Trade Unions are progressively being drawn into the management of the capitalist system. In other words, they are increasingly acting to bolster the power of the bosses, and limit the power of the working class. Inevitably, this will lead to tensions within unions between the rank and file and union leaders, and there will occasionally be short periods when the rank and file get the upper hand - such as in the TGWU in late '78 and early '79. But in a period of deep crisis of the capitalist system, the margins for reformism become very narrow. Every economic demand is clearly a political one. On one side is the "National Interest" (ie the perpetuation of the bourgeois system)



and on the other side is the working class, whose action endangers that system. There is very little space in between. The unions have to make a choice. And we know that in history, time after time, they side with capitalism.

We're arguing that this is the main tendency of trade unionism today. And it's for this reason that we need a mass rank and file movement which will uncompromisingly fight for working class needs and working class power against the power of the bosses.

It will have to be an openly political - socialist - rank and file movement. We cannot win without politics today, just because, in a period of crisis, the struggle is so clearly about power. Trade unionism is based on the idea of the separation of economic struggles (over wages or basic conditions) from political struggles (which it leaves to the Labour Party). It treats the struggle over wages in isolation from the struggle against unemployment, and those in isolation from the struggle against the cuts. We instead have to build a movement which recognises that victories we might win on, say, wages will simply result in a sharp rise in the number of unemployed unless these victories are accompanied by a growth of working class power and control - based on socialist ideas.

So our long term strategy has to be to build a mass, socialist orientated rank and file movement, organised in the majority of workplaces.

- \* Whereas trade unionism relies on passive delegation of a struggle to a steward, convenor or full time union official, the aim of a rank and file movement will be mass involvement and an end to passivity.
- \* Whereas trade unionism relies on inactivity and uses procedure, courts and tribunals, the aim of a rank and file movement will be to rebuild a tradition of direct action. We can only trust ourselves - not our leaders or the bosses' procedure or their law.
- \* Whereas trade unionism encourages sectionalism, the aim of a rank and file movement is to rebuild a tradition of solidarity.

Basically, a mass rank and file movement is needed to fight for working class power - to organise the political independence of the working class. This is the only effective answer to the current crisis.

The fact is that this crisis is an attack on the whole working class. It attacks our wage packets, our social wage, our jobs, our housing and social services - even our basic working conditions. In this situation, no sector alone is powerful any longer. It has taken a long time to learn this. It's only recently that some of the campaigns against hospital cuts have turned for support to local trade union branches.

The point is whether we are prepared to do what the unions are not prepared to do: TO BEGIN - THROUGH THE LONG SLOW PROCESS OF BUILDING RANK AND FILE GROUPS, LOCAL COMMITTEES OF TRADE UNIONISTS, COMBINE COMMITTEES, CUTS CAMPAIGNS - TO BUILD A CLASS STRUGGLE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE CRISIS AND FOR WORKING CLASS POWER.



## How a mass rank and file movement can be built

Over the years, there have been several attempts to build a militant rank and file movement. None of them have been successful, but there's a lot to learn from each of them:

1. It has to be built from the base up. It's no good just announcing the launch of a rank and file movement! Building such a movement will be a long process, which will need adequate preparation, clear politics, and above all, a real basis of support in the working class. It will have to represent a higher level of organisation of strong, well established working class groupings:

- \* broad left-wing caucuses in the unions
- \* rank and file groups within workplaces and industries
- \* local anti-cuts campaigns
- \* broad based ~~national~~ campaigns against unemployment, racism, cuts in public spending, wage restraint.

2. It must be genuinely broad based and totally democratic. It can't be just an industrial front organisation for a particular political party. This would not only exclude workers from other political organisations. It would also dramatically reduce the number of people who'd be willing to become involved because workers are quite rightly wary of being manipulated or controlled by political forces over which they have no control - and they're quick to suss out when they're being used as a recruiting pool.

3. It must be organised among the mass of workers - not just in the so-called "representative layers" of the working-class - shop stewards, convenors and the minority of ardent trade unionists who go to branch meetings. It's all too easy to create a movement made up of delegates from trade union branches or shop stewards committees in which a resolution has been passed just because the branch or committee is in no way representative of rank and file feeling. Such a movement is a paper organisation, and has no real authority or power in the working class.

4. On the other hand, it musn't simply ignore the official union structures. While organising independently among the mass of workers, it's also got to establish a presence in union branches, branch committees, district committees, stewards' committees and so on. A rank and file movement will have to fight for its ideas in the trade union movement: against the incorporation of union representatives at all levels, for more democracy and participation, for direct action, against wage restraint etc. But this mustn't be carried out behind the backs of the mass of workers.

5. It should always be looking for ways of struggling against divisions of trade, skill, race and sex. Trade unions have been built primarily in response to the capitalist organisation of work. And in attempting to build a new rank and file movement, we should also be looking for link ups between workplace organisations and those in the communities.



6. A new rank and file movement will have to be openly socialist (though not tied to, or dominated by any one socialist organisation or party). It will have to put forward socialist arguments to justify its militant programme - because in this period militancy alone can only lead to very temporary victories, leading to further counter-attacks on weaker sections of the working-class. Militancy can only win when combined with class consciousness and an end to sectionalism. The movement will have to represent the growing political independence of the working-class - from both the ruling class and the middle class.

How does the "Rank and File Movement" organised by the Socialist Workers' Party compare against these points? The first thing to be said is that it is absolutely the best example of the most recent attempts to build a grass roots workers' movement. When compared with the All Trade Unions Alliance (built by the Workers' Revolutionary Party) or the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (built by the Communist Party) it's clear that it has - at its height - won some of the best militants through a fairly wide range of industry.

However, the fact is that today, the SWP's Rank and File Movement is not playing a major role in the current wave of struggle against wage restraint. It is not a shadow of the organisation that it was in 1974 - and even then it had no real authority among the mass of the working-class. Many of the local and sectoral rank and file groups are very weak. We hope it's clear that we're not saying this to score sectarian points, or with any sense of gloating. The comrades who are today active in the Rank and File Movement - members of the SWP and non members - and the militants who have in the past been actively involved, must be a part of the process of building a new, mass rank and file movement which carries real weight in the working-class.

So what went wrong with the SWP's Rank and File Movement? These are notes taken from a meeting of the Big Flame Industrial Commission at which a number of comrades who played a major part in building the Rank and File Movement in 1973 and 1974 took part:

The Rank and File Movement was always too dominated by the needs of the SWP (or the International Socialists, as it was then called). It was brought into existence as a national organisation long before the necessary groundwork had been done on the shopfloor or in the stewards' committees, union branches and district committees - or before sufficiently strong national caucuses had been built up in a wide range of unions. There were too many paper or token delegates from union branches and stewards who in truth represented very little - so the Movement did not have the authority to call even limited action. And its steering committee and conferences were very stage managed by the SWP - rather than being genuinely democratic.



In mid 1976, the SWP diverted a lot of resources away from building the Rank and File movement towards building instead their Right to Work campaign. Subsequently, the Rank and File Movement declined rapidly. It was revived briefly in December 1977, during the Firefighters' strike - where at a major conference in Manchester - it issued a call for a day of action in solidarity with the strike. But nothing happened: the movement had over-estimated its own importance.

Another problem with the Rank and File Movement has been the way in which its relationship with the Socialist Workers Party has reflected the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party - the trade unions deal with "economic" struggles and the Labour Party deals with the "political arena". In the same way, Rank and File has restricted itself to fairly narrow "economic" demands, while the SWP is the political voice. As we've explained, in our view today this split is itself a reformist one, and any new rank and file movement will have to take up broad political questions about the distribution of wealth and power in this class society.

But in saying all this, we'd like to stress that there were very positive aspects of the Rank and File Movement. For example, it was clearly concerned to build the confidence and self-organisation of the mass of workers. And it didn't get obsessed with attempts to change or "expose" leaders as a solution to everything. This idea - held by more orthodox Trotskyist organisations - is that trade unions are basically "healthy bodies" with "diseased heads", and that when the bureaucratic and corrupt leaders are exposed before the mass of trade unionists, the workers will see the light and elect a new, socialist leadership. We don't think trade unions are "healthy bodies". Reformism permeates the way unions operate at all levels - right down to the shop floor. Many of the fundamental problems exist right on the shop floor - passivity, reactionary ideas, racism and sexism - and in many ways union leaders simply reflect the problems lower down. A strategy for building a rank and file movement based simply on exposing leaders - which is what some socialist organisations suggest - will get nowhere fast.

#### TWO EXAMPLES OF INDEPENDENT INITIATIVES WHICH SHOW THE WAY IN WHICH A NEW MASS RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT COULD BE BUILT:

##### 1. The Ford (UK) Workers' Combine

The Combine was founded in April 1978, specifically to fight within the union structures and among the rank and file for a wage claim that was worth striking for - £20 on the rate and 5 hours off the week. It brought together a wide range of militants from nearly all the main Ford plants. Most were independent socialists or just militants, but among those in political groups and parties were members of SWP, Big Flame, IMG, the "Militant" group in the Labour Party, a small Marxist-Leninist group, and the CP. The Combine succeeded in forcing the Convenors' Committee to adopt the wage claim the Combine had decided - against initial strong opposition from senior convenors who are members of the CP.



It went on to build strong support for the claim among the rank and file, which led to the spontaneous walk-out's at Halewood and Southampton when Ford made its 5% offer. During the strike, the Combine tried to maintain a level of independent rank and file activity - through regular mass leafletting, pickets and lobbies of negotiations, and a badge campaign. It even produced its own record!

But the Combine didn't come out of the blue. Its first meeting was called by three workers' groups which already existed: the Ford Langley Action Committee, the Ford Dagenham Workers' Group and the Ford Halewood Big Flame group. A short history of the Ford Langley Action Committee (FLAC) will show how much preparation had already gone into building a real Base before the Combine was even formed:

In 1974, a Big Flame group started at Ford Langley (a truck factory of 2,000 workers near London airport) on the initiative of two shop stewards. From then on, mass leaflets were produced for all the workers every two or three weeks - putting an uncompromisingly working-class point of view. The leaflets gave news of, and tried to build support for all the daily disputes in the factory - over manning, conditions, safety and health, victimisation and discipline. It revealed what was going on behind the scenes in negotiations between management and stewards - and took a fairly hostile attitude to the senior stewards, who enjoyed a cosy relationship with senior management.

All the time, the Big Flame group was working towards the formation of an independent rank and file workers group. But it was clear that this could only be born out of a struggle. The opportunity came when - in June 1976 - about 600 assembly-line workers were laid off without pay as a result of a dispute at Dagenham. It's a long standing grievance of line workers that they're always the first to be laid off without pay, and that they don't have a guaranteed week's pay. As usual, the union did nothing to oppose the lay-off - like fighting on the principle "one out, all out". So the line-workers, led by a couple of stewards and a number of militants, decided at a mass meeting to picket the gates.

The resulting picket was very successful, but the management and some senior stewards worked together to break the picket at the weekend. In the aftermath of the struggle, the Ford Langley Action Committee was formed. Fairly rapidly, it was able to build widespread militant support among lineworkers. It began to have a real presence at union branch meetings, which had previously been attended by only 15 or 16 workers. Now attendance shot up to 60 or 70. It forced the shop stewards committee to start holding monthly meetings, and to make the senior stewards on the Joint Works Committee more accountable. It even co-ordinated a 3-day strike against the victimisation of a shop steward. All this was accompanied by continued mass leafletting of the type Big Flame had begun.



Similar work had been going on both at Dagenham and at Halewood, and - in addition - the SWP had begun to set up a rank and file "Fordworker" group at Dagenham. So the Left already had a base among Ford workers when the "Combine" was set up.

Since the strike, the "Combine" is returning to the kind of work which is essential for building up a mass base - mass leafletting about the day to day struggles, giving a lead on the shop floor in struggles against the penalty clauses (financial penalties against unofficial action which were introduced this year as part of the package which ended the strike) - none of which the union at Fords supports.

## 2. The Fightback Campaign against cuts in the Health Service

During 1977 and 1978, several campaigns were underway to prevent the closure of hospitals and run-down of service (at Hounslow Hospital, the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Plaistow maternity hospital, St. Nicholas Hospital). These campaigns, though backed officially by the unions, in fact received very little guidance or practical support on how to take these struggles forward. After the "raid" on the Hounslow Hospital Work-In in October 1977 (when management snatched the patients away and wrecked the wards) the support from the local community, from other hospital campaigns, from trade union branches and individuals all over the country for the continued occupation of the hospital was overwhelming. The campaign at Hounslow had done a great deal of work to build mass support among workers in the area. After the "raid" that work intensified.

However, it was clear:

1. that there was no existing national focus for broad based opposition to the cuts.
2. that there was widespread support for active opposition to cuts (work-ins, occupations etc.) but again, without a focus.
3. that there existed several other campaigns against cuts, and many others who knew the cuts were coming and wanted to be prepared.

Several hospital campaigns in London had already had joint meetings to share experiences and bring workers together, and the high level of organisation and struggle of the occupation committee at Hounslow Hospital provided the spark. Two conferences were called from a wide range of supporters of all the hospital campaigns, and "Fightback" was established as a militant, independent and non-sectarian campaign to help co-ordinate and develop the active fight against the cuts. And it's been very successful. It's made contact with, and integrated into "Fightback" campaigns all over Britain. It runs a full time office and produces a regular bulletin/newspaper - which is even distributed by some of the full time union officials in their areas.

It's run democratically - based on delegation from the large numbers of affiliated organisations which are actively involved - cuts campaigns, trade union branches, trades councils, shop stewards' bodies, women's groups, community organisations and 1 or 2 local branches of political organisations.



### Guidelines for organising at a grass roots level

These two examples - "Fightback" and the "Ford Combine" are not presented as a blueprint for all to follow. But they do have important features in common:

- \* They both developed out of rank and file struggle, led by socialists with long experience at the base in mass work.
- \* Both are very broad based organisations, run democratically - and despite the fact that in both organisations there are members of a wide range of socialist groups and parties, neither has experienced great problems of sectarianism or divisions.
- \* Both openly put forward socialist perspectives in their publications.
- \* Both are more than just rank and file pressure groups within the unions. While both organisations do organise within union structures, they also represent an attempt at independent co-ordination of rank and file and local struggles.

In our view the key aspects of any attempt to build working class power and organisation in this period should be:

1. To stimulate the self-activity and the self-confidence of the mass of workers.
2. That the organisation should be - openly - a contribution to constructing a working class, political movement in opposition to the crisis.

Within these guidelines, there's a whole variety of new kinds of organisation which are making an important contribution: joint area shop stewards' committees in the hospitals; anti cuts committees; rank and file groupings within a particular industry (for example, the building industry). There are also the single issue campaigns - for example, the Campaign against the Criminal Trespass Act and the Health and Safety Movement, which are broadly based and which have begun to build up widespread working class support. Then there are the groupings of socialist based primarily in one union, which at times have played a very important role - in particular in the Civil Service union, the Teachers' Union and the two Health Service unions.

Depending on the kind of workplace, and the particular history and tradition of that workplace, each of these kinds of organisation will be able to contribute a greater or lesser amount to building the self-activity of the workers at that workplace and to building an overall movement against the crisis. It's up to every militant to try and understand the situation properly, to get to know the everyday problems of his or her workmates, to follow the dynamics of the class struggle - in order to decide the right tactical approach.



For example, the model of the Ford Langley Action Committee is almost certainly irrelevant for the Leyland Cowley Assembly Plant. Both are vehicle assembly plants, but that's where the similarity ends. At Ford, where there has always been Measured Day Work combined with very heavy shop floor discipline, the shop stewards have come to play a role in many cases as "policeman of the shop floor" (Sunday Times, 9 February 1969).

But at Cowley there is still a tradition of shop stewards supporting and leading shop floor action. This tradition stems from years of piecework struggles, and because militants and stewards in the plant have over the years consistently put forward socialist and militant ideas in every struggle, at a mass level. Consequently at Cowley both the union branch and the stewards' committee in the Assembly Plant are led by militant socialists with a strong mass base.

Clearly for a militant at Langley, helping to develop the Action Committee and the Combine will be the priority. Whereas at Cowley, a militant in the Assembly Plant would devote much more energy to - say - producing a bulletin of the union branch or stewards' committee. On the other hand, in Leyland as a whole, there is almost certainly the need for a broad-based organisation of militants which can build itself as an alternative pole among the mass of Leyland workers to the present shop stewards' leadership - which is dominated by extremely reformist members of the Communist Party.

### Mass Work

Whatever the precise form of organisation militants think is most useful in a particular situation, the method for building it into an effective organisation is - in our view - through mass work. Why have we so repeatedly stressed this - talking of mass organisation, mass leafletting, a mass line?

The reason is simple. It's because the strategy of mass work is very weak among socialists in this country. In fact the main strategy employed by the majority of socialist organisations - the Communist Party and the majority of the Trotskyist organisations - has been the infiltration and winning over of trade union branches, shop steward committees and local Labour Party branches. The justification for this has been that the main problem in the Labour Movement is the question of leadership and political programme. According to this way of working, the over-riding priority - above anything else - is to put the "correct" leadership into power with the "correct" political programme.

Associated with this approach is a certain, fixed idea of what constitutes a political programme. It is something to be worked out at a theoretical level by "expert" socialist politicians and then "injected into mass struggles .... through the efforts of a broad-based layer of advanced workers" - Ernest Mandel, leader of the 4th International. In other words, these "advanced workers" are the passive carriers of a politics created outside of, and above the daily class struggle.



We reject this political approach. We believe that it in fact only creates self-appointed elites, who can teach but not learn. The ironic thing is that there have been hordes of Trotskyist sects or organisations with such programmes for decades, yet they have seldom played a key leadership role. They don't seem to question that their limited impact is not due to any lack of size, but to their lack of relevance. By working in this way, they succeed in developing programmes for the working class which don't ring true to workers - the demands seem irrelevant or unrealistic, and don't meet the needs and aspirations of the working-class as expressed in the class struggle.

Mass work is the alternative to all this. The Italian revolutionary organisation Lotta Continua once correctly noted that the problem was not to put yourself at the head of the masses, but to be the head of the masses. In our view, the only way we can develop a political programme and leadership of the working class (not for the working class) is from inside the class struggle - with an understanding of the developing content of working class struggle in all its sectors. That's the reason why, in Big Flame, we put so much stress on mass work. It's a question of the relationship between a socialist organisation and the working-class.

What does it mean in practice?

1. Socialist militants have to get fully involved in the day to day struggles that go on in their workplace. As we've seen, many of these struggles directly pose the question of power - though this often lies below the surface of the struggle. And that means that these struggles often have a directly political content - as workers start to struggle for their needs, they come up against the logic and the organisation of Capital. There is also, therefore, an underlying anti-capitalist consciousness - a political consciousness - inside many struggles of working people.

The job of a socialist is first to encourage and support this kind of action; second to publicise, make open and more conscious this anti-capitalist content of the struggle to those involved; third, to generalise these aspects of the struggle.

For example, in a struggle against a bonus scheme, or manning cuts, we talk about how this will mean harder work for us, and more profit (or in the public sector, greater savings) for them. We talk about unemployment - the effect on the lives of the unemployed and how unemployment affects our struggle. We talk about how harder work affects our lives - how we're tired, can't enjoy our relationships with family and friends. All these are fundamentally political questions. Politics is not just about the International Monetary Fund, and the policies of the Government - although we can and should discuss these questions too. But in a way that people can relate to.



In exactly the same way, it's possible to bring out the political content of struggles over wages, victimisation, health and safety, unpaid lay-off's - and to raise general questions about the purpose of work in this society, the great inequality in the distribution of wealth, the racist and sexist divisions among workers.

2. Taking part in, or supporting these kind of struggles also provides the possibility of learning much more about the workplace, and in particular, learning about the strength of the various forces in the place.

For example, in a reasonable size factory, in all probability the number of militant socialists will be tiny. But nevertheless within the workforce, there'll be a definitely defined "left" (the mass vanguard or militants), the centre (the moderates, those who waver) and the right (scabs, company men and women etc.). And our objective, through mass work, is always to unite the left - to increase its power, so that it can win over the centre and isolate the right.

We've defined the "left" as the militants, the mass vanguard. By that we mean not necessarily those who are committed revolutionaries, who've read Marx and Lenin, who belong to left wing organisations. What we mean are those who are at the forefront of the struggle. They might have all sorts of illusions, misunderstandings; they might even have some reactionary ideas, if taken individually. But they are the people that inside the workplace better express the antagonism which exists at gut level inside many working class people. They'll know what demands to put forward, what objective to give. They'll ask the relevant questions at a meeting, or lead the heckling at the right time.

(Obviously, in a smaller factory, or office or a school, where the intensity of class struggle is not high, the concept of mass vanguard is not going to be useful. In these kinds of situation, the opportunities for mass action are limited, and the work of a militant will almost certainly be centred on the union and its structures - but always keeping all the workforce informed, drawing the lessons of what's going on).

The point about the mass vanguard is that at a time of struggle, it acts as a point of reference for the rest of the workforce.

An example - from Ford Halewood in March 1976: During the four weeks of March, there was some dispute happening practically every day. The atmosphere was absolutely electric. It seemed as if the workers of various parts of the plant were carefully plotting a series of stoppages in turn, to attack production - and therefore management. (Which was not true, but does show us what it means to behave as a class). It was a time when the shop floor was strong because Ford was desperate for production, and the Halewood workforce had not been defeated in any way through short time, redundancies, manning cuts, mobility etc.



On a Tuesday night, one section of 120 workers walked out against some disciplinary measures. The rest of the plant was laid off. The following night, led by the Trim section, the rest of the plant walked out, demanding lay-off pay. They did so on Thursday night again, coming back only the following Monday. At the two mass meetings, on the Wednesday and Thursday night, the Convenors' recommendation was for a return to work, on the grounds that a walk out would win no lay-off pay. Both times their motion was heavily defeated. And yet most people there knew there was very little chance of winning anything.

The point is that the walk-out represented something else. There was a principle involved, which had to be established. The shop floor was right, management wrong. There was a feeling to be expressed, on a mass level. Working on the line is rubbish.

Throughout this struggle, the Trim section was the mass vanguard. At the first mass meeting, just before the vote was due to be taken, people noticed that the Trim had not yet arrived. Workers all over started shouting: "Wait for the Trim, wait for the Trim". And then they marched in - the Trim. You knew immediately that they wanted to stay out and that they were going to carry the rest with them. In fact they won. They were clearly the mass vanguard.

Hopefully, this example will have made clearer what we mean by "mass vanguard" or the "left". It should also be clear that in the majority of large workplaces, the union branch committee or the stewards' committee does not represent on its own the whole of the left. In some cases they will. In other cases they will be part of it. In most cases they will be split. In some cases they will be totally against the left of the workplace.

3. As we've said, mass work means organising the left. But no-one can do that on their own. Depending on the balance of forces, it may be possible to organise solely through the stewards' committee or the union branch. But if the left is only a small minority in these bodies - and these bodies are frequently acting against grass roots struggles, then almost certainly it's going to be necessary to build an independent rank and file group.

What are the main tasks of such a group?

First, a rank and file group has to unite the active socialists, the militants in the factory. Frequently they are isolated, often feel demoralised, and it's possible that one socialist militant does not even know the others in the same workplace. The rank and file group aims to bring them together - stewards and non stewards.

Second, the group will try to build a solid relationship with the mass vanguard. Putting out leaflets supporting their struggles, and trying to organise solidarity. Putting their case in the stewards' committee and union



branch. And through regular mass leafletting, bulletins and pamphlets, the group has to try to build a mass base - a relationship with the "centre".

The majority of the workforce is what we've called the "centre". They are the masses, about 80%, those that can usually swing one way or the other. Those that the militants define as "a bunch of sheep" or "they're alright, but need pushing" or "it's them we've got to win over" - according to the circumstances.

But the most important feature about the "centre" is that in times of struggle they will swing left - they will refer to the left as "those well organised militants". Whereas in times of passivity, they'll swing right and refer to the militants as "them trouble-makers". In general, when the left shows that it's got power against management, they'll follow and even be prepared to go in the forefront. When the left shows that it is powerless, they'll stick with the company.

THAT'S WHY MASS PRACTICE IS SO IMPORTANT. BECAUSE THROUGH IT, THE LEFT TRIES TO WIN OVER THE MAJORITY OF THE OTHER WORKERS.

The third task of the rank and file group is to hold regular meetings of as many militants as possible to plan the fight for policies in the union branch and shop stewards' committee which will force the senior stewards to support sections that take action. These meetings will also have to discuss how militants should fight for shop stewardships and other important positions in the union.

4. A final point about mass work is that it requires hard, consistent day to day organising.

Unfortunately there's a tradition of opportunism among socialist organisations in this country, which puts the needs of building their particular party or organisation before the need to build the struggle and the mass movement. So they carry out "political work" among the rank and file only when it provides opportunities for recruitment to their organisation.

Typically, their militants will not be very interested in establishing a broad-based rank and file group. Instead, they'll confine their activities to selling their organisation's newspaper to a few close contacts, and trying to "capture" important positions in the union. But when a strike breaks out - and there's a chance of recruiting a few new members - that's when they put in a lot of effort, producing leaflets, organising meetings, and getting other members of their organisation to come to the gates.

Mass practice is an alternative to this. But it's much more demanding. We believe that socialists must earn the right to be leading rank and file militants through consistent and active participation in struggle.



## Mass Leafletting

Mass leaflets are one of the most important weapons of mass intervention (there are others - like calling mass meetings or section meetings, organising film shows or socialist theatre groups during occupations or for mass pickets). Mass leaflets are directed at the majority of workers and therefore they immediately involve them. They provide information about what's going on in the workplace, and in the community around the workplace, and can counter the propaganda of management. They can help organise solidarity for sectional struggles, and build support for the actions of other groups of workers - so hospital workers can learn, from a workers' point of view, about the struggles of, say, engineering workers, and vice versa. They can bring up questions about the Government, about wages, prices and inflation, about unemployment. They can start arguing for a socialist alternative - in the Health Service, for a people's health service with emphasis on preventative medicine; in the motor industry for a socialist transport system - and so on.

Most important, they put into an anti-capitalist perspective all the general information, all the day to day problems and struggles which are the concern of the workers. Leaflets help to break down the passivity to which most working class people have been educated by capitalist society and by the bureaucratic practice of reformism.

Leaflets should be short, punchy, humorous and well laid out. It's no good cramming line after line of type onto a page and expecting people to read it. It's got to talk in straight-forward language, using bold headings at the top, and sub-headings throughout the text, so people can get some idea of what the leaflet is about without having to read the whole thing.

It's also important to involve as many militants as possible in writing, checking and rewriting leaflets. One way of doing this is to make about 20 copies of the first draft, and passing it around asking for comments and suggestions. Finally, it's vital that leaflets come out regularly - as well as emergency issues when there's a particular struggle going on.

## POLITICAL WORK IN THE UNIONS

As we've seen in Part 1, the main tendency of the Trade Union movement over the past twenty years has been its increasing integration into the management of capitalism - at all levels. In return for this greater power and responsibility, trade union leaders are expected to exercise greater control and restraint on their rank and file. We are expected to passively accept a falling standard of living, closures and redundancies, mass unemployment and cuts in public spending.

Naturally, this has led to growing conflict between the rank and file and the bureaucracy in several unions. At the 1977 Biannual Conference of the TGWU, it resulted in the defeat of Jack Jones and his beloved "Social Contract". Time and again workers have shown their distrust and impatience with national leaders by initiating nationwide unofficial



action at a rank and file level before the officials could take control - for example in the 1978 Ford strike, and the tanker drivers', truck drivers' and water workers' strikes in early 1979.

At the same time, this has forced the union leaders to take measures to control the rank and file: the attempts to enforce the Government's Code of Practice on Picketing, drawn up with Len Murray and Moss Evans, during the truck drivers' dispute; the attempt to discipline the nine Leyland Cowley Assembly Plant stewards who led opposition to the plans to force Leyland workers to accept massive redundancies, manning cuts and wage restraint.

In the face of these problems, some militants are inclined to say: "Stuff the unions. They're just part of management. They're all corrupt and bought off. We're best having nothing to do with them". This attitude is understandable but, we believe, it's wrong. Like these militants, we do not believe that trade unions can be won for socialism. But unlike these militants, we do believe that the struggle for militant and socialist policies in the trade unions can make it easier to initiate mass struggle - and thereby the struggle against capitalism.

As well as this, for many socialists working in small workplaces, or offices, schools and colleges where there's not much chance of mass struggle taking place at all frequently (although in schools or colleges it's likely to happen among the students), the union is going to be the main focus of activity.

So what are the principles governing our work in the unions?

We've seen that the trade unions act as a brake on the ability of the working-class to develop anti-capitalist struggle for four main reasons -

sectionalism - trade unionism accepts and reinforces the divisions in the working class imposed by capitalist production (ie divisions of trade, between skilled and less skilled workers, between women and men and employed and unemployed)

the separation of economic struggle from political struggle

its practice of discouraging rank and file involvement (through bureaucratic language at boring meetings) and encouraging passive delegation

its fundamental acceptance of the status quo.

Our job in the unions is to try to release the trade union brake on anti-capitalist struggle by fighting a battle against each of these tendencies inside trade unionism. That means:

1. We don't kid ourselves that union branches - or even stewards' committees - are genuinely representative of the workers who belong to the branch or work in the workplace. So we always try to relate back to the mass of members what's been going on



in these meetings. Again, the best way to do this is through a regular bulletin or leaflet - which explains simply, amusingly and in everyday language what's been going on. If nothing's been going on, or the meetings are boring, then that's got to be said - and why, and how it can be changed. Our aim is always to encourage maximum involvement of the rank and file in the structures of the union.

RULE 1: WE SHOULD ALWAYS RELATE TO THE MASS OF WORKERS, NOT TO THE MINORITY OF TRADE UNION "ACTIVISTS".

2. We should have absolute respect for democracy in the movement, which means we shouldn't get involved in manipulative games to "win" this position or that or "win" this resolution or that - if these victories can only be carried out behind the backs of the members and by manipulative methods. It's true of course that in trade unions where control by the leadership is fundamentally based on the non-involvement of the majority of members, then manipulation is the name of the game. But that's no reason for socialists to be tempted to use the same means. For a start, it's in conflict with our basic aims and beliefs - that the emancipation of the working-class is the task of the masses of that class themselves. Secondly, even if manipulative games can produce short term "results", it's in conflict with our aim in the trade unions of developing rank and file involvement and control. Finally, it can backfire badly: when policies that have been won behind the backs of the membership are not backed up by action by that membership, or when "leaders" who've won their positions by these methods are shown to have no support among the mass of members. This type of thing - all too common in the history of the Left in Britain - simply destroys the credibility of the Left. In the eyes of workers it just confirms what they've been told repeatedly by the bosses' media - that socialists are just back-room manipulators with no respect for democracy.

Socialists should come to be seen as the main force fighting for a revitalisation of democratic traditions within the movement at all levels. In the early days of the trade union movement - in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century - there was a great concern about this. The rank and file were suspicious of any moves to give greater powers to full time officials. Unions were run by great (and long) national delegate conferences, which sometimes lasted for weeks. And union officials had to present weekly detailed diaries of their activities to local "diary sub committees".

Nowadays we should be fighting for:

- \* Union branch meetings in work time (this already happens in some parts of the public sector)
- \* Shop stewards to hold regular section meetings
- \* All officials to be elected to office (not appointed by other, higher officials) and subject to regular re-election
- \* All lay delegates to Executives, Regional Committees etc and shop stewards to be subject to recall and re-election if a majority of members have lost confidence in their representative



- \* No shop steward should serve continuously for more than three years without a year back as a rank and file worker - and all stewards should have, in any case, an ordinary shop floor job without special privileges
- \* No full time official should serve for more than five years without time back at the job.

RULE 2: OUR AIM IS TO STRENGTHEN RANK AND FILE CONTROL AND PARTICIPATION IN THE UNIONS. THAT MEANS EXEMPLARY RESPECT FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE MOVEMENT, AND A LEADING ROLE IN TRYING TO EXTEND THE DEMOCRATIC TRADITION.

3. We've already said that one of our most important aims in working in the trade unions is to break down sectionalism and to end the separation of politics from economic struggle. Many socialists are agreed about this. But the question on which we differ is how we go about it.

There's one very strong tradition (associated mainly with the orthodox Trotskyist groups) which equates political work in the trade unions with abstract resolution-passing.

I'll always remember a member of the Workers' Revolutionary Party standing up at our branch meeting and putting forward an emergency resolution calling on our branch to call on the TUC to call on the Syrian equivalent of the TUC to call on the Syrian Government to call off its invasion of Lebanon in 1976. The Party had told him this was the main political issue of the moment, and was co-ordinating resolutions from every trade union branch where it had anybody. He put this resolution up in preference to one calling for the boycotting of Trico products. Women at Trico were on strike at the time for equal pay.

member of TGWU 1/1231 branch

This is a great example of how not to work in the trade unions. True - it was an attempt to bring politics into the union, but in the worst possible way. For a start, it was in the great tradition of asking someone else to do something (We call on such and such a body to do this etc). In this way it reinforced the feeling of passivity and powerlessness among the mass of members. Secondly, it was a political issue remote from the interests and needs of the workers in that branch. Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong in that. If we were only concerned to raise issues that directly concerned the workers in a particular factory or members of a particular branch, then we'd be totally trapped in the sectionalism we're trying to fight - and we'd be likely to be anti internationalist.



The point is that this was a union branch where there was no tradition of bringing out the political content of the day to day struggles. It was a meeting attended by about 20 people out of a total membership of about 2,000. The resolution was certain to have absolutely no effect. There was no attempt made to relate it in any way to the lives of the mass of members - or to inform the members of the fact that it was to be discussed and why.

Our aim is to build a tradition of open political discussion and debate based on bringing out first of all the political content of the needs and struggles of the workers in that union, and generalising from there to other struggles.

That means making the union meetings relevant and of interest to the members by cutting down on the time given over to the bureaucratic goings on at the meeting (minutes, report backs of obscure meetings etc.) which are of little interest to the average member and instead raising and giving more time to issues of direct concern: wages, cuts in the health service, manning and staffing cuts, management attempts to force harder work, unemployment, safety and health, racism and sexism.

All these issues can be discussed in a class conscious (ie political) way without in any way being boring or pedantic or off-putting. It's possible to introduce ideas about solidarity and the needs of other workers without introducing them as abstract principles, but by showing that they're in our interest as part of the working class in capitalism.

In this way a tradition can gradually be built in which there's not seen to be a huge gulf between industrial action and political action. Needless to say, none of this should be going on behind the backs of the mass of members who don't come to union meetings. Again, that's why leaflets and bulletins are so important.

And with the increasing politicisation of the everyday struggles at work and in the life of workers, it'll become easier to raise more general political questions in union meetings - "difficult" problems like the withdrawal of the British Army from Ireland, or support for the struggle of the people of Palestine.

RULE 3: POLITICAL WORK IN THE UNIONS SHOULD NOT BE BASED ON ABSTRACT RESOLUTION PASSING. IT SHOULD BE BASED ON FIGHTING FOR POLICIES WHICH WILL INCREASE THE CHANCES OF INITIATING AND WINNING STRUGGLES INVOLVING LARGE NUMBERS OF MEMBERS, AND OF BRINGING OUT THE POLITICAL CONTENT OF THE EVERYDAY STRUGGLES AND NEEDS OF THE MEMBERS.

4. A key problem for socialists is to persuade (rightly) skeptical fellow workers that it is possible to change things by going to union meetings. That it's not all a complete waste of time. One way of doing this is for all



the militants in the union branch (or stewards committee or trades council) to get together to work out a programme of policies that they'll fight for over the coming year which will make a real and noticeable difference for the members. It might be to try to get union meetings in work time. Or a policy for fighting a bonus scheme and voluntary redundancies. Or a call for a mass meeting to decide new ways of fighting unpaid lay-off's. Or all three.

This is only part of the solution. It's a fact that the powers of an individual union branch are limited - if only because it deals with only one, local group of workers. Nowadays, with national wage bargaining, it's rare that a single branch can alone have much impact on questions like wages, shorter hours, conditions. And it certainly won't have much impact in isolation on broader political questions of union policy on wage restraint, productivity deals, unemployment, cuts in public spending and so on.

To prove to your skeptical mate that it's possible to have an impact even on this kind of problem - at a national level - it's obviously important to have national co-ordination of socialist militants within one union, or at least within a single industry or large corporation. This is the reason for socialist caucuses within unions, which we believe should be very broadly based - open to all militant socialists - and totally democratic and non sectarian. A good example of this type of caucus is the Campaign for Action in NUPE (CAN) which first started in 1976. What follows is an abbreviated account of an interview in "Socialist Challenge" with Ray Varnes, secretary of NUPE's Inner London Education Authority District and a member of CAN.

It was the Annual Conference of NUPE in May 1978 which formulated the present claim for a minimum public sector wage of £60 and a 35 hour week. CAN was surprised to find that 22 delegates attended its caucus meeting at conference. The previous year, only four had attended. And although CAN is still a very small oppositional group within the union - campaign activists are playing a leading role in organising action on the claim.

The problem facing militants in NUPE is that the leadership of the union and the strike would be firmly in the hands of general secretary Alan Fisher and the NUPE full time officers, whose conception of winning the claim centres on pleading with the Labour Government to be sensible and recognise the plight of the low paid. That was the aim of the "day of action" on January 22nd 1979, which - as far as the union leaders were concerned - was just to be a large march and lobby of Parliament. Not a launching point for militant action. The job of the militants was to organise to get more power to the rank and file, at the expense of Fisher.



On the London Divisional Council of NUPE, representing about 100,000 workers, the delegates who support CAN were able to give a lead on policies which they hoped would threaten to take the January 22nd action well beyond the expectations and designs of the national leaders. The Divisional Council called for flying pickets to bring out as many public sector workers as possible in the Day of Action, support for all NUPE members who wish to go on strike after the day of action, and an intensification of the struggle against the cuts.

Although it is still a very small force within NUPE, CAN has been instrumental in helping to forge this kind of militant response, and for developing a socialist alternative to Alan Fisher's left social democratic policies.

Without any tradition of organised opposition within the union, and with Communist Party members backing the official leadership, CAN's beginnings were modest. It was the 1978 NUPE Conference which was the turning point - over the issue of how the pay struggle was to be conducted. CAN fought for a proposal to hold a recall conference in the event of the claim being turned down - and we won support for a third of all the delegates.

CAN now has a foothold in eight cities, and holds caucus meetings on several of the main union bodies in London, with members of the Socialist Workers' Party, the International Marxist Group and many independents working together.

The campaign has taken up: total opposition to the government's economic policies; opposition to all cuts and cash limits; opposition to racism and fascism; full democracy in NUPE, including the election and accountability of full-time officials. And it has formulated alternative policies to the Government's aim of sustaining profit levels by cutting public services and living standards. It wants a crash programme of building hospitals, schools and homes - financed by widescale nationalisation - without compensating the owners.

Encouraging the self-organisation of the union members is a key part of CAN's activity. How such policies were shaping up in practice is shown in the decisions of NUPE's district committee representing the 12,000 school keepers, cleaners and canteen workers in the Inner London Education Authority (of which Ray Varnes is secretary): to set up a permanently staffed strike HQ to co-ordinate action throughout the ILEA; hold weekly meetings open to all members in the district; to put out regular strike bulletins to all members; to set up joint shop stewards committees with the other unions in the ILEA.

**RULE 4:** Our job is to organise the left (the militants) in the union, to win over the centre and isolate the right. And to put more power in the hands of the rank and file. Forming caucuses like CAN is an important way of achieving this.



5. What about the thorny question of the election of union leaders? For some socialists - notably the Communist Party and the left in the Labour Party (organised together in the "Broad Left") - their whole industrial strategy centres around the election of left-wing union officials, particularly the top leaders. For them, the elections of Jack Jones to the TGWU General Secretaryship and Hugh Scablon as AUEW President were the peak of their achievement. For a long time they then slavishly followed their leader - regardless of his actual politics.

We don't put the same emphasis on elections for union leader. We don't treat the rank and file as election fodder. We don't trust any leader - whatever his or her politics. Our aim is to develop rank and file power both within and alongside the union.

But we don't ignore union elections. Why? Only because we know they can dramatically affect the ability of the rank and file to develop that power. Take Jack Jones. We all know him as an arch enemy - the architect of the Social Contract, Companion of Honour (of the Queen) and so on. But his election did give space for a growth of the power and autonomy of the shop stewards' movement within the TGWU, and thereby to greater rank and file power which certainly manifested itself in the January 1979 truck drivers' strike. Or take the election of Duffy as President of the AUEW in 1978. He is pledged to do away with the regular re-election of full time officials, and the quarterly regional meetings of shop stewards. And he wants to merge with Frank Chapple's notoriously undemocratic and right-wing EEPTU.

When a "left-winger" is elected, we don't have any high hopes in these people for socialism - for the Left. We know that sooner or later they'll cave in to the pressures on them from Government, bosses and the right-wing in the unions (at all levels) - unless they have exceptional politics, exceptional policies coming up from the rank and file backed up with action and organised pressure from the left in the union.

So our job is first to support the election campaign of these people - but making it clear that there'll be no "union utopia" if they get elected. Secondly, to pile on the pressure from the left after the election. And finally - and most important - to use the political space the election victory opens up to win permanent gains for rank and file power and control in the union.

Another tricky question. Should militant socialists stand candidates of their own against the "Broad Left" in union elections? We say that's a tactical question - it depends on a number of factors: the strength of the right wing; our own strength and base; the differences with the broad left in that particular union; the way that our intervention might influence the outcome of the election. But we would stress these principles:



1. The election campaign has to be a part of a long-term strategy for developing rank and file power and fighting for democratisation of the union. It shouldn't be a one off stunt - or worse, a party building exercise.
2. The campaign itself must be broad based and democratic - open to a wide range of militant socialists and not dominated or manipulated by any one revolutionary socialist group or party.
3. It's only worth putting up a candidate where the socialist left has a real base which is substantially different from the Broad Left - and will thereby be able to extend that base through debate and challenge with the Broad Left.
4. We would only put up a candidate where there are clear and substantial differences between our policies in the union and those of the Broad Left candidate. This might occasionally (but rarely) not be the case.
5. The candidate should be fairly well known in the union, have a good record of struggle and would not be willing to compromise on policies in order to get elected.

These points apply just as much to local, district and regional union elections as to national elections. In fact, we'd say that where possible, a left-wing candidature at national level should be part of a broader campaign at a local level. Otherwise the national intervention can easily be seen just as a stunt.

RULE 5: DON'T TRUST UNION LEADERS - WHATEVER THEY CLAIM TO BE THEIR POLITICS. BETTER LEADERS CAN HELP, AND WE SHOULD TRY TO GET THEM ELECTED. BUT THEN THEY'VE GOT TO BE WATCHED AT EVERY TURN. (On the other hand, we shouldn't make it a reflex action to attack them whatever they do - as some left groups are inclined to do. We should criticise and attack them when they go against the interests of the rank and file and the class struggle).

Our final point is this. The essence of trade unionism is that it has made it difficult for the working-class as a whole to come together to fight our oppression. We're compartmentalised into workers versus consumers; workers versus the unemployed; public sector workers against industrial workers and so on. Sectionalism is rife. Our work in the trade unions must always be to break this down. But it's a very deep rooted ideology - rooted in the rank and file as much as the leadership. So we've got to fight this at all levels - among the mass of workers and in the trade union structures. All the time we've got to fight for real links between working-class people in different situations. That can mean links between health workers and patients and prospective patients in the community; links between workers in the same industry or company; real international links.

RULE 6: Root out sectionalism. Look for ways of linking workers.



Section 1     Fighting apathy in the working class - and all  
               8     attempts to divide us by sex, race, workload,  
                     pay and skill, or to destroy our strength and  
                     unity through changes in production and work methods.

Perhaps the biggest problem socialists face in organising at a rank and file level is apathy. The evidence is there for all to see. Badly attended union meetings. The number of people who promise to come to a meeting of militants and never turn up. The difficulties of getting a struggle going on even the most blatantly justifiable health or safety grievance.

And the "apathy of the membership" is the usual excuse of "moderate" and right-wing shop stewards and convenors for not taking a lead on an issue which demands action - until militant action breaks out when they find other excuses!

So how do we face up to the problem? Too often, militants go through a process something like this: it starts with moral exhortation (you must; it's very important; you can't let us down) - it goes on to bitterness and acrimony (they're stupid, ignorant, lazy etc.) and ends with despair (it's all a waste of time, we'll never get anything done, we may as well give up).

This whole approach is based on trying to pretend that apathy can be "wished away". By regarding it as a "moral" or individual problem that can be dealt with by forcibly repeating "you shouldn't be apathetic". This is about as effective as trying to control a plague of locusts with a fly swat.

Apathy is a social problem not an individual problem. To develop a strategy for mass struggle and mass involvement and against apathy, we've got to recognise it as a real problem and look for what causes it. Basically, the politics of apathy are the politics of powerlessness. It's a kind of fatalism. It's not worth putting any energy in because we can't change anything anyway. There'll always be bosses and the unions will always be corrupt. Things could be worse.

Where does this apathy come from? In many ways it is a realistic (but short sighted) response to the real powerlessness of most working-class people. It's a total demoralisation in large sections of the working-class about ever being able to change important aspects of their lives.

What are the roots of this powerlessness?

- \* We're so divided. By sex, race, workload, skill, trade, wage.
- \* The traditional experience of working-class struggles ending frequently in shabby compromise or outright victory for the bosses. The lack of experience of collective victory.



- \* Deliberate attempts to undermine the organisation of strong sections of the working class through changes in production (eg the dockers, printers) or changes in payment methods (eg the miners)
- \* Fear - or "respect" - for authority. Not wanting to be seen as a trouble-maker.

From this, it's clear that the best way to overcome apathy is:

1. To look for ways of building unity so that workers become potentially more powerful
2. To restore morale by trying to organise collective action on issues which can be won through action
3. To deliberately undermine the authority of the bosses - and their foremen/women, managers etc.

And this applies whether we're talking about a small section or a large workplace - or the working-class as a whole.

#### FIGHTING DIVISIONS

Practically all divisions in the working class are caused by differences in wages and unequal distribution of workload. Socialists have concerned themselves mainly with money. They should start to concern themselves with equalising the workload - by people who have to work too hard doing less.

#### 1. Skilled/semi- and unskilled:

In the conflict between semi-skilled and unskilled workers and "skilled" workers over differentials, we've already made it clear where we stand. We're against differentials. The price of a loaf of bread is the same whether or not you're skilled. And the argument that skilled workers should be compensated for serving a five year apprenticeship at low wages is ridiculous. Why should everyone else be penalised for the whole of their working life because skilled workers have never struggled against the low pay rates of apprentices. The demand should be for apprenticeship on full pay.

It's also true that no socialist can be against low pay while at the same time demanding increased differentials. If the low paid get big rises, then differentials will be eroded. If those differentials are then restored, those who were previously low paid will once again be low paid. For the same reasons we're against percentage pay deals - which give more to those who already have more and less to the lower paid.

Finally, it's worth pointing out that by and large unskilled and semi-skilled workers have to work much harder than skilled workers at jobs which are often more dirty, boring and repetetive.



Skilled workers won't give up their privileges without a fight. Craft consciousness is a deeply ingrained ideology. It'll only be defeated by unskilled and semi-skilled workers organising themselves to fight it - and by proving that unity in action and an ideology of egalitarianism brings a better standard of life, and a better way of life than sectionalism. The key is the self organisation of the semi and unskilled workers.

## 2. White collar versus blue collar workers

There are increasing numbers of workers who in order to live are required to sell not their manual labour power but their mental labour power. Or a combination of both. These are the white collar workers - designers, engineers, draughtsmen/women, analysts, teachers etc. We're not talking about the junior and senior managers who's job is to marshall and discipline workers for capitalism. We're talking about non-supervisory white collar workers.

Just as with the division between skilled and less skilled workers, there's traditionally been a "white collar status consciousness" in relation to blue collar workers. They aspired to semi professional and professional status, and for years were not unionised - or were members of staff associations. This was based on a set of privileges over blue collar workers: a career structure which ensured an increasing standard of living; incremental salaries which automatically increased every year; much better conditions, full sick pay, better pensions and no clocking on and off.

Over the past 30 years, this section of the working class has expanded dramatically. And the bosses have gradually introduced "factory-office" methods, similar to those in industry, to systematise and control the workforce. This has led to greater supervision, de-skilling (no-one responsible for a whole process), assembly-line type set-ups (typing pools, measured day work, time study, job evaluation).

All this, together with attempts to control the salaries of these groups of workers, has led to a proletarianisation of this sector of the workforce. We've seen this in the huge growth of unionisation among white collar workers, and the development of radical ideas about society.

So - unlike with craft consciousness among skilled workers - there has been a gradual erosion of "white collar consciousness" among white collar workers. It still exists - but there are objective processes which are weakening it. And this has created real possibilities for advance which - where they're taken up - are proving themselves in practice. For example, in Lucas Aerospace, the joint shop stewards' combine is made up of blue collar and white collar representatives. Without that combination, the Alternative Plan for fighting closure and redundancies (see page ) would never have come about.

The Lucas Combine is very much the exception. But it's an example that's got to be pushed. In most companies, blue collar and white collar workers still maintain a rigid separation, and only the loosest co-operation. We've got to



fight for more joint organisations, and for blue collar workers to enjoy some of the conditions that have previously been reserved only for those with "staff status".

### 3. Men versus women

Two of the most fundamental divisions in the working class are those between men and women and between white and black and Asian workers.

Despite the undoubted impact of the Women's Liberation Movement, and the passing of the Equal Pay and Equal Opportunities Acts, the division between men and women is growing - not diminishing as many people think. It's a fact that over the past three years, the gap between the earnings of the average hourly paid man and the average hourly paid woman have widened to approximately £19.60p for 40 hours.

Clever job evaluation schemes have been introduced in workplace after workplace to ensure that there are still "women's jobs" and "men's jobs", and that the women get a lower rate for doing more or less the same job as the men.

And in society as a whole, there's still a clear division between women's work and men's work. Women are supposed to be "nimble with their hands" and are therefore employed on fast, detailed, repetitive assembly work. Women are "caring" and "good at looking after the home and people", and therefore find themselves as low paid cleaners, nurses, primary school teachers, social workers etc.

On top of this, the traditional housewife role of women has led to a tradition of part time work. There are  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million women in part-time jobs, largely concentrated in "female areas of employment". They don't qualify for pension schemes, maternity schemes, sick pay or holidays.

Then there are the thousands of women "homeworkers" - sewing clothes, making up boxes, packing, writing and filling envelopes who're paid appalling piecework rates. Many are in rural areas, or immigrant women in the cities. By and large, the trade union movement has shown very little interest in organising either part-time workers or homeworkers.

We believe it's the role of women as unpaid housewife, childminder, cook, cleaner, teacher and nurse in the home which underpins women's role and women's low pay in jobs outside the home. With the creation of the welfare state, many of women's traditional roles in the home were transferred to institutions - hospitals, schools etc. - and capital has then employed women in these places. Women are told they are in the "caring professions" and therefore require lower wages than men would accept. If they are working in other sectors of the economy, women are said to be working for "pin money".

In the past twenty years, it has become normal for most working class women to have two jobs - one unpaid in the home, and the other low paid outside the home. It's true that men are doing a little more housework - but according to a survey in 1970, whereas women who work full time outside the home spend about 23 hours a week on household tasks,



men spend only 10 hours on those tasks. What's happened is that women's workload has increased heavily over the years - and most families now depend for their standard of living on two wages.

But as unemployment increases with the crisis, it's often women who're first thrown on the dole, particularly part-timers (though thousands of women don't register because they're not entitled to unemployment benefit).

### Privilege

Clearly, working class men have a privileged status and way of life over working class women. They earn more, work less and have greater job security.

This has meant that men have frequently been unwilling to take action (and lose wages) in support of women fighting for equal pay or equal opportunities:

"My husband's the chairman of the shop stewards' committee (at Trico), in the same union as us - the AUEW - and although the strike (for equal pay) is official, he's still in there working"

"the women feel that the men working in the factory are scabs"

- two quotes from an article in Spare Rib 49 about the Equal Pay struggle at Trico, London in summer '76.

In the same way, the fact that most women are responsible for household bills, the rent and for buying food and clothing, and that they have a totally inadequate independent income, means that they're the first to suffer the short-term consequences of any strike by their husbands. So, time and again in strikes, you see the mass media pick out one or two vocal wives who're against the strike, and attempt to organising a strike breaking wives' campaign.

Sometimes this kind of campaign succeeds. Often it fails. But the possibility for this kind of campaign exists because the unions are totally hostile to involving or informing wives and dependants (or husbands if the strikers are women) in the struggle. This is reinforced by the appalling sexist attitudes of most men towards women: they're stupid, they wouldn't understand, they're wrong in everything they think etc.

In this way, the bosses win out every time that they succeed in making these divisions work.

### Fighting Back against all this:

Sexism, like racism, is a social and political question that can't be dealt with just in the workplace. As we've seen, women suffer a double oppression when they're working class - as women and as workers. Underpinning this is the role of the woman in the home and the ideology of sexism.

To fight this, women have created their own organisations:



initially the struggle was mainly ideological with the Women's Liberation Movement campaigning against the way women were seen and treated as inferior. But there developed parallel struggles for equal pay, equal rights and equal opportunities.

Women's struggle has taken up issues that combine material and ideological issues - like the fight for a woman's right to choose whether to have a child or whether to have an abortion, or the setting up of refuges for battered wives. And housewives have continually led struggles on estates to pay less rent, against gas and electricity cut-off's, for nurseries, play facilities and safe roads.

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

In Big Flame we welcome this fact and see it as a positive step towards class unity - since there can only be effective unity when all major sectors of the working class are strong enough to ensure that their own demands are taken up.

#### Manifesto for a New Organisation

So these are some of the most important points we want to make on organising against sexism at work:

1. Women at work face a double oppression and we give a priority to supporting and developing separate organisations for women where it's possible. For example, the Campaign for Action in NUPE has stated:

We support the right of women in NUPE to organise independently by electing their own shop stewards and setting up their own joint shop stewards' committees so they can discuss their own affairs and gain the confidence to raise these in the union.

We say that such organisations do not split the movement. The movement is already split - because it is dominated by men. Women play a far, far smaller role in the unions than men - even where there are more women workers than men. Because of sexist education, women are brought up to have less confidence in their ideas and in their ability to speak in public than men. This is why the self-organisation of women is so important.

2. In organising among women at work, - it's always got to be remembered that the vast majority of the women will have a second, unpaid job to go home to. So if women are to play a greater role in the unions, it's crucial to fight for:

- \* all union meetings in work time
- \* all sections where there's a majority of women to be represented by a woman shop steward who understands these problems
- \* women's officers in the unions, and - obviously - positive discrimination in favour of women for all full time union posts.



Among the most important demands for women are those which link women's oppression at home and work:

- \* In particular, we demand the socialisation of housework - the setting up of free child care centres and free laundries, paid for by the state, in order to help free women from the burdens of housework. (This is not a utopian demand. For example, in Notting Hill Gate, local women fought a long campaign for a free local nursery - which after a hard and militant struggle they won outright).
- \* We demand a guaranteed income for all women as of right.
- \* We support the struggle against the unequal division of work between men and women both inside and outside the home. Obviously, men should do a full share of housework.
- \* We demand that housework should be paid for by the state, whoever does it and wherever it is done.
- \* We recognise that the majority of working class women are low paid workers. We therefore give particular emphasis to the campaign for a minimum wage (though we think £60 is now far too low) and a shorter week.
- \* We support the demand for an extension of facilities for abortion within the Health Service, and for an end to all powers of doctors over a woman's right to choose whether or not to bear a child.
- \* We demand the extension of maternity leave to part-time workers, the liberalisation of the conditions attached to it and an increase in the maternity grant. And most important is the demand for paternity leave - which has been successfully negotiated by some chapels of the National Union of Journalists.

3. As we've seen, the Equal Pay and Equal Opportunities Laws have achieved very little. We're for a complete end to the division of labour in social production between men and women. But this will only be achieved by the struggle of women - with the support of men who're sympathetic to their aims. This means that we should give maximum priority to supporting these struggles when they begin: for example Electrolux in Luton in 1978, the Trico strike and the many struggles against the cuts in which women are taking a leading role.

4. One of the most difficult tasks of a militant socialist man at work is fighting the sexist attitudes that exist among practically all his male workmates (and probably in his own head) - and this is particularly difficult in any workplace which has a large majority of men workers.

Of course, there are ways of taking up this question directly in the union branch: fighting for resolutions in support of (or affiliating to) the National Abortion Campaign, donating money to a local women's aid refuge (which means a discussion



can be started about men's violence towards women), or pointing out the deficiencies of the Equal Pay and Equal Opportunities Act. These are important things to do. The problem is that sexism exists among the majority - so passing resolutions (though helpful) won't get at the root.

In the end, it will be the growing power and organisation of women that will force a change of attitudes among men who will begin to genuinely respect women. In the meantime, it's important to begin to develop an atmosphere in which it's at least clear that there is some opposition to sexist attitudes.. ..

Obviously, one way that this can happen is for militants to take a fairly uncompromising stand whenever shop floor arguments break out (as they do) which touch on issues which affect women: abortion, violence in the family, "permissiveness", equal pay, low pay etc. If there's regular mass leafletting going on, issues such as these should be taken up whenever a popular paper or current affairs programme on the TV touches in a dramatic way on these questions. For example, when a Liverpool husband tried to take out an injunction against his wife having an abortion - and it was front page headlines in all national newspapers - this would have been an ideal time for part of a workplace bulletin to have dealt with abortion and a woman's right to choose. Equally, in discussing the merits of the shorter working week, it's a good opportunity to discuss the unequal division of housework in most families - and the way that the shorter week will enable the man to do more (or a woman to have an easier life).

Facing up to the waves of pornographic pin-ups that periodically seem to flood over every male dominated workplace is another difficult problem. What's tricky is how to make a stand against it without sounding puritanical or Mary Whitehouse-like. One attempt to deal with this was in the second issue of "Fraud News", the newspaper of the Ford UK Workers' Group (the Combine), which attacks the presence of a page 3 pin-up in the Company newspaper "Ford News". The article is headed "We're no Puritans but ....." with a sub heading "No Page 3 Tits in 'Fraud News'. Here's why fella's:"

What the hell is a page 3 girl doing in every issue of Ford News? Sexism is what it's about. They think you'll only read it if it has a bit of sex in it.

We're no puritans. We're dead against Mary Whitehouse. But there's a lot of hypocrisy about all this.

For a start, most of the blokes who love poring over the page 3 nudes would rather be dead than be seen nude themselves by millions of people.

And they'd go mad if it was their wife or daughter who was stripping off in front of their mates.



We don't think there's anything wrong with nudity. But we do think that feeding sexual fantasies - which is what these pictures are about - is no sign of sexual freedom. Quite the opposite. It's a sign of a lack of real freedom.

There's another point. "Fraud News" is not just for men. It's for the many women Ford workers too. And for the wives and girlfriends of men Ford workers.

And many women quite rightly object to being seen just as sex objects - the playthings of men. It's a fact that rape is on the increase. It's a fact that there's a lot of violence by men against women in the home.

Sexism is like racism. It's a degrading way of seeing people. It treats them as inferior. "Fraud News" will always make a stand against that kind of thing.

Meanwhile, "Ford News" will still be full of bullshit. It'll continue to pretend to uphold everything it says is decent: Morality, Religion, Hard Work, Thrift and so on.

But like the Sun - which runs titillating and moralising stories about rapists alongside its nudes - "Ford News" will continue to treat Ford workers as though they were a lot of dirty old men in mackintoshes. "Fraud News" isn't here to insult you.

A final point. One of the best ways of fighting sexism in a predominantly male factory is to form an organisation of women workers, and wives or girlfriends of the male workers to support struggles in the workplace. This has happened in a number of workplaces over the past five years, and it's given a much greater authority to both men and women militants to begin the attack on sexist ideas. (All these organisations came out of a particular struggle situation. It would be very hard to create them out of nothing.)

#### 4. White versus Black worker

Like women, black people suffer a dual oppression - as workers with the worst jobs, the poorest wages, the lousiest homes and schools, and as victims of the racist discrimination that runs through our society: the constant harassment of black people by the state and its police and the physical attacks from racist thugs.

In workplace after workplace, the worst, dirtiest, heaviest, most boring, and worst paid jobs are reserved for black people.

The roots of the oppression of black people lie in white imperialism. Encouraged to come to Britain after the war, when white workers had taken advantage of the labour shortage to take the jobs with the best wages and conditions, black workers were forced into the jobs the whites refused. Britain is not unique in exploiting immigrant labour to rebuild the economy after the war. West Germany has exploited hundreds of thousands of Turks and Yugoslavs. France "imported labour" from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Portugal.

By systematically increasing the divisions in the working class in this way, and by giving white workers some marginal privileges,



European capitalism has successfully succeeded in stabilising itself as a social democracy. In fact, social democracy depends for its stability on this kind of division.

How is the situation of black people in Britain to be changed? How is racism to be challenged? It goes without saying that all the Race Relations legislation has made scarcely any difference.

We believe that the main force capable of challenging white racism and fighting against the situation that black people today find themselves in is the struggle of black people themselves. This doesn't mean that white militants can cop out of the struggle against racism. Our job is to counter racialism among the white working class. And to support and build links with autonomous black organisations - sharing information, discussing perspectives and developing common strategies wherever possible.

The important thing for white militants to recognise is that black people are not the passive victims of class and racist oppression.

Black militancy is growing. This is clear from the wave of Asian strikes in the midlands in 1974 (like Imperial Typewriters), to the actions of black youth in Leeds, Notting Hill and Lewisham against the police, to the riots at Ford Dagenham, to the strike in East London factories against racist attacks in the streets, to the struggles at Grunwick and Booth's Gin.

To win our liberation, we must first of all fight for black unity. But there are many differences that exist among us - historical, cultural, sexual and other differences are a living reality. But unity between different groups of black people already exist and will develop. An independent black peoples' movement is in the process of development.

The formation of BPOCAS and BASH (Black People against State Harrassment); the development of independent black women's organisations like OWAAD (the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent) and AWAZ (an Asian Women's organisation); the formation of independent black youth movements, and the formation of many organisations in the black communities which do not necessarily have a particular name - all these are part of that development.

- from an article in the Black Socialist Alliance Newsletter No 2.

What this means for militants organising at work:

\* All mass work leaflets/bulletins and newspapers should regularly take up the question of racism - particularly dealing with any incidents in the workplace or the surrounding community. It should also expose any management racism.



\* We support all efforts to build workplace-based Anti-Nazi League groups (like Miners against the Nazis) to root out the National Front and deny them support and a platform. But we think it's important to take the struggle beyond just confronting the National Front. The underlying problem is racism and that's what the fight is against.

\* We've got to organise support in our own workplaces for the growing wave of unionisation and wages/conditions struggles among immigrant workers - Grunwicks and Garners are perhaps the best known examples, maybe because they are both in London, but there are many, many more similar struggles throughout Britain - often in small, obscure sweatshops. These are part of the growing fightback, particularly by Asian workers - notably Asian youth - who're demanding growing power in the working class.

\* White militants will have to accept that - particularly in a workplace where there are large numbers of black workers - the main job of a black militant will be to build up black organisation and black consciousness. This is a precondition for building a successful rank and file organisation made up of black and white people. If this is not seen to be a priority, then you can easily get the situation - as in the Ford Workers' Group - where the majority of activists in the rank and file group are white, while the majority of semi-skilled workers are black.

\* We've got to try to bring out into the open the racist division of labour that exists in many workplaces. It's fairly simple to find out the proportion of black people in the lower grades, in the higher grades, among office staff and among supervisory and technical staff. This is the only way to establish a pattern of discrimination - though it's obviously important to take up individual cases of provable discrimination in the allocation of better jobs. This keeping of simple statistics is something that militants rarely do - but it's easy and effective.

\* Our propaganda should deal with more than just individual racist incidents. We've got to point out the way that the state and government itself is racist - through a racist police force using laws like the Sus law, whereby many young black people are arrested on suspicion of being about to carry out an offence; through the racist immigration laws whereby racist immigration officers carry out virginity tests and X rays on women entering Britain from India and Pakistan. So we've got to campaign against the Immigration Laws and the Sus Law.

### Summary

Our general strategy for fighting racism at work is to support and encourage the self-organisation of black people at work - formal or informal - and forming strong multi-racial rank and file organisations on the basis of white workers joining with strongly self-organised black workers. This perspective also leads us to organise for black stewards to represent areas in which there's a majority of black workers. Equally important is for white militants to argue and fight against the endemic racism in the white working class - through anti-racist committees and workplace ANL groups.



5. Worker against worker - unequal division of workload and overtime

One of the most important ways in which workers inside even a small section are kept divided is through the foreman or woman arranging for either an unequal distribution of workload - giving "favoured" workers easier jobs under Measured Day Work, or jobs with a higher earnings potential under piece work - or through giving "favoured" workers a much higher proportion of overtime available. These methods are often used to try to buy off militants and shop stewards.

Obviously, a worker with a cushy job is not going to be inclined to join in a struggle about manning if, as a result, s/he might get victimised by the supervisor and end up with a harder job.

To fight against this type of thing, there are three key demands:

1. Equalisation of the workload, job to job within any section.
2. Rotation of jobs.
3. An overtime rota to be administered by the section shop steward.

These policies have to be fought for both on the shop floor - through argument and mass leaflets - and in the union branch and shop stewards' committee.

There's no doubt that the management will be very hostile to these demands. They hit at the heart of management's so-called "right to manage" and at their main tactic for stopping us getting together.

Take the first of these demands. This means conflict with the Time Study Department who're told to make some jobs harder than others. Of course, absolute equality of workload is impossible to achieve, particularly on an assembly line. That's one reason why job rotation - so everyone has an equal share of "good" and "bad" jobs is always going to be important. But it's possible to get much greater equality than the Time Study Engineer will recommend.

Management have already shown their feelings about job rotation. For example, at Ford Halewood, workers in the Press Shop had gradually built up a working practice of hourly rotation of jobs - from the noisiest areas to quieter areas, from jobs requiring heavy lifting to lighter jobs, from boring jobs to slightly less boring jobs - and so on. In February 1978, management provoked a 6 week strike by - out of the blue - stepping in with a series of demands including:

rotation of jobs between workers on an informal basis only once every four hours, instead of every hour as has become standard practice.

Clearly this was just a prelude to getting rid of rotation



completely!

Hourly rotation in the Halewood Press Shop is important just so people can remain sane - the work is so repetitive. In other sections, the appropriate demand will be for daily rotation (a different job each day) within the section, or even weekly rotation. Whatever is decided on, there's no doubt that there's a much stronger feeling of unity and solidarity on all sections where job rotation exists.

In connection with the third demand - for an overtime rota - we'd stress that we're not in favour of overtime, particularly at a time of growing unemployment. But we do think that everyone should have an equal opportunity of doing overtime, if overtime is available. Individuals with less need, or who are more principled, may pass over their opportunity. But they should still be given the choice.

#### 6. Worker versus Technology

In Part 1 of the pamphlet, we saw how new technology can be used to undermine the strength of any sections of the working class that have developed unusual power and strength. For example, the use of containerisation against the dockers, the assembly line against skilled motor vehicle workers, computer controlled typesetting against printers.

Workers' power in capitalism usually shows itself through high wages, a low intensity of work and many demarcation rules for that section of workers. Capitalism naturally hits back by trying to find machines that will do the work cheaper and in a way that gives the bosses more control. When the technology is cheap enough, the battle commences. The first threats are always connected with foreign competition. "Unless you agree to end demarcation, stop demanding such big wage increases, and agree to new technology, we'll become uncompetitive and go out of business. You'll price yourselves out of a job".

The arguments against this type of thing are already listed on page 16 in the section on fighting manning cuts and closure.

The main point we want to stress is that we are not against new technology, as long (and only as long) as it is going to be used to benefit the working class.

Technological developments of this kind can be used to liberate human beings from the worst forms of drudgery and monotony at work; or they can be introduced to increase the level of exploitation of one class of people by another - by undercutting wages or by displacing workers from employment altogether.

- Workers' Enquiry into the Motor Industry, published by the Conference of Socialist Economists.



This means that we are prepared to accept ~~new~~ technology as long as there is:

- \* No loss of jobs at the workplace - either through enforced sackings, voluntary redundancies or 'natural wastage'.
- \* The benefits of the increased productivity are shared entirely by the workforce - through a shorter week with no loss of pay, and higher basic pay.
- \* No overall loss of skills. Extensive retraining programmes to ensure that no-one is deskilled.

Management - any management - would fight tooth and nail against such proposals just because it would hit at the basic reason they wanted to introduce the new technology - to increase profits and take away workers' control over the job.

Our problem is that new technology is practically never introduced with the aim of benefitting workers. Which means a struggle in nearly every case where management try to bring it in.

We're particularly concerned about the deskilling that accompanies the introduction of higher technologies.

The most obvious effect of automation is the loss of jobs, but there is also a considerable impact on the workers that remain. In particular, there is a general tendency for fewer skilled workers to be needed. In order to use expensive equipment to the full, employers increasingly demand that workers specialise in very specific routine operations. In many cases workers become little more than machine-minders. Automation usually involves less skill from workers, not more and it reduces further the control which the worker can exercise over her/his time and skill.

A major consequence of the application of robots, numerically-controlled machines etc in the motor industry is, therefore, a growing splitting up of groups of workers - the technicians, engineers and controllers on one side and the development of unskilled manual workers who service the robots and carry out simple repairs on the other.

- Conference of Socialist Economists "Workers' Enquiry into the Motor Industry"

So that's the general picture. Automation/new technology will lead to a mass of impoverished unemployed people and their families on the one hand, and a group of unskilled workers with dull, repetitive jobs who share the honour of getting a wage with a highly skilled (and much better



paid) group of engineers and technologists. All ruled over by a tiny group of bosses.

Automation could be liberating for the working-class. But we can see just how mad the system is, when the effect of the introduction of automation will actually be to impoverish and make life worse and more dull for hundreds of thousands of people.

How can we fight this kind of thing? The first point we have to make is that it's going to be a very hard struggle. As we've seen at the "Times" and "Sunday Times", bosses are willing to close down whole companies if they don't get their way. But these are some guidelines:

1. Prepare the struggle well in advance of management plans, publicising the social consequences of the new technology in a broad campaign to the workforce, and to national and local press/radio/TV. This means bringing out the effect on jobs, on deskilling and "job satisfaction" in the remaining jobs.
2. Try and find out everything possible about the potential health and safety hazards of the new technology, and their effect on both the workers who'll operate the machinery and the community at large. For example, the Yorkshire Area of the Miners' Union has taken an active role in the campaign against the growth of nuclear powered electricity generating stations. Obviously, these are a threat to jobs in the mining industry - but the main argument used by the miners is the danger to the community.
3. Bring out into the open the fact that the introduction of new technology is practically always connected with an attack on working class power. Bring out the class question and destroy the myth that technological change is a neutral force in a classless society. These are the arguments that cut the ground from beneath management's feet. Used successfully, they put management on the defensive and mean you're no longer fighting on management's terms - profit, competitiveness, productivity etc.
4. Build links (such as joint Combine committees) with white collar, technical and engineering staff - to produce alternative, socialist plans for production and methods of production (as at Lucas Aerospace) and to prepare a joint list of criteria for the introduction of new technology. If management refuse to agree to these points (such as the ones on the top of the previous page), then you're in a strong position to

\* block the installation of new equipment

\* refuse to allow any work to be carried out on the new equipment if it is installed

Unity with technical staff is essential, because it will be the technical workers who will usually be asked to carry out the work - via the new automated/computerised machinery - that previously would have been done by blue collar workers. Just how important this is can be



seen from the struggle at the "Times", where the journalists have been asked to type their stories direct into a computer which would automatically typeset them - ready for layout and printing. This would have the effect of destroying the jobs of hundreds of typesetters throughout the newspaper industry.

The journalists have decided to adopt the following national policy:

Journalists will not take over work traditionally done by members of other unions, unless the work and the jobs have been voluntarily relinquished.

"The Times Challenger" (the newspaper published by workers at the Times during the dispute.

This policy resulted in victory in Scotland, when the publishers of the Glasgow Herald and the Evening Times backed down on their demands for journalists doing their own typesetting.

#### Conclusion:

Over the next five years, there's going to be struggle after struggle over the introduction of new technology. It'll be combined with, or used to disguise, a major attack on workers' rights and established practices - and as such it will become a major arena of local class confrontation, buried away in workplaces all over Britain. We've got to bring it out in the open as an issue and make it possible to link these struggles.

This attack by management is part of an international effort by bosses to restructure the working class and decompose our strength. Although it's an international attack, the bosses are using the national divisions in the working class to implement their plans. So they say - "if we don't introduce automation and sack half of the workforce, the Japanese will do it, and we'll all be out of a job." And the trick often works - because it's true.

In Big Flame we reject import controls as a solution - unless workers in an exporting country have asked for them to aid their struggle against oppression and exploitation, like in Chile or S. Africa. Import controls lead to support for your own bosses and just put the burden of unemployment on brother and sister workers abroad.

Instead we must look to building long term links with workers abroad.

Finally, we want to stress that where the bosses do succeed in their attack, we have to look for new ways of rebuilding - or recomposing - our strength. Containerisation destroyed much of the strength of the dock workers. But now the inland container ports are being organised. In the face of the present attack, we'll have to put more energy into organising the unemployed and the highly skilled technologists.



Section 9 The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation

This pamphlet has been about how militants should struggle and organise where they work. Throughout it there have been references to Big Flame - a revolutionary socialist organisation. In this section, we want to say something about Big Flame and its relation to workplace organising.

Money, Power and Politics:

The working class in Britain is in a hole. The past four years in particular have seen a dramatic drop in our standard of living, cuts in our public services, the threat of mass unemployment, attempts to force us to work much harder and to destroy our workplace organisation through attacks on demarcation and so-called "restrictive practices". There has been a distinct shift in wealth and income away from the working class towards the bosses.

In Big Flame, we see this as a political problem for the working class - and one which needs a political response. Why do we say that? Because for us, politics is about power - the power to decide who gets the benefit of wealth, who controls the state, who shapes all the most important institutions and relationships between people in society. At present, it is the bosses who have a near monopoly on this power. But it is always threatened by workers' struggles - struggles over wages, safety, redundancy, victimisation, conditions and so on - which in nearly every case are partly a challenge to the bosses' right to manage us, control us and exploit us.

What we're saying is that in this class society, politics is about the struggle for power and control between the bosses and the working class. And one of the main problems for workers is that they have created no mass political organisation which has as its aim the development of working class power. The bosses don't have the same problem. In fact the debate between the Labour and Tory parties during the April/May General Election campaign was principally about who was best able to control the working class. The Tories were saying: "we can control them best through legislation and the police". And Labour was saying: "we can control them better through the trade union movement".

Hopefully, we've explained why Labour can make this offer: throughout the pamphlet we've argued that trade unions are defensive organisations whose function is to secure for their members the best possible wages and conditions within the capitalist system. This leads the trade union officials (including stewards and convenors) to sign compromise agreements with the bosses which include clauses requiring the trade union to ensure that its members abide by the agreement. In this way, trade unions through their defensive role act to limit workers' struggles and act to limit the fight for working-class power.



Clearly, the trade unions - and their political arm, the Labour Party - are not going to be the organisations that lead the working-class to socialism. In the present crisis, they're not even capable of defending jobs and living standards. And because of these limitations, in every industry or public service sector, workers come together to form democratic rank and file organisations to press for more militant demands. Organisations like the Ford Workers' Combine, the "Collier" group in the mines, Fightback in the NHS and NALGO Action in the main local authority union.

People join these rank and file organisations because they can't stand the sell-out's and shabby compromises that are the hallmark of trade unionism/reformism. They're fed up with the politics of compromise - and potentially, these organisations represent an alternative: the politics of organising for working class power.

At present, we can only speak of their potential - for many reasons. For a start, most of these organisations do not have a mass following, although the possibility does exist. Some are not even openly socialist: their politics is implicit rather than explicit. And many of them depend for their administration and publications on the skills, energy and resources of the members of revolutionary socialist organisations who belong to them. Nevertheless, through their existence and their many successes, these organisations do show the way towards the building of a mass socialist movement for working class power.

It's important to realise, however, that most of these rank and file organisations were started by members of revolutionary organisations, and certainly could not continue to exist without them. And this is just one reason why revolutionary organisations are so important. In our view, without them, we will never be able to build a mass movement.

#### Why Join a Revolutionary Organisation?

In Britain today, there are countless revolutionary organisations. Among the most important are the SWP (Socialist Workers' Party) with about 4,000 members, the WRP (Workers' Revolutionary Party) with about 1,000 members, the IMG (International Marxist Group) with about 800 members, the WSL (Workers' Socialist League) and Big Flame - each with about 300 members, and many more much smaller groups.

All of these organisations have one declared aim: to demolish the power of the bosses over us and to organise a new society in which working-class people will have power and control over the wealth. Why so many organisations? Basically there are differences in the socialist movement over two questions: what kind of society we're trying to create, and how to get there. There are those who believe in the need for a highly centralised and disciplined party to "lead the working class to socialism". There are those who put more emphasis on democracy, solidarity and learning in struggle. There are those organisations which are very dogmatic and sectarian - believing that only they have "the right line". And there are others which are more flexible. There are some organisations who believe their members should also work in the Labour Party. And there are others who are opposed to workers voting Labour at all.



It goes without saying that all these 57 varieties (and we in Big Flame are one of them!) with all their divisions and differences don't help at all. We know that people find it confusing and off-putting. But we still think that there are overwhelming reasons why militants should try to discover more about these organisations, make a choice and join one. Here are some of these reasons:

1. It helps you make a break from the politics of compromise

There are many great militants who believe they're making the best contribution they can by being active in their union branch, on the shop floor, as a steward or in their local Labour Party. And they believe that by working in this way, they're making an effective contribution to working-class power and the struggle for socialism.

There's no doubt that this kind of work is important. But it does have serious limitations - and the most significant of these is that in the long-term it limits you to the defensive perspective of the existing institutions of the working-class - the Labour Party and trade unions. So the first argument in favour of the need for a revolutionary organisation is that it puts you in contact with a wide range of militants who share similar ideas and whose aim is the same: to fight for a new society in which there is no exploitation of men and women and in which working-class people have power. So the main reason for joining a revolutionary organisation must be political - to make a clear commitment to building a new society.

2. It provides support, breaks isolation and provides education and training

As a militant socialist, you're more than likely to be out on a limb at work. Among your mates, you're probably the most likely one to get involved in aggro with management, and sometimes your mates won't back you up, or are more nervous of taking action - and some might be out and out scabs. You may be labelled as a "commie" by management, and the label is picked up and used against you by some of the workforce. And the struggle at work goes up and down. The defeats will be many and the victories few. And - even worse - there may be long demoralising periods of no struggle at all. Isolation and demoralisation are the number one enemies of the socialist militant at work.

Belonging to a socialist organisation is one way round this kind of problem. For a start, it trains you to expect defeat and demoralisation (after all, if the working class was united and winning all the time, the revolution would be round the corner). It gives you a longer term perspective - of working towards working-class unity, slowly but surely - but with many downs on the way up. And it enables you to meet more experienced comrades - or to read and learn - so that you can understand why a defeat has happened. And it breaks the isolation. Surrounded by comrades and militants, you realise once again that it's the world that's insane - not you.



More important, a revolutionary organisation should be able to provide you with support, education and training to help you better organise the struggle at work. Just think about the kinds of support you need as someone organising at work, trying to win over your mates to socialism.

First, you need to break out of your isolation at work by building a group, at local and maybe at national level. You need to be able to draw up a list of demands capable of uniting the different sections, races, sexes of workers in your workplace or union. You need to be able to win wider support for your struggle amongst other workers and people who live near where you work. You'll need to be able to prepare leaflets and pamphlets, know how to get films and show them, or where to get hold of a theatre group. A good rank and file organisation is often capable of doing all of these things. But in the end, it's the political and organisational abilities of its supporters which makes it possible.

Some militants pick up revolutionary politics for themselves. This is a hit and (mainly) miss process. Only a political organisation is able to provide systematic political debate and education, and organisational training for its members. By pooling the resources, ideas and experiences of all the members, the organisation turns itself into a kind of school of the class struggle. It's a school which passes on what might otherwise be lost or forgotten - the experience and insights of struggles gained in previous times and in other places.

In the same way, by concentrating the financial resources at its disposal, a revolutionary organisation can provide very cheaply (or sometimes for free) a whole range of services to help build and sustain a struggle. It'll have duplicators, projectors, a printing press and a newspaper to publicise the struggle. And some revolutionary organisations provide financial support for their comrades who're losing money through being involved in a struggle.

3. It helps you to see beyond your immediate problems and the struggles in your own workplace to see the need for changes in society as a whole. And it gives an international perspective

Many of the problems that face workers at work have their origin in capitalist society as a whole - and can only be understood and fought against by someone who sees the need to change social relations existing in society as a whole, and who understands the need to link up with the wider social forces fighting for these changes.

Take the example of women working in factories or hospitals. As we've seen in the previous section, the fact that they're on the lowest grade and get the worst rates is caused by the role and position of women in society as a whole. So no organisation (for example, a union branch or rank and file group) which has a workplace as its only focus can do much on its own about the super-exploitation of women in the workplace, unless it makes links with those social forces fighting for the liberation of women in society as a whole. (e.g. the Women's Liberation Movement).

It is through revolutionary organisations (because they have a perspective of overall revolutionary change) that these links can be made.



The general points we're making here are these:

- \* To develop a revolutionary perspective, workplace militants have to link up with other revolutionary forces in society - and a revolutionary organisation is the main agency by which these links can be made.
- \* The divisions that exist between workers (between black and white, men and women, young and old) have causes that come from outside the workplace, and can only be fought by forces that have as their target society as a whole.

In the same way, becoming a member of a revolutionary organisation can help you develop an internationalist outlook. Time and again, the bosses have thrown workers into battledress to fight their brother or sister workers from another country in defence of their bosses' interests. The slogan of all revolutionary organisations is "Workers of the World Unite", and most revolutionary organisations have international links - albeit usually only with the organisation that happens to be of the same variety (out of the 57 available).

4. It makes it easier to give support to other groups of workers - in the community or in other workplaces - and to pass on the lessons that you have learnt in struggle

The struggle for socialism is - for us in Big Flame - very much about building solidarity and support between working class people. And one of the ways that this can happen is for militants to share their experience in struggle with others who are less experienced. So, where people have the time and energy, we encourage members to get involved in one area of struggle besides their own workplace. For the reasons we've given on the previous page, revolutionary organisations should be in touch with a whole range of struggles - local anti-racist campaigns, women's groups, housing action campaigns, the Troops out of Ireland Movement, strikes or occupations in local workplaces etc. And so it becomes easier for members to pass on their experience to other people.

In addition to this, the theoretical/political insights of a revolutionary organisation should make it possible to predict what will be the most important areas of struggle for the working-class in the (near) future. This makes it possible for local branches of the organisation - who know the local situation - to discuss what might be the best activities for members to get involved in to build the struggle. In other words, it enables members to prioritise their own involvement in the struggle.

For example, the Big Flame Industrial Commission - in its report to the 1978 Big Flame National Conference - made the following comments on what struggles (in the industrial/workplace sector) were going to be important in the following 18 months:

In terms of our activity, there are likely to be six "arenas of struggle" in the coming year. First -



the struggle against further attempts to cut our standard of living, either through a Phase 4 of Incomes Policy under a continuing Labour Government or through harsh controls on public sector wages and severe restrictions on money supply (and therefore massively increased unemployment) under a Tory Govt. Second - the struggle against the bosses' attempts to force us all to work harder - manning cuts, prod deals, bonus schemes. Here our understanding of the struggle against work can give us some key insights: this struggle has to be brought out into the open so that instead of being largely individual and isolated, it can be made collective and organised. Third - the struggle against unemployment, closure and cuts in public services. Fourth - a continuing high level of union recognition disputes, as particularly immigrant workers begin to organise against their lousy conditions and pay, and against racism. Fifth - struggles over health and safety - encouraged by the implementation of the recent legislation and the growing health and safety movement. Sixth - campaigns against the disciplining of militants who're against "participation" and "abiding by procedure" by their own unions.

May 1978

We can see how this kind of prediction and prioritisation might have helped say the Merseyside group of a revolutionary organisation. Since the report was written, there have been major struggles on wages and conditions - led by Ford Halewood and by truck drivers in Warrington; there's been a major strike at Vauxhall Ellesmere Port over attempts to impose speed-up's; there have been big struggles against the closures of Leyland Speke Number 2 Plant and Dunlops, and campaigns against hospital closures.

5. It should give you a foretaste of what communism might be like: and it encourages you to widen your horizons, learn skills and start thinking about many new things

Whereas capitalism appeals to the anti-social side of people's nature - greed, individualism, thinking only of yourself or your immediate family - socialism and communism appeals to the social side of men and women: to solidarity, support, co-operation and collectivity. The best of the revolutionary organisations try to "practice what they preach" - and among their ranks you'll find some of the most basically decent, warm and supportive people in the world. You'll be meeting people who try to treat others as equals, who're not power or status hungry for themselves, who're actively opposed to sexism, racism and anti-gay prejudices. And within a revolutionary organisation, there'll be a real emphasis on equality and democracy. The aim, in such an organisation, is that there is no split between leaders and a rank and file - all must learn and train to lead and take initiative.

Finally, you'll be in a position to learn from, and contribute to the body of theoretical knowledge which is the rock on which any socialist organisation must be built. As we've said, one of the



advantages of belonging to a revolutionary organisation is being with people with whom you share many ideas. Obviously, you can't just go along and join an organisation. They'll want to know that you're in basic agreement on a whole series of questions - Ireland, internationalism, the need for separate women's and black people's movements ... and so on. And it's the theory of the organisation that determines the ideas they hold. But this isn't a holy skrit - for ever unchanging. It's a group of ideas which are constantly being tested in practice, discussed and revised. And all members should be able to take part in the democratic process of adding to, and changing theory. It's not something for intellectuals or specialists only - in a working-class revolutionary organisation, struggling for communism, it's something for every member.

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

#### So What about Big Flame?

If the arguments for joining a revolutionary organisation are so overwhelming, why is that militant workers are not flocking to join many of the existing organisations (including Big Flame)? We believe that these are a few of the answers:

- \* in many of these organisations, working class people are a minority, and have very little power. They don't feel like working class organisations, and they're often dominated by intellectuals and semi-professionals.
- \* many of the organisations are very dogmatic and sectarian. Some of them are organised very hierarchically and members have little power. Policies are made on the Central Committee and members are ordered to carry out the decisions.
- \* many working class militants believe that politics is something they don't want any truck with. They see politics as what the Labour, Tory and Liberal parties do, and - quite rightly - they don't want anything to do with it.
- \* some organisations put totally unrealistic demands on the time and financial resources of their members.
- \* some of the revolutionary organisations spend all their time trying to recruit new members and grow - rather than putting much energy into building the struggle or building broad, non-sectarian rank and file organisation. Unfortunately, there are all too many examples of revolutionary parties/organisations putting their own organisational needs first and acting in a way that was damaging to the class struggle. We all know stories of "rank and file" papers being stopped when it seemed they were getting too independent. Or of supposedly open campaigns and "fronts" that were in fact being manipulated by one or other revolutionary organisation.
- \* the fact that the weight of the mass media, and the real experience of Russia, China and other so-called "communist"



countries has ensured that "communism" and "socialism" are not seen as symbols of freedom and democracy - and a real goal for the class struggle - by many working class militants.

Big Flame grew up as a small local group of militants in Liverpool in 1969 and 1970 as a response to these kind of problems in other left-wing groups. It wasn't a split or schism from any other group - and it wasn't originally intended that it would become a national organisation (to add the 57th variety). But militants in other parts of Britain heard about the way it worked, and over the years local groups have started in other parts of the country.

We're not saying that Big Flame is free of all the problems we've listed on the previous page. And we openly admit that we're smaller than many other organisations - and in some ways we've less experience. But at least we recognise these as problems and are trying to solve them:

- \* We say, class first, building our own organisation second, which means putting the movement of class forces before building the party in a political sense. For us, revolutionary organisation must be the servant of the class struggle, gaining its strength through its efforts in creating powerful mass organisations of the working class. Class power and party power grow alongside each other.
- \* In the relationship between Big Flame and rank and file groupings (like the Ford Combine) or the black or the women's movement, we have always believed in the need for the political independence of such autonomous class organisations. They must be free to develop the struggle for the needs of their sections of the working-class - to build unity in the working class by struggling against divisions.
- \* We try not to be dogmatic or sectarian. We don't claim to "know everything" or "get everything right". All revolutionaries have a lot to learn. And we'll work with anyone or any group as long as we agree about the question on which we're to work together.
- \* We reject manipulation totally, and are trying to build a strong tradition of proletarian democracy - both within Big Flame and in our relation to the class struggle. Hence our emphasis on mass work - rather than attempts to recruit "important" figures in the labour movement.
- \* Our politics starts not from abstract principles, but from the real needs and everyday struggles of working class people.

Those of us who are in Big Flame know full well that there is nothing that we can write that will convince a militant that we are any different from the other organisations which - as they have grown larger - have developed an inflated sense of self-importance. Many organisations say that they put the class struggle before party-building. We know that the only way of convincing militants is in what we do.



Therefore what we say to any unaligned militant sympathetic to our politics is: work with our members in the Ford Workers Group, in Fightback, in campaigns against closure, in Health and Safety Committees etc. - and contribute to the paper and to the debate around this pamphlet.

This will enable you to decide how genuine is our claim to put the class struggle before building our own organisation. It'll also help you find out more about our politics, and what Big Flame can offer in support. Our first priority is to develop a political dialogue and to carry out political work together with our sympathisers - asking you to join comes after this, not before.

### BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: A DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR WAGED WORKERS

The essence of our programme is:

TO FIGHT ONLY ON OUR TERMS - AS WORKING CLASS PEOPLE -  
FOR MORE MONEY, LESS WORK, MORE POWER AND LESS  
DIVISIONS IN THE WORKING CLASS - AND AGAINST THE  
NEEDS OF THE BOSSES FOR PROFIT.

#### A. A GUARANTEED INCOME FOR EVERYONE AND A MAJOR REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH AND INCOME FROM THE RICH TO THE WORKING CLASS

- \* Against wage restraint, the 12 month rule and productivity or bonus deals.
- \* For immediate, large across-the-board increases in wages, benefits and pensions. No! to percentage increases which widen differentials and increase divisions among us.
- \* For a full week's pay - work or no work. No unpaid lay-off's.
- \* For a minimum wage of £50 a week take home pay. This means large rises for the low paid.
- \* Less money for directors, managers, senior administrators, senior civil servants etc. - more for the working class.

#### B. AN END TO UNEMPLOYMENT

- \* Active resistance to all closures, redundancies and "natural wastage" using the most militant and imaginative tactics possible.
- \* At least 5 hours off the week with no loss of pay.
- \* For the Right to Work on our terms (in decent conditions, with the best possible manning and wages) to fulfill working-class needs. Towards a socialist alternative in production and in the provision of public services.
- \* No! to productivity deals, bonus schemes and manning or staffing cuts. Resist mobility of labour which is always a first step to flexibility, manning cuts and redundancies.
- \* For a fight to force the inclusion of mutuality and status quo clauses in all agreements - against speed-up's and manning cuts.
- \* For a campaign against excessive overtime working.
- \* For much more money for the unemployed and all claimants.
- \* LESS WORKLOAD FOR THOSE WITH JOBS - MORE JOBS FOR THE UNEMPLOYED.



C. BETTER SERVICES, CONTROLLED BY WORKERS AND USERS

- \* No public spending cuts.
- \* No cash limits on local authority spending.
- \* For a free health service controlled by its workers and users. An end to all private medicine in Britain.
- \* Education as a right, not a privilege - and directed towards the fullest development of the individual, not subordinated to the needs of the capitalist labour market.
- \* A nursery place for every child in free nurseries controlled by parents and nursery workers.
- \* A major programme of building council houses (for renting), repairs to council housing, building nurseries, schools, hospitals and community facilities.

D. FOR A SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKING ENVIRONMENT

- \* For the extension of protective legislation to give us the right to stop the job immediately without loss of pay if a job is suspected of being dangerous or unhealthy.
- \* For an end to all shift work which is operated just to increase profitability or "efficiency".
- \* For a major reduction in the working week for all jobs which are boring, repetitive or physically exhausting - without loss of pay.

E. AGAINST DIVISIONS IN THE WORKING-CLASS

- \* For a reduction in pay differentials between different sections of the working-class.
- \* An end to the distinction between blue and white-collar workers, notably in pay, pensions, sick pay and conditions.
- \* An end to the racist and sexist division of labour existing in most workplaces.
- \* For the self-organisation of women workers and black and Asian workers to organise the struggle for real equality at work and against racism and sexism.
- \* For the building of Anti-Nazi League workplace branches or anti-racist committees in all workplaces.
- \* For the socialisation of housework - free child care centres and laundries, and men to do their equal share in the house.
- \* For payment for housework by the state whoever does it and wherever it's done.
- \* No divide-and-rule in the allocation of jobs or overtime: equalisation of the workload as far as possible in jobs on a section, and regular rotation of those jobs. An overtime rota to be administered by the section shop steward.

F. NEW TECHNOLOGY

- \* No introduction of new production processes where they involve any increase in the intensity or repetitiveness of work, any loss of jobs or deskilling.
- \* The benefits of increased productivity to be shared entirely by the workforce - through a shorter week with no loss of pay, and higher basic rates.



G. FOR STRONG TRADE UNIONS CONTROLLED DEMOCRATICALLY BY THE RANK AND FILE

- \* 100% trade unionism, and the right to enforce closed shops. But the defence of any militant who is threatened with loss of his/her union card and consequently their job (because of the closed shop agreement) as a disciplinary action by the right-wing in the union against the activities of the class-conscious militant.
- \* All officials to be subject to election and regular re-election by the members (at least every 3 years) and subject to recall.
- \* For policy making union bodies to be comprised entirely of elected lay members.
- \* For national delegate conferences to be held annually.
- \* For workplace branches of unions to hold meetings at times convenient for the maximum number of members - in worktime where possible (shift working can make this difficult) - and with creche facilities.
- \* For the right to paid day-release education opportunities for adult workers.

H. FOR STRONG WORKPLACE ORGANISATION AND TOWARDS A TRADITION OF MASS ACTION, SOLIDARITY, STRUGGLE AND DEMOCRACY AMONG RANK AND FILE WORKERS

- \* Against all participation schemes and worker directors.
- \* For reliance on ourselves - the rank and file - and our ability to take action - not on Courts, Tribunals, Factory Inspectors, union officials - or even convenors, stewards and safety reps.
- \* For mass participation in struggle - through workplace bulletins, regular section or shop meetings with the steward, frequent mass meetings - and in a dispute mass picketing or mass occupation.
- \* In all struggles, the tactic to be chosen on the basis of:  
MAXIMUM DAMAGE TO THE MANAGEMENT, MINIMUM COST TO US.
- \* Against sectionalism and in favour of solidarity between workers. In the public sector, for the building of links between workers and users.
- \* For the building of joint shop stewards' committees, combining blue and white collar unions (but excluding supervisory or managerial staff).
- \* For the creation of combine committees, industry-wide stewards' committees and the formation of international links. For international working class solidarity.
- \* For the building of a mass rank and file movement for socialism and workers' power.

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REMINDER REMINDER REMINDER REMINDER

This pamphlet is only a first draft. If we're to produce something of much more value to the movement, it must contain the lessons of your struggles, of your experience of organising at work, and your criticisms of this draft. So write to Big Flame, 217 Wavertree Rd Liverpool 7.