

# MARXISM AND THE TRADE UNIONS

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## EDITORIAL

This special double issue of Workers Power is exclusively concerned with the question of the Trade Unions. The journal constitutes a comprehensive study of the revolutionary communist analysis of the Trade Unions and the principal tasks facing communists in the Trade Unions today. The first article traces the development of the Marxist analysis of the Trade Unions. The archive reprints of central programmatic documents of the Communist International, and the discussion of the Comintern and CPGB's programme and strategy for work in the British unions in the 1920s, draw together the vital experience of the revolutionary period of the Communist International, and the immediate effects of its period of degeneration. Lastly our document on the Rank and File Movement today, and the Workers Power "Action Programme" for the Trade Unions, builds on that experience and tradition to draw out the key tasks facing communists in the Trade Unions today.

The programmatic and organisational tasks posed are of burning and immediate relevance. The role of the Trade Union bureaucracy as police for incomes policies and 'austerity programmes' becomes more and more vital for international capitalism as it faces continued stagnation and crisis. Likewise mass action to defend and improve living standards and conditions — in France and Italy in the late '60s, in Britain in the early '70s, in this year's American Miners' strike — pits militants not only against the capitalist class but also the bureaucracy of the Trade Unions. The building of a movement under communist leadership to break the hold of the bureaucrats, to turn the unions into organs of struggle on the road to workers revolution becomes an ever more urgent task of revolutionary communists in the battles of today and tomorrow.

We are pleased to announce that this issue of Workers Power marks its last appearance in its current format. From October Workers Power will appear in a monthly paper form. This will enable us to intervene in, and comment on, the international and national class struggle more immediately and effectively. This does not mean that we will be shirking the theoretical tasks facing us. We shall continue to produce a theoretical journal, three times yearly, entitled 'Communist Review' to appear from January 1979.

This marks an important step forward for the Workers Power group. It is a step that will necessarily strain the material and financial resources of the group. We therefore urge all our regular readers and supporters to aid us financially with donations and subscriptions, so that we can win a wider base and audience for our politics.

The Editor

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# MARXISTS AND THE TRADE UNIONS

by **Dave Stocking**

## TRADE UNIONS AND CAPITALISM:

### THE NATURE AND LIMITS OF TRADE UNION CONSCIOUSNESS

The Marxist understanding of the role and nature of Trade Unionism proceeds from the analysis of the laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production itself. Capitalism creates the proletariat by freeing the serf both from feudal rights and duties and from the ownership of any means of production. The proletariat, as a result can only acquire the necessities of life by selling its ability to work, its labour power. The value of labour power, like that of any commodity, is determined by the amount of labour necessary to create it. In effect this means that the price of labour power (wages) tends always to equal the cost of sustaining the labourer, i.e. the cost of the means of subsistence. Marx's concept of 'subsistence', it must be stressed, was not one of a bare physical minimum. Marx wrote of the proletarian, "..... *the number and extent of his needs and necessary requirements, as also the manner in which they are satisfied, are themselves products of history and therefore, to a great extent on the level of civilisation and that of a country; in particular they depend on the mode of production in which, and consequently on the habits and customs with which, the class of free workers has been*

like other commodities, the value of labour power contains a, "historical and moral element" in its determination. In addition, 'subsistence' must be taken to include the means necessary for the recreation of the labourer, the raising and training of children.

The capitalist is driven, by competition from other capitalists, to minimise the price he pays for labour power to its minimum or even below it. To reduce it below its minimum means to physically 'wear out' the working class more quickly than it can reproduce itself. Such a process occurred, as far as the majority of the working class was concerned, in the early period of capitalist production, and has recurred since, under Hitler or Pinochet, for example.

Capitalism, as a crisis-ridden system, is incapable of involving the whole of the potential workforce in production on a continuous basis. As a result it creates, what Engels called in 1843; 'a reserve army of labour' – the unemployed. This reserve army shrinks and swells with capitalism's booms and slumps, providing a source of blacklegs, and thus a further pressure on the wages of the employed proletariat. Marx further observed that the formal equality that existed between capitalist and individual worker was entirely bogus, concealing as it did capital's monopoly of the means of production and, therefore, of subsistence. Capital is a compact social force against which the individual labourer is powerless.

The working class, an objective class (a class in itself) of capitalism, is impelled by the circumstances of its existence to resist the strength of capital through combinations. As long as the ruling class has the power and the politico-economic motivation to deny them legality, such combinations attain only an episodic mass existence and normally take the form of a conspiracy. In these circumstances terror is a weapon of the economic struggle, for example the 'outrages' of nineteenth century trade unionism directed against blacklegs, and various other forms of economic sabotage.

The conquest of legality is a vital condition for the establishment of permanent organs of economic struggle – for trade unions proper. Marx and Engels regarded trade unions as a vital first step for the working class in becoming not merely a class in itself but a class for itself, conscious of its needs and aims. Engels, in, 'The Condition of the Working Class in England' coined the phrase which communists have, ever since, applied to the unions, "... as schools of war, the unions are unexcelled". Strikes he referred to as, "the military school of the working men".<sup>2</sup>

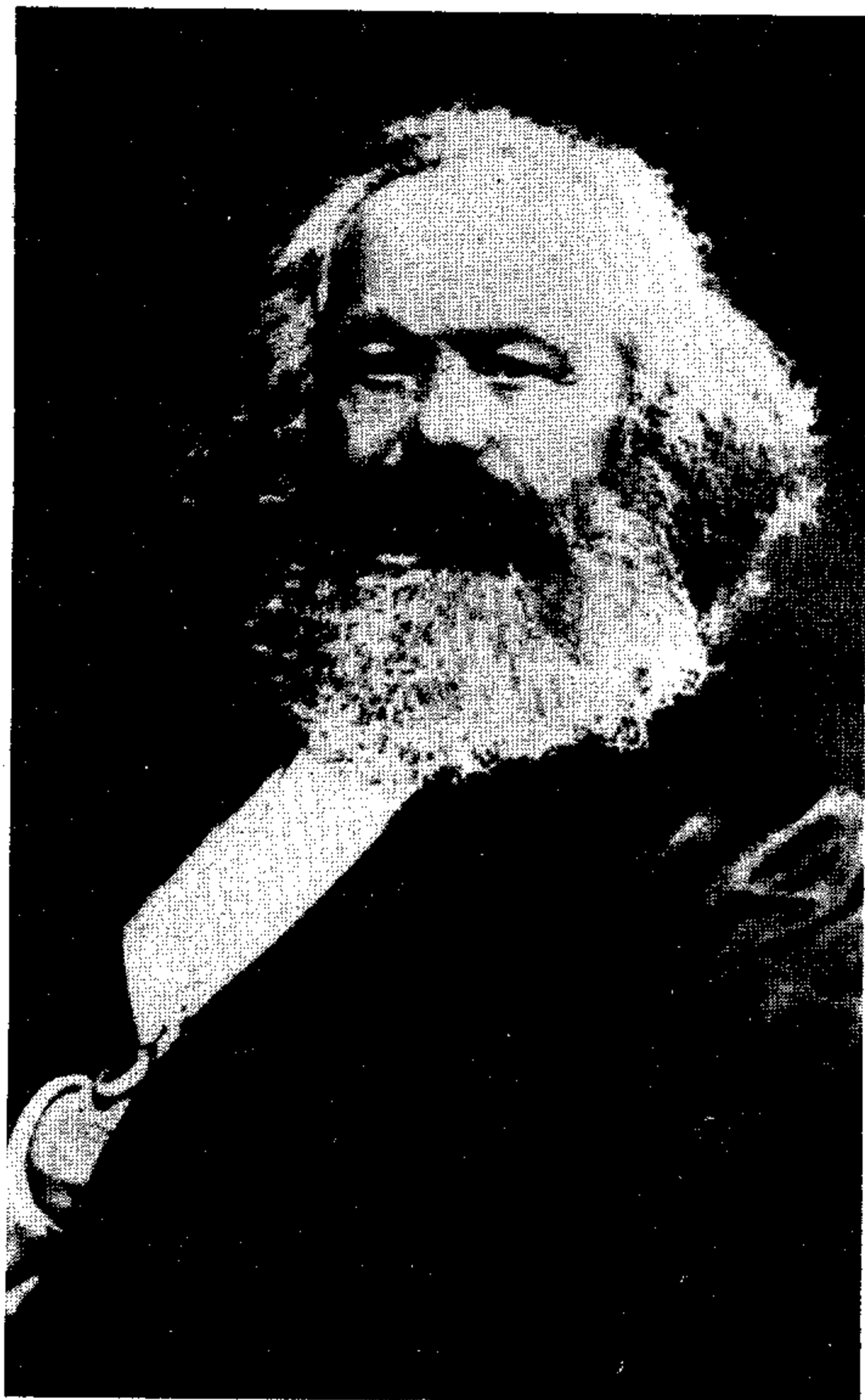
Trade unions then, represent the first, most direct attempt by workers to negate the attacks of capital on their most immediate interests. Their essence, combination and solidarity, is the beginning of class consciousness. Nonetheless they are only a partial or one-sided attempt to negate the tendency of capital to impoverish and atomise the working class. Here a dialectical understanding of the nature of trade unionism is necessary for an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the unions and their necessary course of development. This

was expressed most clearly by Marx in 'Value, Price and Profit': "Trade unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effect of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system."<sup>3</sup>

Richard Hyman, in his booklet, 'The Sociology of Trade Unions', places Marxists in two categories vis-a-vis the trade unions; Optimists and Pessimists. Marx and Engels, it appears, were Optimists whilst Lenin and Trotsky were Pessimists. This facile approach, collecting together positive remarks from the former as against negative evaluations from the latter, serves only to obscure the guide to action which the work of Marx and Engels, and its consistent and coherent development by Lenin and Trotsky, represents. That this is so can be seen from the most mature formulation of Marx's position, the material he drew up for the First International and the commentary on the union movement in letters after that time.

Marx summed up his perspectives for, and analysis of, the trade unions in his, 'Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council' which was read as the official report of that body to the First Congress of the First International, held in Geneva in September 1866. In the first section of the document, Marx sums up the limitations of the unions. Capital is a "concentrated social force" whereas the only social force of the workers is their numbers, a force weakened by their, "unavoidable competition amongst themselves". Marx pointed out that, "..... the contract between

Karl Marx



capital and labour can, therefore, never be struck on equitable terms....."<sup>4</sup>

Trade unions arose spontaneously to check the effects of this internecine competition, to resist the most immediate attacks by capital – the lowering of wages and the lengthening of the working day. Marx states categorically that this activity, ".... is not only legitimate, it is necessary. It cannot be dispensed with so long as the present system of production lasts."<sup>5</sup> In addition to these immediate tasks, the preservation and improvement of the material and cultural level of the proletariat, there is also the aspect that Engels had described as, "a school of socialism". Marx pointed out, more fully than hitherto, the dialectic of trade union development. These organisations, developed as a spontaneous response to the despotic inroads of capital, became "centres of organisation" of the workers, helping to constitute them as a class. Here Marx likens their activities to the role the mediaeval town corporations played for the early bourgeoisie – the burghers – in providing a centre for developing themselves as a class. However, they play this role, "unconsciously to themselves". In this Marx emphasises what Lenin was later to reiterate forcefully in, 'What is to be Done?' – the limits of the spontaneous economic struggle, of trade unionism pure and simple and, consequently, the inability of both to attain clear class consciousness. This view was Marx's quite as much as it was Lenin's and remains a scandal and an offence to all Reformists and Centrists. Of themselves, therefore, the trade unions were not agencies for superseding capitalism itself. Here lies the historical limit of 'pure trade unionism'. However, the unions could and did serve as centres for organising the working class as a class under capitalism. It was on this dialectical understanding of the nature of the trade unions that the Marxist tradition has developed its strategy and tactics for work in the unions.

Rosa Luxemburg was simply restating the position of Marx and Engels on the essential but limited effectiveness of trade union action when she wrote in 'Reform and Revolution', ".... the objective conditions of capitalist society transform the economic functions of the trade unions into a sort of labour of Syssiphus, which is, nevertheless, indispensable."<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, Lenin's pre-1905 polemic with the Russian economists stood to a large extent as a restatement of Marx's position on the limits of trade unions. It is absolutely erroneous to regard Lenin's pre-1905 writings as 'original' or in contradiction to the 'Optimistic' views of the founders of scientific socialism.

A serious reading of 'What is to be Done?' would convince anyone of the idiocy of Hyman's attempt to paint Lenin as a 'Pessimist'. In 1903, Lenin drafted a resolution for the Second (London) Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, that indicated a 'classic' Marxist position on the unions: "The congress deems it absolutely essential in all cases to support and develop in every way the economic struggle of the workers and their trade unions (principally the All-Russian unions) and from the very outset to ensure that the economic struggle and the trade union movement in Russia has a Social-Democratic character".<sup>7</sup>

Lenin, arguing against the economists, stressed the integrationist tendencies in unions where the Marxists abandoned any attempt to give their struggle a, 'Social-Democratic character'. 'Pure trade unionism', not won to Marxist politics might be nominally 'apolitical' or 'neutral' but would inevitably adopt *bourgeois politics*. The experience of British and American trade unionism in the nineteenth century confirmed Lenin's view.

No less than the economists of the early 1900s, the economists of today are incapable of understanding the role and nature of trade unions dialectically. For Tony Cliff of the SWP there is supposedly a flat contradiction between Lenin's 1902 position that, "The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness." (*What is to be Done?*) and his position of 1905, "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic ....." (*On the Reorganisation of the Party*).

Cliff cannot have read seriously either of the works on which

he bases his paradox. In 'What is to be Done?' Lenin makes it perfectly clear that he is not denying the fact that the working class is spontaneously receptive to Marxism as a scientific formulation of its world view as a class, or that in periods of crisis and upheaval the working class does 'spontaneously' take up revolutionary struggle, *"It is often said that the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the cause of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily, provided however, this theory does not itself yield to spontaneity, provided it subordinates spontaneity to itself."*<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Lenin's criticism of the Economists is that in their passive tailing of the elemental economic struggle, they are prone to fall **behind** the working class when great events (wars, crises etc.) move the class to spontaneously revolutionary actions. Lenin was as aware of this in 1902 as he was in the high tide of the 1905 revolution. That he did not forget, even during that high tide, the importance of the conscious intervention of revolutionaries, can be shown by citing **in full** the quotation which purportedly reveals Lenin's change of line: *'The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic; and more than ten years of work put in by Social Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness.'*<sup>9</sup> The truncated first half of the sentence appears in Cliff's 'Lenin' Volume 1 (p.176) as evidence that in this article, Lenin, 'formulated his conclusion in terms which were the exact opposite of those of 'What is to be Done?'. Cliff does this in order to downgrade the specific duty of revolutionaries to 'transform spontaneity into consciousness', and to substitute for it the old economist position of, 'lending the economic struggle itself a political character'. Now, even Cliff is aware that the workers are not spontaneously revolutionary all the time and so he resorts to a vulgar empiricist notion of period. Put baldly it reduces itself to the view that in periods of capitalist crisis the workers are spontaneously revolutionary because their thirst for reforms is blocked. In periods of boom, however, the capitalists can simply buy them off. This 'theory' neatly absolves revolutionaries from the struggle to build a party even in periods of stability and is totally incapable of explaining why, in periods of deepening crisis reformist leadership is still so difficult to defeat. As we shall see it is completely incapable of analysing the roots of reformism and this inability lies in its failure to understand the limits of 'pure' trade unionism and the economic struggle. Lenin's restatement of Marx and Engels' position (including the vital distinction between trade union politics and Social-Democratic politics) on the other hand was capable of application and development. On its basis Lenin was able to come to a full understanding of the development of bourgeois politics in the workers' movement and their catastrophic momentary triumph in August 1914.

## THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY AND THE TRADE UNION BUREAUCRACY

*"The history of the Trade Union movement in every country is not only the history of strikes and in general of mass movements; it is also the history of the formation of the trade union bureaucracy."*<sup>10</sup>

The full development of the views of Marx and Engels on the trade unions took place during and after their period of work alongside the English union leaders in the International Working Men's Association. These leaders played an important part in the formation of the International. The early 1860s saw a powerful revival of working class activity in Britain. Strikes by the Staffordshire miners, the South Yorkshire Ironworkers and the Midlands builders bore witness to a new militancy. Trades Councils came into existence in London, Birmingham, Glasgow and many other cities. The trade union

leaders, full-time secretaries of associations of skilled or semi-skilled workers, made important moves, including the formation of the Trades Union Congress, to centralise the unions as a national movement. A labour press came into existence on a national and local level. An increased political awareness manifested itself in wide trade union support for the Italian Unification struggle – Garibaldi was given a tumultuous reception in London – and in widespread union support and active solidarity with the Union in the American Civil War. Renewed activity around the fight for Manhood Suffrage and against the still severe legal sanctions of the Master and Servant laws, brought a temporary radicalisation to these unions of the skilled labour aristocracy. Royden Harrison, in his work on the mid-nineteenth century labour movement, has noted that, *"The founding of the International coincided with the most creative and ambitious phase of the development of this privileged stratum. Some of its successes were of value to the entire proletariat and indicated new lines of advance."*<sup>11</sup>

What was this labour aristocracy? E.J. Hobsbawm assesses that in the second half of the last century it made up something between 10 and 20% of the working class as a whole. Its wages averaged double that of unskilled workers although, in some industries, they might reach three or four times the rate for labourers. With the partial exception of the textile workers and the miners, it was this privileged stratum of respectable artisans which participated in the First International. Harrison has observed that, *"With respect to England, the central paradox of the International was that it expressed the standpoint of the working class as a whole, whilst relying on the organisational support of the Labour Aristocracy."*<sup>12</sup>

The strength of the labour aristocracy in Britain, the increasing incorporation of the unions based on this distinct stratum of workers into bourgeois politics, forced Marx and Engels to analyse this phenomenon. In so doing they laid the essential groundwork for Lenin's and Trotsky's later work on the position and social roots of the labour aristocracy. They started this during a period of considerable change in the position of the union leaders and the labour aristocracy upon whom they rested.

The 1867 Reform Act, although it excluded most male workers, and all women, from the body politic, gave the vote to the upper layers of the working class. In addition the Trade Union Act of 1871 gave their unions a wide measure of legal recognition. The two Acts were enough to mollify them and to tie them to the Liberals. In addition, 1873 saw the beginning of a long slump and period of economic stagnation, as unemployment rose the chances of success for the movement to unionise the unskilled, fell. As a result, organised labour remained the sole preserve of the pro-Liberal labour aristocrats. In 1869, the Labour Representation League, a direct expression of this Lib-Labism, was formed. It set itself the task of, *"avoiding Utopian theories and illusory phantoms and of bringing the interests of the working men into harmony with those of the whole of society."*

Even during the lifetime of the International, Marx and Engels were well aware of the political backwardness of the Labour movement in England. Engels noted, after the first elections under the extended franchise, *"the proletariat has discredited itself terribly"*<sup>13</sup> and he saw the failure to break with the Liberals as, *"a disastrous certificate of poverty for the English proletariat"*.<sup>14</sup>

Marx saw a vital root of this political poverty in the British oppression of Ireland. This, coupled with fear of competition from immigrant Irish workers, bolstered a chauvinism in the English worker, who, Marx noted, *"feels himself a member of the ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself"*.<sup>15</sup> So, continued Marx, *"This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite their organisation"*.<sup>16</sup>

By the later years of the International, Marx was openly denouncing the class collaboration of the trade union leaders. He considered that before any progress was made towards the creation of a workers' party in Britain, *"the industrial workers have first of all to get rid of their present leaders"*.<sup>17</sup>

Between the late 1870s and late 1880s, Lib-Labism and a servile craft unionism held complete sway in the British labour movement. Engels developed a definite characterisation of its causes. As early as 1858 he had noted a tendency towards embourgeoisement in the English workers' movement and remarked on its inevitability, "for a nation which exploits the whole world".<sup>18</sup> At the same time he observed that the "English proletarian movement, in its old traditional Chartist form, must perish before it can develop in a new and viable form".<sup>19</sup> Now, in 1882, he wrote that the English workers, "gaily share in the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies".<sup>20</sup> Writing to August Bebel the following year he argued that, "Participation in the domination of the world market was, and is, the economic basis for the political nullity of the English workers."<sup>21</sup> At the same time Engels recognised that the effect of this world domination was not uniform throughout the working class.

Writing in William Morris' journal "Commonweal", Engels reviewed developments during the period of revolutionary Chartism and in the long period of embourgeoisement thereafter. He pointed out, in particular, that the condition of the skilled workers in the large trade unions had "remarkably improved since 1848," and continued, "the best proof of this is the fact that for more than fifteen years not only have their employers been with them, but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form an aristocracy among the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final."<sup>22</sup> He goes on to root this in the past period of England's development, "The truth is this: during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of this monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them: the privileged minority pocket most, but even the great mass had at least a temporary share now and then. And that is the reason why, since the dying out of Owenism, there has been no socialism in England. With the breakdown of the monopoly the English working class will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally, the privileged and leading minority not excepted, on a level with its fellow workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be socialism again in England."<sup>23</sup>

Within the state of chronic stagnation after 1876, a period which produced neither a full crash nor a return to prosperity, Engels saw the seeds of a new period of capitalism. He expected this to be characterised by the clash of several industrial powers: Britain, Germany, France and America, in which Britain would lose her stranglehold of the world market. Whilst he could not be expected to theoretically anticipate the Imperialist epoch, Engels certainly accurately identified most of its salient features, in particular the new role of the leaders of the labour movement. It was these leaders who prevented the extension of union organisation through their exclusiveness and craftism. This attitude not only prevented the growth of the unions but positively threatened those already organised by creating blacklegs. At the same time their status was greatly enhanced after the 1867 Reform Act created, for the first time, a sizeable working class electorate. Recognising this, the bourgeoisie altered its strategy. From open hostility and legal coercion, it turned to using the leaders of the unions to tie the working class to itself, at first through the auspices of the radical wing of the Liberal Party.

Engels noted the lavish attention paid to the union leaders by "Members of Parliament, by Lords and other well-born rabble"<sup>24</sup> and he also noted the desire of these leaders to get into Parliament, not as open representatives of their class, not on the basis even of the consistent democratic demands of the Chartists but by doing a deal with the Liberals to gain votes and money. It was clear to Engels that as a result, "they ceased to be workers' candidates and turned themselves into bourgeois candidates".<sup>25</sup> In other words they became an agency of the bourgeoisie within the working class. The class nature of their politics was clearly shown in their preparations for the 1874 elections. Meeting under the chairmanship of Morley, a leading Liberal manufacturer, trade union leaders



Frederick Engels

and labour journalists, in Engels words, "drew up a 'labour programme' to which any bourgeois could subscribe, and which was to form the foundation of a mighty movement to chain the workers politically still more firmly to the bourgeoisie".<sup>26</sup>

Engels was clear that the passivity of the working class in England could not be wholly explained by the bourgeoisification of the labour aristocracy and its corruption through the incorporative policy of the bourgeoisie. In addition the very structure of the unions and the banning of politics (that is working class politics) within them, resulted in excluding the mass of workers and lowering the horizons of the organised minority. Within the unions, it was necessary to change workers' understanding of trade unionism and to win them to the struggle for the emancipation of the working class as a whole. Equally important, however, was the need to organise the unskilled, the vast bulk of the working class. The conservative structure of existing craft unionism had to be broken up and new unions built. Only in this way could a new socialist leadership of the working class be developed to replace the bourgeois leaders and create a working class party — a revolutionary party.

Marx and Engels, through their active involvement in the British labour movement, developed the fundamental elements of a coherent position on the nature and role of the trade unions. In addition they analysed the causes and features of the incorporation of the unions into capitalism. Towards the end of his life, as we shall see, Engels was able to begin the task of elaborating the methods of struggle to be used against bourgeois labour leaders. The completion of this task, on the basis of a developed theory of the nature and basis of the stratum of trade union bureaucrats, fell to the next generation of Marxists — to Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky.

In the period between the death of Engels and the foundation of the Communist International, the question of the relationship between trade union action and the struggle for socialism was centred in the two countries which developed mass trade union organisations, Germany and Britain. In both countries a powerful trade union bureaucracy developed. In Germany it was able to release itself from the dominance of Marxism and even to overthrow Marxist influence in the

Social-Democratic Party. In Britain it was able to isolate the revolutionary Marxists and to turn the pressure of the workers for a class party into the 'safe' form of a class collaborationist Labour Party. In the countries with a newer or belated capitalist development: the U.S.A., Italy, France, Spain, for example, revolutionary syndicalism, a hybrid of Marxism and anarchism, held sway until 1914. Under the impact of the First Imperialist war this split into a reformist wing which effected a rapprochement with the Social-Democratic and Labourist bureaucrats, and a revolutionary wing which rallied to the banner of the Comintern and the Red International of Labour Unions.

The most profound analysis of these trends came from the pens of the pre-War left wing of the Second International, Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin. This was consolidated by the early Comintern and the RILU before the disastrous degeneration of these bodies under Bukharinist and Stalinist leadership. It was then restated and reformulated in the work of Leon Trotsky from the late Twenties until his death in 1940.

The initial focus for the elaboration and development of the Marxist analysis of the trade union bureaucracy was the struggle of the Left in German Social-Democracy against the hold of the conservative trade union leaders on the practice and tactics of the Party.

## TRADE UNIONISM AND THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

Until the 1890s, Britain was the only major country with a well-developed trade union movement. From this period on, however, the union movement grew rapidly in other countries. In Germany, Italy and France the growth of unionism in the last years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries made the trade union question a central topic for discussion and debate for Marxists.

This was particularly true in Germany where, after the repeal of the Anti-Socialist laws in 1890, trade unionism grew very rapidly under the direct influence of the German Social Democracy. Membership rose from 237,000 in 1892 to 680,000 in 1900, 1.8 million in 1908 and 2.6 million in 1912. Organised in the General Committee of Trade Unions under the chairmanship of Karl Legien (1861-1920) six major industrial unions – metal, building, manufacturing, wood, textiles and transport, dominated the German trade union movement. This powerful movement was instrumental in forcing the extremely autocratic German capitalists, who had, moreover, the Prussian autocratic state at their disposal, to recognise the unions and conclude collective agreements with their workers at least on a plant by plant basis.

Kautsky, then the leading Marxist of the Second International could remark with pride, "*The German unions were founded and led by the Socialists, who were guided by the fruitful theory of Marxism. Thanks to this fact the German unions were able to adopt, from the beginning, a much more effective form. In the place of the local and occupational divisions of the English unions, they substituted the great centralised industrial organisations. They were able thereby to avoid the jurisdictional disputes as well as the guild-like ossification and aristocratic exclusiveness of the English unions. Far more than the English, the German unionists feel themselves the representatives of the whole proletariat and not simply of the organised membership of their own trade.*"<sup>27</sup>

Germany's modern trade unions were, in part, the product of her modern industrial development, a confirmation of the law of uneven and combined development whereby later developers do not merely copy the stages of their predecessors but base themselves on the most advanced techniques of production and organisation of labour available. The German working class, unhampered by craft union organisation and concentrated in huge industrial enterprises already well on the way to monopoly, found in Marxism the political and organisational weaponry with which to combat their 'captains of

industry'. This was not, however, the only factor that strengthened the hold of Social-Democratic Marxism. The Party gained from both the imposition and the lifting of the Anti-Socialist Laws and from the political shackles imposed by Bismarkian and Willhelmine Bonapartism. In addition Marxism benefited from the relative shallowness of the social roots of opportunism. In the early years of the Imperialist epoch, Germany, with only limited colonial expansion and therefore super-profits, could only maintain a small Labour Aristocracy. As a result the opponents of Marxism within the union leaderships had to be more cautious and circumspect than their brazenly class-collaborationist brethren in Britain. Nonetheless, this stratum, so important to the strengthening of reformism had been created, as Jurgen Kuczynski observed, "*... in spite of the fact that the extra profits from foreign investments gained by the German ruling class were relatively small as compared with those of Britain's ruling class, it was possible for them to make sufficient extra profits – partly from foreign investments and partly through the exploitation of cheap foreign labour within Germany (Russians and Italians mainly) to create a small labour aristocracy ready to play its role when monopoly capitalism came to full power in the twentieth century.*"<sup>28</sup>

Parallel to the growth of this significant privileged stratum of workers went a dramatic growth in the full-time apparatus of the trade unions. In 1898, the Free Trade Unions had only 104 salaried officials, six years later and with a slightly more than doubled membership the number was up to 677. Ten years later when the membership had just trebled the number of fulltimers was 2,867.<sup>29</sup>

The funds at the disposal of these officials were considerable. In 1907 for example, trade union funds stood at some 33 million marks as compared to the 1.3 million of the SPD itself.<sup>30</sup> Thus a powerful bureaucracy was crystallising within the German unions, one that was to come into increasing conflict with the forces of revolutionary Marxism.

The first seeds of this conflict can be seen at the time of the Erfurt synthesis – the adoption of a formal Marxist programme disconnected from any attempt to develop revolutionary tactics. An 'Appeal to Union Members' from that year (1891) stated a dichotomy between political party and trade unions, "*The difference between the political activity carried out by the Workers' Party and the tasks of the unions rests on the fact that the former seeks to transform the organisation of existing society, while the efforts of the latter, being circumscribed by law, are anchored in present day bourgeois society.*"<sup>31</sup>

For the trade union leaders Rosa Luxemburg, who had talked of trade unionism as a 'labour of Sisyphus' became, "the most hated and repeatedly reviled, 'enemy of the trade unions'."<sup>32</sup> The nascent trade union bureaucracy picked their enemy well, for it was indeed Luxemburg who was first to turn the spotlight of Marxist analysis on them. Moreover it was her struggle that was to alert Lenin to this new development which was to prove of cardinal significance for the labour movement.

Luxemburg's clash with the German trade union bureaucracy was first provoked by the Left's attempts, in co-operation with Kautsky's 'Marxist Centre' to raise the tactical lessons flowing from the Belgian General Strike of 1902 and the Russian Revolution of 1905. Against the background of a rising tempo of class struggle on an international scale including a massive strike of the Ruhr miners – the trade union leaders moved dramatically to forestall all attempts by the Party to refine and develop the general strike tactic. In May 1905, the Cologne Congress of the Trade Unions adopted a resolution condemning even **discussion** of the mass strike as 'a dangerous playing with fire'.<sup>33</sup> The union bureaucrats were prepared to go even further. Bringmann introduced a resolution describing the unions as the **only** means for the improving of working class conditions and at a private meeting of union leaders he described Marxism as the disease from which the German labour movement suffered. The trade unions, he said, should replace it with an ideology of their own.<sup>34</sup>

In the autumn of 1905 the Congress of the SPD met at Jena against a background of the greatest industrial unrest ever seen. The Party was forced to consider the General Strike. It was in that debate that Luxemburg was forced not only to examine and develop the General Strike as a central weapon in the armoury of revolutionary Marxists but, crucially, to develop an analysis of the malaise in the German trade union movement. This analysis is to be found in her pamphlet, 'The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions'. In it she observed, "*an antagonism between Social-Democracy and a certain part of the trade union officials, which is however, at the same time an antagonism within the trade unions between this part of the trade union leaders and the proletarian mass organised in the trade unions.*"<sup>35</sup>



Rosa Luxemburg

Luxemburg further analysed the sociological and ideological roots of the trade union officialdom's hostility to socialism. Observing its growth in the previous fifteen years she went on, "*The specialisation of professional activity as trade union leaders, as well as the naturally restricted horizon which is bound up with disconnected economic struggles in a peaceful period, leads only too easily, among trade union officials, to bureaucratism and a certain narrowness of outlook.*"<sup>36</sup> The result of this, Luxemburg argued, was that the leaders arrogate to themselves all the initiative, leaving to the members, "the more passive virtue of discipline". She called for a "rejoining of the trade unions to Social-Democracy" – not by means of agreements and treaties between the Party and trade union leaderships which would be to "*desire to build a bridge at the very spot where the distance is greatest and the crossing most difficult*".<sup>37</sup> The re-fusion had to take place, "below, amongst the organised proletarian masses". Luxemburg predicted that the fight for this re-fusion would, "*inevitably call forth a vigorous opposition from a part of the trade union leadership*".<sup>38</sup>

Luxemburg's work contains a series of powerful observations of the bureaucrat's mentality and world outlook. In this sense it is a work of considerable insight. However, having said that we must note that Luxemburg's analysis did not

locate the social roots of the conservative trade union bureaucracy. As we have seen she explained the malaise of the German trade unions in terms of the functions of officialdom in a period of capitalist stability. This position runs the danger of suggesting that organisation, in and of itself, is inherently conservative – a position no doubt related to Luxemburg's weakness on the organisation question. Marx and Engels had worked with the explanation of the labour bureaucracy as rooted in the privileged labour aristocracy. They had linked the stability of this stratum to the dominance of Britain and America on the world market which had laid the basis for the unimpeded development of bourgeois democracy. Luxemburg offered no social explanation for the existence of bureaucratism and official narrow minded conservatism in the leadership of the trade unions before 1914. It was left to Lenin to systematically develop an explanation and analysis of the bureaucracy in the period of capitalist development after the death of Engels.

Observing the bourgeois influence in the trade union movements of the Anglo-Saxon countries (US, UK and Australia) and the mounting opportunism of the German trade unions, Lenin turned to the analysis made by the founders of scientific socialism of the British union movement. Here, Lenin rediscovered their work on the bourgeoisification of a labour movement and the socio-economic roots of this development.

As early as 1912, Lenin had grasped the importance of this analysis, "*The state of affairs in the American labour movement shows us, as it does in Britain, the remarkably clear-cut division between purely trade-unionist and socialist strivings, the split between bourgeois labour policy and socialist labour policy, if it forgets about its emancipatory aims, puts up with wage-slavery and confines itself to seeking alliances, now with one bourgeois party, now with another, for the sake of imaginary 'improvements' in its indentured condition.*"<sup>39</sup>

Lenin understood the root of this bourgeoisification to lie in the particular situation of American and British capitalism whose uninterrupted development and world dominance had "*... tended to produce within the working class an aristocracy that has trailed behind the bourgeoisie, betraying its own class.*"<sup>40</sup> However, up to 1914, Lenin thought this situation was on the wane, owing to the development of other major capitalist states who were putting the squeeze on the particularly high profits of British capital. Because it had been these super-profits that had been the basis of the corruption of the labour aristocracy, Lenin expected their shrinking to limit the continuation of that corruption. Thus, at the time of 'the great unrest', the massive strike wave that rocked Britain in 1913, Lenin could write, "*The masses of the British workers are slowly but surely taking a new path – they are abandoning the defence of the petty privileges of the labour aristocracy for their own great heroic struggle for a new system of society.*"<sup>41</sup>

Lenin was acutely aware of the fact that while the position of the labour aristocracy was under attack in Britain and America, all was not well in the German trade union movement. The opportunism of the German union leaders was becoming more self-conscious and brazen. In April 1914, Lenin noted a grossly opportunist speech made by Karl Legien while on a speaking tour of America at the expense of the American Congress. Lenin also noted that Legien was not, 'just somebody', but a representative of the 'officers' corps' of the German trade unions, that not only were his views a "servile renunciation of socialism" but that they corresponded to those of at least half the representatives of German socialism. Lenin further pointed to the hopeless 'official optimism' of the German Party in turning a blind eye to opportunism, concluding, "*We must not try to play down the disease which the German Party is undoubtedly suffering from*".<sup>42</sup>

Four months were to provide shattering testimony to the depth of this disease. The war, the open defection of the overwhelming bulk of the parliamentary and trade union leaders of the class to their respective warlords, and the temporary support they gained in this from many workers, drove Lenin all the more thoroughly to re-examine the whole epoch of capitalist development and its effects on the political and trade union leadership of the class.

Lenin's new development of Marx's theory is to be found in



"Imperialism and the split in socialism" written in October 1916. We have discussed this article in Workers' Power number six. Lenin noted that Marx and Engels traced two trends, "one might even say two parties" in the English labour movement from 1858-92. The existence of a bourgeois labour movement was, to Marx and Engels, due to the exceptional features and primacy of British capitalism. The super-profits of British capitalism had made it possible that, "*The capitalists can devote a part (and not a small one at that!) of these super-profits to bribe their own workers, to create something like an alliance (recall the celebrated 'alliances described the Webbs of English trade unions and employers) between the workers of the given nation and their capitalists against the other countries.*"<sup>43</sup> The epoch of world imperialism, Lenin argued, meant that Britain was no longer an exception, "*The bourgeoisie of all imperialist 'Great Powers' can economically bribe the upper strata of 'its' workers by spending on this a hundred million francs or so a year . . .*"<sup>44</sup>

The transition to a new, Imperialist era meant that a bourgeois Labour Party was not the feature of one power capable of monopolising the world market and, therefore, of bribing a stratum of the working class – it was the feature of several, "though very few" Great Powers; "*Now a 'bourgeois labour party' is inevitable and typical in all imperialist countries.*"<sup>45</sup>

For Lenin the conservatism and opportunism of the trade union leaders was not rooted in officialdom as such. It was a result of capitalism's stage of development. Imperialism had laid the basis for a privileged stratum in the working class upon which the trade union bureaucrats rested and whose outlook they represented, "*On the economic basis referred to above, the political institutions of modern capitalism – press, parliament, associations, congresses etc, have created political privileges and sops for the respectful, meek, reformist and patriotic office employees and workers, corresponding to the economic privileges and sops.*"<sup>46</sup>

Lenin's theory links the labour aristocracy to a general epoch of imperialism. It locates the political corruption and involvement with the state of the bureaucratic caste, noted so vividly by Luxemburg, in this feature of capitalist development. It is for this reason that we can speak of it as a new development of Marx's theory.

Leon Trotsky was to formulate the Leninist body of analysis more clearly still in, "The New Constitution of the USSR" as a result of analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy. Starting from the Marxist axiom that "the bureaucracy is not a technical but a social category. . ." <sup>47</sup> Trotsky argued that, "*every single bureaucracy originates in, and manifests itself upon, the heterogenous nature of society, upon the antagonism of interests and the internal struggle. It regulates the social antagonisms in the interests of the privileged classes or layers, and exacts an enormous tribute for this from the toilers.*"<sup>48</sup>

This was no less true of the trade union bureaucracy than of the Soviet bureaucracy. Conditions of capitalist expansion had laid the basis for the creation of a distinct labour aristocratic stratum – with the conditions of life of comfortable petit-bourgeois. The trade union bureaucracy, "leans on", is "bound up with" with this stratum. It has solved its own social question, has been integrated into bourgeois society and the bourgeois state through perks and posts. The mass of workers clearly are neither labour aristocrats nor integrated bureaucratic functionaries. However, in the absence of a revolutionary party, Trotsky argued, they will fall under the leadership of the labour aristocrats – the backbone of pure trade unionism.

The Marxist tradition, therefore, through the works of Lenin and Trotsky, was able to locate the social base of the distinct body of opportunist trade union functionaries. The functionaries were rooted in the essence of limited, 'pure trade unionism', itself the horizon of the labour aristocrats. The trade union bureaucrats have a distinct caste spirit – talking of the French trade union bureaucracy under Jouhaux, Trotsky declared, "*. . . there is not a day, not an hour, when his entire apparatus does not struggle obstinately for its existence, does not collectively select the best methods for that struggle, does not think for Jouhaux and does not inspire him with the necessary decisions*"<sup>49</sup> However, a decisive

change in the balance of class forces – to fascism or towards revolution – renders them impotent. Their omnipotence depends on class compromise and peace, "*. . . having risen above the masses, and then having resolved its own 'social question' (an assured existence, influence, respect etc.) the bureaucracy tends increasingly to keep the masses immobile. Why take risks? It has something to lose. The supreme expansion of the influence and well-being of the reformist bureaucracy takes place in an epoch of capitalist progress and of relative passivity of the working masses*".<sup>50</sup> There is nothing eternal or everlasting about the authority of the trade union bureaucrats, however, "*. . . when this passivity is broken on the right or the left, the magnificence of the bureaucracy comes to an end. Its intelligence and skill are transformed into stupidity and impotence.*"<sup>51</sup>

As stated before, Marxism proceeds from a dialectical understanding of the trade unions – of the limits of 'pure trade unionism', of their ability to organise the energies and dynamism of the class. The trade union bureaucracy, and the labour aristocracy upon which it rests, are features of capitalist expansion. In periods of prolonged capitalist crisis the conditions of the labour aristocracy will inevitably deteriorate. Restiveness and militancy among the labour aristocracy, among the skilled and craft workers, will inevitably disrupt the dominance of the trade union bureaucrats. It is this situation which opens up possibilities for communists to link the struggles of the labour aristocrats to those of the mass of the workers. That is to say, the possibility of taking the unions out of the hands of the bureaucrats, transforming and broadening the unions themselves. It is this potential for transforming the unions – for galvanising the mass of workers against the conservative bureaucracy, that lies at the heart of the Marxist programme for work in the unions.

It is the development of that position, the development of programme and strategy for the transformation of the unions, that we now turn.

## MARXISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE UNIONS

Marx recognised that the unions would either remain tied to bargaining within the capitalist system or would have to become agencies for superseding capitalism itself. If we return to the "Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council", we find that in the last two sections of that document, Marx laid out the basic programme for transforming the unions into agencies for superseding capitalism.

Whilst welcoming the moves they had made towards the International, he pointed out that the unions had a tendency to keep themselves "too much aloof from general and political movements".<sup>52</sup> Pointing to their future role, Marx summed up in a few sentences the general principles for the communist transformation of the unions – principles which have not lost their validity to this day, "*Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interests of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves, and acting as, the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the down trodden millions.*"<sup>53</sup>

In this passage Marx aimed every sentence against the tendency of the unions to restrict themselves to protecting the immediate economic interests of a minority of skilled workers. Instead he emphasised that the unions had to put to the fore the interests of the, "down trodden millions", opening their doors wide to all who could be organised. Integral to these

perspectives, which would have utterly transformed the "new model unions" of the time, was the call that they break from their 'apolitical' stance (a position which, in reality, meant acceptance of the politics of the Liberal Bourgeoisie).

The history of the International is also the history of Marx's struggle to bring these reticent and conservative craft organisations into the key political struggles of the day. Between 1867 and 1870, Marx kept up a ceaseless pressure, via the General Council, to involve the English Trade Unions in the 'Irish Question'. He urged agitation, demonstrations etc in support not only of the Irish right to separation but directly and openly in support of the Fenians, "a violent and . . . an anti-English movement" (Engels). This agitation met with a considerable response and helped to overcome the virulent hostility existing between English and Irish proletarians in England.

On the question of women workers, Marx remained intransigently opposed to the prejudices of the craft unions who tried to exclude women from industry. For Marx the presence of women in industry, and in the ranks of the organised workers, was vital. At the same time he argued for the unions to take up the struggle for protective legislation to defend women against super-exploitation, for shorter working hours and against nightwork. In September 1871, Marx proposed the founding of special Women's Sections of the International.

Marx strove to make the unions aware of the political machinations of "their own", and other bourgeoisies, in the words of the Inaugural Address they had to, "*master themselves the mysteries of international politics, to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments, to counteract them, if necessary, by all the means in their power.*"<sup>54</sup> This work came to a head in the great work of the International in solidarity with the Paris Commune. The recognition, by the International, of the Commune as the Dictatorship of the Proletariat – the working class holding political power for the first time, and the publication of Marx's "The Civil War in France", led to a split in the English section. Benjamin Lucraft and George Odger (Secretary of the London Trades Council) withdrew from the General Council and publicly attacked the ideas contained in 'The Civil War in France'. On the other hand, Robert Applegarth (General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners 1861-71) wrote to Marx, whilst the storm of vilification was at its height, giving permission for his name to be included as a signatory to the Address of the General Council on the Civil War in France (in the event Applegarth's signature was not included).

For Marx and Engels, the prospect for transforming the unions depended on a political break with the bourgeoisie, and with a fundamental change in the relation between the unions and the masses of the workers. Not only did the unions have to break with the bourgeois parties, they had to cease to be the closely guarded property of a distinct and privileged stratum of workers.

The last period of Engels' involvement in the English labour movement saw an explosion of unionisation amongst the unskilled which changed the face of the English trade unionism. At the same time there was a revival of socialism and of the socialist press. Within the pages of the "Labour Standard" a paper edited by the Secretary of the London Trade Council, Engels attempted to influence the new unions. In a series of articles he explained the Marxist programme, simply and intelligibly, by patiently criticising the old trade union maxim, 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay'. At the same time he laid heavy stress on the role that the trade unions could play, for good or ill, in the workers' movement – their inherent limitations, their recent, lamentable record when they, "forgot their duty as the advanced guard of the working class", and the imperative necessity facing them of helping in the creation of a 'Workingmen's Party'.

Engels welcomed the great strikes of the 'new unions', the Match Girls, the Dockers and the Gasworkers not only as blows against capital but equally as blows against the old, skilled unions who, "treated with contempt" these sections of the proletariat. In addition he saw the success of the new unions as a great step in rescuing a whole section of the working class from domination by the lumpenproletariat and the

criminal elements. What Engels particularly welcomed was the will and effort of the new unions to organise all workers, ". . . *these unskilled are very different fellows from the fossilised brothers of the old trade unions; not a trace of the old formalist spirit, of the craft exclusiveness of the engineers for example, on the contrary, a general call for the organisation of all Trade Unions in one fraternity and for a direct struggle against Capital.*"<sup>55</sup>

These 'New Unionists' were not, of course, socialists, but they had not made their peace with capitalism. They regarded their immediate demands as provisional, and if they did not yet clearly understand the final aim, they chose as their leaders "only avowed socialists". Lastly, these new unions represented a basis for transforming the labour movement from below, for ousting the old leaders. Engels foresaw that this would not be easy, that on the political front, ". . . *it is the trade union that will enter Parliament. It is the branch of industry and not the class that demands representation. Still it is a step forward. Let us first smash the enslavement of the workers to the two big bourgeois parties; let us have textile workers in Parliament just as we already have miners there.*"<sup>56</sup>

The re-awakening of that section of workers, the overwhelming majority, who had not been bribed by capitalism was central to any strategy for taking the unions out of the hands of the labour aristocracy and the bureaucracy which rested upon it. Talking of the 'New Unions' in 1889/90, Engels saw as one of the most vital factors that distinguished them from the old craft unions, the fact that they were, "*essentially, and the gas workers exclusively, strike unions and strike funds . . .*"<sup>57</sup> and that they organised every worker to do battle with the capitalists. It was because of this that Engels could write with confidence and enthusiasm of the British proletariat, "*Its long slumber – a result on the one hand, of the failure of the Chartist movement of 1836-50 and, on the other hand, of the colossal industrial upswing of 1848-80, is finally broken. The grandchildren of the old Chartists are stepping into the line of battle.*"<sup>58</sup>

Towards the very end of his life, Engels was seriously addressing the problem of developing methods of struggle to break the hold of the conservative union leaders. That task and work was continued by the Left in German Social-Democracy.

It was precisely on the question of the involvement of the mass of the workers in struggle, of developing tactics and strategy to organise the masses to transcend narrow trade unionism and confront capitalism itself, that the revolutionary Left in German Social Democracy conducted their sharpest battle with the burgeoning German trade union apparatus.

The argument centred on the role and potential of the General Strike weapon. We have discussed this debate in previous articles.<sup>59</sup> The Party majority supported the view of Bebel that the general strike was a useful weapon to be used as a defence should the democratic rights of the workers' movement come under attack. For Luxemburg and the party's left the mass strike, as witnessed in Russia and Belgium, grew out of the exacerbation of class contradictions. It was not simply a defensive response, nor could it be 'organised' or contained as a single act to win an extension of the suffrage. It had to relate to the spontaneous combativity and willingness of the mass of the class (and that meant the unorganised majority as well as the union members) to take action for economic as well as political goals. Luxemburg saw the mass strike as mass direct action, having its roots in the multitude of defensive struggles but focusing them into a mighty political offensive.

At the Party's Jena Congress, Luxemburg and the Lefts had intended to, "*put up a fight against it during the discussion so that we could champion the mass strike, not as a mechanical recipe for a defensive political position, but as an elementary form of revolutionary action.*"<sup>60</sup> In fact, for fear of giving an opening to the right, they decided against this. They voted with Bebel's formula that recognised the utility of the general strike, albeit as a limited and defensive tactic, "*The Party Congress considers the broadest utilisation of the mass work stoppage under certain circumstances one of the most effective weapons to defend itself against such a criminal political act against the working class, or to acquire an important basic right for its liberation.*"<sup>61</sup>

The rotten nature of this compromise formula soon became clear, Luxemburg herself called it, "one-sided and flat".<sup>62</sup> On 16th February 1906, in a secret meeting between the SPD executive and the union leaders, the former agreed to cease all propaganda on the mass strike, to try to prevent one as much as possible and, should one occur, the party would bear the costs. The union leaders were given a veto, thus only if they and the party agreed would the latter issue the call. Even then the unions would not participate officially. This shameful deal marked the complete prostration of the party in front of the trade union bureaucracy and the abandonment of the party's leading role.

As news of this agreement leaked out, and in preparation for the Party Congress at Mannheim in the autumn, Luxemburg penned her most brilliant defence of the tactics she had been advocating, "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions". In it she emphasised again the limits of 'pure trade union' tactics and organisation. She pointed out the importance of the 'backward', unorganised sections of workers, textile workers, electricity workers, homeworkers, agricultural labourers and railway and post office employees, for whom "there exist Russian conditions in the midst of the parliamentary constitutional state of Germany".<sup>62</sup> She maintained that it was typical trade union pedantry to hold that these sections had to gain the legal right to strike and be organised by peaceful, gradual means. A powerful mass strike movement could win these demands providing it included in its demands the eight hour day, the struggle for the introduction of workers' committees in all factories, the abolition of piecework and homework, a compulsory Sunday rest and the recognition of the right of combination.

In the footsteps of Engels, Luxemburg developed key elements of the Marxist strategy for the transformation of the unions. Drawing in the mass of workers for direct political

action, challenging craft and trade divisions, challenging the stranglehold of the union bureaucrats, these were the central elements of the developing Marxist programme for transforming the unions.

Lenin's consistent struggle to maintain the positions of "What is to be Done?" brought him sharply into conflict with the Mensheviks, anxious to revise Marxism and proclaim the 'neutrality' of the trade unions. The struggle within the Russian party over this question related to the same issue raging in the German Social Democracy and, within the Second International, it aligned Lenin with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky. In 1907 and 1908, Lenin supported them in their struggle against the German trade union leaders, aided as the latter were by the compromise that the party leaders, under Bebel had made. Lenin, of course, had enormous respect for German Social-Democracy and August Bebel, nonetheless he could write, "We must criticise the mistakes of the German leaders fearlessly and openly if we wish to be true to the spirit of Marx and help the Russian Socialists to be equal to the present day tasks of the workers' movement."<sup>63</sup>

In the Russian Social-Democracy, newly united by the 1906 Stockholm Congress, a serious struggle soon erupted between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks over the issue of trade union 'neutrality'. Lenin had always been in favour of broad trade unions, with their own unfettered democracy, not party bodies masquerading as unions. The great value of unions was that they organised hitherto non-class conscious workers, educated them in the elementary stages of class struggle -- solidarity, hostility to the employer etc. His view was that Marxists worked within these organisations to imbue them with the Social-Democratic spirit and to win the leadership of them. The upsurge of 1905-6 which radicalised the whole vanguard of the Russian working class and awoke millions to class consciousness, creating a truly mass labour movement,

#### V I Lenin



presented the problems to Russian Marxists. The Mensheviks, centralists as they were, stamped to accommodate their politics and programme to this mass movement, and as the revolution ebbed and the level of mass consciousness fell, were impelled to hurl overboard as useless ballast more and more of the strategy and tactics developed by the Iskra group before 1902. Plekhanov became a vociferous advocate of trade union neutrality and Axelrod, influenced by Western European Syndicalism, became the advocate of a broad Labour Congress, within which the Social-Democrats and the Socialist-Revolutionaries (Populists) should restrict themselves to acting as propaganda societies. The struggles with the Mensheviks, at the London Congress of the Russian Party (May 1907) and at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International (August 1907) convinced Lenin thoroughly that, "*The only correct principle is the closest possible alignment of the unions with the party. Our policy must be to bring the unions closer to the party and link them with it.*"<sup>64</sup>

What is more Lenin convinced the party and, as part of a bloc consisting of Rosa Luxemburg, Kautsky and others, helped to win the International to a rejection of neutralism. In this they succeeded even against the veteran Bebel who defended the 'two pillars' agreement struck with the union leaders. Lenin remained vigorously opposed to 'sticking on labels' or 'mere recognition' of socialism with regard to the unions. He held that, "*the partisanship of the trade unions must be achieved exclusively by Social Democratic work within the unions . . . the Social-Democratic must form party cells in the unions.*"<sup>65</sup> and in this way win them to socialism. This was a position the Bolsheviks vigorously defended after the definitive split of 1912. Thereafter the Bolsheviks found themselves opposing a hostile bloc of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in the trade unions. This bloc, whilst loudly proclaiming the need to keep the unions neutral, to keep them, 'out of politics' was not above 'sticking on a label' in unions where they obtained a temporary majority and forthwith expelling their opponents. When this happened in the Metalworkers Union, Lenin noted that, "*only feeble groups with no principles lose their heads at the first 'victory' and behave in this fashion*". He continued, "*Marxists are not stray visitors in the working class movement. They know that sooner or later all the unions will take their stand on the basis of Marxism. They are convinced that the future belongs to their ideas, and, therefore, they do not force events, do not goad unions on, and do not stick labels on them or split them.*"<sup>66</sup>

In fact, the Marxist Party's open and honest avowal of its principles, programme and tactics, its organisation of cells to fight for them, is indissolubly linked to its unswerving defence of the internal democracy, unity and opening of the unions to workers of various parties or no party. The Marxists struggle openly and honestly to influence the workers to socialism and to win the leadership democratically. In the fight for leadership, and when it has been won, they declare openly that they will align the unions with the central task of the party — the struggle for working class power.

This method was systematised and concretised by the work of the Communist International. Drawing on the experience of the pre-War Social-Democratic Lefts, the syndicalists who had been won to Communism after 1917 and the Bolsheviks, the Comintern first discussed trade union tactics and strategy at the Second Congress in 1920. We publish elsewhere in this journal the Action Programme and the Theses on Factory Committees and Workers' Control of the Communist International. The perspective and method of the Comintern will, therefore, be dealt with only briefly here.

As we have seen, Lenin and Trotsky did not consider a privileged labour aristocracy to be a permanent feature of capitalism. Periodic crises would inevitably challenge the viability of 'pure trade unionism', drawing whole new sections of workers into struggle. The Comintern described this process in the following way in 1920, "*for the success of their economic struggle the wider masses of the workers, who until now have stood apart from the labour unions, are*

*now flowing into their ranks in a powerful stream . . . these masses strive to make them their weapons of battle. The sharpening of class antagonisms compels the trade unions to lead strikes, which flow in a broad wave over the entire capitalist world, constantly interrupting the process of capitalist production and exchange.*"<sup>67</sup> In this situation the trade unions, in the hands of the masses, against the inevitable resistance of the trade union bureaucracy become, "*. . . organs for the annihilation of capitalism.*"<sup>68</sup>

Trade unions as, "organisations for the annihilation of capitalism" must, necessarily, place as their central objective, the struggle for control against the employers. Hence the programme for transformation advanced by the Comintern — a break with all craft and trade divisions, the building of industrial unions, factory and shop committees organised for the battle for workers' control, the democratisation of the union apparatus directly under the control of the rank and file of the unions. The objective of Communists was to struggle for that transformation, without which the trade unions would increasingly prove incapable of defending the living standards and cultural level of the working class.

Such a transformation could not take place gradually and peacefully. As Communists developed their influence and leadership over the broad masses of workers, as the broad masses of workers learnt through victories and defeats that, "*in fact it is already impossible to obtain human conditions of life on the basis of capitalist methods of management. . .*"<sup>69</sup> so it would be possible to remove the opportunists from office, to, "*. . . remove the old bureaucracy separated from the masses and replace it by the apparatus of factory representatives, leaving only the most necessary functions to the centre.*"<sup>70</sup>

In the face of capitalist crisis, the broadening of the unions and the pressure of the masses, it was inevitable that the trade union bureaucracy would be wracked with contradictions. This fact was elaborated and discussed most systematically by Trotsky in his short but vital works on trade unionism. The Right wing will cling openly to the capitalist state, prepared to become the economic police of capital; J. H. Thomas was an excellent example. This is further underlined by the grovelling of the German trade union leaders before Hitler, the ADGB (German TUC) paper hailed Hitler's victory as, "Our victory as well" one day before the SS and SA occupied all trade union offices and began the mass arrest of all trade union leaders. The 'Lefts' however, will offer to lead struggles under the pressure of the mass of workers. While agreement between Communists and the trade union 'Lefts', "*on the basis of the partial tasks of the trade union movement were, of course, quite possible and in certain cases, essential.*"<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless the 'Lefts' would inevitably betray and mislead the struggle,<sup>72</sup> hence Trotsky's permanent insistence on the condition for such agreements, "*the Communist Party had to preserve its complete independence, even within the trade unions, act in its own name in all questions of principle, criticise its 'Left' allies whenever necessary, and in this way win the confidence of the masses step by step.*"<sup>73</sup>

The writings of Trotsky on the trade union question represent the culmination and crystallisation of nearly one hundred years of Communist intervention in the trade unions. Imperialist decay and crisis undermined the basis for 'pure trade unionism' except during exceptional periods of capitalist stability and growth, "*. . . all the efforts of the Labour aristocracy in the service of Imperialism cannot, in the long run, save them from destruction.*"<sup>74</sup> The trade union bureaucracy was firmly entrenched, had transformed itself into, "the economic police of capital."<sup>75</sup> In this situation, Marxism's dialectical grasp of the contradictions of trade unionism served to make all the more necessary communist intervention in the unions, precisely in the face of the bureaucracy's incorporation, "*It is precisely in the present epoch . . . that revolutionary work in the trade unions, performed intelligently and systematically, may yield decisive results in a comparatively short time.*"<sup>76</sup>

Talking of a temptation, voiced by the syndicalists in the early Comintern debates, to turn away from the unions

because of the role of the bureaucracy, Trotsky had this to say, "The fundamental mistake of such attempts lies in that they reduce to organisational experiments, the great political problem of how to free the masses from the influence of the trade union bureaucracy."<sup>77</sup> From the time the bureaucracy had turned the accumulated authority of the trade unions against the socialist revolution, "the most important task of the revolutionary party became the liberation of the workers from the reactionary influence of the trade union bureaucracy."<sup>78</sup>

For Trotsky, therefore, building within the traditions of revolutionary Marxism, the struggle to build, "independent militant organisations corresponding more clearly to the tasks of mass struggles against bourgeois society..." was a central task of all sections of the Fourth International.

The trade unions can either prove instruments for the subordination of the working class to capital, or in the hands of the masses and under the leadership of a revolutionary communist party, crucial weapons in the battle to overthrow capitalism. The programme for the transformation of the unions, consistently developed and elaborated in the communist movement since the work of Marx and Engels -- proceeded from this central tenet of revolutionary Marxism.

24. *ibid.*, Engels, The English Elections, p.369
25. *ibid.* p.370
26. *ibid.*
27. K. Kautsky, The Road to Power, p.84
28. J. Kuczynski, Short History of Labour Conditions Under Industrial Capitalism, Vol. 3, Pt. 1, p.139
29. cited in R. Schlesinger, Central European Democracy and its Background, p.70-1.
30. cited in H. Grabbing, The History of the German Labour Movement, p.69
31. *ibid.* p.68
32. P. Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.59/60
33. cited in R. Schlesinger, *op.cit.* p.67
34. *ibid.*
35. Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.214
36. *ibid.* p.215
37. *ibid.* p.217
38. *ibid.* p.218
39. Lenin, CW 36 pp.214/5
40. *ibid.*
41. Lenin, CW 19 p.36
42. Lenin, CW 20 p.256
43. Lenin, On the Trade Unions, (Moscow comp.) p.293
44. *ibid.*
45. *ibid.* p.295
46. *ibid.* p.296
47. Trotsky, Writings 1935/6 p.309
48. *ibid.*
49. *ibid.* p.173
50. *ibid.*
51. *ibid.*
52. Marx, First International and After, p.91
53. *ibid.* p.92
54. *ibid.* p.81
55. Engels to Schuter, On Britain, p.569
56. *ibid.* Engels to Plekhanov, p.583
57. *ibid.* p.522
58. *ibid.* p.527
59. See Party and Programme, Part 3: From Social Democracy to Communism, Workers' Power 6
60. Quoted in Schorske, German Social-Democracy, 1918-17
61. *ibid.* p.43
62. letter to Roland Holst, quoted in Frolich, *op.cit.* p.132
63. Lenin, CW 13 p.165
64. Lenin, CW 13, p.108
65. *ibid.* p.460
66. Lenin, On Trade Unions, p.271
67. Second Congress of the Communist International, Vol.2, p.278
68. *ibid.*
69. *ibid.* p.280
70. *ibid.*
71. Trotsky, On Trade Unions, p.36
72. For this argument in more depth see S. King's article on the Minority Movement in this journal.
73. Trotsky, *op.cit.* p.36
74. *ibid.* p.72
75. *ibid.* p.55
76. *ibid.*
77. *ibid.*
78. *ibid.* p.54

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1. Capital, (Fowkes translation) p.275
2. F. Engels, Condition of the Working Class, in Marx and Engels on Britain, Moscow 1962, p.260
3. Marx, Value, Price and Profit, Allen and Unwin, pp.93/4
4. Marx, First International and After, Penguin, p.91
5. *ibid.*
6. Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.71
7. Lenin, Collected Works (CW) Vol. 6, p.473
8. Lenin, What is to be Done?, CW 5, p.386
9. Lenin, On the Reorganisation of the Party, CW 10, p.32
10. Trotsky, Writings 35-6 p.173/4
11. Royden Harrison, Labour before the Socialists
12. *ibid.*
13. Engels to Marx, On Britain p.545
14. *ibid.* p.546
15. *ibid.* Marx to Meyer and Vogt p.551/2
16. *ibid.* p.552
17. *ibid.* Marx to Kugelmann, p.554
18. *ibid.* Engels to Marx, p.538
19. *ibid.* p.537
20. *ibid.* Engels to Kautsky, p.560
21. *ibid.* Engels to Bebel, p.562
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23. *ibid.* p.34

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# THE R.I.L.U. THESES ON TRADE UNIONS

## INTRODUCTION

We print below three of the crucial founding documents of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU but also known as the Profintern). All three documents – the Programme of Action, the theses on Workers' Control and the theses on Factory Committees – were passed at the first congress of the Red International of Labour Unions held in Moscow in July 1921.\*

At the Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in March 1920, Zinoviev spoke of the need to form a new, revolutionary trade union international. In April of the same year, the Russian trade unions joined the Communist International and appealed for all revolutionary trade unions to follow suit in order to fight the re-constituted International Federation of Labour Unions. The IFLU, based in Amsterdam, was committed to class-collaboration and to peaceful non-political trade unionism. Against this international alliance of the trade union bureaucracy, the executive of the Comintern called, in April 1920, for unions with revolutionary programme to become sections of the Comintern in preparation for the formation of a revolutionary trade union International.

However, there was a major obstacle to the building of a united, international and communist-led opposition to the Amsterdam leaders. This was the extent of the differences, amongst adherents to the Comintern, on how communists should work in trade unions. The First Congress of the Comintern had not concerned itself with the question, although the executive committee of the Comintern had characterised and explained the capitulation of the trade unions in its April 1920 appeal in this way: "The old trade union leaders will again try to push the unions onto the bourgeois road. . . What was it in the old trade unions that in fact led to their capitulation to the bourgeoisie? A narrow craft spirit. Division into small units. An exaggerated respect for bourgeois legality. Emphasis on the labour aristocracy and contempt for the mass of unskilled workers. High membership dues which an ordinary worker could not afford. The leadership of the unions concentrated in the hands of the bureaucratic bosses who developed into a caste of officials. The advocacy of a *neutral* attitude to political questions, which amounted, in fact, to support for bourgeois policy."

Talking of a "fresh wind blowing through the musty trade union offices", they called for a new movement, opposed to the old craft spirit and directly committed to fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat, alongside the Communist Parties. It was not until its Second Congress, however, that the Comintern deliberated upon the principles and strategy of communist work in the trade unions.

\*The Programme of Action has been retranslated from the Russian for this journal. the two theses are based on the printed English texts, revised in the light of the Russian original.

The theses, "On the Trade Union Movement, Factory Councils and the Communist International" adopted at the Congress were, of necessity, primarily concerned with correcting ultra-left and syndicalist positions on trade union work which were predominant in certain sections of the Comintern. In America and Britain in particular, adherents of the Comintern were opposed to work in the reformist trade unions. They insisted that the existing unions could never be won to communist leadership. Against this position the drafter of the theses, Karl Radek, had to emphasise the necessity of work in the mass trade unions, in order to wrest control of them from the labour bureaucracy. Of course a split was not ruled out if "a refusal to split would be tantamount to abandoning revolutionary work in the trade unions". Under such conditions communists should be prepared to form new, rival trade unions if and only if, they succeeded in convincing the broad mass of workers that this was necessary.

Having emphasised this point against the syndicalists it was necessary to insist that factory committees could not be posed as an alternative to the unions. "Trade Unions organise the working masses for struggle on the basis of the demands for higher wages and a shorter working day throughout the country. Factory committees are organised for workers' control over production, for the fight against economic chaos, they cover all the workers in a factory, but their struggle can only gradually assume a nationwide character."

The theses did not leave the matter there. The factory committees were seen as the crucial organs in the struggle for workers' control, for organising the class for power. While not immediately an alternative to the official structures of the mass trade unions, Radek posed the struggle for mass-based factory committees, struggling for control against the employers, as the central question of communist industrial strategy. In this way we can talk of Radek and the Communist International fusing Marxist politics with the experience of the syndicalists before the first imperialist war, that is factory committees, opposition to the bureaucracy, primacy of direct rank and file action.

From the time of the Second Congress, July and August 1920 when Radek's theses were adopted against the votes of the American and British delegates, work started in earnest to organise the First Congress of RILU. Such work would have been impossible without the decisions on strategy taken by the Comintern. But of themselves, the decisions of the Second Congress did not solve the problem of focussing a programme of action which could lay the basis for the struggle for communist leadership in the unions.

The work to build the RILU conference involved both organised struggle to win support, and the elaboration of a programme and theses to guide the new International. The manifesto to all trade unions on the decision to form RILU declared unequivocally, "The Amsterdam Federation is an agency of the bourgeoisie in the workers' camp." It urged the working masses to, "Take into your own hands these powerful organisations, not shrinking from the most resolute struggle against those who are distorting the workers' organisations into instruments of bourgeois policy."

Trade union delegates to the Second Congress were to return to their own countries and work for their trade unions to support RILU, creating organised supporting minorities where this was not possible. In Britain, for example, a London bureau of RILU was created, composed of Robert William (the leader of the Transport Federation when it scabbed on the miners on Black Friday) Purcell, Cook, Bamber, Wilkinson and Coppock, under the chairmanship of Tom Mann. At the 1921 TUC it proposed the establishment of Industrial Unions, the reorganisation of the TUC and affiliation to RILU. It was the London bureau of RILU which was to lay the basis of the Minority Movement.

The First Congress of RILU met in the period immediately after the Third Congress of the Comintern (held in June 1921). The Third Congress proposed a draft Action Programme to the RILU Congress which was debated in Commission and plenum and finally passed in the form published below. The section on women was added to the Comintern's draft proposals by the RILU Congress. Commissions reported to the Congress on Workers' Control from theses proposed by Tsiperovich (and published below). The theses on Factory Committees (also below) were proposed by Hekkert. The Congress also debated work amongst women with reports from Blok of Sweden and Clara Zetkin.

The debates of the Congress showed that despite the Second Congress of the Comintern, the syndicalist tendency was still strong amongst revolutionary trade unionists. Bill Hayward, for the IWW and with the support of the French and Spanish delegates, proposed not only that the new International should break with the existing unions, but that it should also remain entirely independent of the Comintern. As a result the First Congress of RILU had to fight this tendency, and debate and focus a programme for intervention and struggle.

The Congress (which had 380 delegates from 41 countries) debated for three days the question of the relation between the RILU and Comintern. A resolution proposed by Rosmer and Tom Mann, and calling for "the closest possible link with the Third International" was passed. In addition it agreed to reciprocal representation on the leading bodies of Comintern and RILU. That this formula was clearly a compromise can be seen from the last paragraph of the Comintern's proposed draft on the relation between Communist Parties and revolutionary trade unions, which we print below. This was omitted from the text of the Programme of Action passed by the RILU Congress.

The three documents we publish below are central to the history of the Communist movement. The Programme of Action, which flowed from clearly enunciated general principles concerning the impossibility of trade union neutrality, the reactionary nature of the Amsterdam International, stands to this day as an example of a Communist Programme of Action. Starting from the attacks and crisis facing the workers' movement, it outlines a linked chain of demands and forms of struggle to defend the living standards and organisations of the class within the process of organising the working class for power. It is not a limited, trade union programme; it concretises the struggle for workers' power in the face of capitalist offensive and trade union betrayal.

The central thrust of the programme — the reorganisation of the unions on an industrial and

workplace basis, around a communist programme of struggle — has lost none of its relevance. It was to be refocused and re-elaborated in the programmatic statements of the Fourth International in the 1930s. Likewise the major demands raised in the programme, work or full pay, abolition of business secrecy, the struggle for control over production, the defence of women's right to work, the formation of the organs of workers' self-defence, opposition to all participation and profit-sharing — a chain of demands leading inexorably to the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat — remain central to the armoury of communist militants in the trade unions.

The programme was elaborated and explained in a pamphlet penned by S. Lozovsky and published in November 1921. The pamphlet, entitled, "The Programme of Action of the Red International of Trade Unions" was an indispensable accompanying handbook to the published programme. Proceeding from the new period of capitalist development, the need for new forms of struggle by the working class, it explains the body of analysis, the basic principles and major demands presented in the Programme of Action.

The spinal cord of the Programme of Action is the struggle for workers' control. The RILU Congress passed theses on the question that developed the method and principle demands posed in the Programme. The theses talk specifically of what is termed, "primitive workers' control" — sporadic attempts to supervise speed and supply, to investigate the plans and claims of the employers, even to maintain production against the will of the employers. The primitive stage of workers' control proves the ability of the working class to organise and order production, the potential of the class, but it cannot answer the problems posed to the workers' movement when faced with the inevitable capitalist disorganisation. The working class must either assert control over production as a class, i.e. through the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, or face the disintegration of its 'primitive workers' control' at the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Such a programme for the struggle for workers' control has nothing in common with the piecemeal reformist projects of the Institute for Workers' Control. Neither does it have anything in common with those who see Socialism and "Workers' Control" in terms of the extension of state ownership. That is why the resolution can state, "Workers' control is antagonistic to bourgeois nationalisation of industry and state ownership".

The RILU theses underline that any struggle for workers' control in the factory, in pursuance of sporadic or immediate needs of the workers, poses objectively the question of which class shall rule — a question that cannot be answered finally within the confines of individual factories or industries. Hence the impossibility of separating the struggle for workers' control from organising the class for the socialist revolution. But it was evident, and remains so to this day, that the traditional structures of the labour movement are incapable of waging the struggle for workers' control. They are structured and controlled with other purposes in mind. In order to carry through the struggle for control, new organisations, galvanising the energy of the rank and file, were necessary. Hence the RILU resolution on factory committees.

The factory committee should not be confused with the existing shop steward committees in Britain. Their express purpose was designated by RILU as the struggle for control of production. As the tempo of the social revolution increased so then (and only then) could the factory committees become the basis for the reconstructed trade unions. The theses document the specific tasks of the factory committees in the struggle for control, a struggle that must pose at its successful conclusion the control of supply, of finance, of import and export by the working class. These are demands that must not be confused with demands on the capitalist state to limit the inflow of foreign produced goods in order to save jobs within a tariff-protected British capitalism.

These documents are of great relevance to the tasks of communists in the current period. Internationally, the Stalinist and Social-Democratic trade unions stand as a crucial prop of the capitalist order. Against their programmes of class collaboration communists must reply with a programme of struggle. Such a programme cannot be elaborated except on the basis of the method, the principles, and the major demands outlined in these documents.

# THE ACTION PROGRAMME

## THE THESES

Proceeding from the above principles, from the condition of the international trade union movement, the economic crisis, the intensification of the class struggle, growing social conflict and the imperative necessity of preparing the unions for the social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, the First International Congress of Red Trade Unions adopts the following programme of action.

The acute economic crisis spreading all over the world, the catastrophic fall in wholesale prices, the overproduction of goods combined with an actual lack of sale, the aggressive policy of the bourgeoisie towards the working class, their determination to reduce wages and force the workers' movement backward, the growing exasperation of the masses on the one side and the impotence of the old trade unions and their methods on the other — pose new problems for the revolutionary trade unions all over the world. New methods of economic struggle are required. Called forth by the decomposition of capitalism, a new aggressive economic policy for the trade unions is necessary in order to parry the attack of capital, strengthen existing positions and pass over to the offensive.

The basis of the tactics of the trade unions is the direct action of the revolutionary masses and their organisations against capital. All the gains of the workers are in direct proportion to the



degree of the revolutionary pressure of the masses. By 'direct action' we mean all forms of direct pressure of the workers upon the employers and the state: boycott, strike, street demonstrations, the occupation of the factories, forcible opposition to the removal of finished manufactured goods from the enterprises and other revolutionary actions which lead the workers to the overthrow of capitalism, uniting the working class for the struggle for socialism. The task of the revolutionary trade unions is, therefore, to turn all forms of struggle into a weapon of education and fighting preparation of the working masses for the social revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The last year of struggle showed, with a particular vividness, all the weakness of strictly trade union organisation. The membership in several unions of the workers of one enterprise weakens their struggle. It is necessary, and this should be the starting point of a tenacious struggle, to pass from organisation based purely on trade to the organisation of unions based on industries. All the workers of one enterprise should belong to one union – that is the fighting slogan in the field of union organisation. The fusion of related unions into one union should be effected in a revolutionary way, putting the question directly before the members of that union in the factories and mills, and also before district and regional conferences, as well as before national congresses.

Each factory and each mill should become a citadel of the revolution. Old forms of communication between rank and file members of the union and the union itself, such as money collectors, representatives, proxies and others should be substituted by the formation of factory committees. The factory committee must be elected by the workers engaged in the given enterprise, independently of the political creed they profess. The task of the supporters of the Red International of Trade Unions is to involve all the workers of a given enterprise in the election of their representative organ. The attempt to elect the factory committee exclusively from adherents of the same party, and the casting aside of the broad, non-party rank and file workers, should be severely condemned. Such a body would be a party cell and not a factory committee. The revolutionary workers should, through cells, committees of action and their links with the rank and file members, influence and act upon the general meeting and the election of the factory committee.

The first question to be put before the workers and the factory committee is the maintenance of the workers, discharged on account of unemployment, at the expense of the employers of a given branch of industry. No worker should be thrown on the street without the enterprise taking responsibility for guaranteeing their livelihood. The owner must be compelled to pay full wages to the unemployed. Not only the unemployed, but above all the workers in the factories, must be organised around this, it must be explained at the same time that the problem of unemployment cannot be solved within the capitalist regime and that the best means of struggle against unemployment is the social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The closing of the enterprises, and the cutting of the number of working days in the week is, at the present time, the most important weapon with which the bourgeoisie force workers to accept cuts in wages, an increase in the working day and the abolition of collective agreements. The lock-out is becoming an ever more important form of direct action on the part of the employers against the organised working class. Therefore, the unions must lead action against closures, and for the right of investigation, on the part of the workers, in to the cause of the closure. For this purpose special control committees, composed of workers, should be instituted to oversee raw materials and orders. They should verify the quantity of available raw materials necessary for production, and also the financial resources of the enterprise deposited in the banks. Specially elected control committees must investigate, in a most thorough manner, the financial relations between a given enterprise and other concerns. For this it is necessary to place the abolition of commercial secrecy before the workers as the practical task of the day.

One of the most important forms of struggle is the occupation of the factory by the workers and the continuation of production against the will of the owners. Such a continuation of production is particularly important given the chronic shortage of goods, therefore, unions must not allow the premeditated closure of factories and mills. Depending on local conditions of production, the political situation, the tension of the social struggle, the occupation of enterprises can and must be accompanied by other methods of pressure on capital.

In the occupied enterprise management must rest in the hands of the factory committee and representatives of the union specially appointed for this purpose.

The economic struggle should be conducted under the slogan of the raising of wages, improvement of the conditions of work and defence of the vital interests of the workers. The exhaustion of the working class during the period of the war must now be compensated for by an increase in wages and the improvement of work conditions. The reference by the capitalists to foreign competition, as an excuse for not meeting these demands, should not be given consideration, the revolutionary trade unions approach the question of wages and conditions not from the point of view of the competition between rapacious capitalists of different nations, but solely from that of the preservation and the defence of the living labour force.

In the post war period, the employers have utilised every possible means to create divisions in the ranks of the working class. They utilised, in full measure, the women work force in the time of war and are now attempting to further use this cheap labour force to push down the level of men's wages. Along with this, in order to struggle against the employers, workers in several countries have stood on the principle of expelling women from industry and excluding them from the unions. Such conduct must be met with a decisive rebuff on the part of the Red Trade Unions. Revolutionary trade unions must struggle for equal conditions of work for women and men and equal pay for equivalent work.

The drive of the capitalists to reduce wages during the economic crisis must be met by a united response from the revolutionary trade unions in order to prevent a general wage cut being achieved through separate wage cuts in industry after industry. Workers in the public service industries, for example mining, railways, electricity and gas, should be drawn into the struggle at once in order

that the struggle against the onslaughts of capital should touch the very nerve of the economic organism. Here it is advisable to use all forms of resistance, from partial and intermittent strikes to a general strike embracing basic industries on a national scale. Such planned action is a mighty weapon against the reactionary attempt of the bourgeoisie of every country. Trade unions must closely study the world situation, selecting the most suitable moment for their economic action. They must not forget for one moment that international action is only possible with the formation of real revolutionary class conscious international trade unions, having nothing in common with the Yellow Amsterdam International.

The belief, fostered in the masses by the opportunists of all countries, in the sanctity of collective agreements must be sharply and decisively opposed by the revolutionary trade union movement. Collective agreements are no more than armistices. The employers always violate them, given the slightest opportunity. Respectful attitudes to collective agreements show how deeply bourgeois ideas have penetrated into the minds of the leaders of the working class. Revolutionary trade unions, while not rejecting collective agreements, must realise their relative value and must clearly address themselves to the question of the methods to be employed when it is advantageous to the working class to break such agreements.

In the fight against individual and collective employers, the workers' organisations must, while adapting to national and local conditions, utilise all the experience of the struggle for the emancipation of the working class. Every large strike needs not only careful preparation but also the organisation, from the very start, of special cadres for the struggle against strikebreakers and opposition to provocative attacks from all sorts of whiteguard organisations encouraged by the bourgeois state. The Fascists in Italy, the "security police" from the last war in Germany, the civil white guard organisations of ex-officers and non-commissioned officers in France and England, all these organisations, though different in form, pursue an identical task. They have the aim of disorganising and forestalling the decisive actions of the workers not only by replacing the striking workers but by smashing their organisations and physically destroying their leaders. The organisation, in such conditions, of special strike militia, special selfdefence squads, is a matter of life and death for the working class.

During the strike the workers' organisations should not only struggle against the employers' strikebreaking organisations, but take the initiative by stopping the movement of all freight, both raw materials and finished goods, both in and out of the striking factory. In this the transport unions should play an especially prominent role, with them lies the responsibility of stopping the freight, which can be done easily with the full support of all the workers of a given locality.

All the economic struggles of the working class in the coming period should centre around the slogan, 'Control of Industry'. This control must be effected without waiting until governments and the ruling classes have initiated a form of fake control. We must conduct a stubborn war against all attempts on the part of the ruling classes and the reformist leaders to create labour associations in which labour and capital cooperate, or control commissions shared jointly by workers and employers. This control of industry must be brought about by direct action; only then will it give definite results. The revolutionary trade unions must come out with determination against the tricks and fraudulent schemes paraded as 'socialisation' by the leaders of the old trade unions with the cooperation of the ruling class. All the talk on the part of these gentlemen about peaceful nationalisation has for its sole task the sidetracking of the workers away from work for the social revolution.

To divert the attention of the workers away from their immediate revolutionary task and to awaken in them petty bourgeois aspirations, the capitalists and reformists are bringing forward the idea of profit-sharing, i.e. to return to the workers a really insignificant part of the surplus value they have produced. This plan of corrupting the workers must be met with severe and merciless criticism. Not 'profit-sharing' but 'the abolition of capitalist profit', this is the slogan of the revolutionary trade unions.

In order to paralyze and nullify the fighting force of the working class, bourgeois governments militarise individual concerns or even whole industries under the pretext of defending the national interest. Under cover of preventing, as far as possible, economic crises, they introduce, in the interests of capital, obligatory courts of arbitration and conflict commissions. Still in the interests of capital, some countries have introduced a direct tax on earnings with a view to throwing the weight of the war wholly onto the shoulders of the working class, the tax-collectors being the employers themselves. It is incumbent upon the trade unions to lead a ruthless and merciless battle against these state measures that exclusively serve the interests of the capitalist class.

While conducting the fight for the improvement of the conditions of labour, raising the standard of living of the masses, and establishing workers' control over industry, we should always keep in mind that it is impossible to solve all these problems within the framework of the capitalist system. For this reason the revolutionary trade unions, while gradually forcing concessions from the ruling class, compelling it to enact social legislation, should always clearly explain to the workers that only the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat can solve the social question. For this reason not a single case of mass action should pass, from this point of view, without leaving a deep mark. It is the duty of the revolutionary trade unions to explain these conflicts to the workers, leading the rank and file always towards the idea of the necessity and inevitability of the social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

\*Every economic struggle is also a political one; that is a general class struggle. Such a struggle can only acquire a really revolutionary character, no matter how many workers it may involve, and be carried through for the greatest benefit of the entire working class, when the revolutionary trade unions act in perfect unity with the Communist Party in each respective country. To divide the theory and practice of the struggle of the working class into two distinct parts is extremely detrimental, especially at the present moment. Every offensive requires the maximum concentration of forces which is only possible by exerting the greatest revolutionary energy; it must not be divided into two separate policies, one for the Communist Party and the other for the

Red Trade Unions – such a policy is doomed to failure in advance. Therefore the unity of action and organic coordination between the Communist Party and the trade unions is the preliminary condition leading to success in the struggle against capitalism.

\*Printed in the text recommended by the Third Congress of the Comintern to the constituent World Congress of Red Trade Unions; does not appear in the printed RILU text.

# RESOLUTION ON WORKERS CONTROL

1. The analysis of modern economic conditions irrefutably proves, that the productive forces are in sharp and irresolvable contradiction with the prevailing relations of production. During the world war this contradiction was evident only to the most advanced sections of the proletariat. However, the acuteness of the post-war world crisis, affecting equally the victorious, the vanquished and the neutral countries, brought home this lesson to the great majority of the proletariat. The continued threat of war, despite the treaty of Versailles; the general and chronic crisis, despite the absolute necessity of restoring industry, have put society as a whole, and particularly the world proletariat, face to face with the question of its very survival. With the first attempt to solve this question it becomes absolutely clear that the above mentioned contradictions have now reached such a degree, that the bourgeoisie, the class which hitherto directed industry, has now become its disorganiser. The bourgeoisie no longer assist the development of production, but on the contrary puts obstacles in its way, a

The working class is the first to sharply experience the unbearable burden of this contradiction, because it is more than any other class tied up with production in great industrial centres, workshops and factories, and also because the contradiction mentioned above leads to the wholesale slaughter of the battle field or to wide spread starvation during periods of unemployment.

For these reasons the working class is forced to understand the role of the bourgeoisie in the organisation of industry, to find out how it fulfils this task. From this arises the need for the workers themselves to re-organise production, to meet their own needs. This response to direct necessity, which in reality means a prologue to the resolution of the contradiction of the capitalist system by force (ie the path to the social revolution), takes in fact the form of workers control over production.

2. The primitive stage of workers control reveals itself in sporadic attempts of the workers of each concern to supervise the work, the supply, and condition of the machinery of production; to determine whether the closing of the factory, or the curtailing of production are really based upon necessity and are not a result of the disruptive intentions of the owner. But very soon the workers become convinced, that supervision and control alone are not sufficient to prevent the capitalist from disorganising the work in the factories. The system of artificially curtailing production or completely closing their factories, adopted by the capitalists of different countries, shows very well the limitations of this form of control. Equally insufficient are the spasmodic attempts made by workers of some concerns to continue production at all costs, even against the will of the factory owner. In such attempts, as in Russia after the March revolution, or not very long ago in Italy, Germany, England and other countries, the basic feature of the new position of the working class in industry is manifested. From the position of a passive and exploited force, considered merely as a machine or as the appendage of one, the working class rises to the position of pioneer of the idea of the organisation of production, to the position of the direct inheritor of the bourgeoisie, which because of its class interests, has now become the disorganiser of production.

To the old type trade unions, whose activity was limited to the fight for only slight improvements under the existing capitalist system, such a change in the minds of the working masses causes an indisputable blow. Tied together through its bureaucracy with the bourgeois apparatus, and entirely dependent upon it, the old trade unions are powerless to grasp the new problem of production put before the working class, or to find a practical solution for it. This is why with particular force and rapidity new organisations are now growing up which, still using the weapon of the old trade unions – the strike for revolutionary purposes, already strive to take over industry. The activity of the shop committees is now not limited only to the strike, but is mainly expressed in taking over some functions of the factory owner, especially in the branches of supplying the factory with raw materials, fuel and later with financial means, or the confiscation of factories sabotaged or left by the owners. This is the reason why at this stage of workers control the bourgeoisie and its apologists – the leaders of the old trade unions make the fiercest attempt to oppose to revolutionary workers' control, so-called "industrial democracy", joint commissions of factory owners and workers, profit sharing schemes and other "democratic" tricks based on the theory of equal rights between labour and capital based on leaving the means of production in the private ownership of the bourgeoisie. This idea of "equality", carefully cultivated by the English trade unions, which received its final expression at the 10th Congress of trade unions in Germany (1919) and which still dominates the French General Confederation of Labour, is in practice nothing but an attempt to fool the working class through the distortion of the meaning of

revolutionary workers' control; to turn it aside from immediate revolutionary problems to the entirely outlived bourgeois ideas of the yellow International of trade unions.

4. Of the same significance are the attempts of the yellow leaders of trade unions to pose "government ownership" against revolutionary workers' control. The bourgeoisie is supporting this because it cleverly uses the principle of this pseudo-socialisation in its own class interests. They willingly obscure the fact that government ownership does not mean social ownership, but only the transition of production from the private management of a group of class representatives to management by the entire class. The theory of state control consists in an administration composed of elected representatives either of the government and the workers or of the owners, the government and the workers. The representatives of the government are always considered as representing the entire population, and workers as representatives of a class. Here the falsity of the principle of democratic control reveals itself as utterly unacceptable to the revolutionary workers because their idea of workers' control necessitates the negation of today's government, which is but a weapon of the bourgeoisie. Thus they reject the bourgeois democratic principle and advocate instead that of the workers' state expressing the real needs of the toilers. Workers' control is antagonistic to bourgeois nationalisation of industry or state ownership. Any attempt to combine state ownership with workers' control, whilst actually conserving the power of the administration of industry in the hands of the bourgeoisie, will result only in the putting of the responsibility for existing problems on the working class. On the other hand, such attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable may bring about the disintegration of the new revolutionary nucleus of the trade union movement on the shop floor. This is a major danger because of the tendency of the union bureaucracy to take advantage of every weakness and lack of co-ordination in the activity of the revolutionary nuclei to subject them to its disintegrating influence.

5. No less dangerous is the pseudo-revolutionary opinion, wide spread among the workers of different countries, that the proletariat can achieve positive results from control even before the overthrow of the capitalist state. The sad experience of the Italian workers' control, betrayed by the treacherous leaders of the proletariat, has emphatically proved the sheer nonsense of this opinion, and revolutionary workers in different countries must avoid the repetition of such experiments. In this connection it is particularly vital to realise that the application of workers' control in its fullest expression is impossible unless it includes the financial function as well as technical supervision. Only the full application of financial control reveals to the worker the fundamental basis of the capitalist system. In the process of financial control the workers learn in practice the dependence of their factory upon the banks and national and international financial trusts. The disclosure of the commercial, industrial and particularly financial secrets gives the proletariat an exact picture of the prime source of the overwhelming sabotage on the part of the bourgeoisie. It reveals the main lever of the system which engineers lockouts, the curtailing of production by establishing short time work and other methods artificially bringing about unemployment, the cutting of wages, the disruption of labour organisations, etc.

6. The struggle for financial control leads the working class to the immediate and decisive clash with the bourgeoisie whose political power is to a certain extent based on financial power. At this stage, control inevitably takes an openly political aspect and requires political leadership. Meanwhile, the increasingly frequent cases of seizure of factories, and at the same time the impossibility of managing them without having at their disposal the financial apparatus, clearly puts before the workers the urgent problem of getting hold of the financial system, and through it, of the whole of industry. At this stage of workers control, the contradiction stated in the first clauses resolves itself into the struggle for power between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, ie in the social revolution. In the process of this decisive struggle, the duration and difficulty of which depends on the level of organisation and culture of the bourgeoisie in each country, it is no longer merely a question of controlling the factory owner in order to paralyse his evil "intentions", to break his sabotaging activities, or to continue production, at all costs etc. The question before the proletariat now is to take industry from the capitalists and to take as a class, into its own hands and under its own responsibility the management of the industrial resources of the country. At this moment workers' control develops into a militant attempt of the working class to direct the organisation of production, in factories, shops, mines and railroads not only in the interest of separate groups of the working class, but for the benefit of the whole proletariat of a given country.

7. The victory of the proletariat is inevitable because the bourgeoisie has no longer the force to direct industry with its own hands. This brings the proletariat to the difficult task of state reconstruction amid very adverse conditions, primarily because the preliminary stages of workers control were necessarily destructive of industrial machinery. To exercise management over production in such a situation on the morrow after the revolution becomes a particularly difficult task. The sabotage of the bourgeoisie and its obsequious flatterers, concealed until now, becomes open and systematic. The factories, shops, government institutions, schools and universities are left without directing staffs. Not only must the working class physically defend the revolution, but also give its best workers to the task of administration. In such a moment the role of mass organisations, including not only the advance guard of the proletariat (the communist party), but broad sections of the nonparty masses, is especially important. The economic organisations of the proletariat must penetrate to the very heart of the working class through the creation of nuclei in each factory and in each workshop. This is why the question of relationship between the trade unions and factory committees is now of the utmost importance. Experience has shown that factory committees are of great value, especially where trade unions are either weak or captured by opportunistic leadership. But the work of shop committees must not be localised, otherwise it will easily be paralysed or sidetracked by the bourgeoisie. The advance guard of the working class must direct the work of factory committees into nation-wide channels. This shows the necessity of utilising the machinery of the trade unions for new aims, to win the leadership of the factory committees and turn them into mighty weapons of mass control and ownership of production.

8. But the unions can assume this work only under two conditions: 1) that their structure changes from craft lines to industrial, permitting them to unite all workers and employees of any branch of industry; 2) when, in opposition to the yellow counter-revolutionary trade-union bureaucracy in each industry, there is created firm and determined revolutionary nuclei to counteract the corrupting policies of the bureaucracy, and to retain the organised masses in the factories on the path of revolutionary struggle for control over production and permanent management of industry.

In their vigorous fight against Amsterdam, which attempts to turn the revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat into the channel of futile and fruitless control within the limits and interests of the capitalists system, the Red unions must pay special attention to the practice of workers' control which is the best preliminary school for the proletariat striving to take power in its own hands. The logical conclusion of this is that preliminary to the social revolution the slogan of workers control must be put on the order of business of every gathering of workers, not only with the object of revolutionising them, but to give them the political and economic education necessary for the immediate future. The maintenance of the proletarian rule after the social revolution depends on this preparation, because the social revolution and the maintenance of proletarian power are determined by the preparation and ability of the proletariat to conquer and submit to its will the mechanism of production (ie whether it will be able to solve not only politically but also economically, the basic contradiction mentioned in the first clause). This task can easily be achieved by suitable preparation, primarily because the workers gradually learn to manage the factory, then they clearly see the correlation between different branches of industry and learn to supervise them on a nation-wide scale. Thus, after the social revolution, when it inevitably has to proceed with the nationalisation of the whole financial system, industrial transport and important sources of raw material etc, the proletarian government will have enough workers capable not only of fighting for the social revolution, but building on the inherited ground, a new socialist commonwealth, new organs of distribution and management of industry.

At this stage workers' control assumes the form of participation of the trade unions in the shaping of new economic organs and management of production through the latter, ie it transforms itself into one of the organs of economic reconstruction and control of the working class through the Soviets and the economic organs.

# **RESOLUTION ON FACTORY COMMITTEES**

1. For the purpose of carrying out the above stated tasks (resolutions on workers' control), factory committees must be built along determined lines. A question arises whether factory committees ought to be organised within or outside the labour unions? In Germany and England wide labour circles were of the opinion that factory committees must be organised outside of the unions, that they should take over from the craft unions and entirely displace them. This opinion holds that the form of craft organisation is not adaptable to the needs of struggle, but should they be re-organised along the industrial lines, they might, together with factory committees, become able to cope with the problem.

2. The factory committees cannot take the place of the trade unions. Only in the course of the struggle can they go beyond the limits of the separate shops, factories and mines on the basis of separate industries, creating a common machinery for carrying on the struggle.

Hence trade unions have already become central organs of the struggle, although they do not embrace such a great number of workers as the factories committees could do, representing free organisations accessible to all the workers of a given concern. The division of functions of the factory committees and the trade unions must result from the historical development of the social revolution. The trade unions organise the workers for an increase of wages or shortening of working hours on a national and state-wide scale. The factory committees, being organised for the purpose of controlling industry, embracing the workers of a given concern and their struggle, will only gradually assume a national and state-wide scale.

In so far as the rank and file of the trade unions succeed in combatting the counter-revolutionary tendencies of the bureaucracy and transform the unions into revolutionary bodies, the factory committees will become the nuclei of the trade unions in the factories.

3. The organisation of the factory committees by separate industries and their utilisation for the immediate struggle for working class interests cannot but influence the present structure of the trade unions. The activities of the factory committees shatter the old forms of the trade unions built on the craft principle and hasten their transformation into unions organised by industries.

4. By turning trade unions and factory committees into a powerful weapon for social revolution, revolutionary workers are thus preparing these mass organisations for the great task which they will have to face after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the task of becoming the bulwark of the new organisation of economic life on the basis of socialist principles.

The trade unions, reconstructed on an industrial basis and supported by factory committees, will familiarise the workers with industrial problems, will prepare the more experienced among

them for the management of the concerns and effect control over the technical experts. Thus, under the general direction of the workers' government in co-operation with other economic organisations of workers, the trade unions will carry out the fundamental principles of a socialist commonwealth.

The concrete tasks before the factory committees are as follows:

- I) To draw the unemployed into the process of production, for the fulfilment of which task it is necessary a) to clearly determine the potentialities of production, to take account of the available supplies of raw and accessory materials in production and take them under control; b) to shift the available labour force into such branches of industry in which a shortage of hands is felt; c) to secure sufficient aid to the unemployed on the owners' account until they resume work; d) to establish connections with the distributive organisations in order to get acquainted with the exact necessities of the working masses and conform production to these needs.
- II) The organisation of the distribution of fuel in order to secure regular work in the concerns and an adequate standard of living for the workers, ie organise a systematic supply of fuel for the different concerns as well as the households of the workers.
- III) The suspension of all unproductive work, especially the manufacturing of arms, ammunition, and articles of luxury.
- IV) The establishment of control over transport in order to prevent overtaxing transport by unproductive shipping such as a) transport of war materials; b) export of capital; c) export of equipment from closed concerns; d) export of food-stuffs for purposes of speculation. First of all, provision should be made for the supply of food and articles of mass consumption: raw material, fuel and accessory materials necessary in production; the conveyance of the working population to the place of work should likewise be provided for.
- V) The establishment of financial control in order to make possible the valuation of capital and cash of concerns; of control over banking and other financial operations, and generally of control over banks.
- VI) The establishment of financial control over the supply and distribution of foodstuffs; by establishing communications between the toiling population of the town and the country. Special attention should be paid to the organisation of mutual exchange between town and country of agricultural and factory goods. which the toiling population is in need of.
- VII) The organisation of control and the fixing of prices on agricultural and factory products which the toiling population is in need of.
- VIII) The establishment of control over export and import: a) in the first place preference must be given to the import of commodities necessary for the working masses and to the maintenance of production; b) the import of luxury should be prohibited; c) the export abroad of foodstuffs and capital, as well as articles necessary for local production should be likewise prohibited.

# GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

1. Workers' control is the necessary school in the work of preparation of the large masses for the proletarian revolution.
2. Workers control must be the war cry for the workers of every capitalist country, and must be utilised as a weapon to disclose the financial and commercial secrets.
3. Workers' control must be widely used for the purpose of transforming the old trade unions into fighting working class organisations.
4. Workers' control must be used for the reconstruction of the outlived trade unions on the basis of industries, the former becoming harmful for the workers' revolutionary movement.
5. Workers' control is distinct from bourgeois schemes of "mixed committees", nationalisation, etc., and to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie it opposes the dictatorship of the proletariat.
6. When establishing any form of workers' control or seizure of concerns, great attention must be given to the necessity of attracting the most backward proletarian masses to the discussion of the issues at stake. At the same time, a careful selection of the more capable workers must be made during the process of workers' control with the view of preparing them for the leading positions in the task of re-organising industry.
7. For the efficient functioning of workers' control in each locality, it is necessary that the trade unions direct the work of the factory committees, while the trade unions must coordinate and combine the work of the local control committees of the same industry in such a manner as to avoid any attempt to create "factory patriotism" on the ground of localised control.
8. For the guidance of the work of the factory committees the trade unions must from the outset issue special instructions, discussing the questions of workers' control, carry on a propaganda in the daily press and in the factories not only by explaining the necessity of workers' control, but also giving detailed reports of the results of workers' control in different concerns, call for that purpose joint meetings, conferences etc.
9. With a view of carrying out these aims in unions which do not accept the principles of the Red International of the Trade Unions, it is necessary to organise strong revolutionary nuclei which will lay special stress on the reconstruction of the unions on an industrial basis and will keep the revolutionary character of the struggle for workers' control.

# THE COMMINTERN, THE CPGB AND THE MINORITY MOVEMENT

DEVELOPING A COMMUNIST UNITED FRONT TACTIC  
IN THE BRITISH TRADE UNION.

By Stuart King

## EDITORS INTRODUCTION

Many of the groups on the left today have examined, with a greater or lesser degree of seriousness, the early history of the CPGB and in particular its industrial strategy in the early '20s through the Minority Movement. We do not apologise for writing on the same subject again today, for two reasons. Firstly the experience of the early British Communist Party, working under the direction of a still revolutionary International, is the history of a communist grouping attempting to apply and hammer out a revolutionary strategy within a working class with strong reformist traditions, a powerful trade union bureaucracy and a Labour Party wedded from its birth to a policy of class collaboration. A correct understanding of that attempt, of its successes and its mistakes is essential for revolutionaries today. Secondly we believe that the political assessments emanating from the left groups are as inadequate as their politics in general providing only misdirection for communist work in the trade unions today.

We do not, in this article, attempt to provide a comprehensive historical account of the early Communist Party and Minority Movement, rather we focus on the programmatic method and tactics of the CPGB in its attempt to build a revolutionary opposition under communist leadership within the trade unions, and the impact on this tactic of the centrist degeneration of the Communist International from 1924 on. The failure to deal with this aspect of the Minority Movement has been one of the major weaknesses of most previous studies. It is doubly important to focus on this question given the confusion in the left today on what constitutes a communist united front tactic in the trade unions. As a result of this emphasis in the article we have had to severely restrict the amount of historical background contained in the text. We have attempted to provide an introduction which places the CP's tactic of building the Minority Movement in a historical context, and a chronology which outlines the major events in the class struggle of the period.

Finally we ask the reader to bear with us through the fairly substantial quotes from the CP and Minority Movement press. This does not make for easy reading but is necessary both to enable the reader to make an independent judgement of the method used by the CP in building a united front and in order that the distortion of this method by all varieties of centrists who claim to stand in the 'communist tradition' can be clearly demonstrated.

## PREFACE

The period succeeding the First world war were years of significant advance for the British working class. On the level of wages, full employment, mass unionisation, shop-floor organisation massive advances were registered. On the political level too, the British working class finally gave its overwhelming allegiance to a working class party, distinct at an electoral level from the Liberal Party and pledged to a variety of reformist socialism. The pressure of the masses forced the cautious semi-liberal trade union leaders and the timid petit-bourgeois Fabians to go a good deal further than they had wished to go. Never were these leaders to make such radical noises as they had made in 1917-1918.

The most crucial gain, the key promise for the future, however lay in transformation that took place on the tiny forces of British Marxism due to the world war, the working class upsurge and most importantly the Russian Revolution. Galvanised out of their propaganda sect existence by the revolutionary upheavals that altered the political face of Europe, the various splintered groupings began to grope towards a new conception of Marxism - one which saw it as a real guide to action, a method for formulating a strategy for power, not in the distant future but in the very period opening up before them. Indissolubly linked to this new conception was the necessity to break completely with the old forms of organisation, more suited to an education club than to operating the tactic flowing from this strategy.

The British Communist Party was officially formed after tremendous difficulties on July 31st 1920. But for a whole period thereafter it was obvious that all that happened was to aggregate small sects, the Socialist Labour Party, the British Socialist Party and many tiny and localised societies. Before the new party could be welded together the whole working class movement was hit by a massive capitalist crisis at the end of 1920 - a crisis which glaringly revealed the total inadequacy of the leadership and organisation which should have defended the class in the only way it could be effectively defended - by a resolute struggle for power.

Then, as so often at critical periods in the history of the British working class, the miners stood at the forefront of resistance to the massive wage cuts demanded by the Liberal-Tory coalition government. The working class was electrified by the seriousness of the crisis. In the preceding year the threat of a general strike, called by a national trade union council of action and supported by local councils had headed off direct intervention by British Imperialism against the Russian Revolution. In 1920, the old Parliamentary Committee of the TUC had been replaced by a new 'General Council' whose task was to act as a 'central co-ordinating body representative of the whole movement'. A power process of amalgamation - which in 1920/21 led to the creation of the AEU, the TGWU and the GMWU, placed potentially powerful weapons of struggle at the disposal of the working class. Most immediately to hand was the Triple Alliance of Miners, Railwaymen and transport workers, worked for so hard before the war and still unused.

Thus when Lloyd George announced a bill terminating state control of the mines (a war-time measure) and the employers announced drastic wage reductions, they were throwing down the gauntlet of battle to the whole movement. The government mobilised the reservists, despatched regular troops to the working class areas and posted machine guns at the pitheads. Faced with this show of strength and also by the eagerness of the rank and file of their own unions for action, the principle leaders - JH Thomas (railwaymen) Frank Hodges (miners) and Robert Williams and Ernest Bevin (transport workers) betrayed the miners and indeed the whole working class. Using the pretext of the Miners'

executive's refusal of a 'reasonable compromise', they called off the solidarity action on Friday April 13th - a date henceforth to be known as 'Black Friday'.

The effects of this betrayal were felt in every working class home. By the end of 1921, six million workers had suffered wage cuts averaging 8% a week. By 1924, real wages had fallen dramatically; by 26% for miners, by 20% for iron and steel workers, by 11% for textile workers. Nearly two million workers - a quarter of the entire membership flooded out of the trade unions, virtually wiping out the whole of the massive post-war increase. Unemployment leapt from only a quarter of a million in September 1920 to over two million by June of the following year. The labour movement mounted no co-ordinated resistance to the effects of the crisis and the highly organised Government/Employer offensive to ensure that the working class bore the whole brunt of it.

A series of defensive struggles ensued, section after section being picked off by the employers until even the powerful engineers were brought to their knees in a four month lock-out - their funds exhausted and the workshop organisation in ruins. The elements of workers control won in the war and post war years such as control over overtime, were lost and undisputed exercise of all managerial functions was recognised by the union. The shop-stewards movement crumpled under the joint impact of high unemployment and the victimisation of militants following these defeats.

The young CP had issued sharp warnings to the working class about the likelihood of betrayal from the reformist leaders. Under the slogan "Watch Your Leaders", the Party organ warned of the probability of a 'Black Friday'. But organisationally the CP's intervention in the crisis was lamentably weak. The local branches were left to organise according to their own lights and the Party's organ 'The Communist' carried no reports of what was being done in the localities or instructions as to what should be done. Yet the terrible negative experience of 1921 would have been lost to the working class if it had not been for the British CP, particularly because it was a section of the Communist International and could draw on a wealth of experience in class struggle which no home-grown isolated national grouping could provide. At the Third Congress of the Comintern (June/July 1921), the British CP's tactics and organisation was severely criticised.

On the trade union front the Red International of Labour Unions pressed its London bureau for a more active intervention. In 1922 the London Bureau of RILU launched a 'Back to the Unions Campaign'. In August 1921, communists took the lead in setting up the National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement which was to play a central role in the bitter struggles of the 1920's and 30's.

But a pre-requisite of effective communist work in the mass organisations of the working class was a solidly organised communist party. The adoption by the CPGB of a series of proposals embodied in a report on re-organisation adopted by the Battersea Congress in October 1922, again paid tribute to the Party's ability to learn and the vital lessons which the Comintern had to teach. The report was the work of two relatively junior party leaders, RP Dutt and Harry Pollitt and without strong Comintern backing it is unlikely that the new methods would have carried the day. As it was considerable consultations with the Comintern were necessary to help re-found the party. The whole executive of the CPGB visited Moscow for a prolonged discussion in June 1923.

This year saw the beginnings of recovery in the working class movement, an upturn in the number of strikes and an increasing political confidence. In March 1923 a new



paper was launched by the CP called 'Workers Weekly' and which sold approximately 50,000 copies compared with 'The Communist's' circulation of 17,000 two months previously. In the General Election of November 1923, Labour became the largest single party in the Commons and and over the New Year a minority Labour Government was formed.

The ruling class had managed its affairs since the middle of the First World War by a coalition of Tories and Liberals headed by the charismatic Lloyd-George, an expert in the use of the stick and carrot method of dealing with the reformist leaders. Successful as these methods had been in defusing the militancy of 1918 to 1920 and then clawing back the concessions made in this period, after 1921, a change of strategy was required. Firstly the apparently irresistible electoral advance of Labour had to be stemmed - not so much because of what the Ramsay Macdonalds or Arthur Hendersons might do to private property as because of the upsurge in working class confidence and pressure which a clear electoral victory might bring with it.

From the ruling classes point of view a minority Labour Government with Liberal support was the safest option. Hopefully it would demoralise its supporters and do no-

thing to injure the interests of the bourgeoisie. In this Balfour and Baldwin knew their opponents only too well. Their aim was to return to office with a powerful majority and prepare for a decisive onslaught on the workers organisations.

It was against this background that the CP was setting about the task of re-aiming politically and organisationally the working class movement. To this end the CP from late 1923 onwards was busy putting together nuclei of CP members and non-party militants into rank and file groupings, reform movements, in the mines, in engineering and on the railways. The greatest strength of the unofficial movement lay in South Wales from which base AJ Cook (briefly a party member in 20/21) was elected to the secretaryship of the Miners Federation in March 1924. A National Miners Minority Movement had been formed in January 1924 and its support played an important part in getting Cook elected. A Metal Workers Minority Movement was founded on a national scale a few months later.

How far the young CP had moved from the propagandistic immobility of its early days is shown by the strategy and tactics it operated in forming the Minority Movement. It is necessary to look in detail at what this method was, how it was learned and from whom.

In taking the initiative to form the National Minority Movement in 1924 the British CP was applying the tactic of the United Front in the Trade Unions. At the same time it pursued a similar tactic inside the labour party through the construction of a 'left wing'. The strategy of fighting for the united front in both industrial and political wings of the labour movement stemmed from the decisions of the 3rd and 4th Congresses of the Communist International. The 3rd Congress had recognised that the revolutionary upsurge which followed the Russian revolution and the 1st World War had ebbed and that capitalism had succeeded in achieving a temporary stabilisation. The majority of the European working classes remained loyal to social democracy - refusing to break with their old parties and remaining in unions which were affiliated to the Amsterdam (Yellow) International, the International Federation of Trade Unions (I.F.T.U.). While a minority were organised in Communist Parties fighting inside the Trade Unions for affiliation to the communist trade union international, the Red International of Labour Unions. In such a situation the Communist Parties needed to seize every organisational avenue to ensure maximum co-ordinated action between communist and non-communist working masses around the immediate needs of the class - this was the meaning of the slogan of the 3rd Congress 'to the masses'. Radek pointed out that until 1920 the Communist International had used the method of direct assault.

"At that time we not only did not propose joint action with the social democratic parties, but sought by all means to split them. We placed in the foreground the slogan of the Soviet dictatorship, while now . . . we place in the foreground concrete transitional demands." (1)

It was this revolutionary use of the United Front tactic, seeking to fight alongside reformist workers on the basis of a programme of transitional demands - a programme of action which guided the activity of the early CP in the minority movement. Such a tactic in no sense meant sacrificing freedom of criticism or action on the part of the communist party. Only through ruthless criticism of social democratic and centrist leaders could communists defend the immediate interests of the working class and win the masses to communism. This was clearly stated in the directives on the United Front issued by the Executive Committee of the CI (ECCI) in December 1921.

"The principal conditions which are equally categorical for communist parties of all countries are, in the view of the ECCI

1. J. Degras, The Communist International - Documents Vol. I. (Frank Cass 1971) p.308.



... the absolute independence of every CP which enters into agreement with the parties of the Second and Two and a half Internationals, its complete freedom to put forward its own views and to criticise the opponents of communism. While accepting a basis for action, communists must retain the unconditional right of the policy of all working class organisations without exception not only before and after action has been taken but also if necessary DURING ITS COURSE. In no circumstances can these rights be surrendered. While supporting the slogan of the greatest possible unity of all workers' organisations in every PRACTICAL ACTION AGAINST THE CAPITALIST FRONT, communists may in no circumstances desist from putting forward their views, which are the only consistent expression of the defence of the working class interests as a whole." (2)

It was the failure to carry out precisely this method that led the C.P. G.B. in the mid-twenties to an opportunist practice in its relationship to the T.U. lefts and in the Minority Movement itself.

From the 3rd Congress onwards the Executive of the Comintern was much preoccupied with putting this turn into effect, having to persuade, cajole and direct parties which still clung to ultra-left and sectarian positions. (3) The British party was no exception to this. While arguing for the united front consistently in its paper, it nevertheless delayed setting up an opposition organisation in the T.U.s. The basis for such a movement had already been outlined at the 4th Congress of the C.I.

"As far as Britain is concerned, we see clearly that it would be disastrous if the party contented itself with organising its forces only within its little Party nuclei. The aim must be to create a more numerous opposition trade union movement. Our aim must be that our communist groups should act as a point of crystallisation around which the opposition elements will concentrate. The aim must be to create, to marshal, to intergrate the opposition forces, and the Communist Party itself will grow concurrently with the growth of the opposition. There must be established a relationship between the party organisation and the opposition, which by its very nature is heterogeneous—in such a manner that the communists could not be charged with striving to mechanically dominate the entire opposition movement. This goal—i.e. the goal of winning the working masses for communism—we must work for under these circumstances with the utmost care, definiteness, and staying power." (4)

In fact for a whole period from 1922 to mid 1924 the British Bureau of the RILU, encouraged by the ECCI took the initiative in building such a movement. 'Black Friday, the 15th April 1921, when the NUR and Transport Unions failed to support the miners in their fight against drastic wage cuts, thus effectively breaking up the Triple alliance, showed clearly that the union leaders were unwilling to fight. Throughout the mining crisis the Communist Party had mounted a campaign under the slogan 'Watch your leaders', warning that the officials of the Triple Alliance unions were likely to betray the miners. In the following year the Engineering Employers Federation locked out AEU members over an agreement accepted by the AEU executive but rejected by the rank and file. The RILU organised a 'Stop the Retreat' conference attended by 200 delegates representing 150,000 workers. Following the defeat of the engineers, and other sections of workers, there was a serious decline in T.U. membership. Again the RILU organised a series of conferences as part of a 'Back to the Unions Campaign'—calling for united resistance to attacks on wages and hours, T.U. affiliation to RILU, and the reorganisation of the T.U.s into real fighting organisations.

Throughout the period up to the formation of the Minority Movement, the two papers of the British branch of the RILU "ALL POWER" and "THE WORKER" (published in Glasgow) and the Communist Party's press—"THE COMMUNIST" and later "WORKERS WEEKLY", reflect the development of the tactic of the united front in relation to the trade unions. The relationship of the party to a movement to transform the unions, the aims of such a movement and most importantly the debate over what a programme for mobilizing

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Workers Power is producing a monthly newspaper in October.

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the rank and file against the bureaucrats should be, filled the pages of the party's papers and journals.

The party argued for the united front by taking as its starting point the situation facing the working class. The capitalists encouraged by 'Black Friday' were on the offensive in all industries, aiming to cut wages and break union organisation. 'The Communist' pointed out that neither the present leadership of the unions nor the old methods of struggle were capable of combatting this offensive, only if the unions were transformed into fighting organs of the class and those leaders unwilling to fight swept aside could the working class defend its living standards and go onto the offensive. ALL POWER pointed out in July 1922.

"The most moderate man amongst the workers can see that the capitalist offensive has called for a complete break with the sectional tactics which characterised disputes before the war. Yet every struggle from the miners lockout down to the terrible defeat of the engineers has witnessed the same old tactics the same old methods. We forget nothing yet we learn nothing. Every leader of every union looks at every question not from a class standpoint, but from the narrow view of how it is going to effect his little tinpot union." (5)

The RILU-organised 'Stop the Retreat' conference was aimed precisely at building such a united front against the bosses offensive, around a fighting programme. Clearly such a strategy had nothing in common with "dual unionism"—the setting up of break-away revolutionary trade unions. Gallagher, joint secretary of the RILU made it quite clear

"The essential aim of the British Bureau is not to organise independent revolutionary trade unions, or to split revolutionary elements away from the existing organisations affiliated to the TUC... but to convert the revolutionary minority within each industry into a revolutionary majority." (6)

In an article entitled "Sweep them aside (Referring to the reactionary T.U. leaders—Ed), rank and file must build a Minority Movement", THE WORKER spelled out the tasks of such a movement

- "In every union the rank and file forces must be gathered  
 1—around a fighting programme.  
 2—around concrete demands for union consolidation and re-organisation.  
 3—around the necessity for creating a new ideology amongst the union membership.  
 4—around the necessity of training and developing a new leadership to replace the old." (7)

The Minority Movement proposals for "consolidation and re-organisation" of the Trade Union movement covered four main areas—the building of factory and workshop committees in the workplaces, transforming the trades councils, the amalgamation of sectional craft unions into industrial unions, and transforming the T.U.C. General Council into a 'general staff of the labour movement'. All the demands were directed at overcoming the chronic craft and sectional divisions in the British Trade Unions.

Factory committees were to unite all workers in a particular workplace, regardless of skill or craft presenting a united front of workers to the employers offensive in the factories. They were to be the primary organs to fight for and put into practice workers control of production. The building of factory committees, and their affiliation to local trades councils was seen as running alongside the fight for amalgamation of the unions. The Trades Councils were to be transformed so as to reflect the entire labour movement in a locality, and provide its local leadership. Their constitution had to be changed to allow onto them representatives of all working class organisations in the area—the factory committees, district committees of the unions, bone fide working class political organisations, the co-operative guilds, labour colleges etc. as well as the TU branches. The scourge of sectionalism and craftism which divided the working class and made a united front against the capitalists doubly difficult had to be removed by the amalgamation of all the unions in one industry—along the lines of the Miners Federation and the N.U.R. At the same time the class needed a centralised leadership in the trade unions which could lead the offensive against capitalism. The T.U.C. in the early twenties was merely a federation of TUs each jealously guarding their autonomy and power. Inter-union rivalry led to poaching of members, to one union manoeuvring with the employers against another, and to black legging by unions during strikes. The General Council had no power to call a general strike or even sympathetic strikes, this was up to the individual union leaderships who fought tooth and nail against any erosion of their power. The fight was to transform the T.U.C. into a real representative body of the labour movement. This meant the affiliation and representation at congress of the trade councils, and creation of a General Council which would consist of the "wisest and most aggressive fighters for the working class". It also meant giving it the power to conduct such a general class-wide fight against the capitalist class, i.e. to call sympathetic and when necessary general strikes.

But the early CP recognised that it was not sufficient for an opposition movement in the unions to fight only for organisational reforms. These couldn't be separated from the fight to create "a new ideology amongst the union membership" and a new leadership. Any organisational reform however radical, if it was divorced from such a political transformation could just as well be utilised by the reactionary trade union

leaders to stifle the class struggle. J.R. Campbell one of the CP leaders pointed this out in an article called "WATCH YOUR SLOGANS" written in early 1924. After warning that demands originally propagated by advanced sections of the movement could well be utilised by labour reactionaries in the interest of conservatism, he goes on to show how both the demand for 'industrial unionism' and for 'more power to the general council' had been perverted by labour bureaucrats. With regard to the former slogan he wrote:

"During the ASLEF strike the social pacifists of the NUR worked this slogan, which was once symbolic of revolutionary trade unionism, to death, and used it as an excuse for the most disgusting strike breaking tactics imaginable." (8)

The CP and the RILU forthrightly supported ASLEF throughout the strike, the Jan 26th issue of THE WORKER running an article under the heading "A craft union which fights is better than industrial union which funks".

"In a similar way we find the slogan 'more power to the General Council' which advanced Trade Unionists have been popularising, finding favour with the Social-pacifist Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, which hopes to see the General Council using its power, not in co-ordinating the workers struggles but in stifling forward movements." (9)

He goes on to say

"Our aim in the union movement must not be merely the conquest of the TU apparatus but the ideological conquest of the membership. Without this the various proposals for a concentration of power in the TU movement might conceivably mean not a concentration of leadership for class struggle purposes, but a Gompers dictatorship in the TU movement of this country. More power to the General Council means more power for good and evil and it may well be evil, if the active men do not succeed in establishing an ascendancy over the mass of workers." (10)

And in a section which might well have been written for the SWP today

"It should be clear to members of minority groups, however, that their task consists of something more than demanding slightly higher wages than the officials are prepared to demand, or by popularising amalgamation proposals. That 'something more' is the popularisation of the conception of trade unionism, not merely as a reformist force under capitalism, but as a revolutionary instrument for participating in the struggle for power, and after the struggle for power, playing a part in the management of industry.

The Minority Movement must popularise this or leave the working class to draw the inevitable conclusion that the only difference between the Left wing of the TU movement and the Right is, that the former are concerned with demanding higher wages increases, and are somewhat impatient about the slow progress of amalgamation." (11)

It was not just the membership that had to be won to such a position but the leadership of the unions as well, either by winning them to the programme of the Minority Movement or sweeping them aside and replacing them with a new leadership. Even here it was clear that

"Every candidate for even the most insignificant post in the TU movement must be judged by where they stand in relation to the conflict of ideas that is going on in the movement . . . The business of the Minority Movement is not merely to wangle positions for those who support its policy. It is the more fundamental task of capturing the rank and file, of recreating the will to fight. Only by those who go into positions of authority in the union movement having behind them a solid basis of rank and file support will be able to make progress."

In this period the party had no illusions in either right or left trade union leaders—and constantly criticised their betrayals and vacillations.

In October 1924 Campbell was arguing

"It would be a suicidal policy, however, for the CP and the MM to place too much reliance on what we have called

2. Degras op cit p.313.

3. The KPD for instance under its 'left' Maslow/Fisher leadership appears to have come into constant criticism from the CI for its failure to work consistently for the united front in the Social Democratic Trade Unions.

4. Fourth Congress of CI Abridged Report (CPGB 1923) p.226-7.

5. 'ALL POWER' July 1923. Monthly paper of the British Bureau of the RILU.

6. Quoted in Roderick Martin - Communism and the British Trade Unions 1924-33. Oxford 1969. p.29.

7. 'WORKER' No.252. September 22 1923.

8. 'Watch Your Slogans' COMMUNIST REVIEW September 22 1923.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid

11. Ibid.

the official left wing. On problems of TU organisation this element is fairly clear, on other problems it has not broken away from the right position. It is the duty of our party and the MM to criticise its weakness relentlessly and endeavour to change the muddled and incomplete left wing viewpoint of the more progressive leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint. But revolutionary workers must never forget that their main activity must be devoted to capturing the masses." (12)

The British CP set off with a clear conception of the tasks of a united front in the TU movement—it was to bring together around a fighting programme a revolutionary minority which set itself the task of conquering and transforming the entire trade union movement. To turn unions which under capitalism were the instruments for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution into the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.

### DEBATING THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED FRONT.

Around what sort of programme could such a movement be built? This was a question that preoccupied both the International and the British party in the period before 1922–1924. The programme debate in the Comintern is outside the scope of this article. There were important differences over the International's programme but clearly there was a recognition of the need for each party to develop a programme—the ACTION PROGRAMME of the party—which started out from the immediate needs of the class, which was made up of 'partial', 'immediate' or 'transitional' demands, the fight for which would educate and organise the proletariat for the necessity of seizing state power. The Theses on Tactics adopted by the Third Congress (July 1921) sums up this method:

"The alternative offered by the Communist International in place of the minimum programme of the reformists and centrists is: the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for demands which, in their application, undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, which organise the proletariat, and which form the transition to proletarian dictatorship, even if certain groups of the masses have not yet grasped the meaning of such proletarian dictatorship . . .

All concrete watch words, originating in the needs of the workers must be utilised to focus and stimulate the struggle for the control of production, which must not assume the form of a bureaucratic organisation of the social economy under capitalism, but of an organisation fighting against capitalism through the workers committees as well as through revolutionary TUs." (13)

This was the programmatic method used by the Communist Party in working out its programme for the Minority Movement, the communist programme swivelled to the situation facing the trade unions in the 20s. Such a programme was by no means restricted to "trade union issues" but dealt also with the question of government and the application of the keystone of the united front the Workers Government slogan. A discussion article in WORKERS WEEKLY in 1923 entitled "TOWARDS AN IMMEDIATE PROGRAMME" followed this method in outlining such a programme.

"The only way to do this (develop a real movement which could show a way out of the crisis) is to formulate a clear programme of action that will give definite immediate objects for which all can unite." It must answer "the immediate concrete needs of the mass of workers.

A workers government must be at the forefront of our programme. But in calling for a workers government we have in mind a definite working class programme of action, which we must endeavour to force through in any case.

The whole force of the working class must force the Govern-

ment to intervene on the basis of State control of the banks and credit houses. Idle factories to be taken over by the state without compensation and run by the workers. Similarly all land. Workers control commissions to check the management and regulation of all production taken over by the state.

These are the demands for immediate action to meet the present crisis and must be raised alongside

Minimum wage of £4 a week.

Shorter hours the 6 hour day.

Full maintenance of the unemployed at minimum wage rates.

How will the money be found it will be asked? Our answer is simple, the state can raise the money, if it will seriously begin to tax the gigantic incomes of the rich.

Abolition of all indirect taxation which burdens the workers.

All taxation to be based on income and fall on wealth.

Alongside these demands goes our proposals for the reorganisation of the labour movement." (14)

Such programmes were put forward in the WORKERS WEEKLY and in the WORKER throughout the early 20s. They centred on the demands for the minimum wage, the 44 hours week and abolition of overtime, on Government schemes under TU control for absorbing the unemployed, and for nationalisation of the banks and key industries without compensation under workers control. Alongside these were raised demands on the Labour Government, class on the TUC for international trade union unity; and the demands for reorganisation of the trade unions. Each demand was explained in detail in articles in the Party's paper before and after the RILU and 1st MM Conferences. The Labour Party Executive's programme for the Labour Party conferences were dissected in the pages of the paper and contrasted with the programme a workers-government would be pledged to. In this way the paper of the party and of the Minority Movement provided a coherent alternative to the programme of the reformist labour and trade union leaders and argued a fighting strategy to carry it out.

This political method was not used without mistakes and corrective argument took place within the party and between the party and the Comintern. The party's use of the united front and the Workers Government slogan during the 1922 election campaign reveals the fact that the party was still learning and absorbing the method of communist tactics and in this situation the advice and guidance of the Comintern was crucial in correcting these errors. In August 1922 the party had withdrawn all its candidates who had been adopted in opposition to official labour candidates leaving only candidates who had been adopted by CLPs or not opposed by them.

12. Quoted in Woodhouse - Marxism and Stalinism in Britain 1920-26. In Communism in Britain (New Park 1975 p.82)

13. Report of the Third Congress of the Communist International CPGB. London 1921.

14. Workers Weekly. November 26th 1923. Signed with the pseudonym Practicus. Similar arguments are found in the April issue of the Communist Review, the party's theoretical journal where an article arguing the importance of the working out of a positive programmatic alternative to the programme of the Labour Party - a programme for a workers government - says: "The party will attain its leadership and group the masses behind it, only in proportion as it can put forward a positive programme of action to drive home the moral of the destructive criticism of its opponents. The time is amply due for a positive answer to the questions advanced. What kind of answer it is we shall see. But just as the Communist MP is no longer the old type of MP, but a herald of transition. . . circumstances simply do not permit us to postpone the question of a transitional programme. There is an exact parallel between this question and the question of transitional or fighting programmes which are being worked out just now - at last in each industry by the party union nuclei and the RILU minority groups." The Workers Government - the need for a programme. Communist Review, April 1923.

15. CPGB electoral programme quoted in L.J. Macfarlane - The British Communist Party. (MacGibbon and Kee 1966) p.101.

16. The Communist 25th November 1922. Quoted in Macfarlane op cit p.101.

17. Report of the 4th Congress of Comintern - CPGB London 1923.

18. February 17th 1923. Workers Weekly.

19. February 15th 1924. Workers Weekly.

20. February 29th. 1924. Workers Weekly.

21. Workers Weekly January 11th 1923.

They went on to urge workers to vote for the labour party and transform it into "an instrument for revolutionary progress". (15) After the elections the central committee of the party declared that the great victories at the polls including the C.P.s had produced a new alignment of political forces. On the one side stood the political defenders of capitalism: on the other the Labour Party as representative of the working class supported in their struggles by the communist members in the House of Commons. (16) This opportunist use of the united front tactic, was quickly condemned at the 4th congress of the Comintern by the ECCI and by Radek at the Congress:

"How does the British Communist Party apply its united front tactics? It says 'we are a section of the working class namely its left wing. Nevertheless we wish to stand together with all the other workers parties.' And then the election address goes on 'What is the Labour Party? The workers are fine fellows, they want to fight but the leaders are not quite so fine.' And then it says 'In the past as in the present there was treachery on the part of the leaders. Such treachery might happen once but nevertheless, the Labour Party is against the capitalists.' By jove if this is a sample of unity tactics we had better leave them alone." (17)

Under the impact of the Comintern's criticism the party recognised its errors. A resolution at the party council in February 1923 notes the mistakes in seeing the united front tactic "as an endeavour to form a bloc of organisations instead of as a unity of the masses in actual struggle." (18) From this period through to the beginning of 1925 the party made no concessions to the Labour Party leaders. Their consistent criticism of every act of cowardice and treachery of labour leaders both right and left brought a torrent of abuse from the centrists of the ILP. Murphy in reply to a charge of the party being 'splitters' put forward the party's position, in a way which was to contrast starkly with the positions he was to be arguing only a year later

"Revolutionary criticism becomes pre-eminently important in the working class as a means of clearing out reformist policies, changing the leadership of the movement and rousing the workers to vigorous action." (19)

A resolution appearing in *WORKERS WEEKLY* in February 1924 sums up the approach of the CP and also, later, that of the MM to the Labour Party now in the position of a minority Government.

"The Communist Party should at once enter on a widespread campaign both for the promises made by the labour leaders as

well as for other immediate slogans calculated to mobilise the class conscious section of the working class for common action. These slogans which should be simple, clear and expressive of the most pressing demands of the revolutionary workers, should be declared in a PROGRAMME OF ACTION of the communist party.

It should induce workers to demand that the Labour Government adopts a "bold policy" in defence of British workers and the oppressed—especially in Ireland. Without regard as to whether a bloc of two capitalist parties might overthrow it.

- a) In connection with unemployment—state control workers control of idle factories
- b) Nationalisation of railways and mines
- c) Measures for the emancipation of Ireland, Egypt and India
- d) Struggle against the threat of war in Europe
- e) Measures to arouse new sections of the proletariat." (20)

Even in 1924, a debate was continuing, as it was in other sections of the Comintern, over the nature of an "immediate" programme which reflected the leadership's lack of clarity on the question.

J.P. Murphy, an Executive Committee member of the Party attacked the concept of an 'immediate' or 'transitional' programme which he argued did not constitute a programme for socialism and was therefore reformist. He argued instead for a fight on the question of higher wages, hours etc. while arguing the full communist programme. Murphy still worked with a maximum/minimum approach reminiscent of the policies of the old SLP. This error was taken up by a writer under the pseudonym 'Practicus'. There was, he said

"no room left for the old spirit of alternating sectarianism and reformism: which denies the possibility of the workers united front, and then after proclaiming that only the social revolution can break workers chains sees no practical immediate policy other than that of the MacDonaldis or Webbs." (21)

That such confusion existed in the British party on the nature of a 'transitional' programme reflected the debate in the Comintern over the same question. Bukharin at this time was arguing a position along similar lines to Murphy's. Bukharin's draft was put forward to the 4th congress and was referred back. It contained no immediate or transitional demands but was content to put forward only the maximum programme—the marxist position on the state, imperialism, national defense etc. Demands relating to the united front, and the workers government were "really not part of a programme—(but) a programme of action which should deal with purely tactical questions, and

*The CPSU leaders 1926. On the left Trotsky and Zinoviev. At the microphone Voroshilov. On the extreme right Stalin and Rykov.*



which might be altered once a fortnight." (22) The question was not finally settled at the congress but referred to future discussion (23). Both these debates emphasise the importance of the Comintern for the British party whose individual leaders spent long periods with the ECCI in Moscow and at the Congresses of the CI and RILU. For a relatively inexperienced party like the British the debates and guidance of the Comintern were crucial for developing communist tactics in the British labour movement.

## THE FOUNDING OF THE MINORITY MOVEMENT

By May 1924 the CP had been convinced of the necessity to build a national opposition movement in the Trade Unions under the leadership of the party. The first MM conference represented a culmination of the work of the British branch RILU in initiating MMs in individual industries and of the programmatic debate in the British party in the period 22-24. (24). In taking this decision the party was clear that the aim was to win, via the united front, the mass of workers over to communism.

"The existing organisations of the workers no longer respond to the new demands of the workers for united action to secure common demands. Hence the workers are forced into a struggle with the existing reformist leadership in order to realise their most immediate needs and demands. The growing opposition movements now springing up in the leading trade unions, industries and the Labour Party, are the first expression of the concrete raising of the demands of the workers and of a definite challenge to the existing leadership . . .

As the fight develops, new leaders will be thrown up out of the ranks of the workers, who will either have boldy to lead, or be cast aside as the workers sweep forward in their fight for the realisation of their demands.

Therefore the Communist Party, while working inside the minority movements, will on no account sacrifice its separate existence or limit its freedom of agitation and propaganda. On the contrary, while assisting and leading the workers in their everyday struggles, it considers it to be its duty at all times to intensify the struggle, and explain to the workers the real nature of the issues involved. By these means, it will win the workers to the Party in ever-increasing numbers, and prepare the

# COMMUNIST REVIEW

The new theoretical journal of the Workers Power group. Number One, focussing on the Irish struggle, out January 1979. Articles include:

The Land Question in Ireland  
Permanent Revolution and Ireland  
Republicanism  
Communist strategy in an imperialised nation.  
Party and Programme Part 4: The Communist  
International.  
plus reviews.

working class for the real problem that confronts them, that of the conquest of power." (25)

The immediate demands and new methods of struggle which were to lay the basis of the programme of the minority movement were laid down in the manifesto and resolutions adopted by the first MM conference, held at Battersea Town Hall on 23/24 August 1924. In a manifesto directed towards the forthcoming Hull Congress of the TUC the MM points out that while certain changes had taken place in official policy since the 1923 Plymouth congress, reflected in the approach of the General Council to the unemployed movement, and in the stand made at Vienna by the British delegation for the admission of the Russian TUs into the Amsterdam International, "these developments have not been accompanied by any change in the character of the whole leadership or the policy of the movement as a whole.

While the past 12 months has shown the increasing stagnation and decay of the old leadership they have also seen a great revival of working class activity to which the official movement has been wholly unable to give direction." (26)

Going on to discuss the issues facing the Hull congress the manifesto says:

"The first and most important of all is that of the labour government. This is not a question outside trade unionism but the central question for trade unionism. Every question of working class advance and working class policy turns on the Labour Government, and the action of workers in relation to it . . . On every side it is realised that trade unionism is not enough and that only a workers government can solve these problems . . ." (27)

The manifesto lists the strike breaking role of the labour Government since it came into office and declared

"at home and abroad it has declared itself the servant of the capitalist state, and of all commercial and financial interests. It has failed to take one single step towards the only object of working class organisation the conquest of power, in order to break the power of capitalism, and establish working class control of economic and social condition." (28)

The emergency resolution on the labour government at the conference outlines a policy towards the labour government for the trade unions and working class.

"The many pressing problems facing the workers can only be effectively dealt with when there is a unifying of demands and methods of struggle. It is essential that we have a Labour Government which will act on behalf of the workers and by using the whole resources of the State make it possible for the workers to go forward in a real fight for their demands. The Government should be under the control and responsible to the organised working class movement, and the Trades Unions must see that this is done, for only then will it be possible to force the Government to act in the interests of the working class as a whole.

This Conference calls upon the Trades Union Congress to immediately take steps to bring about such control, and urges that Congress to demand that the Labour Government shall immediately repeal all legislation of a character inimical to the interests of the working class. In particular the Conference demands that the Labour Government shall immediately repeal the Emergency Powers Act, abolish the Sedition Law of 1797 and all other Seditious Laws, and refuse to use any of the armed forces of the State in any industrial dispute, or allow any police protection of blacklegs.

If the Government refuse to carry out such measures, then the workers will not fail to recognise in such refusal a complete betrayal of the best interests of the working class, and this Conference pledges itself to do all in its power by active propaganda and agitation in the working class organisations it represents to force the Government to act long the lines laid down in this resolution." (29)

The conference passed resolutions on wages, hours, the unemployed movement, Young and Women workers, International trade union unity as well as on factory committees and the trades councils. The resolution on factory committees stressed

"Every worker no matter what age, sex, colour, creed or race, he or she may be—shall be organised and come within the protecting power of the factory committee of the concern for which he or she is working. Factory, workshop, mine, mill, garage, railway station, ship and dockyard committees must be formed to embrace all workers in the particular undertaking.

The factory committees must be an integral part of the working class. Where craft unions oppose their formation the factory committees should boldly meet this opposition, particularly by becoming affiliated to Trades Councils." (30)

The resolutions on trades councils argued for the councils

'to focus, to combine under one central local leadership, all the forces of the working class movement.' To do this 'they must regard themselves not solely as strike' committees or local L.P.s, but as the leading 'class organs' of the workers in the towns and districts for expressing every phase of the working class activity. And they must widen their constitutions so as to admit 'all' the organised forces of the workers—industrial, political, co-operative, educational and social. They must become the centres about which are massed all the local TU branches and District Committees branches of bone fide working class political organisations, co-operative guilds, labour colleges etc.'" (31)

The much criticised position of calling for the transformation of the TUC general council into 'the general staff of the labour movement' was not posed mechanically as an organisational device, as the CP was to pose it later in the run up to the 'general' strike, but linked absolutely to the ideological and organisational transformation of the unions.

"It must not be imagined that the increase of the powers of the General Council will have the tendency to make it less reactionary. On the contrary, the tendency will be for it to become even more so. When the employing capitalist class realise that the General Council is really the head of the Trade Union movement much more capitalist 'influence' will be brought to bear upon it, the members and officials of the General Council will be much more 'honoured', given Government jobs, flattered and bamboozled than they are at present. The capitalist class will desire to make of the General Council a machine for preventing strikes, for holding the workers in check., for ensuring the smooth-running of capitalist industry and for the soothing away any tendency to revolt on the part of the workers. Already the General Council is a nest of the reactionary Trade Union bureaucracy, and if the Trade Union movement is to remain organisationally and ideologically what it is at present, any increase of the Council's prestige and power is likely to make it more so.

This very real danger has to be guarded against. The nec-

cessity of re-organising the Trade Union movement, sweeping away the craft barriers to unity, and establishing a united class front against the capitalist class is so imperative, and is historically so completely a logical development of the Trade Union movement, that to satisfy that necessity this danger must be braved. How can we guard against it? The reactionaries desire a General Council which will check and dissipate all advances of the workers. We, of the Minority Movement, desire a General Council which will bring into being a bold and audacious General Staff of the Trade Union movement, fearlessly using its power in intelligently planned campaigns on behalf of the workers, mobilising the workers' forces, re-organising these forces, fitting them in every way to fight against and finally to overcome and suppress the forces of capitalism. We can guard against the General Council becoming a machine of the capitalists, and can really evolve from the General Council a Workers' General Staff only by, in the first place and fundamentally, developing a revolutionary class consciousness amongst the Trade Union membership, and in the second place by so altering the constitution of the General Council as to ensure that those elected thereon have the closest contact with the workers and are the most trusted, most loyal, and most clear-minded and audacious champions of the working class." (32)

Using the method of addressing the principle strategic and tactical problems faced by the British working class in the early twenties — a labour movement crippled in the fight back by a fragmented and craft prejudiced and antiquated trade union structure — the CP was able to show that any serious attempt to mobilise against the employer/state offensive necessitated tackling the question of the transition to socialism. Using an action programme based on this method, consisting of a series of interlinked, immediate and transitional demands, the CP was developing the ability to fight alongside reformist workers and demonstrate in action the inevitable necessity of seizing state power. The CP followed this method of work in the campaigns organised through the British Bureau of the RILU around the engineering lock out of 1922 and the 'Stop the Retreat' conference organised in its support, in the series of local conferences held in key industrial towns in the Autumn of 1922 as part of a 'Back to the Unions' campaign and in the London Docks Strike of 1923 where the London strike committee issued a programme of demands drawn up by the Communist Party. This work was further consolidated in 1924 with a series of conferences in major unions to organise a Minority Movement fraction and work out a fighting programme for the industry concerned. It was this experience in using the communist united front tactic that was codified and summarised in the resolutions and manifesto of the first Minority Movement conference.

The development of this communist united front tactic by the British party was to be cut short by the political developments in the USSR. The growing power and independence of the centrist bureaucracy in Russia under Stalin was to have a profound impact on the Comintern and the British party. The triumph of Zinoviev's political positions at the 5th Congress marked the beginning of a short 'left-centrist' period for the International. The equating of the workers government slogan with the dictatorship of the proletariat signalled the end of the united front tactic as developed by the Comintern between 1921–24, and its replacement with a version of the united front only 'from below'. (33)

By 1925 the workers government slogan had vanished from the pages of WORKERS WEEKLY and the emphasis on the united front itself had been replaced with the empty slogan 'build a mass communist party'. The party was thrown off course at a crucial moment in its history (and at a crucial moment for the history of the British working class). More disastrous still was the pressure on the party of the 'right-centrist' section of the Russian bureaucracy (the Stalin-Bukharin-Tomsky faction) exerted through the Russian Trade Unions and the effects of their tactics within the Anglo-Russian trade union committee. A pressure which led to a chronic failure on the part of the British party to criticise in the working class, the vacillations of the left of the General Council and prepare it for that body's treachery during the general strike, in essence applying the united front in AN OPPORTUNIST RATHER THAN a communist fashion.

The vacillation of the Comintern under Zinoviev left the British party without a rudder, the pressure of the Stalinist

22. Bukharin Debate on Programme. 4th Congress.

23. The question was finally settled for the Comintern when Bukharin presented his programme for socialism in one country at the 6th Congress.

24. MMs were set up in the Mining, Metal and Transport industries, each with a programme for the industry and were represented at the first MM conference. The Miners MM had the largest influence, having its own paper and being instrumental in getting A.J. Cook (an ILPer and ex-member of the party) elected secretary of the MFGB in 1924.

The first conference had over 270 delegates representing, according to the report of the conference "over 200,000 workers". While the figure needs to be treated with some caution, trades councils' entire affiliated membership were counted for instance, the conference represented significant forces in the trade union movement, particularly in mining and engineering.

25. Resolution on Minority Movement passed at the 6th Congress of CPGB (May 1924)

26. Report of (First) National Minority Conference. NMM London 1924. Manifesto of the NMM to the TUC. p.5.

27. Ibid. p.5

28. Ibid p.6.

29. Emergency Resolution on Labour Government. op. cit. p.9.

30. Resolution on Factory Committees. op. cit. p.12.

31. Resolution on Trades Councils. op. cit. p.14.

32. Resolution on the Concentration of Trade Union Power in the General Council of the TUC. op. cit. p.16.

33. See the Workers Government: Problems in the Application of a Slogan. Workers Power No.5.

bureaucracy was to steer it firmly onto the rocks of opportunism.

## SECTION II: THE DEGENERATION OF THE MINORITY MOVEMENT'

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION UNITY AND THE ANGLO-RUSSIAN COMMITTEE: THE INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN PARTY.

The question of International trade union unity had been central to the propaganda of the Profintern (RILU) since the adoption of the United Front tactic in 1922. A systematic campaign had been carried out since then for a unified world trade union international directed at the executive of the IFTU. The IFTU had no interest in convening an international conference on trade union unity and broke off correspondence with the RILU at the beginning of 1923. The responsibility for splitting the world movement was thus demonstrated to lie with the IFTU. The national CPs and trade union RILU sympathisers continued to conduct campaigns to force the Amsterdamers to the conference table. The responsibility for continuing the united front offensive then fell to Tomsky and the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, as the Amsterdamers had indicated they would talk only with the Russian trade unions. Here also the approaches for an international conference were turned down, the IFTU agreeing to a meeting 'only on the sole basis of the rules and policies of the IFTU', a condition guaranteeing a refusal from the communists. It was in this context that co-operation of the General Council of the British T.U.C. who were willing to support an IFTU/Russian TU Conference became an important lever against the IFTU. Thus the question of international trade union unity became central to the British party's propaganda in 1925.

Early 1924 had seen a strengthening of the 'left' in the General Council of the TUC. The good old reformist principle of separation of 'politics' from trade unionism led to the resignation of all council members who had taken official positions in the first labour government under MacDonald. Five members left the General Council all of them on the right wing—including J.H. Thomas and Margaret Bondfield, the two most notorious class collaborators in the movement. This significantly strengthened the 'lefts' on the council with A.A. Purcell becoming its chairman and George Hicks another left winger replacing Thomas on the International Committee. Following discussion with Tomsky and other Russian trade unionists, the General Council agreed to raise the question of world trade union unity at Amsterdam. This was done at the June IFTU meeting, where the British delegates headed by Purcell and Bromley stopped the IFTU breaking off negotiations and moved an amendment instructing the executive to continue consultations with the Russians. (34)

It was this shift to the left in the General Council under the pressure of rising militancy in the working class in Britain (A. J. Cook was elected secretary of the MFBG (Miners Fed. G.B.) the day the Soviet delegations arrived in London) which gave rise to the proposal for an Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee from the communists. The committee was seen as part of the united front tactic, entered into from above as well as below, aimed at pinning the General Council to its commitment to work for trade union unity in front of the masses of British and Russian workers.

Undoubtedly even at this time there were very different conceptions of the purposes of such a committee amongst the leaders of the Russian party. Trotsky was fully in favour of using the committee as part of a communist united front tactic. Writing in 1927 he says

"The creation of the Anglo-Russian committee (ARC) was at a certain juncture an absolutely correct step. Under the left-

# CHRONOLOGY

## 1920

- May 10th: Dockers refuse to load munitions ship (Jolly George) bound for Poland which was at war with the Soviet Republic.
- July: Foundation Congress of the CPGB (July 31st - August 1st)
- August: National Council of Action (set up by the TUC and the Labour Party) threatens a general strike if Britain becomes further embroiled in intervention against Russia.
- September: TUC Portsmouth. Resolution to set up the General Council as a 'co-ordinating body for the whole movement.'
- Autumn: World crisis erupts; massive increase in unemployment.

## 1921

- April 15th: Black Friday; Miners Strike, April to June.
- June/July: Third Congress of the Comintern.
- July: RILU, first Congress.
- December: Theses on the United Front issued by the Executive Committee of the Comintern.

## 1922

- March - June: Engineers lock out.
- October: Fifth Congress of the CPGB. Re-organisation along the lines of the Dutt-Pollit commission.
- November/December: Fourth Congress of the Comintern  
Second Congress of RILU.

## 1923

- October: Crisis in Germany. Workers Government crushed in Saxony. KPD grossly mishandles the situation.  
Trotsky publishes 'Lessons of October'. Platform of the 46 issued in the Russian Party calling for serious democratisation of Party life.
- December: General Election in Britain. Creation of the first Labour Government.

## 1924

- June: Fifth Comintern Congress condemns 'Trotskyism'.
- July: Third RILU Congress.
- August: First Conference of the Minority Movement.
- September: Hull TUC. Tomsky, head of the Russian Trade Unions, warmly received.
- October: Decision taken to form the Anglo - Russian Trade Union Committee.
- November: Stalin first formulates the theory of Socialism in One Country.  
British TUC delegation goes to Russia.
- December: General Election in Britain — Tories returned.

34. See D.F. Calhoun - The United Front - The TUC and the Russians 1923-1928 p.55.





# WHAT THE MINORITY MOVEMENT STANDS FOR

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*The original cover  
of the Minority  
Movement  
pamphlet explaining  
its programme*

ward development of the working masses, the liberal labour politicians, just like the bourgeois liberals at the start of a revolutionary movement made a step to the left, in order to maintain their influence among the masses.

To reach out to them at that time was absolutely correct. However it had to be clearly kept in mind that, just like all liberals, the English reformists would inevitably make a leap backwards to the side of opportunism, as the mass movement openly assumed revolutionary forms." (35)

It was this position, which Trotsky held throughout the existence of the ARC, which led him to become increasingly concerned at the way the ARC was viewed by the majority of the Politburo and at the impact that this view was having on the young British party. In his book "Where is Britain Going?" (36) and in a series of articles in *Inprecor* and *Communist International*, many of them delayed, some of them altered by the editors, Trotsky tried to issue increasingly urgent warnings to the British party of the dangers of sowing illusions in the likes of Purcell, Cook, Hicks and co. Despite the opportunist distortion of the united front tactic, emanating from the Russian party Trotsky still defended the value of the tactic:

"The tactic of the united front still retains all its power as the most important method of struggle for the masses. A basic principle of the tactic is "with the masses - always; with the vacillating leaders - sometimes, but only so long as they stand at the head of the masses." It is necessary to make use of the leaders while the masses are pushing them ahead, without for a moment abandoning criticism of these leaders. And it is necessary to break with them at the right time when they turn from vacillation to hostile action and betrayal. It is necessary to use the occasion of the break to expose the traitorous leaders and to contrast their position to that of the masses." (37)

Such a view of the ARC committee was not shared by the other members of the Politburo. Zinoviev's view, as head of the Comintern, was important in influencing the line of the British party. For Zinoviev the development of the British party was progressing too slowly for the objective possibilities being offered by the developments in the British labour movement, it was necessary to find a short cut to the development of a "mass communist party" in Britain. For Zinoviev the Trade Union and labour party left offered just such a possibility giving rise to his statement at the 5th Congress of the Comintern that:

"We do not know exactly when the communist mass party of England will come, whether only through the Stewart-MacManus door or through some other door." (38)

This approach, the opportunist side of Zinoviev's left-sectarian 'united front only from below' position, saw the ARC as a short cut to revolutionising the masses, a lasting bloc between the communists and the lefts, between the Russian and British Trade Union leaderships. The result as Trotsky pointed out was that:

"The struggle to win the masses organised in trade unions through the communist party was replaced by the hope for the swiftest possible utilisation of the ready made apparatus of the trade unions for the purposes of revolution. . . out of this false position flowed the later policy of the ARC" (39)

While Zinoviev saw a bloc with the left leaders as a means of swiftly revolutionising the trade unions, Stalin and Bukharin, already developing the theory of socialism in one country were indifferent or even cynical about these perspectives. They placed the emphasis on using the bloc to prevent a war of intervention by the British government against the Soviet Union. At the 15th Conference of the Russian party (April 1925) on the eve of the formation of the committee Stalin emphasised that revolution in the West was likely to be delayed, possibly for decades, and that strengthening links with the British trade union organisation was the best method in the meantime to ensure that the British bourgeoisie did not attack Soviet Russia. Bukharin was to elaborate this approach arguing at the ECCI in May 1927 that the approach taken by the Russian party to the Anglo Russian committee couldn't be considered from the stand-

point of the international revolutionary struggle of the proletariat but from the standpoint of a diplomatic counter-action to the offensive of imperialism against the USSR. This approach to the united front, put forward by Stalin and Bukharin and supported by Tomskey, was summed up thus by Trotsky:

"The new principle of opportunist exceptions "in particular important cases" can find broad application. The orientation on the opportunist chiefs of the labour movement will be motivated everywhere by the necessity of avoiding intervention. The possibility of building socialism in one country will serve to justify the principle of 'non-interference'. That is how the various ends will be knotted together into a noose that will strangle to death the revolutionary principles of Bolshevism." (40)

This opportunist approach to the united front, emanating from the Russian party and trade unions and the Comintern was to have a dramatic effect on the British party's application of the tactic in relation to the 'left' leaders of the trade unions and was to bring about the centrist degeneration of the party's work in the minority movement.

## COURTING THE LEFT WING

The Hull congress of the TUC, to which Tomskey had been invited as a fraternal delegate from the Soviet trade unions, met a week after the first minority movement conference in September 1924. Harry Pollit, a leading member of the CP, put an emergency resolution calling for a world trade union unity congress without conditions on the participants. Only two delegates spoke in support of the proposal, and the resolution was overwhelmingly defeated. However the attitude of the congress was to change considerably after Tomskey's speech in which he argued that the Russians had been forced because of their exclusion from Amsterdam to set up the RILU. The RILU he suggested "may be a good thing or a bad thing.

35. Amendments to the resolution on the Situation in Britain 1927. Leon Trotsky on Britain. Pathfinder Press 1973. p.260.

36. Published in Britain in February 1926.

37. Resolution on the General Strike put forward to the Central Committee of CPSU by the United Opposition signed by Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Piatakov, Krupskaya. Leon Trotsky 'On Britain' Pathfinder 1973. p.255.

38. Abridged Report of the 5th Congress of the Comintern 17th June 8th July 1924. (CPGB 1924) Robert Stewart and Arthur Macmanus were two leading members of the British party.

39. A Balance Sheet of the ARC - July 28th. op cit. 288

40. The Struggle for Peace and the Anglo Russian Committee. Trotsky on Britain. p.278.

41. Tomskey quoted in Calhou op cit. p.85.

42. Communist Review (Oct 24)

43. In a speech to the Russian trade union congress for instance he said "I believe that the real basis for international unity must be a definite anti-capitalist class organisation and not some mere form of unity. We say it is our duty to assist in the abolition of capitalism from our midst and to secure the emancipation of our class, remembering always that there are no foreigners". This was typical of the type of speeches being made by the 'lefts' at this time. The section above appears in a boxed quote, without comment in the Worker of January 31st 1925.

44. The Worker No.321 January 17th 1925.

45. The speech itself is revealing of Cook's approach to the Minority Movement, he says "The gravest dangers we have to face are written within our own ranks. Therefore we must proceed cautiously; we must remember that this movement can only be an educational and propagandist body inside the unions" (our emphasis) and "You must realise, comrades, the difficulties and responsibilities of leadership particularly under the present form of organisation." This was from the most 'left-wing' member of the General Council and secretary of the most militant union in the country. Quoted in The Worker No.323 January 1925.

46. CI. No number. New Series (probably June 1925)

Many people do not like it, but the essential point is that it exists and cannot be ignored." (41) He went on to say how the RILU-Amsterdam split had produced harsh language and that the communist side might have been excessively severe on Amsterdam and called for unity discussions without conditions. Following this remarkably conciliatory speech which reflected the willingness of the section of the Russian bureaucracy he represented to ditch the RILU if it offered the possibility of reaching an accommodation with Amsterdam on reasonable terms, the General Council reopened the unity debate proposing that the congress empowered them to take all possible steps through the IFTU to bring the two parties together, this proposal was passed with acclamation by the congress.

An article entitled "After Hull -What?" written by J.R. Campbell, soon to be editor of WORKERS WEEKLY, was a straw in the wind, presaging the changing position of the CP to the 'lefts' on the General Council:

"It would be a complete mistake to imagine that they are mere right wingers being pushed on from behind by the masses. (There were) genuine progressive elements amongst them that should be encouraged." (42) Following the Hull decision a delegation from the General Council went to Russia in the winter of 1924 to discuss the issue of unity and agreed to form a Anglo-Russian trade union committee to further international trade union unity. The delegation, in which the 'lefts' held a majority, became the 'bette noir' of the capitalist press for their pro-soviet speeches. Purcell in particular was fond of making fiery, revolutionary speeches in front of the Russian workers. (43) THE WORKER, the Minority Movement's paper, was led to remark, with an air of caution that it was soon to abandon:

"... now, we see the curious position of the revolutionaries, actually having to defend the left wing of the trade union leadership from the right wing leaders. The left wing leaders are either going to be forced to openly identify themselves with the minority movement or be forced to line up with the right wing against the minority movement." (44)

The General Council as a whole was unenthusiastic about the ARC and the activities of its Russian delegation and attempted to delay ratification. The Minority Movement immediately organised a national conference to demand the ratification of the committee in January 1925 which was attended by 617 delegates representing 600,000 workers. This conference undoubtedly contributed to pressurising the General Council into ratifying the ARC which it did shortly after, but it should also have revealed to the CP the weakness of the lefts. The General Council not only refused to support the conference but forbade any of the TUC's Russian delegation to speak at it. Even A.J.Cook who was down to give the opening speech (in which he was to describe himself as "a disciple of Marx and humble follower of Lenin") was unwilling to break with his fellow trade union leaders and attend the conference preferring to send a written speech on the pretext of "pressure of work". (45) The conference also gave a clear insight into the relative importance Tomsky and the Russian trade unions attached to the General Council as compared to the Minority Movement. Having heard the Russian trade unions were planning to send delegates to address the conference the General Council sent a telegram urging them not to attend. Within a day a reply was received reassuring the TUC that no delegate should be sent!

Two further developments in early 1925 signalled the changing position of the CP under the impact of the ARC as it was being developed by the Stalin faction. The first was the launching of a 'broad left' newspaper the second was debate between two leading party members Dutt and Murphy. In March 1925 the Sunday Worker was launched on the initiative of the Communist party. It was an "independent" paper, being controlled by shareholders including 24 ILP branches, 35 miners lodges, and 54 Labour Party branches, which set out to be the "unofficial organ of the left-wing". Its contributors included prominent TUC and Labour party lefts - including Purcell, Swales, Hicks, A.J.Cook, Walter Citrine, John Wheatley MP, Ellen Wilkinson MP, James Maxton MP and others. The paper which rapidly exceeded the circulation of the Workers



*Grigori Zinoviev, President of the Comintern 1919 - 1926.*

Weekly was partly financed by the CP and edited by a party member. Its political line, determined by this broad alliance, was consistently softer in its criticism of the 'lefts' of the labour movement than either WORKERS WEEKLY or THE WORKER. These developments led to a sharp exchange between two leading party members Palme Dutt editor of LABOUR MONTHLY and J.T. Murphy who was in charge of the party's industrial department. These conflicting views appeared in the pages of Communist International between February and July of 1925. Dutt, resident abroad owing to ill-health, attacked what he saw as the tendency of the CP to submerge itself in the left-wing of the Labour Party. Echoing Zinoviev's shallow 'leftism' Dutt argued that the Labour Party was in a state of decay and decomposition, and baldly counterposed the necessity of building the only revolutionary alternative - the communist party. Despite these mistaken positions Dutt nevertheless attacked quite correctly the party's softness on the lefts, an attack which was to force Murphy to make more explicit the party's new approach to the 'left-wing'.

"Whereas last year we could only look to Maxton, Kirkwood, Hicks and Purcell etc. as individuals with left tendencies, now we know that large numbers of workers in Labour Party locals, express themselves in support of the sentiments they express, ... Four questions present themselves to our party: shall we help these masses to effectively challenge the leadership they resent? or shall we vigorously attack the prominent leaders who are typical of the movement and drive them further from us in the hope of a direct appeal to the rank and file to join us proving successful? ... There appears to me only one course to take, and that is the first. If we vigorously attack the "left wing leaders" we attack the mass with a similar outlook and drive them away from the party." (46)

It was this opportunist approach to the united front tactic which was to play an increasingly dominant role in the propaganda and agitation of the party. The revolutionary tactic of SUPPORTING every move made by the left leaders in the interests of the working class while "without for a moment abandoning criticism of these leaders" was abandoned. In the period up to the General Strike the party was to boycott the use of its own programme as a measure of, and an alternative to, the actions of the vacillating lefts of the General Council. The policy of criticising exclusively the 'rights' in the trade union movement provided a cover for the inaction of Purcell, Swales, Cook and Co. during the government preparations for the general strike and thus completely disarmed the working class militants grouped in the Minority Movement when the lefts joined the right in selling out the General Strike (47). The change in the party did not pass without comment and criticism at its 7th congress in May 1925. Challenging Campbell's political report and the line of WORKERS WEEKLY one delegate from Sheffield pointed out: "We must in future be completely unsparing in our criticism of the reformists. It is dangerous to praise too much, without qualifications and warnings to the workers, the leaders of the labour left wing." Another expressed his surprise at "finding well known traitors and fakers amongst those advocating trade union unity." (48) Pollit reassured the delegates suggesting that "certain individuals" did indeed need to be treated with suspicion, it was dangerous however, to overstress this point. After all it was not only the British trade union leaders who were involved in the unity campaign but the Russian ones too "in whom we have complete confidence". (49) Both Pollit and Murphy argued that the surest way to safeguard against vacillation was to build a mass communist party which could hold the lefts to their promises.

The concentration of building a "mass communist party" combined with the reliance on the left leadership of the trade union movement, naturally led to a downplaying of the necessity of building a united front from below as well as above and also the organising of united action against the inactivity and sabotage of the official leadership. In 1925 and '26 the united front and the Minority Movement itself no longer held such a prominent place in the pages of Workers Weekly. There is every indication that the conferences were increasingly viewed by the communist party leadership as a means of putting pressure on the left leaders by demonstrating the support for militant policies, rather than as a focus for thrashing out the policy necessary to develop a revolutionary opposition rooted in the factories and localities (rather in the fashion the CPGB views the LCDTU today). Certainly there is little positive evidence to suggest that the party concentrated on turning the minority fractions in the unions and factories into real campaigning and fighting groups, in fact this would have only been necessary if the CP had an orientation to mobilising the rank and file for action INDEPENDENTLY of the left leaders and if necessary against them.

## THE C.P. AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

This was the position of the party on the eve of "red Friday". With the German coal fields coming back into production following the French evacuation of the Ruhr, the temporary breathing space gained by the uncompetitive, and under-invested British mines came to an end. At the end of June 1925 the coal owners gave one month's notice to end the existing agreement and introduce dramatic wage cuts. The General Council supported the miners in their rejection of the owners terms. A national strike was called, but the government stepped in at the last minute with the promise of an enquiry and a subsidy to maintain wages at existing levels

while it was sitting. The TUC withdrew the strike call on 31st July "Red Friday". The CP had been raising the demand for a General Strike, calling on the General Council to approach the TUC for further powers to call the entire labour movement into struggle, and calling on workers in the localities to transform the Trades Councils into councils of action. But even here the CP had little to say as to what the councils should demand of the TUC and its 'left' members, the only warning that workers were given that the General Council might not live up to expectations was a cryptic and completely inadequate formulation: "The best guarantee against weakness and hesitation in high places is the unity of workers in the localities." (50) After the government had backed down (or more correctly as the CP pointed out - used a delaying tactic to prepare its forces more fully to smash the labour movement's resistance in the near future), the party threw all caution to the winds in its fullsome praise of the 'lefts'. In a lead article by Gallacher in the WORKERS WEEKLY "Is it a Workers Victory?" we find:

"(At the first real crisis) the leadership passed into the hands of good proletarians like Swales, Hicks, Cook and Purcell. And this proletarian leadership and the proletarian solidarity it was capable of organising and demonstrating was the real big thing that came out of the struggle. . . Swales and his colleagues were not timid, cowardly middle class place hunters . . . (quoting Swales to Baldwin) 'Alright I also am a pacifist, just as you are, and if it comes to a fight we'll use every available force to smash you and the employers you represent'. THERE SPOKE THE WORKING CLASS DICTATORSHIP (their emphasis - ed) (57)

The changed position of the party was reflected also in the resolutions passed at the 2nd Minority Movement conference in August 1925. The conference undoubtedly represented a step forward for the movement in terms of the support it was gaining in the labour movement; 683 delegates attended representing 750,000 workers. But in terms of its POLITICAL programme and method the 2nd Conference represented a step backwards. The method of placing a programme for action at the centre of the united front tactic, and demanding that the left leaders put their fine words into the deeds required to forward the class struggle which had disappeared from WORKERS WEEKLY by the end of 1924, was also absent from the 2nd conference of the Minority Movement. This was most clearly demonstrated in the demand for increased powers to the General Council. The positions argued by Campbell in

47. It should come as no surprise that sections of the debate between Dutt and Murphy should appear in the Autumn 1977 issue of the IMG's theoretical journal 'International' with due weight being given to Murphy in the sections reproduced. The IMG's approach to building a "new minority movement" based on 'class struggle tendencies' is almost identical to the positions argued by Murphy. For a concrete application of that policy one needs to look no further than the IMG's coverage of the miners pay claim and of Scargill's role in the defeat (see section below in Rank and File Movement today)

48. Report of 7th Congress. Workers Weekly May 29 1925.

49. CPGB report of 7th national congress.

50. Workers Weekly. July 24th 1925.

51. Workers Weekly. August 7th 1925.

52. Report of the 2nd Conference of the Minority Movement.

53. Murphy's speech in Resolution on Capitalist Offensive. Workers Weekly. September 4th 1925. The 'left' leaders found it extremely useful to their left image to be identified with the Minority Movement, without in any way wishing to come under its discipline. Harry Wicks notes in his pamphlet on the General Strike how Battersea Town Hall vestibule was always thronging with leftists during Minority Movement conferences, but how very few of them were to "push open the door to the conference", to identify themselves with the movement.

54. The Worker No 255. September 12th.

55. Report of 1925 TUC - quoted in Macfarlane op cit. p.156.

56. Pollit Workers Weekly September 11th 1925.

57. Communist Review October 1925.

58. Workers Weekly September 18th 1925.

59. The Worker No.356 September 19th 1925.

60. Problems of the British Labour Movement. Leon Trotsky on Britain op cit. p.163 January 7th 1926.

61. Trotsky op cit. p.167. March 5, 1926.

"Watch your Slogans" and reflected in the resolution on the General Council at the 1st Conference, stressing the dangers in separating the call for more power from the organisational and ideological transformation of the TUC, had vanished with the party's new found confidence in the left wing of the General Council. The resolution on the TUC and the General Council says:

"This conference pledges itself to work unceasingly in all the various trade union organisations for the granting of increased powers to the General Council, in order that it can act as the general staff of the trade union movement." (52)

This position was to rapidly become a call for "ALL power to the General Council" in the pages of the WORKER and the WORKERS WEEKLY in the run up to the General Strike.

There was an increasing tendency for the party to identify the left leaders with the policies of the Minority Movement, particularly after the Scarborough Congress of the TUC, despite numerous indications that the lefts' loyalty lay elsewhere, Murphy speaking at the 2nd Conference argued:

"Labour leaders like Purcell, George Hicks, Cook etc. have followed our lead. And the moment will come when those who have been expressing themselves in terms of what the national Minority Movement has propagated will have to openly declare themselves with this movement." (53)

Of course the moment never came, and Trotsky's prediction that the left would IN FACT side with the right when a potentially revolutionary situation stared them in the face was proved absolutely right during the General Strike.

It was the CP's response to the Scarborough TUC Congress which really demonstrated the extent to which the new approach to the united front affected the party's response to the left leaders. The Congress, taking place shortly after "Red Friday" in September 1925, undoubtedly reflected the growing militancy of the working class and the impact of the Minority Movement on the trade unions. It was opened with an extremely 'left' speech by the Chairman Swales, referring to the success of Red Friday in making the capitalists back down and calling for Congress to:

"give the General Council full powers to create the necessary machinery to combat every movement by our opponents." (54)

The Congress itself accepted a Minority Movement resolution seconded by Harry Pollit pledging Congress to establish shop committees as "indispensable weapons in the struggle to force the capitalists to relinquish their grip on industry". (55) and went on to approve almost unanimously a NMM resolution condemning the Dawes plan, opposing imperialism, demanding the withdrawal of British troops from China and expressing solidarity with "our working class Chinese comrades."

However when the resolutions became more specific the Congress was more reticent, Congress ruled out of order a resolution on the affiliation of trades councils to the TUC, did not discuss the amalgamation of unions along industrial lines, and referred back to the General Council the question of granting increased powers to the General Council. Even so the Congress definitely reflected a shift to the left in the trade union movement. How should the party have reacted to this development? In 1923 or '24 it undoubtedly would have responded by saying "Fine words - now for Action" and put forward its programme of action for the trade unions, measuring the RESULTS of the Congress and the ACTIONS of the 'lefts' against the urgent tasks facing the working class. But the CPGB had moved far from this position, greeting the decisions of the Congress and the 'lefts' speeches almost euphorically. Pollit set the tone by suggesting that the results showed the MM was on the verge of 'capturing' the TUC (56) Campbell declared in an article in COMMUNIST REVIEW entitled "From Minority to Majority":

"the Congress as a whole trod the path of the class struggle by adopting some of the leading aims of the MM" (57)

A view of the Congress endorsed by Zinoviev at an enlarged plenum of the ECCI in March 1926. Only Murphy could bring himself to offer the mildest criticism of the lefts for their lack of support for Minority Movement resolutions (Swales and Cook alone had spoken in support of the lost resolutions - the rest of the 'left wing' preferring to remain silent). In an article

entitled "A Great Congress - Fighting Spirit of the TUC" he suggests that perhaps the left could "learn from the rights fraction work"! (58) THE WORKER was even clearer on the significance the CP attached to the Congress:

"Gone are the days when the influence of the reactionaries was powerful in the counsel of the trade unions. The TUC marked the end of Thomasism and MacDonaldism, the end of whining and class collaborationist policy." (59)

Trotsky alone poured cold water on this uncritical euphoria over the 'lefts' victories. In a series of observations only published in COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL after the General Strike and then with certain phrases critical of British 'leftists' deleted, Trotsky had tried to warn the CP:

"In the British labour movement, international questions have always been the line of least resistance for the 'leaders'.

Regarding international issues as a kind of safety valve for the radical moods of the masses, these esteemed leaders are prepared to a certain extent even to bow to a revolution (elsewhere) so they can take still more revenge on questions of internal class struggle. The left faction of the General Council is distinguished by its IDEOLOGICAL shapelessness and is therefore incapable of ORGANISATIONALLY assuming the leadership of the trade union movement". (60)

And this Trotsky argued was true even of the most left trade union leaders:

"Both right wingers and left wingers including of course both Purcell and Cook, have the greatest fear of commencing the final action. Even when they verbally admit the inevitability of struggle and revolution, they hope in their heart of hearts for some kind of miracle that will deliver them from this prospect. At any rate they will themselves put a brake on the movement, will evade, will wait and see, will refer responsibility to others, and in reality will help Thomas in any important problem of the BRITISH labour movement." (61)

Trotsky was directing his fire against the opportunist use of the united front tactic, which in its search for a short cut to a mass party painted up the revolutionary potential of the left wing, and thus played down the need for independent communist criticism. These left reformist and centrist leaders had either to be won to communism under the blows of ruthless criticism from the revolutionaries or swept aside by the rank and file won to communist leadership. There was no third way, the lefts, because of their ideological shapelessness, could offer no alternative to the generalised system of politics provided to the 'right' by the bourgeoisie - reformism. This was particularly apparent in the Labour Party where the rights hold was never seriously threatened. The reformist division between economic and political struggle, between trade union and parliamentary

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work, allows room for greater verbal radicalism in the former area - where in day to day sectional economic struggle the question of political power, of government does not directly arise as the central issue except at times like 1926. In the latter area 'politics' are divorced from any form of direct action by the masses. The exigencies of vote-catching from passive sections of the working class and the petit-bourgeois experts pressure in a conservative direction. In the unions social-democratic politics could be hidden by the left leaders (in the case of figures like Cook from themselves) behind a cloud of rhetoric, secure (so they believed) that **THEY** would not have to lead a struggle for political power. For the Labour Party lefts it was different - their utterances were 'political' and any radicalism on their part would have led to furious attacks on them as violators of the constitution. Whilst the road between rhetoric and reality was shorter in the Labour Party it was a road that consequently far fewer were willing to embark on. As it turned out the 'unexpected' happened - Purcell, Swales, Hicks and Cook **WERE** called on to lead a political struggle. The former three threw themselves desperately into the arms of the Thomas, Bevin and Co. Cook on the other hand courageously conducted the dispute as an industrial dispute, but was unwilling to expose and challenge the 'right and left' traitors who were throttling the miners. The silence from the Labour Party MPs was shattering. These Trade Union leaders - at least the first three were conscious **REFORMISTS** who to influence the radicalising workers adopted a 'quasi-revolutionary' mode of address and enjoyed the prestige of associating with the Russians and to a lesser extent the British CP militants. When the latter offered them an uncritical organised support (via the MM) in the unions the situation was ideal. But they would inevitably fall backwards faced with a real test. The workers had to be **PREPARED** for this. Thus Trotsky could write: "The ideological and organisational formation of a really revolutionary (ie communist) party on the basis of a mass movement is only conceivable under conditions of a continuous, systematic, unwavering, untiring and naked denunciation of the muddles, the compromises, and indecision of the quasi-left leaders of all shades." (62)

It was this subordination of the programme of the party in search of a political bloc with the 'left wing' of the labour movement which disarmed the communists, and therefore the working class, in the face of the activity of the left in the run up to the General Strike and their outright capitulation to the right during the strike itself. The party had quite correctly argued that the retreat by the ruling class on "Red Friday" represented nothing but a breathing space for the Baldwin government, to prepare its strike breaking force, and that therefore the vital task of the trade union movement was to prepare ITS forces for the coming struggle. This was a recurrent theme of the party's press between Scarborough and the General Strike. But one looks in vain in trying to find any warnings of the criminal inactivity of the General Council in this respect. Far from mobilising the most militant sections of the class to force the 'lefts' and the General Council to implement the decisions of Scarborough and the Minority Movement's programme, the party kept a diplomatic silence on the doings of the General Council, limiting itself to only the most cryptic references that the leadership of the trade unions was not all that it should have been. This was a position that finally led the party not only to argue on the eve of the strike that the working class should trust and remain loyal to the General Council but also to deny that the General Strike had any revolutionary implications at all!

Events which reflected the real situation in the labour movement came thick and fast after Scarborough. At the Congress itself the right wing on the General Council was in fact **STRENGTHENED** by the return to the Council of Thomas and Bondfield and the election of Ernest Bevin of the transport workers. The Liverpool conference of the Labour Party taken place in the same month represented a triumph for the right, with proposals for completing the exclusion of communists from the Labour Party being carried by massive majorities. (63) Even **WORKERS WEEKLY** was forced to note:

"On the question of admission of communists as individual

members the whole of the left wing was silent. None of the trade union leaders, and none of the Glasgow group, got up to speak against the executive." (64)

A fortnight later the Baldwin government took the opportunity to arrest the entire executive committee (bar one) of the CP, try them for sedition and give them jail sentences ranging between 6 months and a year. It was in this situation where the government was openly recruiting middle class strike breakers to the Organisation of Maintenance and Supply that the CP should have been at its most emphatic in raising in every branch and workplace where it had a member and through its press, warnings of the lack of preparation of the General Council, and the need to force them into action and prepare if necessary in spite of them. In fact the closest the party's paper came to issuing a warning in this period is in its Christmas 1925 issue. After noting the "sinister preparations" of the government and the fact that "very little" was being done by the working class movement in response, the article goes on to say the lead must come from the rank and file:

"This does not mean the TUC can stand and wait. They also must get on with their work of preparation. The General Council can stimulate by example and precept the rank and file; the rank and file can stimulate in a line manner the TUC" (65)

Even this isolated warning makes no criticism of the General Council, places no demands on the 'lefts' and outlines no actions the shop committees, branches and trades councils can take to force them to act. And at exactly the same time the Minority Movement's paper **THE WORKER** was carrying articles of which the following editorial was typical:

"The trade union movement is the one bright spot in the labour movement of this country. The fight for international trade union unity, the struggle for national solidarity so strikingly demonstrated on July 30th and 31st (Red Friday - editor) the rapid advance which the Scarborough conference of the

AJ Cook



TUC initiated - all these bear witness to the revival in trades unionism. The trade union movement of this country has passed from the stage of being a bulwark of capitalism to being its most active opponent." (66)

By February 1926, the party was forced to act given the obvious lack of preparation by the General Council. Announcing a special Minority Movement conference to be held in March, **WORKERS WEEKLY** argues "if the leaders will not lead, the rank and file (through the Minority Movement's conference of Action) must make them clear the road for those who will." (67) Such sentiments were not however to be found in the ensuing conference. Meeting on March 21st in Latchmere Baths, Battersea, the conference represented the high point of the movement's influence in the trade unions; delegates from 547 organisations representing 957,000 workers attended. The opening speech by Tom Mann summed the party's attitude to the general Council which was to carry through till the betrayal of the General Strike. After warning of the preparations of the OMS and the fascists, Mann declares:

"Therefore prepare at once: let us have our industrial machinery ready for action. The real central body through which we must function is the General Council of the TUC. All unions should be loyal thereto and co-operate there with." (68) Certainly the Minority Movement adopted a fighting programme for the period ahead including the need to transform trades councils into councils of action, the need to organise workers defence forces, to demand the right of soldiers to refuse stride service etc. But the programme was of little use in arming the working class, since it was put entirely within the context of reliance on the leadership of the General Council. The conference saw no warnings issued about the "general staff" behind which the working class was about to enter its most crucial battle.

The CP and the working class was to reap the fruits of these disastrous policies during the course of the General Strike. Yet at the same time the party specifically renounced in advance the revolutionary implications of such a strike, a position that flowed logically from their subordination of the programme of the party to that of the left wing. Murphy writing in the last issue of **WORKERS WEEKLY** before the strike in an article entitled "Fighting for life - Revolution not in sight" put it thus "Our party does not hold the leading positions in the trade unions. It is not conducting the negotiations with the employers and the government. It can only advise and place its forces at the service of the workers - led by others. And let it be remembered that those who are leading have not revolutionary perspectives before them . . . . . to entertain any exaggerated views as to the revolutionary possibilities of this crisis and visions of new leaders "arising spontaneously in the struggle" etc is fantastic." (70)

Having settled in advance the non-revolutionary nature of the General Strike, ie its reformist character, the party pro-

ceded to raise as one of its main demands the slogan "Resignation of the forgery government! Formation of a Labour Government!" (71) A demand which if taken up by large sections of workers would have channelled the strike in a reformist, parliamentary direction. The real task of the communist party lay, as Trotsky pointed out, in supporting unity of mass action in every way BUT :

"They cannot permit any appearance of unity with the opportunist leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions. The most important piece of work for the truly revolutionary participants in the General Strike will be to fight relentlessly against every trace or act of treachery, and mercilessly expose reformist illusions. In so doing they will not only help forward the chief and permanent task of developing revolutionary cadres, without which the victory of the British proletariat is altogether impossible, but they will also contribute directly to the success of the present strike by intensifying it, revealing its revolutionary implications, pushing aside the opportunists and strengthening the position of revolutionaries." (66)

Trotsky did not expect, as his Stalinist critics tend to imply, that the first great strike wave would result in a proletarian revolution in Britain. What was at stake was whether the CP and the best elements of the left wing would come through the first revolutionary stage at the head of the masses as the revolutionaries had done in 1905 in Russia. On this depended the result of future battles:

"The more widely it (the strike) develops, the more violently it shakes the foundations of capitalism, the more completely it rejects the treacherous and opportunist leaders, the more difficult it will be for bourgeois reaction to take up a counter offensive, the less the proletarian organisations will suffer, the sooner the next decisive stage of the fight will come." (72)

It was for precisely in this respect that the policies of the CI and the CP compounded the defeat. The reformist leaders inflicted on the working class. In failing to use the united front in a communist fashion, supporting every move by the left wing leadership in favour of the working class and ruthlessly criticising every vacillation of the same leadership, and measuring every step against the real needs of the class - put forward in the action programme of the party, the party failed to arm the leftward moving workers against the treachery of their leaders. Because of this the communists failed to come through the first wave at the head of decisive sections of the masses, broken from a treacherous reformist leadership. Thus the communists who should have represented the future of the movement, a clear alternative strategy and leadership were compromised by their alliance with the traitors or, at best, seen as having been as completely taken by surprise by the General Councils betrayal as the rank and file workers themselves.

The reformists were thus able to deliver the working class into the hands of bourgeois reaction without any coherent opposition. The employing class made the most of their opportunity instituting lockouts, provocations and sackings of militants. The government took a series of measures restricting the right to strike and picket and workers left the unions in droves.

## The Aftermath

The CP's immediate reaction to the calling off of the General Strike by the General Council, an action taken by its 'lefts' as well as rights was one of shock. The edition of **Workers Weekly** after the strike registers this and attempts to cover its own mistakes:

"The CP had in fact constantly warned (sic) the workers that such was likely to happen, but even the CP can be for-

62. Trotsky op cit p.162 January 6th 1926.

63. An executive recommendation that no member of the CP should be eligible as an individual member or be entitled to remain a member was carried 2,870,000 to 321,000. A second recommendation that trade unions should refrain from electing known communists as their delegates being carried by 2,692,000 to 480,000.

64. **Workers Weekly** October 2 1925.

65. **Workers Weekly** December 25 1925.

66. **The Worker** No 371 January 2nd 1926.

67. **Workers Weekly** February 12th 1926.

68. Report of special conference of the Minority Movement, pub NMM London (no date).

69. **Workers Weekly**. 30th April 1926.

70. Statement of E.C. of CPGB. Klugman History of CPGB Vol II. Lawrence and Wishart. London 1976 p.210.

71. The Political Meaning of the General Strike - statement by the E.C. of the CPGB May 5th 1926. in Klugman op.cit. p.209.

72. Trotsky. Problems of the British Labour Movement op cit.p.173.

given for not believing it to be possible that once the struggle had begun these leaders would be such pitiful poltroons as to surrender at the moment of victory."<sup>73</sup>

After briefly adopting a hard line of the lefts under the slogan "Cashier the cowards"<sup>74</sup> the party quickly returned to its previous position. The Executive Committee statement printed in *Workers Weekly* on 4th June blames the defeat entirely on the right wing – the role of the lefts receives no mention whatever.<sup>75</sup> The report of the EC meeting in *Workers Weekly* carries the following caution: "There will be a reaction without our party against working with left wing leaders. We must fight down this natural feeling, and get better contact with these leaders and more mass pressure on them."<sup>76</sup>

'The Worker' followed a similar line of not making any criticism of the lefts in a leading article entitled "Clear Traitors Out – The result of right wing policy."<sup>77</sup> While the *Sunday Worker* was happy to run a piece by Ben Turner arguing in effect there were no 'rights' or 'lefts' in the General Council, and certainly no traitors – only "men and women desiring to do what is right and possible"<sup>78</sup> and follow it up with an article by George Hicks, a 'left' of the General Council, arguing the strike had been a 'great victory' which shattered the 'moral prestige of the capitalist class'.<sup>79</sup> This in a paper edited by a CP member!

It is only some time after the General Strike that the Russian party and the CI take a position vis a vis the 'lefts'. That the line of the Comintern was to the 'left' of the CPGB for a period was undoubtedly due to the offensive then being

launched by the newly forged united opposition. The opposition bringing together Trotsky with Zinoviev and Kamenev made as its major focus the Stalin factions responsibility for the line of the British party during the General Strike and the continued existence of the Anglo-Russian committee. On the 18th May Trotsky demanded the immediate breaking off of the ARC and attacked the failure of the Soviet trade union movement to criticise the treachery of the TUC in the run up to the strike until after a meeting of the ARC had been held. Their silence had led the British CP to abstain from criticism of the General Council "partly upon offensive by the opposition which forced the Stalin faction to attempt to cover their tracks. They switched to a position of condemning the lefts while insisting that the ARC must be maintained. Articles started to appear in 'The Worker' by Lozovsky heavily attacking the left wing and the General Council."<sup>81</sup> On June 7th the Russian All Union Council of Trade Unions issued a manifesto condemning the left as hypocrites and phrasemongers. This sudden change, brought about by expediency in the battle with the opposition, threw the British party into turmoil. The CPGB put off printing a translation of the manifesto for an unprecedented six weeks and Murphy complained bitterly for the party at a meeting of the ECCI on 7th August 1926.<sup>82</sup> The CI's criticism of the General Council and the lefts was to be of short duration – once the joint opposition had been forced to declare a truce (Oct. 1926) – the old policies were resumed. At the meeting of the ARC in July 1926 – where the major item was the role of the TUC in the General Strike and the rejection of Soviet aid for the miners, Tomskey was conveniently 'ill'. Thus the most 'respected' of the Russian trade union leaders did not have to spoil his relationship with the TUC leaders by attacking Purcell, Hicks, Citrine etc. for their betrayal, in line with the Comintern's new position. By the next meeting of the ARC in March 1927 Tomskey was back in the saddle as was the old policy of conciliating the TUC leaders. It was at this meeting that the Russians accepted the notorious non-intervention clause, the Russians promising 'unconditional recognition of the principle' that 'the TUC and its General Council' was 'the sole representative and medium of expression of the trade union movement' and that their 'fraternal alliance cannot and must not in any way impair the internal authority of the General Council ..... or infringe or limit their rights of autonomy ... or allow any intervention in their internal affairs.'<sup>83</sup> This declaration made explicit the whole trend of Russian relations with the TUC leaders to break off the ARC at a time of their own choosing, when they had no more use for an international 'left' cover – this they did in September 1927.

The Minority Movement itself continued, much weakened, after the general strike. At the 4th Conference only 300,000 workers were represented. The trade union leaders took the opportunity of the demoralisation after the strike to launch an offensive against 'disrupters' in the unions – meaning communists and Minority Movement members. In February 1927 the TUC banned Trades Councils from affiliating to the Minority Movement on pain of disaffiliation. This was accompanied by a series of bans in certain unions on communists and Minority Movement supporters holding office. The CP itself was to play into the hands of those accusing them of being 'splitters' when it adopted, under the direction of the Comintern, the 'new line' which in 1928 inaugurated the ultra-left 'Third Period'. From 1929 on the CP and Minority Movement declared the unions bankrupt and breaking up. 'Red Unions' under revolutionary leadership were to be formed and the party was to assume 'direct revolutionary leadership' of strikes through strike committees. The Minority Movement was to become an alternative trade union centre to the TUC. The result of these policies was increasing isolation for the CP and a dramatic withering of the Minority Movement. One result of these policies was the re-emergence of rank and file movements in several industries independent of CP influence. The builders Forward Movement, a Members Rights Movement in the AEU and the London Busmens Rank and File Movement all developed in the late '20s and early '30s. In 1932 in consultation with the RILU, the CP uncer-

*Continued from page 32*

## CHRONOLOGY

### 1925

- January 26th Minority Movement Conference on International Trade Union Unity.
- July Red Friday.
- August Second conference of the Minority Movement.
- September Scarborough TUC.  
Labour Party Conference, Liverpool.  
Split between Zinoviev and Stalin. Zinoviev attacks the Theory of Socialism in One Country.
- October Arrest of 12 CPGB leaders.
- October/ December Leningrad Opposition of Zinoviev formed.
- December 14th Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Zinoviev defeated.

### 1926

- March Special Minority Movement Conference.
- April First discussions between the Trotskyist and Zinovievites to form the Joint Opposition.
- May 3rd to 12th; GENERAL STRIKE.
- June/July Joint Opposition formed and declared.
- August Third Congress of the Minority Movement.
- September Bournemouth TUC.
- October Trotsky expelled from Politburo. Zinoviev removed from Presidency of the Comintern.
- November Miners return to Work.

### 1927

- September TUC withdraws from Anglo-Russian Committee.
- November Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the Russian Communist Party.



moniously wound the Minority Movement up although it lingered on in name for some time, turning instead to the new movements which had bypassed the Minority Movements sectarian rump.

The history of the Communist Party between 1920 and 1926 is a history of a party in formation – where at every stage of its development the Communist International played a decisive role. The period 1920-23 sees the party, under Comintern guidance, throwing off its sectarian and social democratic origins and learning the method of communist organisation and tactics. By the start of 1925 the centrist degeneration of the Comintern is already having its impact on the young CP. The communist united front tactic in the form of the RILU campaigns and the early Minority Movement rapidly took on an opportunist course under the impact of the Anglo-Russian Committee, through the policies of the centrist Stalin faction of the CPSU were reflected. This opportunist use of the tactic led the party to progressively boycott its own programme in its dealings with the left wing of the TUC and thus fail to build a Minority Movement independent of the trade union bureaucracy. As a result the party entered the General Strike, not as an independent communist organisation offering a clear alternative strategy and leadership to the working class but effectively as the 'left wing' of the official leadership. A position that both disarmed the party and the most militant sections of the working class in a decisive battle with the ruling class.

## Conclusion

The history of the early CP and its work in the Minority Movement is of the utmost importance for revolutionaries today, representing as it does the first and most important attempt by a communist organisation in Britain to develop a

73. Workers Weekly May 21st 1926.

74. Workers Weekly May 28th 1926.

75. 'Why the Strike Failed' E.C. statement, Workers Weekly June 4th 1926. (reprinted in full in Klugman op cit. p.212.)

76. Ibid.

77. The Worker No 389 May 22nd 1926.

78. Sunday Worker 23 May 1926.

79. Sunday Worker 13th June 1926.

80. Trotsky Archives quoted in Macfarlane op.cit.p.167.

81. The Worker No 392 June 12th 1926.

82. James Hinton and Richard Hyman have used this example of the British party being to the 'right' of the Comintern to back up their thesis that in fact the right wing deviations of the party stemmed not from the Stalinisation of the CI but from the British Party itself. (Trade Unions and Revolution; the Industrial Politics of the early British CP; Pluto Press 1975, p 35). Such an analysis not only fails to grasp the zig-zags of the CI in this period, but underestimates the political impact of the Comintern on what Trotsky quite correctly described as a "politically very young CP". In neglecting any revolutionary implications for the general strike and opposing the CI's criticism of the lefts, the British CP was following the logic of the positions it had developed under the guidance of the Russian Party and the Comintern. That the 'left turn' of the CI for a short period after the General Strike was nothing but a tactical manoeuvre aimed at warding off the united oppositions criticism, can be seen from the subsequent history of the ARC.

83. Minutes of meeting quoted in Calhoun op cit p 338. When C Citrine complained of the "intolerably abusive" prose of Lozovsky's pamphlet 'British and Russian Workers', Tomsy is reported to have replied "Oh, that's just Lozovsky. Well what can you expect from Lozovsky!" Quoted in Calhoun p 337 op cit.

83(b). Calhoun op cit p 317

84. See The Rank and File Movement Today in this journal.

85. Collected in a book entitled "Communism in Britain". New Park.

86. Woodhouse op cit Marxism and Stalinism in Britain p.81.

87. James Hinton & R. Hyman Trade Unions and Revolution. The Industrial Politics of the Early British Communist Party.

88. p.73 op cit.

revolutionary opposition in the trade unions, under the political leadership of communists. Any grouping which claims as part of its perspective the building of a movement in the trade unions against the present class collaborationist leadership must examine and learn from the attempt by the young CP to apply a communist united front tactic in the British trade unions; from both its revolutionary period and from the mistakes made in the period of its centrist degeneration. Most of the major groups on the British left today – the WRP/WSL, IMG and SWP claim to base their trade union strategy on the method of the CP in the Minority Movement. The ATUA, CDLM, the National Rank and File Movement and the "class struggle left wing" stand as monuments to the misinterpretation (and often deliberate distortion) of the experience of the Minority Movement. The political practice of these groups in their respective rank and file groupings is dealt with elsewhere in this journal.<sup>84</sup> Their historical analysis and interpretation of the Minority Movement needs to be dealt with here.

The most serious attempts at drawing the lessons of the early CP and Minority Movement have undoubtedly come from the Socialist Labour League (forerunner of the WRP) in a series of articles by Woodhouse and Pearce written in the late '50s and early '60s.<sup>85</sup> Even here the analysis is marred by the inadequate politics of the Healeyites. The political errors of the party – in terms of the policies and programme it would argue in the working class as an alternative to the reformists and centrists, receive scant attention from these writers. This isn't surprising given that even a cursory account of the positions the early CP was developing in this period – its approach to the united front and its use of the workers government slogan for example – would have contrasted dramatically with the policies of the SLL in the '50s and '60s (and of course with those of the WRP today). As a consequence Pearce and Woodhouse tend to ignore the programme and central tactics of the party in the period, concentrating almost entirely on questions of the party and leadership. Thus the programmatic degeneration of the party is not examined by these writers and everything is reduced to the failure of the party to provide an independent alternative leadership to the left reformist leaders in the general strike. This position underplays the role of developing a fighting movement around the programme of the united front in favour of a passive/sectarian belief that the working class would flock to the "revolutionary leadership" once they had been betrayed by their reformist leaders. Thus Woodhouse can argue that the tactic of building the Minority Movement, "was understood wholly in the context of building the party in preparation for the revolutionary turn which the coming industrial struggles must take",<sup>86</sup> transposing their method of "building the alternative leadership and waiting for the crisis" on to the early CP.

A more recent root and branch revision of the traditional Trotskyist analysis of the Minority Movement has been put forward by two labour historians connected to the SWP(GB).<sup>87</sup> As would be expected from writers from this stable, their analysis views the party's industrial strategy through syndicalist spectacles. They start from the position that all previous writers (including Trotsky) were over optimistic about the working class in Britain in the '20s. That there was never a possibility of a revolutionary situation developing, even in the general strike. Because the party never came to terms with this situation, of the labour movement being in retreat, but "vainly" attempted to build a mass revolutionary party, they succumbed to an opportunist style of politics."<sup>88</sup> Such a view represents not only a one sided view of the class struggle but at root an extremely economic one. To believe that a revolutionary situation can only occur, indeed that a mass party can only be built, in a period where the working class is on the offensive and the ruling class "in retreat", is a recipe for propagandist passivity in the face of a ruling class offensive. It is a position which leads Hyman and Hinton to write off the 1926 general strike as a strike that *could only* have been a defensive trade union struggle, (a position identical to that of J.T. Murphy on the outbreak of the strike) and

indeed to criticise the Communist Party's role in the strike, not for its tailing of the left leaders but for putting forward "too advanced" demands e.g. nationalisation of the mines and the call for the general election (itself a reformist demand in the context of a general strike).<sup>89</sup> This position, which confines a revolutionary grouping to waiting for a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge to be able to intervene in a revolutionary fashion while intervening in "defensive trade union struggles" with economic and trade union demands, reflects an underlying syndicalist misunderstanding of the nature and role of a revolutionary party. Like their SWP mentors Hyman and Hinton reject the use of transitional demands in providing a bridge from present day demands and consciousness of the working class to the conquest of power by the proletariat. The rejection of this method means that it is impossible to intervene in a REVOLUTIONARY fashion in the everyday struggles of the working class. Where Hyman and Hinton differ from the SWP is in their "solving" of this problem. Hyman and Hinton opt for the sectarian propagandist tradition of the SLP arguing in the conclusion of their essay "clear revolutionary propaganda might have well been of more value to the working class movement than the dilution of the party's ideology in search of mass support".<sup>90</sup> The SWP reject this "passive propagandist" approach in favour of intervention in the class struggle, but are left intervening at the level of trade union militancy – while making propaganda for socialism. In rejecting the method of the transitional programme both the SWP and Hyman and Hinton reject not only the gains of Trotsky's Fourth International, but also the method of the Communist International and of the Bolsheviks, on which it was based. This means their POLITICAL METHOD is rooted in pre-Bolshevik tradition – a tradition of the maximum/minimum programme of Social Democracy – abstract propaganda for socialism on the one hand combined with a syndicalist and tailist practice on the other.<sup>91</sup>

It is the programmatic method of the early Communist Party's work in the British trade unions which sets it apart from its would be centrist imitators today. Working under the constant guidance and supervision of the Communist International in its revolutionary period the party was treading new ground in two senses. It was learning to apply the united front in a communist fashion both in the trade unions and Labour Party drawing non-communist workers into joint struggle around the immediate needs of the class – while maintaining its political independence and criticism of the reformist leaders. At the same time it was applying a 'new' programmatic method – still under debate in the Communist International using 'partial' 'immediate' and 'transitional' demands in the place of the traditional social democratic programmatic method – the maximum/minimum programme.<sup>92</sup> The party was throwing off its social democratic and sectarian origins learning the methods and tactics of revolutionary Bolshevism. It was this programmatic method that allowed the CP to build a REVOLUTIONARY opposition in the trade unions – the Minority Movement – involving large sections of workers who weren't necessarily in agreement

with the Communist Party's programme. The party didn't abandon its programme – for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the construction of socialism etc – it argued at each and every point that only this programme could finally overthrow the system of exploitation and develop a socialist society – however it did not make this programme the basis of the united front. The basis of the Minority Movement was a transitional programme, an action programme focussed on the need to transform the trade unions organisationally and ideologically to face the employers' onslaught. It was a revolutionary programme in the sense that the mobilisation for and achievement of the demands of the programme would undermine the very basis of bourgeois power, a programme "stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of workers and inevitably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."<sup>93</sup> It is this programme and tactical method – the communist united front tactic, which has been most readily abandoned in the trade union work of revolutionary groupings, no less among those claiming to stand by the method of the 1938 Transitional Programme than by those who reject it. The sectarians – best represented today by the Spartacists – will only build caucuses in the unions on the basis of their programme – on the basis of workers accepting the dictatorship of the proletariat. The opportunists on the other hand keep their programme for the party members preferring to build their "class struggle left wings" or socialist currents in the Labour Party, not on the basis of a programme which attempts to answer the urgent needs of the class in the present period, but on platforms designed to pull in the largest number of 'left leaders' and left reformists. Such methods contrast dramatically with the method used by communists to build the RILU and Minority Movements between 1923-25. Any attempt to build a new minority or rank and file movement has to be measured against the method used by the early Communist Party working under the direction of a still revolutionary Communist International. In this lies the importance of studying the history of the CPGB and Minority Movement.

89. p.44 op cit.

90. Hyman & Hinton op cit p.71. This position has been most explicitly put by another historian from the IS school Raymond Challinor in 'The Origins of British Bolshevism (Croom Helm 1977). Challinor finishes off his anti-Bolshevik and nationalistic account of the socialist movement in between 1900 and the founding of the CPGB by declaring the SLP to be "The last truly revolutionary party to fight in the arena of British politics." p.275.

91. The IMG has yet to offer its interpretation of the Minority Movement cast in the mould of the "class struggle left wing". All the indications are that this grouping places itself firmly in the tradition of the Minority Movement's centrist period. The IMG will find the mirror image of its opportunist use of the united front tactic in the policies of the CP in the Minority Movement between 1925 and the General Strike.

92. Leon Trotsky, The Transitional Programme, p.15. New Park.

# CLASS STRUGGLE

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# THE RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT TODAY

*A document passed by the National Committee of Workers Power*

Marxists in Britain have historically faced two related phenomena. The restriction of revolutionary politics to a small minority of industrial militants and intellectuals, and, secondly, the great size, longevity and hence prestige of trade unionism in the British working class. This glaring disproportion between the Marxist nucleus and the mass forces of the trade unions has often led revolutionaries into either a sectarian retreat from the problem, into abstract propaganda, or, more usually, an opportunist accommodation to trade unionism and trade union politics.

Several periods of severe crisis for British capitalism from the late 1880's onwards have opened tremendous possibilities to revolutionaries. We have been in such a period since the early Seventies. A precondition of building a revolutionary Communist Party, organising in its ranks the recognised vanguard of the British workers, is the ability to handle correctly the question of the trade unions. In Britain there is little danger of underestimating their importance. In fact, the greatest danger is accommodation to the status quo, an acceptance of trade union struggle as capable of spontaneously developing a revolutionary dynamic. Economism has time and again reduced would-be revolutionaries to the level of syndicalists in the day to day struggle. This position is not at all inconsistent with abstract propaganda for Socialism or the hysterical pushing of a small sect as The Party or The Alternative. Indeed, this combination of economist politics, designed to be indistinguishable from the views of the average militant, with an apolitical thirst to 'build the party' -- no matter how disruptive this may be of ongoing struggles, has proved a deadly poison for all rank and file groupings. It is a recipe for breeding cynicism and disillusionment amongst working class militants. Democracy alone is an impotent remedy to this. A real alternative lies in a correct understanding of the relationship between a Leninist party and the trade unions. A relationship which involves: neither covering up one's politics nor behind the scenes manipulation.

A revolutionary communist party must be formed on the basis of the disciplined commitment of its members to a programme which is not only based on the principles of Marx and Lenin, the class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat etc., but which also follows the method of Trotsky's Transitional Programme. One that centrally addresses the key struggles of today and links them to the seizure of power by the working class via a series of demands, tactics and organisational means which, step by step, prepare the class for this task. Inextricably bound up with the question of programme is the question of organising, educating and hardening in struggle a communist cadre. Such a new leadership within the class must, of course, win the existing militants away from the Stalinist, Social Democratic and centrist currents.

Since, in Britain at least, the trade unions are the central arena in the struggle against the misleaders of the class 'Left' and 'Right' -- revolutionary communists must develop an action programme specifically oriented to the ideological and organisational transformation of these organisations. This action programme is a programme for application in the trade unions, in the shop stewards' and factory committee, but it is not a trade union programme, i.e. one limited to the existing horizons of trade union struggle, even of militant rank and file struggle.

Such an action Programme must apply the overall strategy of the Party -- the Programme -- to the particular area of work. As such it must include all the major elements of the Programme, charting the strategy from present conditions and struggles to the struggle for state power. Its focus, its limits as it were, are those of a coherent strategy to transform the unions into organisation capable of aiding, rather than obstructing, the struggle for socialism. Such a programme must be based upon a clear understanding of the nature and limits of trade unions.

## OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL TRADE UNIONISM

Trade unions, are mass organisations for realising the law of value with regard to wages under capitalism. As such they perform a vital function of defence for the whole working class. However, trade union action, in itself, has definite limits. It cannot indefinitely hold up wages in a period of general depression, nor can it protect the class from the full effects of unemployment. Under capitalism, it cannot embrace the whole of the working class. Furthermore, trade unions are incapable of overthrowing capitalism, or even of continually increasing the workers' share of total value.

In this lies the domesticating aspect of trade unionism – organisationally and ideologically underpinned by a distinct caste of Trade Union officials – the Trade Union bureaucracy: ideologically committed to, and organised for, the negotiation and maintenance of the wage contract. Since the last half of the 19th century this caste has grown ever larger, been drawn more and more into the actual administrative machinery of the capitalist state.

However the Trade Unions remain the basic means by which workers defend and improve their living standards within capitalism. As the bedrock fighting organisations of the working class they retain a potential, *against* the domesticating bureaucratic apparatus, for the organisation of the mass of the working class for struggle against the capitalist class.

'The Trade Unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instrument of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat'.

(Trotsky, Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay).

The dual aspect of Trade Unionism means inevitably for communists that their strategy in the Trade Unions must be directed to transforming the Trade Unions into organs of working class struggle for power, against the conservative bureaucratic apparatus that fetters and strangles the workers' organisations. The rank and file movement we seek to build is fundamental to that perspective, its politics, its strategy and tactics must serve that purpose.

Just as the class struggle is inevitable under capitalism (the struggle to defend and improve living standards and working conditions) so it follows that in periods of capitalist decay and instability the bureaucratic Trade Union apparatus will be incapable of defending the elementary needs of the working class. It will in fact act to sabotage the struggle of the class to defend conditions, jobs and living standards. It is the inevitable contradiction between the Trade Union bureaucracy and the fighting needs of the class that gives rise to the unofficial organisations of the class, in the factories, mines and offices. The growth of the shop stewards movement before the first imperialist war, the Minority Movement of the 1920s the massive growth of the shop stewards movement in Britain in the late 1960s (Donovan in 1968 recorded 175,000 shop stewards in British industry, the Labour Government in 1974 recorded 300,000) testifies to the fact that:

- a) the Trade Unions are not solely the unchallenged property of the bureaucratic apparatus, and
- b) the working class must inevitably look to unofficial, work place organisations in all periods when workers' living standards and organisations come under attack.

Unofficial, workplace based Trade Unionism may be inevitable, but, of itself, it is incapable of spontaneously generating a political alternative to the Trade Union bureaucracy. The reform and amalgamation movements of the early 20th century in Britain and of the 1930s in the USA, the resilience of British shop stewards in the late

1960s and its apparent weakness in the mid 1970s, *both* testify to the mobilising potential of the unofficial movement compared to the Trade Union bureaucracy and to the inherent political weakness of the unofficial movement without communist leadership.

## THE LIMITS OF THE LEFT TRADE UNION LEADERS

Periods of militant rank and file activity and pressure will always create divisions in the ranks of the Trade Union bureaucracy. Sections of the bureaucracy will be prepared to verbally espouse the militant demands of the class, to even offer to lead struggles for them. The majority of the bureaucrats do so, so as to deliberately head off and betray, rank and file militancy. A small minority of Trade Union 'lefts' may to a greater or lesser extent identify themselves with militant demands and organisation under the pressure of the mass of workers.

But these 'left' leaders remain incapable of leading the struggles of the mass of workers to a successful conclusion. Their membership of the distinct caste of Trade Union officials, committed to the limits of Trade Union action ensures that they too will seek to contain the struggles of the class within the framework of Trade Union struggle. In periods of acute crisis only a struggle led independent of, and against, the bureaucratic caste, can maintain and advance the workers organisations and living standards. This struggle, the 'lefts' - Scargill in the 70's, Scanlon in the 60's, no less than the 'lefts' of the 20's - will not lead.

The experience of the shop stewards movement of the early 1920's, of the CIO in the 1930's, tells us that only conscious revolutionary communist leadership can prevent unofficial movements falling prey to these 'left' leaders . . . the most potentially dangerous misleaders (in all periods of struggle) of the best and most militant sections of workers. Only revolutionary leadership can prepare the advanced militants to march independently of the left-talkers and fakers, to be prepared for their inevitable betrayal. Warning and preparing the class for that betrayal is an indispensable component of communist work in the Trade Unions.

These 'lefts' ought to be supported *critically* where they represent the pressure of the rank and file for increased democracy in the union and a more militant struggle with the employers and the government. To convert the communist programme of class struggle into a demand that workers *first* abandon these left leaders is a recipe for sectarian isolation and impotence. But critical support is a tactic to be applied concretely in circumstances where united struggle is possible and necessary not a permanent strategy whereby the 'lefts' must be installed at the head of the unions as an 'alternative leadership'. The modern Stalinist approach sees these lefts as a real alternative. The 'orthodox' Trotskyists of the WRP/ WSL see this as the last stage in the 'exposure' of reformism prior to the assumption of leadership by the revolutionaries. The former position is opportunism naked and unashamed. The latter is a barren sectarian schema concealing an opportunist accommodation to workers with illusions in the lefts.

In Britain in the present period the major agencies for ensuring the subordination of the shop floor and Trade Union branch leadership to left and not so 'left' talking bureaucrats are the 'broad left' machines in the unions, and episodically, the Liason Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions.

Programmatically and organisationally gagged by the Communist Party as a stage army to be used to pressure the Trade Union bureaucrats the LCDTU must not be confused with genuine, but programmatically inadequate, rank and file formations – it is a Stalinist orchestrated support mechanism for sections of the Trade Union bureaucracy. However during the mobilisations against the Tory Industrial Relations Act, the freeing of

the Pentonville dockers and the miners' struggles, the conferences called by the LCDTU opened up an arena within which a principled revolutionary intervention could have stood as a pole of attraction to militants previously under the influence of the Stalinists. The task of revolutionaries in those conferences was to open up a road of struggle alongside the better sections of militants, to demonstrate in action the bankruptcy of the Stalinist programme, to intervene among not stand outside these particular gatherings of militants.

The crisis of leadership and direction in the shop steward stratum of the British workers in the early and mid-Seventies, underlines the bankruptcy of believing that organisations thrown up by, and built for, the economic struggle, can, by and of themselves, pose a direct and consistent, communist challenge to the projects of the bureaucracy.

Not only can such a challenge not be expected to simply grow 'from below' out of the shop steward milieu, *but* the employers themselves have set out systematically to draw in and incorporate sections of this once, 'unofficial' leadership of the trade unions, viz. the Ryder proposals at Leyland.

The task of communists is to struggle for political leadership in the unofficial movement, a leadership committed to the wholesale transformation of the purpose and therefore structure of the mass Trade Unions – their conversion into revolutionary Trade Unions. We aim to win the leadership and transform the mass Trade Union organisations of the class – not to split them. Such a transformation must be based on the class energy, the mobilising potential of the unofficial movement, *that is the purpose of the Rank and File movement.*

Communists today must learn the significance of the Minority Movement. It was not simply an extension of pre-existing unofficial movements. It transcended them fundamentally. Under the hammer blows of the Russian revolution, as a direct result of the conscious intervention of a communist party guided by the arsenal of revolutionary strategy and tactics established by the Communist International an unofficial movement was built committed initially, to the transformation of the unions as a means to organising the working class for the struggle for power.

The militant unofficial minorities in the major unions were welded into a potential alternative revolutionary leadership under the programme of the communist party. In this way the Minority Movement was distinct from the previous syndicalist shop stewards movement, and it is this vital distinction that lies at the heart of our orientation to the building of a rank and file movement in the period ahead.

The operative principle of the Communists in the revolutionary period of the Minority Movement was later summed up by Leon Trotsky in the 'Transitional Programme', *'Trades Unions are not ends in themselves, they are but means along the road to proletarian revolution'*.

The class struggles of the 60s and 70s have again created an unofficial movement in the British Trade Union. In every major industry and union there exists a distinct militant minority. The capitalist offensive and the class collaboration of the Trade Union bureaucrats, pose sharp political questions before this minority of militants. The nature of unofficial organisation and the circumstances in which it exists are different from those prior to the building of the Minority Movement. Nevertheless the tasks of Communists remain the same, to win the unofficial movement away from its confused, at best centrist, politics and to a revolutionary communist strategy. Whereas this was done relatively rapidly in the Twenties, in today's conditions it is likely to be the result of a long and protracted political struggle within the unofficial movement.

The central tactic in this struggle will be that of the united front. Within the trade unions the form of the united front, in present conditions, will be a rank and file movement. By this we mean that revolutionary communists must fight alongside reformist and centrist workers in all their struggles to defend or extend the interests of the class, placing no conditions on their involvement. However, at all times we counterpose to

the methods, slogans and goals of the reformist and centrist leaders, those of the Action Programme for Trade Unions. The correct implementation of the united front tactic places revolutionaries in constant and open conflict with the false leaders of the class, whilst allowing the maximum unity in action. In this way communists can prove, in practice, the superiority of their strategy. We recognise that, under present conditions, revolutionaries will inevitably be involved in limited and partial struggles. We do not turn our backs on such struggles, but constantly seek to extend them beyond their self-imposed limitations by raising the demands and methods of our Programme.

In the fight to build a rank and file movement there is always a temptation for 'revolutionaries' to try to reach a bigger audience, to build a 'broader movement' by watering down the demands of the communist programme, to present demands in essence and form more palatable to non-communists. This method – of so-called revolutionaries constructing halfway house programmes for joint struggle with reformists is, in fact, a travesty of the united front tactic.

Just as revolutionaries do not make their support for a strike for Trade Union rights conditional on the acceptance of the communist programme by the strike leadership, we do not make our involvement in rank and file organisations (mobilising advanced sections of the working class) conditional on their prior agreement to our programme. But the task of communists is not to offer imagined compromise programmes of agreement with reformists – it is to fight alongside those workers maintaining full independence of programme, seeking to prove the correctness of our programme and strategy in struggle. That must be the position of revolutionary communists in the struggle to build a rank and file movement. Any other method would be an abdication of our duty to raise the demands that are necessary for the class. As a result it would prevent constant exposure of the weakness of the reformists' policies in comparison with those of the revolutionaries'. Such a 'halfway house' approach to the question of the united front must be opposed at all times – there are no short cuts.

## THE LEFT AND THE RANK & FILE MOVEMENT The Socialist Workers' Party (IS)

In formal terms, the creation of a Rank and File Movement has been most central to the politics of the SWP. The theoreticians of IS declared the post-war Labour Government (1945-51) to have been the last great period of reforms, 'enacted from above'. The decline of individual Labour Party membership in the 1950s, the growth of the shop stewards' organisations in the workplace, signified, for them, a turn on the part of the best militants toward the shop-floor where real gains could be made. IS dubbed this a new tradition of 'Do-it-yourself Reformism'.

From this analysis, in the mid sixties, IS, deeply imbued with the spontaneism and anti-Leninist politics of Cliff's 'Luxemburgism' (viz T. Cliff 'Rosa Luxemburg' 1st edition) argued that, "the principal tasks of socialists are to do what we can to unify the working class and to encourage the movement from below." (Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Stewards; May 1966, p.185) This, 'movement from below' was equated with the steady expansion of shop steward organisation across industry. "It is the general nature of the threat facing stewards that allows the opportunity for developing them into a widely based movement" (Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Stewards; 1966, p.136) To IS at the time, the shop stewards movement was set to become *the* labour movement. This was posed most sharply in the Liverpool Socialist Worker pamphlet, 'In Defence of Strikes, the Anti-Castle report':

"To all intents and purposes, the old Labour movement, the Trade Unions and the Labour Party, are dead or dying..."

"The shop stewards movement is the only real Labour movement that exists at the moment."

The IS gave no political content to their call for the shop stewards movement, it was simply expected to fight the Incomes Policy, to link factories together, to put more bite into 'do-it-yourself' reformism.

By 1970 IS had to admit that its expected shop stewards movement had not come into existence. "The Employers Offensive" of 1970 admitted that the scenario of 1966 had been faulty. In the wake of "discovering Leninism" as a form of organisation for the IS, Cliff placed stress on the reasons for the non-emergence of the shop stewards movement lying with "The lack of a strong militant socialist party to unify the class." (Employers' Offensive, p.5)

The new work did not even mention the need to build a rank and file movement arguing in its 1½ page conclusion entitled "Politics" that, "We need a revolutionary socialist movement," (Employers' Offensive, p.232) The IS perspective outlined in "Incomes Policy" had not proved correct because of "the lack of a strong militant socialist party to unify the class" (Employers' Offensive, p.5) and therefore bring into existence a rank and file movement. The party was designated a necessary, but *purely organisational role* in uniting the rank and file movement.

The rank and file movement was designated a limited, trade union role, as a halfway house between the party and the class. The IS executive committee's pre-conference discussion documents of April 1975 made this clear. The rank and file movement was seen as "playing a vital role of organising a bridge between the party and the class", within a division of labour where the party consisted of those "ready to overthrow capitalism" and the rank and file movement organised those "who are ready to fight".

This has been most recently summarised by Steve Jeffreys in the International Discussion Bulletin of the SWP (no 7/8). He advances a programme of militant Trade Union reformism.

*"In the present world crisis of the capitalist system this often means being the most consistent (and most democratic) reformists within the unions which are rapidly abandoning (in the most bureaucratic ways) the reformism of yesterday."*

Explicitly and honestly he goes on to argue that what he terms 'orthodox Trotskyism' has always failed to understand the significance of the party as being not its political, programmatic essence but its organisational role.

*"They ignore or play down the central contribution of Lenin, namely that the issue of party and class is fundamentally an organisational question. Both of mass organisations of the revolutionary party and of intervention by the party in even greater mass organisations of the class."*

The IS schema envisaged a rank and file movement as no more than a *militant* shop steward based movement. Its development was guaranteed because of the collapse and decay of the official movement. The job of revolutionaries was simply to assist in organising this current. While IS underlined the need for independence from, and opposition to, the trade union bureaucracy, this task was seen in purely organisational terms. In his work, "The Challenge of the Rank and File" (ISJ 76 March 1975), Steve Jeffreys outlined the four major lessons that needed to be learnt from the history of the national Minority Movement and the Shop Stewards Movement:

- 1) that organisation at the workplace level was the key question,
- 2) that the aim of the rank and file movement must be to connect existing sectors with each other,
- 3) that the rank and file movement must work within unions to challenge reformist leaders over their control of the unions,
- 4) that the rank and file movement must have a national organisational structure, a structure that could only result from the conscious activity of committed militants, ie the party.

In fact IS learnt none of the central lessons of the Minority Movement. They did not understand that such a movement could only be organised around a political challenge to class collaboration and the class collaborating bureaucracy — a

programme for workers' power and the transformation of the trade union movement. This explains the history and failure of the IS attempt to build a rank and file movement. The rank and file movement was posed as an alternative to the bureaucratic LCDTU in a period of generalised militancy. The IS leadership turned their backs on intervention in the LCDTU conferences considering they could win militants directly to the "rank and file movement" and build a sufficient pole of attraction outside the LCDTU to break its hold over militant sections of the class.

In the face of the LCDTU's failure to organise democratically and independently of the trade union bureaucracy, the IS leadership decided to declare their own "rank and file movement" based on militant groupings in a series of industries. Two hundred and seventy trade union bodies were represented at the first conference (1974), 313 at the second in 1975. Most were militants schooled in the upsurge of militancy against the Heath government, against anti-union legislation, against productivity dealing and speedup. The programme of the "movement" never rose above the level of militant trade unionism, IS opposed all forces who attempted to change this with characteristic undemocratic and bureaucratic zeal. The first conference declared itself for the defence of trade union rights, against incomes policies, for militant policies and for trade union democracy. The national campaigns of the formation centred on issues of 'trade union principle' giving the "rank and file movement" a hearing among better sections of the class but laying no basis for a coherent communist opposition to the bureaucratic leaders. Schools were organised on 'safety at work'; leaflets and campaigns were organised on Shrewsbury and the adoption of Chilean trade union prisoners; but the "movement" never materialised. In 1976 and 1977 it was replaced by the Right to Work campaigns and marches. The 1977 conference of the IS dominated Rank and File Movement was the smallest and least representative, incapable of organising sustained solidarity action with the firemen's struggle.

For many, particularly ex-IS members, this record of stagnation and decline is explained simply by the bureaucratic stifling organisational practices of the IS leadership. The movement failed, it is argued, because IS refused to recognise the organisational independence of the rank and file movement. The current leadership of the SWP's counsel to their members to drop the "front" aspect of the "rank and file movement" suggests that certain of the SWP's leaders understand their failures in these terms too.

Our position is that the IS sponsored and dominated "rank and file" initiative failed because of its politics. Conceived of as a militant halfway house between the party and class, IS were only prepared to fight for policies that were "militant" and not being carried out by the trade union bureaucracy — for what IS quite openly called "do-it-yourself reformism".

Policies of militant shop floor economic reformism could lay the basis for individual stunts but they could not lay the basis for a political challenge to the trade union bureaucracy, a challenge to transform the unions in order to struggle for power. The SWP dominated rank and file has been left calling for militant trade unionism, modelled on the shop floor strength of the 1960s at a time when it is precisely such traditional shop floor militancy which is incapable of answering the central questions facing the workers' movement.

## The International Marxist Group

The IMG, and Socialist Challenge, also claim a commitment to building a new Minority Movement. Although they make much of their disagreements with the SWP's conception of the 'Rank and File Movement' in reality both groups operate on the same, 'half-way house' methodology.

The IMG advance two major criticisms of the SWP position. Firstly, they argue, the SWP operates with a purely

sociological notion of the difference between the bureaucracy and the rank and file of the unions. Secondly, they attack the SWP for strangling and suffocating democracy and the necessary debate within the Rank and File formations. What is the alternative argued for by the IMG?

The IMG, quite rightly, point to the need to challenge the politics of the union bureaucracy – to fight for political alternative to their class collaboration. However, the politics they advance are simply the politics that can draw together all those elements in the trade unions who will support, at least verbally, the need for ‘class struggle’ policies. For the IMG this means gaining support both from the rank and file and from within the bureaucracy itself. And it follows that the programme and tactics of the broad alliances must be tailored so as not to alienate the potential allies – the class struggle ‘lefts’ in the trade union bureaucracy. Likewise criticism of these projected allies must be played down by the “revolutionaries” of the IMG in order to smooth the way for their recruitment into the class struggle alliances. Loose federations, on a loose programme of ‘class struggle’ demands, is the projection of the IMG for the new Minority Movement. In this way the IMG, like the SWP, seeks to build a ‘half-way house’ on a non-Communist, ‘class struggle’ programme. They are seeking to engineer broad alliances on a programme suitable only for holding the alliances together. Here is what the IMG say about the tendency it’s trying to build: “What is urgently required is the development of cross-sectoral and cross-union alliances involving shop stewards and shop floor militants and capable of challenging the political authority of the union bureaucrats . . .” Further “. . . the alliances we seek to build would aim at creating a unionwide network of militants, cemented together by a broad agreement on the tasks that lie ahead. Our model would be a modified form of the National Minority Movement of the 1920’s” (Socialist Challenge no.31)

Modified out of all recognition, we might add. Where the Minority Movement was based on the quite clear understanding that the only genuine and effective programme for class struggle was that of the Communists, the IMG want only, ‘a broad agreement on the tasks that lie ahead’. Now the Minority Movement was cemented together by the sharpest agreement on the need to transform the unions into organs for the struggle for power, the need to build a new leadership that would struggle to wrest control of the unions away from the bureaucrats: But all this the IMG wish to ‘modify’ into a ‘broad agreement on the tasks that lie ahead’. The IMG’s strategy of reaching ‘broad agreement’, of developing and offering programmes to reach that agreement, stands in stark contrast to the actual tasks of communists in the building of a new Minority Movement – the fight to prove the superiority of the revolutionary programme and to arm and prepare militants for the inevitable betrayal of the trade union bureaucracy.

In comparison with the SWP, the IMG can sometimes seem more ‘political’ in its understanding of the problem of the trade union bureaucracy. Where the SWP employes crude rhetoric about the salaries and life-styles of the bureaucrats, the IMG talks of a political challenge to them. In reality, however, the IMG’s perspective of bringing together unionwide networks of militants is based on a refusal to follow in the footsteps of revolutionary communists in the unions. In order for their ‘class-struggle tendencies’ to become anything more than reformist ginger groups they would have to base themselves on the need to organise the rank and file for struggle independent of the bureaucracy where this proves necessary. They would have to fight openly for control of the unions by the rank and file against the bureaucrats. They must warn the mass of workers that *all* bureaucratic leaders, whether they are of the ‘right’ or the ‘left’, are potential traitors, the only test being whether they will submit to the discipline of their own rank and file and the demands for the democratisation of the unions.

The IMG has never based its industrial work on these positions. At the April 1977 ‘Leyland TUC’ its representatives failed to attack the trade union officials of ‘Left’ and ‘right’ who had connived at wage controls, they refused to attack the

AUEW ‘Lefts’ who, while organising the conference, were refusing to support the struggle of the toolroom workers.

In the supplement to Socialist Challenge (31st March 77) the Broad Left in the CPSA is held up as a model of what the IMG want to build: “The Broad Left, at its last conference adopted fighting policies and an open democratic structure. All tendencies are free to operate inside it and put forward their own positions. Minority positions are represented on all leading bodies and in its journal.” It is significant that no mention was made of what these ‘fighting policies’ were. The open structure seems worthy of comment from the IMG. The real nature of this grouping can be seen from the CPSA conference of 1978. The Broad Left did tremendously well in the executive elections. The candidates of the Broad Left secured an overwhelming majority on the new executive. At the same conference, proposals on pay and democratising the union, supposedly central to the Broad Left, were equally overwhelmingly defeated. The real fight for policies amongst the membership was never undertaken whilst the tactic of the ‘broad agreement’ succeeded only in ensuring victory for a leadership committed to nothing except vague ‘left’ rhetoric.

At the founding conference of the Socialist Teachers’ Alliance, WORKERS’ POWER proposed a resolution calling for the formation of an organisation prepared, if necessary, to fight independently of the bureaucracy, prepared to challenge the bureaucracy for control of the union. The resolution was opposed by the IMG as being, ‘divisive’, presumably threatening the unity of the new organisation with ‘left’ bureaucrats prepared to campaign under the banner of the STA.

In the Working Women’s Charter Campaign the IMG consistently fought against amending the outdated and reformist programme of the campaign on the basis that the alternative put forward was “too advanced” – too advanced that is for the CP and left trade union bureaucrats that the IMG hoped to woo to the campaign. For the same reasons the IMG virtually boycotted the efforts to build Charter caucuses in the trade unions, committed to struggle for the implementation of the policy of the Charter, fearing that such caucuses would alienate sections of the trade union officialdom that could be won to nominal support for the Charter campaigns.

The IMG are committed to building ‘militant’ caucuses in the unions in political alliance with sections of the ‘Left’ bureaucrats. They quite falsely counterpose the division between ‘Lefts’ and ‘Rights’ at all levels of the unions and a programme designed to unite the ‘Lefts’, to a Communist understanding of the distinct division of interests between the bureaucracy of the Labour movement and the rank and file, and a communist programme designed to unite the rank and file in struggle. Indeed, while attacking the SWP for trying to ‘leap over’ the bureaucracy, they suggest that not only is such a movement impossible to launch at the present, but that it will *never be necessary*: “This leap, however, cannot even be begun, leave alone completed today. It will only happen when an important segment of the mass base of the trade union bureaucrats is dented by important upheavals, and then it will not be so much a leap as a breach.” (Socialist Challenge 31)

In other words, the IMG expect upheavals in the class struggle itself to make a breach in the trade union bureaucracy for us; a breach that they expect will send the ‘Lefts’ to the side of the ‘class struggle’ and the ‘Rights’ into the arms of the class enemy. Because future candidates for the ‘Left’ side of this breach cannot be won today to a programme based on breaking the bureaucratic stranglehold over the unions, and transforming their structure and nature, the IMG refuse to put forward such a programme.

This is made clear by a brief examination of Socialist Challenge’s coverage of Arthur Scargill.

Towards the end of 1977 Arthur Scargill attempted to defeat the right wing of the NUM and avoid mobilising his members by taking the union to court over the productivity deals issue. That Scargill should turn to the capitalist state for help against the right wing should come as no surprise to anyone with any understanding of the Trade Union bureaucracy.

Likewise Scargill's climb down in June 1978 over the Yorkshire call for strike action to support the pit rescue workers. Though the Yorkshire area of the NUM was committed to strike action from June 1st, Scargill called the action off under pressure from Gormley and the NCB to keep negotiations open.

Scargill's response was predictable. The duty of revolutionaries is to support all positive mobilisations called by Scargill - e.g. of the Yorkshire miners flying pickets and the mass picket of miners at Grunwick - while warning workers of his inevitable retreat in the face of pressure from the rest of the Trade Union bureaucracy. This fact has not been recognised by the IMG and Socialist Challenge. In their coverage of last year's pay claim and productivity deals dispute Socialist Challenge refused to take Scargill, who they enjoy interviewing and quoting, to task over his failure to organise the rank and file members in a fight for the £135 a week claim and against all productivity deals. Instead they criticised, correctly, the Scottish miners leader and member of the Communist Party, Mick McGahey, but let Scargill off the hook by quoting him on his new found belief in the uselessness of the British courts, but said nothing of his error in going to the courts in the first place! (See Socialist Challenge No 27 "Whatever happened to the miners' pay claim.")

It is clear from this and other instances that Socialist Challenge does not see the need to build a rank and file movement in the NUM, independent of the bureaucracy, which can challenge the likes of Scargill both organisationally and, through its programme, politically.

This centrist irresponsibility is particularly damaging given the strategic importance of the NUM. This union - which has played a vital role in all major periods of class struggle (in the 20's and the 70's) has no clearly developed workplace based shop steward structure. It has remained in the stranglehold of a bureaucracy divided between the right and a primarily stalinist 'left'. In these circumstances it is absolutely crucial that revolutionaries refuse to tailor their programme to 'lefts' like Scargill, that they organise to build a pit based rank and file movement in the NUM.

The IMG, like the SWP, seek to build a rank and file movement on a limited programme, a halfway house between 'their' politics and those of the mass of the workers. They do this quite consciously, arguing that a communist programme would be 'too advanced' or 'premature' for the class, although they themselves might agree with it. In other words, they both put forward demands and programmes which they know to be insufficient. Neither stand in the tradition of the revolutionary Minority Movement. The SWP, while being explicitly anti-union bureaucracy, have no political alternative to it, contenting themselves with calls for more militancy in the belief that it will, of itself, develop into a political challenge. The IMG base their approach on building broad, democratic alliances with sections of the bureaucracy, tailoring their political programme in order to cement them together.

The IMG's call for openness and democracy can sound very attractive to militants who have experienced the degeneration of the 'Rank and File Movement' into an organisational appendage of the SWP, or that of the All Trade Union Alliance. However, the cause of such degeneration cannot be explained by their internal life. Rather, both have to be seen in the context of the political line behind them.

## THE HEALEYITE TRADITION (WRP/WSL)

On a formal level the WRP (and the SLL before) have a clearer idea than the IMG and SWP of the need to build an alternative, revolutionary, leadership to challenge the bureaucracy for control of the unions. To quote The Newsletter of 21st June 1969, "The ATUA was formed in order to organise together all those trade unionists moving

towards the political struggle of the SLL for revolutionary leadership in the Trade Unions."

"This is not a trade union in any sense, but a rallying of all the advanced political elements in all unions, trained to take their place as, first and foremost, fighters for a revolutionary leadership in the trade unions."

It was the political bankruptcy of the political line of the WRP; the campaign for a general strike to bring down the Tories and assure their replacement by a Labour government committed to unspecified 'Socialist Policies', false projection of Bonapartism and impending military coups, the focus on bringing down the Healey/Callaghan government - that ensured the ATUA would become the lifeless appendage of a bankrupt sect. Likewise it was the IS politics, Economism, not the organisational possessiveness of the IS leadership, which made the Rank and File Movement sterile. In a similar fashion, the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement, initiated by the WSL will meet the same fate, unable to intervene anywhere, it will turn in upon itself as a recruiting ground for its parent organisation.

## OUR TASKS

At the present time a new period of capitalist instability has led to the bourgeoisie, acting now through the Labour Government to attempt to claw back from the working class those gains it made in the period of relative stability following the second Imperialist war. Since the mid 60s, the unofficial organisations of the class have been under attack. Individual victimisation, participation schemes, national bargaining with full-time officials insulated from the pressures and demands of the shop floor, state organised arbitration and tribunal schemes are all facets of the employers drive to break the strength of the plant-based unofficial organisations. The ranks of trade union officialdom have proved willing accomplices of this drive by the employing class, a drive to place them firmly in command of the trade union movement.

In the face of these attacks - a shift of power away from the shop floor - the shop stewards movement has proved incapable of sustained resistance. There is a severe crisis of direction and strategy in the shop floor organisations traditionally looked to by workers as their first line of defence.

As the class struggle unfolds, it reveals ever more clearly both the traitorous role of the present labour leaders and the continuing willingness of the rank and file to defend itself and its organisations. The tremendous outburst of militancy amongst the rank and file of the FBU and the sympathy they gained throughout the working class, the fact that even in the EEPTU and the white collar unions, candidates stood for election on platforms based on opposition to the entrenched leaders, are all eloquent proof of the potential and the desire to fight back against the attacks of the state. That the rank and file of the FBU were beaten, that the NUM stands divided against itself, that the once-powerful dockers and carworkers have not defended their jobs, let alone their wages, is equally eloquent testimony to the need for new organisations, new methods and new objectives to wage the class struggle. The class desperately needs to transform its organisations, the movement to achieve that must be rooted in every section of the working class and must recognise the need to go beyond mere defence of previous gains towards the irrevocable transformation of society itself.

Hence the centrality and urgency of the call for a shop-steward based rank and file movement in all individual unions and on a national scale. The task of communists is to support every step towards the building of such a movement, while fighting to prove that such a movement can only offer an alternative to the employers' offensive and bureaucratic betrayal, if armed with a programme to take the unions out of the hands of the bureaucrats in the struggle to prepare the class for power.



At the present time even the nucleus of such a rank and file movement does not exist. Periodically major struggles – in the Grunwicks dispute – pit significant sections of workers against the traitorous plans of the trade union bureaucrats. Groupings such as the Right to Work Campaign, the Rank and File Organising Committee, the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement, the LCDTU and various broad left formations – although they are effectively the industrial peripheries of centrist and reformist organisations – do bring together genuine and serious militants with whom we are prepared to struggle, and put our programme and theirs to the test. We will intervene in all these milieu, to the extent that our size and the frequently undemocratic practices of their parent organisations allow.

We are not ultimatists. We do not demand acceptance of our programme as a condition of our involvement in the rank and file movement, neither do we make acceptance of our programme a pre-condition of activity with the rank and file. At every stage, in every key struggle, we fight for those elements of our programme vital to victory in the struggle and the strengthening of the movement in its transformation into a revolutionary movement of the rank and file. We seek to build an organisationally totally independent rank and file movement, having its own democratic internal life, its own elected leadership and publishing its own propaganda and agitational material. We fight for leadership of such a movement openly proclaiming and fighting for our action programme in the day to day struggles of the class, confident that we will be proved the most consistent fighters for the interests of the class and will attract to our banner the best militants.

A mass rank and file movement will include individual members. But in order to develop roots in the factories,

offices, mines and docks – where its programme has to be implemented, it must be based on the affiliation of genuine workers' organisations: shop stewards committees, union branches, combine committees, the caucuses of black and women workers, Trades Councils and union reform movements must be represented by recallable and therefore responsible delegates.

Although the rank and file movement will be built in struggle against the trade union bureaucracy, it is inevitable that elements of that bureaucracy will attempt to attach themselves to the rank and file as it grows in authority amongst the workers. We do not organisationally debar such officials from membership of the rank and file. We do, however, argue for conditions to be placed on their membership. The guiding principle here is that they must prove by their actions, that they have not only broken from the bourgeoisie but also from the bureaucratic caste whose position as mediator between the working class and the bourgeoisie means that all its members are potential traitors. We demand of all officials who wish to adhere to the rank and file movement that they lead a struggle for the programme of the movement and that they place themselves and the union machinery they control, under the control of the rank and file.

The more strongly militants fight for such a movement the more they will be attacked, vilified and betrayed by all those who fear the independent organisation of the working class fighting for its own interests. A rank and file movement bent on defending the interests and extending the control of the working class against the ever-increasing attacks of the state, will be driven, ever more forcefully, towards the Communist Programme of action for the trade unions. To argue for, and fight for that Programme and for the building of a rank and file movement committed to it, is the task WORKERS POWER sets itself in the trade unions.

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# AGAINST THE CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE

## 1. A NEW PERIOD OF CRISIS

A new period of crisis has opened for world capitalism. The period of expansion and relative stability which characterised the '50s and '60s has ended. It has given way to a new period of chronic instability affecting all the major capitalist countries. This period, marked by high rates of inflation, declining rates of profit, sharpening competition between the major capitalist economies for investment and markets, the collapse of major companies employing thousands of workers, propels the capitalist class everywhere to devise new methods to increase the exploitation of the working class. The capitalist class, internationally, is seeking to solve its crisis by attacking workers' rights and organisations, by driving down living standards, by increasing the size of the army of unemployed, by fostering and exploiting divisions in the ranks of the working class. In order to carry through this offensive, to break working class resistance, the capitalists everywhere are forced to rely more and more on legal and physical attacks on the working class, its rights and organisation.

The crisis is international. The stronger capitalisms - Japan and West Germany - may suffer less than the weakest economies from the effects of international stagnation and instability, but no economy is free from the effects of capitalism's crisis.

The new period of crisis is accompanied by an increase in the tempo of the class struggle internationally. The massive French General Strike of 1968, the overthrow of fascism in Spain and Portugal bear witness to the potential strength of the working class. Internationally the working class is faced with the struggle to prevent a capitalist solution to the crisis—a solution that would mean the loss of most of its post-war gains in terms of real wages and social services, and the weakening and possible destruction of its organisations. Anti-Imperialist movements of national liberation increasingly challenge the traditional methods by which capitalism has enslaved and exploited the under-developed world. Conflict between these movements and the agents of Imperialism contains an ever present potential for setting off

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**the  
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a third world war—a war whose barbarism would dwarf those of the first half of the century. The working class is faced with the task of wresting political and economic power from the hands of the bourgeoisie if it is to avoid this fate.

Against these attacks the traditional leadership of the workers' movement is shown increasingly to be bankrupt. The Social Democratic and Labour Parties are committed to the hilt to maintaining the capitalist order. The leaders of European Social Democracy consciously seek to protect the capitalist order at the expense of the working class. The so-called 'Communist Parties' in those countries where their strength puts them to the sharpest test, have shown themselves prepared to support anti-working class governments in exchange for consultation and vague hopes of ministerial office.

## 2. BRITAIN A WEAK LINK IN THE CHAIN OF WORLD CAPITALISM

Britain, although still a major link in the chain of world capitalism, is a particularly weak one suffering chronic decline. The major representatives of British capitalism are unanimous in their verdict that British capitalism stands no chance of regaining competitiveness with its major rivals without a major restructuring of the British economy. Such a restructuring, the capitalists argue, can only be possible if the working class can be forced to pay. Wage controls—to hold down real wages, redundancies and the pillaging of the social services—to make available funds to underwrite huge handouts to private industry: these are the central props of the employers of forcing the workers to pay for their crisis.

A permanent incomes policy, drastically reduced social and welfare services—the indiscriminate sacking of thousands in such industries as steel and motors—that is the immediate programme of the British Capitalists.

The employing class is divided on tactics. There are those who argue that only government spending and direction can doctor British capitalism. Such views are presented with a 'left-face' by Mr Benn. Others look to the ravages of the "free market" jungle to perform the operation. This is the predominant view of the Tory party. But all are agreed that the trade union strength of the British workers must be drastically weakened through a policy of both direct confrontation and incorporation of them as docile agencies of the state.

British capitalism is trying to conduct this offensive at the same time as it is committed to a war to maintain its direct political hold over one part of Ireland. The maintenance of the artificial sectarian statelet of 'Northern Ireland' not only constitutes an enormous drain on the resources of British capitalism, it is a training ground for new techniques in repression and confrontation. The perfection of crowd control practice—adopted and learnt from Ireland by the Special Patrol Groups—the perfection of techniques of torture and interrogation show not only the measures that the capitalists and their state forces will adopt to maintain their power but also that they are in an advanced state of preparation to defend their property, to confront the organisations of the working class.

In Britain the first thrusts of the ruling class attacks on the labour movement—in 1969, In Place of Strife in 1972, the Industrial Relations Act and in 1974 the Phase 3 of the Incomes Policy—were beaten off and a Tory Government driven from office by rank and file militancy. From 1974 it has been the Labour Government that has set out to systematically drive down living standards. In alliance with the TUC the Labour Government has gone on the offensive against

the conquests of the past 25 years of workers' struggle. The working class movement which smashed the Tories' freeze, freed the Pentonville Five and finally sent Heath packing in 1974, has suffered years of reverses inflicted by the Labour Government/TUC alliance.

## 3. THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Against these attacks, administered by the Labour Government and connived in by the leadership of the trade unions, the workers' movement faces a crisis not simply of organisation. The crisis facing us is one of strategy and tactics—of political direction.

This crisis of leadership is above all a political crisis—it is one which will not be resolved until the working class settles accounts with the trade union leadership, left and right, and constructs a mass revolutionary communist party, capable of leading the working class to the seizure of state power. This conclusion is however not simply or even principally a question of proclamation via propaganda—but convincing those militants who wish to fight attacks on the workers' living standards and organisation, that only revolutionary communist tactics, strategy and leadership are adequate to even these immediate tasks, as well as the historic goal of the class and that the trade union bureaucracy is a mortal foe.

The framework for proving this in struggle is a democratic rank and file movement within which revolutionary communists fight to demonstrate this to militants.

## 4. A MOVEMENT TO TRANSFORM THE UNIONS

The tasks with which a general period of capitalist crisis faces the working class, both of a political and an economic nature, both defensive and offensive, requires organisations, methods of struggle, strategic goals and immediate tactics which present-day reformist (or 'a-political') trade unionism is completely unable to provide. The old Social-Democratic programme of piecemeal trade union improvement of living standards allied to parliamentary reforms, which received a powerful support from the post-war expansion of capitalism, becomes in the coming period a terrible straitjacket for the working class. Thus no programme, no strategy can be adequate to these needs except one which calls for the direct militant action of the workers themselves at all levels and in every phase of the class struggle from the strike over a wage claim up to and including the taking of state power by the working class and the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The trade unions, essential mass organs for the defense of the economic interests of the working class, cannot limit themselves to this task alone. In the epoch of Imperialism unions which do not take up the task of political struggle against the bourgeoisie, which do not actively train and prepare the workers for socialism become, via the medium of the trade union bureaucracy, agencies of the bourgeoisie in the workers' movement, crippling even the elementary struggle of economic self defence and educating the masses in passivity and self-sacrifice to the continuation of bourgeois society.

To win the unions from the grasp of their bureaucratic leaders, who collaborate in tying them ever more closely into the bourgeois state in return for privileges and positions in the lower echelons of this machinery, means to transform them from their present narrow, stultified form as organisations of at most half the working class into real fighting organs of the great mass of the working population. This necessitates transforming them politically, breaking down the rules and regulations and the attitudes which sustain them—which

excludes politics. It means taking into the unions and making the unions take up the question of women's rights such as abortion, of the British oppression of Ireland, of action in support of the struggles of the African masses against apartheid. Not least it means taking up the struggle against racism in the unions and in the streets.

To achieve these aims the rank and file militants of the unions must be rallied into a movement which has a definite fighting policy on the key issues facing the class; which is committed to thoroughly transforming the unions into democratic fighting organs; which recognises the necessity of winning the mass of the membership to the struggle for socialism; which trains and puts forward an alternative leadership to that of the bureaucrats.

## 5. THE STRUGGLE FOR WORKERS' CONTROL

Every aspect of the ruling class offensive—closures, speed-ups, cuts, inflation poses the question of who controls production, and for whom shall it be organised. Against the continuation of capitalist control of production—rationalisation for profit disorganises production for need—we must organise the struggle for *workers' control* of production.

The elementary defense of working conditions, jobs and trade union organisation demands breaking down the sacred 'right of management to manage'. The capitalist class permits the working class not even a shadow of control over economic administration. It conducts its affairs, makes decisions affecting the livelihoods of millions of workers behind a cloud of secrecy and confidentiality.

The defense of jobs and conditions therefore demands a struggle to break open the world of business secrecy to workers' inspection. We must organise to open the books, committees and offices of management to unfettered inspection by shop floor delegates and any 'experts' they may appoint to assist them.

Against the employers' drive for shake-out, speed-up and productivity we must fight for workers' control over the speed of work, over manning levels, over the length and intensity of the working day, over production schedules and hiring and firing. Armed with knowledge of the amount of work available, of the order books and accounts of the employers we must institute workers' control in all these spheres.

But workers' control by its very nature can only be a temporary stage in the struggle for workers' management. As Trotsky puts it:

*"Control lies in the hands of the workers. This means: ownership and the right of the disposition remain in the hands of the capitalists. Thus the regime has a contradictory character, presenting a sort of economic interregnum. If workers' control were to take on a stable, i.e. permanent character it could only be on the basis of class collaboration and not class struggle."*

Such is the nature of the phoney 'participation' proposals of Ryder and Bullock. Against real workers' control the employers offer instead 'participation'—involvement of workers' representatives, union officials and shop stewards in the decisions of certain committees. This is an attempt to make shop floor representatives co-responsible for decisions dictated by the laws of the capitalist market and the decisions and plans of the bosses themselves. Its effect can only be to weaken trade union and shop floor organisation and demoralise resistance to the bosses' plans. We demand instead the right to inspect all books, records etc and to send workers' inspectors into all meetings—not to co-operate under promises of secrecy, but to report management's requests to the shop

floor for decision by mass meeting. Thus the workers' democratically elected representatives and the shop floor itself can exercise a veto on actions which are against their interests

Management will not concede the right of workers' control without a life and death struggle. Likewise it cannot be won gradually without management noticing. It can only be won by mass direct action, by solidarity between workers in different branches of industry, by the support of power and transport workers, by the mass strike and factory occupations.

The capitalist class will fight back tooth and nail. They will attempt to move production and resources. Their allies in the banks and financial institutions will use all their power to shift resources and sabotage production itself in order to defeat the workers. Workers' control of the plant is not a stable condition that can continue in isolation—either it can develop into a broadening class offensive including workers' control of the banks and finance houses (the centre of the planning and regulative functions of capitalism) or it will fall back into isolated utopian schemes like workers' co-operatives or into the outright class collaboration of participation schemes. Workers' co-operatives under capitalism are subject to all the laws of the market, can raise capital only out of the profits of the enterprise and the savings of the workers and have in every way to act like a capitalist firm. The workers and their representatives 'manage' their own exploitation and via wage cutting, speed-up etc are forced to produce under conditions *worse* than those of a normal enterprise. The result is eventual demoralisation and the collapse of the co-operative. Against this utopian scheme which makes workers responsible for maintaining the jobs a particular set of capitalists are unable to provide we demand that the capitalist class as a whole, via the state, continue production or maintain the workforce at full rates of pay; we continue the fight for workers' control, demanding its recognition by the bourgeois state.

The strength and ability of workers to effectively check the capitalists' power to direct industry against the interests of the workers, to obstruct every move detrimental to working people—a situation where the capitalist is no longer master in 'his' own house is possible even for a short period *only* whilst the capitalist is unable to use the forces of the state to restore his prerogatives. That is it must correspond to a period in which workers' councils, factory committees and the trade unions have the support and sympathy of the rank and file of the armed forces (as in Portugal in 1975) and workers are organised to physically defend their gains. This situation—workers' control in the factories and in the banks etc—dual power in society as a whole—is an unstable situation which must be resolved by one or other class seizing political power. Either the bourgeoisie restores its power in the state and economy or the workers use a workers' state to expropriate the bosses. Under the political power of the working class, workers' control can step by step give way to a centralised, planned economy with workers' management of the factories.

The demand for nationalisation is a source of endless confusion in the Labour Movement. After the seizure of political power the concentration of the ownership of the means of production and exchange in the hands of the workers' state constitutes the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and lays the basis for a planned economy, for workers' management and the construction of socialism. Under capitalism the demand for nationalisation of particular firms or whole industries is of a different order. It is the demand that, to secure essential production and the continued livelihood of the workforce, both of which are disrupted or

put at risk by the anarchy of production for profit, the Capitalist Class as a whole takes responsibility for this via the State. In addition we oppose the bailing out of the bankrupt exploiters at State expense (which via taxes falls partially on the shoulders of the workers)—we demand no compensation. However, State ownership under capitalism does not signify an end to exploitation, nor is the state sector some sort of island of socialism. It is in fact *State Capitalism* and the struggle for workers' control is as central here as in privately owned industries. Such firms or industries will belong to the workers only when the property of the capitalist state passes into the hands of the workers' state. Then and only then will the struggle for workers' control (against the management appointed by the capitalist state) be transformed into workers' *management*. To talk about workers' management in the nationalised industries of today is to advocate participation by workers' representatives alongside a capitalist management and is as drastic a form of class collaboration as participation schemes in private industry.

## 6. PUT THE UNIONS ON A WAR FOOTING

Our unions and workplace organisation are woefully inadequate to the tasks facing us—riven by trade and craft divisions, organised so as to stifle initiative, delay action and promote apathy. They organise scarcely half the working class and the great majority of them in the most minimal and passive fashion. To transform these bodies, integrated via their leaders into all sorts of collaboration with the bosses and their state, into fighting bodies, to *put the unions on a war footing* we must start from the workplace.

**For the closed Shop:** for 100% Trade Unionism: for the right of Trade Unionists to discipline fellow workers who flout democratic decisions taken in the interests of the workforce.

**Factory Committees:** existing shop stewards committees must be transformed, overcoming all bureaucratic, craft and trade divisions, into real representatives of the whole workforce. They must

i) regularly report back to shop and mass meetings held in work time.

ii) publish a regular and democratically controlled workers' bulletin for the workplace.

Their central task must be the struggle for workers' control—to abolish all forms of business secrecy.

**Trade Union branches:** where possible they should be organised on a factory or workplace basis. They must fight to meet in work-time with no loss of pay. This is doubly important in involving the entire workforce and, more specifically, women in the workforce.

**Combine committees:** we must fight to build combine committees in every combine. They must be made up of accountable delegates from all the factories and offices in the combine.

Such workplace based combine committees can lay the basis for the building of genuine democratic fighting industrial unions.

**Industrial Unions:** we must put an end to all craft divisions and jealousies. We need one union for every major industry and must support all genuine amalgamations that contribute to that end. We must oppose however all state and employers' plans for enforced union amalgamation on their terms and ensure that amalgamation does not simply mean welding together the undemocratic bureaucratic apparatus of the unions—that amalgamation should take place on the basis of rank and file control of the unions.

**Democratise the Unions:** kick out the bureaucrats, take the unions into the hands of the rank and file.

All officials and representatives in the Trade Unions, and in the Labour Party must be subject to regular election and instant recall. They should receive no more than the average wage of those they represent.

Union policy must be determined by annual democratic conferences of lay delegates—their decisions must be binding on all officials. All disputes in support of trade union principle, improved conditions and wages, the defense of jobs, conditions and wages should automatically be declared official and receive the full backing of the unions' funds and officers.

All union elections to be by show of hands at branch meetings in work time. Opposition to the postal ballot system.

**Trades Councils:** at present Trades Councils have no official power and little ability to mobilise workers in struggle.

They must be strengthened by the admission of delegates from workplace organisations and the local Labour Party.

Only in this way can the Trades Councils claim to represent and lead the workers in a given locality; only in this way can they lay the basis for *Councils of Action* to organise solidarity action, mass picketing and demonstrations in a given locality.

**The General Strike, the TUC and the Rank and File:** whilst in all conditions we advocate solidarity action with workers in struggle, whilst we advocate alliances between the unions (i.e. a Public Sector Alliance, alliances between Power Workers, Miners and Transport workers etc) any generalised period of class struggle such as occurred in 1925-26 and in 1971-74

poses the question of a class wide direct action response to the attacks of the bosses and their state. In such

circumstances we fight for mass strike action striving to clarify the necessarily political nature of such action. The

General Strike is the most powerful challenge to the bourgeois state short of the armed insurrection. Even if called

on a limited economic demand (support for the miners against wage reductions in 1926) or as a political protest strike (as the TUC threatened in 1972) it is objectively a challenge to the

state power of the bourgeoisie. It can either succeed in winning these limited aims *as a threat*, if the bourgeoisie is weak and/or divided (1925 and 1972), or it must take up the

full logic of a struggle *for power* with the class enemy, the fight for a workers' government directly responsible to the

organisations of struggle of the working class. In either case it necessitates the building of councils of action, a workers' defence guard, the taking into the control of the workers'

organisations of transport, communications, the distribution of food etc. This necessitates a dual struggle to force the

Trade Union leaders, most particularly the General Council of the TUC to mobilise all the forces of the separate unions and

at the same time to place all these forces under the control of democratically elected and controllable delegates of rank and

file workers. We fight for the TUC's power over all affiliated unions to call a general strike, and at the same time call for

a democratic national strike committee/congress to co-ordinate the struggle and to ward off the danger of sell-outs and

betrayals from the TU officialdom. We fight for a democratic Trade Union Congress with lay delegates alone voting and a

General Council similarly composed and elected by the Congress.

## 7. ON WAGES AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Break the TUC/Government shackles. An immediate and unconditional return to free collective bargaining. Active support for all workers whose claims breach the Incomes Policy.

**For a workers' cost of living index:** the official retail price index deliberately obscures the real rise in the cost of living as

It affects workers and their families. Committees of Trade Unionists and housewives must be formed to calculate a workers' cost of living index. Such an index will provide the basis for an ongoing struggle to ensure that the working class does not pay for inflation.

**Immediate Catch up Claims:** we must fight for lump sum increases now to compensate for the last three years of cuts in real wages.

**For the Sliding Scale of Wages:** shop committees, national unions and the TUC must struggle to ensure automatic, full compensation for every rise in the cost of living of the workers and their families. Guaranteed monthly rises equivalent to the rise in the workers' cost of living index—1% for 1%.

**Fight for Minimum wage:** the employers must not be allowed to divide the ranks of the workers, must not be allowed to set the "low-paid" against the rest of the working class. We must fight on an all-Trade Union basis for a national minimum wage adequate to protect the cultural level of the working class and automatically protected against inflation.

**For Equal Pay for Women now:**

**Full Lay off pay:** guaranteed full lay off pay for all workers laid off by disputes. The employers are seeking to drive down real wage levels through undermining the bargaining strength of the factory organisations. Where possible they are seeking to impose national wage contracts negotiated between the Trade Union officials and the employers. They are seeking to tie wages more and more to the increased output of each worker through productivity and measured day schemes. We must oppose the employers' drive to centralise bargaining out of the control of the Trade Union rank and file.

We must oppose all attempts to make workers pay for higher wages through productivity dealing, measured day work and the selling of Trade Union rights.

A wages policy built on these demands lays the basis for uniting all workers to prevent the employers opening up divisions between stronger and weaker groups of workers. While we demand that this policy be adopted at a national level, by the TUC and by the Labour leaders we must not wait for them to act. These demands must be fought for at a plant and local level by direct action whatever the position of the Trade Union and Labour leaders.

**For the sliding scale of hours:** in response to the employers' offensive against jobs we put forward the demand for a sliding scale of hours to be under the control of the trade unions and fought for on a class wide basis. As the immediate steps in fighting for the implementation of the sliding scale of hours we argue the following:

**a) for worksharing under Trade Union control with no loss of pay.**

In response to all employers who attempt to reduce existing work forces we fight for a programme to cut the hours not the jobs. Under trade union control, faced with rundowns in production, we fight for the work to be shared out through reducing the hours worked, with no loss of pay. In this way we challenge the employers' right to deploy labour in their class interests. This necessarily involves an immediate fight against so-called 'natural wastage' and against the non-filling of vacancies. We also fight for trade union control over recruitment. Hiring and firing should be subject to trade union control;

**b) no to productivity deals.**

We oppose all productivity bargains. They are a means by which the employers seek to extract as much as possible out of as small a labour force as possible. Productivity deals inevitably mean speed-up, the erosion of shop floor organisation and strength. At the same time there should be

trade union inspection of production speeds with the right of veto;

**c) open the books to workers' inspection.**

For direct action to abolish the business secrecy behind which the employers launch their attacks. For the formation of factory based trade union committees to inspect the books, records, boards and committees of the employers;

**d) for work or full pay.**

Force the employers to guarantee full pay for all workers for whom they can provide no work. We must ensure that all employed workers take up the struggle to force the employers and Government to provide alternative work or full maintenance at equivalent take home pay rates for all the unemployed;

**e) for the Trade Union Organisation of the unemployed.**

All unions to register the unemployed and grant full membership rights. Particular attention has to be paid to trade union organisation among the unemployed youth. If the labour movement fails to mobilise the anger of unemployed young people and to give a lead in a real fight on their behalf, then the racists and fascists stand to make gains among this section of the working class;

**f) cut the working week.**

For the 35 hour week now with no loss of pay; for an immediate campaign to ban overtime working in conjunction with the organisations of the unemployed.

## 8. AGAINST THE CUTS IN SOCIAL WELFARE

The employers wish to make the working class pay for *their* crisis with declining standards of health, welfare, housing and education. Already these services are woefully inadequate. The employers will be ever ready to seize on any opportunity to open up divisions in the working class between workers in the public and private sectors. While the cuts mean sackings, speed-up, unfilled vacancies and deteriorating conditions for workers employed in the public sector, they mean deteriorating standards of welfare for *all* workers.

**Direct action to stop the Cuts:** we must organise direct action to oppose the implementation of the cuts. There must be no covering for unfilled vacancies, no Trade Union acceptance of deteriorating conditions or increased workloads. Direct Action of this sort challenges the right of the employers and Labour Government to cut the welfare and social services on which workers depend.

Build local trade union delegate-based committees against the cuts. Such committees must draw industrial unions into solidarity action (e.g. stoppages and mass pickets) with all workers fighting the cuts. They must draw in women's organisations, trade unions from the manufacturing industries, immigrant organisations, Labour Party and Young Socialists branches.

Such committees must build support to force Labour Councils to refuse to implement cuts, to deliberately overspend. We must demand this course of action from all Labour Councils. We must insist that they refuse to pay the crippling interest and loan servicing payments which starve the social services while filling the coffers of the banks and finance houses.

The struggle against cuts must be more than a series of local and isolated protest campaigns. We must campaign to demand:

i) the immediate nationalisation of the banks and finance houses with no compensation;

ii) that the Government cancels *immediately* the crippling debts of the local authorities to the banks and finance houses

without compensation. Only this action can free the local authorities to immediately expand the social services;

iii) stop Labour Government handouts to private capitalists. That the government immediately makes available the funds to restore all cuts in social spending;

iv) for a programme of socially useful public works—schools, homes, nurseries and hospitals—under Trade Union control;

v) social spending must be protected against inflation—

**FOR A SLIDING SCALE OF SOCIAL EXPENDITURE.**

## 9. UNEMPLOYMENT

The Trade Union and Labour leaders have stood passively by while the employers have created an army of unemployed numbering over 1½ million. The employers will attempt to use the threat of the dole queue to discipline those still at work. They will try to use the unemployed against the Trade Union movement. The fight against redundancy is a fight to challenge the employer's right to deploy labour and organise production as they choose. We must, therefore, fight for:

**Direct action to stop redundancies and plant closures:**

The most effective and proven tactic in the struggle against closures is the factory occupation—the seizure of the plant and equipment of all firms declaring redundancies.

The successful factory occupation depends on the seizure of the plant, on the organisation of workers' self-defense against inevitable attack and provocation on the picket line, on solidarity action to stop the transportation and exchange of the products of the given company.

Occupations must demand the nationalisation under workers' control of all firms announcing sackings—that the government carries this through with no compensation to the former owners.

## 10. FIGHT LEGAL SHACKLES AND STATE ATTACKS ON THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

The employers are increasing, and will continue to increase, their use of the courts and legal system against the working class. New anti-union legislation, the reactionary corps of anti-working class judges, new forms of police and military intervention in trade union disputes are all central weapons in the armoury of the capitalist class.

**To fight them we must:**

- 1) Defend the picket lines, meetings and organisations of the workers' movement—**FOR WORKERS' SELF-DEFENCE**;
- 2) Support the right of the police and troops to form trade unions—while *not* accepting them into the ranks of the Trades Union Congress;
- 3) Demand the disbandment of the Special Patrol Group and the SAS;
- 4) Demand the disbandment of the Police Force: for the carrying out of its duties by a Workers' Militia;
- 5) Demand the abolition of the class courts: for the democratic election of all judges;
- 6) For mass industrial action to oppose anti-working class legislation and legal judgements.

## 11. FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

"In every society the degree of female emancipation (freedom) is the natural measure of emancipation in general". (Fourier). Under capitalism women remain condemned to the role of domestic labourer and child-bearer within the confines of the family. They are shunted in and out of work by the

employers as a source of expendable, cheap labour and used to foster divisions in the working class. Oppressed as women, super-exploited as workers, the struggle by women for their emancipation must be the goal of the organised labour movement

The struggle for the emancipation of women is inextricably tied to the struggle for socialism. Only a socialist society, where the productive forces are planned and democratically controlled, can release women from their centuries-old oppression, laying the basis for them to achieve full equality with men. Only a socialist society can socialise housework and child-rearing thus freeing women from domestic drudgery and oppression.

On a world scale the employing class is organising to force women to pay for their crisis, to attack those reforms and social provisions won by women and the labour movement in the last period. Incomes Policy and inflation cut real wages. Cuts in public spending injure women as workers through the loss of jobs in the social services and as "consumers" for whom the shrinking of these services means heavier and heavier burdens in the home caring for the young, the sick and the elderly.

Unemployment strikes particularly sharply at women—often unorganised or weakly organised. Even in strong unions the "first in last out" principle works to women's disadvantage—given their childrearing breaks in employment. All too often the attitude of male trade unionists—"women out first", "women only work for pin money" blocks the use of the full strength of the union to fight women's unemployment.

Everywhere the extremely limited and circumscribed right to abortion is under constant attack as a focus of the ideological campaign to drive women back into the home—most notably the "Woman as Mother" campaign spearheaded by the Catholic Church.

The Trade Union movement must take up the struggle against these attacks. But in order to do so, in order to draw women into the class struggle, they must put their own house in order. They must be organised to lead a determined struggle against women's exploitation and to open their ranks to the fullest participation by women workers. The Trade Union's record of support for women's struggles is lamentable. Here, as in the general class struggle, the bureaucracy has made its peace with capitalism. It is thus the entrenched enemy of women within the labour movement. Yet women have fought back against the attacks. They have struck, occupied, marched to defend their jobs and social service provisions. This gives the lie to the claim that women are 'naturally' passive or indifferent to trade union and political struggle.

**Open the Unions to women workers.**

Through their particular oppression as wives, mothers and workers women face problems of confidence in raising demands in the Trade Unions and practical difficulties in attending meetings outside work time. They often face the hostility of male trade unionists and trade union bureaucrats.

We must fight for:

- 1) Union meetings in work time and on full pay,
  - 2) For women's right to caucus in the unions,
  - 3) For democratic women's sections in the unions, while in no way restricting the right of women to participate in the unions as a whole, in no way allowing the women's sections to become a means for ghettoising women workers,
  - 4) Trade Union membership rights for housewives and unemployed women;
  - 5) For the right of gay people to caucus in the unions.
- For Equality at work.**

We must fight for the opening of all skills, trades and professions to women. Only such measures will allow women to play a full role in the working class movement and will prevent the employers using women as a source of cheap and insecure labour against the working class as a whole.

- 1) For positive discrimination in favour of women in training schemes and education ... *under Trade Union Control*,
- 2) Equal Pay for Equal Work NOW: The 'Equality' legislation produced by the Labour Government has proved to be completely inadequate. Only direct industrial action by women workers themselves—rather than reliance on government tribunals—can secure equal pay;
- 3) Against discrimination and victimisation on the grounds of sexual orientation,
- 4) For the defense of protective legislation and for its extension where appropriate to cover men ... *under Trade Union Control*. No dismissal during pregnancy—adequate paid paternity, maternity and child care leave with no loss of benefits.

#### **Women and unemployment.**

In the struggle against unemployment the workers' movement must oppose all attempts by employers to force women out of the workforce. We must therefore fight for: Opposition to all 'women out first' solutions, For a Woman's Right to Work, Only by taking up these demands can we prevent the employers using women to divide the workforce, stop them exploiting the prejudices of sections of the male workforce to their own advantage.

#### **Public Works Programme under Trade Union Control.**

We must ensure that the trade unions take up the fight for massive government spending on a programme of social services that enable women to play an ever greater role in social and political life.

For free 24-hour nursery and creche facilities under trade union control;

For free laundry and canteen facilities under trade union control,

For a Woman's Right to Choose: Free Abortion on Demand; for the provision of day care centres.

#### **For a working class women's movement.**

The whole working class movement must take up and struggle for these demands, but we must recognise the backwardness of male workers on the question and struggle to overcome it. This backwardness of male workers makes it necessary for women to organise together at the workplace and on the housing estates to lay the foundation for a fighting women's movement. For full time housewives the possibilities of organising together are made more difficult through their isolation from one another within the home and their isolation from the collective potential of the organised trade union movement. If these women are to be won they must be drawn into the structures and organisations of the working class including all rank and file bodies of struggle, e.g. anti-fascist committees, cuts committees, from which as individuals they may at present be excluded. The building of committees of trade unionists and housewives to monitor prices is an important immediate step in raising workers' control and drawing women into struggle. Equally important is the drawing of women into shop stewards committees. Full time housewives must be drawn by women workers into the building of a working class women's movement.

Such a working class women's movement, though independent of the rank and file movement will fight alongside it to achieve its aims.

## **12. SUPPORT THE STRUGGLES OF YOUTH**

It is vital that youth be won to the side of the workers' movement. Only decisive action by the working class to fight unemployment, deteriorating social services and racism can prevent the forces of the fascists gaining credibility with a section of youth.

We must therefore fight for:

- 1) The unionisation of the unemployed: offer a fighting lead to unemployed youth;
- 2) Wages for young people to be equal to those of adults, **Equal pay for equal work.**
- 3) Extension of study and apprenticeship facilities. For a Government financed opening of the colleges and apprenticeship schemes to *all* youth: for the provision of adequate leisure and study centres for youth through the programme of public works under trade union control,
- 4) The provision of confidential contraception and medical facilities for youth,
- 5) Full union membership rights for young workers—remove all restrictions on the rights of apprentices, young workers and school students to join the appropriate union and to strike,
- 6) For democratic youth sections in the unions, which in no way restrict the rights of young workers to participate in the union as a whole.

## **13. THE WORKING CLASS AND RACISM**

From the fascists of the National Front to the 'respectable' racists of the Labour and Tory Parties, comes the threat to turn white workers against black, blaming the latter for unemployment, shortage of housing and all other symptoms of capitalist crisis.

Whilst the Tories wish to use racism to divide the working class, the Fascists—the National Front, National Party, British Movement etc—have the project of destroying the unions altogether. A united front of all working class organisations is necessary to smash the fascist threat, to deny them the 'democratic right' to intimidate black people, to rally their stormtroopers on the streets, attack working class organisations or spread their racist poison via literature and public meetings. But the unions themselves need to be cleansed of racism. Known fascists must be driven from the ranks of the organised working class.

The legacy of Britain's Imperialist past, the disgusting chauvinism of the British reformist tradition means that the trade unions are awash with hostility to black workers. If we are to give any real meaning to correct slogans like, 'Working Class Support for Black Self Defence' we must fight to win the trade unions and local Labour Parties to doing just this in action, and to ruthlessly hound the racist trade union officials, local councillors or MPs.

If this is not done then slogans like, 'Black and White Unite and Fight' will remain the hollow mockery they are now when chanted by white demonstrators. Anti-racism is quite as vital as anti-fascism, particularly at a time when the official party of the British bosses—the Tories—is trying to outmanoeuvre the National Front as the electoral expression of racism.

We must support the building of a **WORKERS' UNITED FRONT AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM**, on the following platform accepting support from other sections of society who will fight with us for that programme, particularly immigrant organisations.

#### **Purge the Labour Movement of Fascists and Racists:**

For the automatic expulsion of all known members of the



fascist organisations from the trade unions,  
Action for the removal from office and responsibility of all  
complicit in racist legislation or speeches;  
For the right of black workers to caucus in the trade unions.  
**Equality at work.**

For positive discrimination to open apprenticeships,  
training and education schemes to black workers;  
Oppose all racist grading and promotion schemes.

**No platform for Fascists.**

Drive them from the streets. Trade union mobilisation to  
this end. Trade union action to deny the fascists use of, and  
access to meeting places.

**Repeal all Racist Legislation.**

No immigration controls—the abolition of all special  
police and state control over the movements of immigrant  
workers.

**Defense Against the Fascists.**

Active trade union support for black self-defence against  
Police and fascist thuggery. For Labour Movement defence  
against fascist attack.

**14. THE WORKING CLASS AND NATIONALISM**

The working class will never be able to fight effectively for  
its own freedom while remaining silent over the question of  
the British ruling class's oppression of other nationalities. We  
demand the immediate end of the vicious policy of national  
oppression being implemented by the British Army in Ireland.  
We are for the immediate withdrawal of all British troops  
from Northern Ireland recognising the right of the Irish  
people as a whole to determine the future of the Six Counties.

We are therefore in complete solidarity with all those  
fighting to drive British Imperialism out of Ireland. We are  
for the release of all Irish prisoners of war held in the UK or  
in Ireland and the immediate, unconditional repeal of the  
Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Only thus can a complete fraternal solidarity be built with  
Irish workers in Eire or the UK.

Throughout the world the employing class is fighting a  
desperate battle to maintain its grip on the markets and raw  
materials it has so ruthlessly exploited. Spearheaded by  
American Imperialism they are prepared for war to hold on to  
their possessions.

The Trade Union Movement must make it its task to  
support movements of liberation against Imperialism in all  
ways possible. We share a common enemy with the oppressed  
and exploited of the world.

Through the blacking of supplies to the Imperialist war  
efforts, through demonstrations, through collections and  
donations for arms for the freedom fighters we must do all  
in our power to actively assist the struggle against Imperialism.  
At this moment we must campaign actively to support those  
fighting to liberate Zimbabwe and Southern Africa from  
Imperialist domination.

The Labour Movement must fight to prevent the  
splitting of the Scots, Welsh and English working class. We  
must oppose vigorously the threats to that unity posed by the  
nationalists and by those chauvinist Labour 'Lefts', who  
actually strengthen nationalism by their attempts to block  
a referendum in Scotland and Wales. We must recognise the  
democratic right of the Scots and Welsh to self determination  
up to and including complete separation. But we must  
campaign vigorously to argue that the interests of Scots and  
Welsh workers do not lie with either independence or  
parliamentary devolution arrangements. Against these we do  
not pose the sovereignty of the British Parliament or of the  
United Kingdom, but of the united struggle for a workers'  
republic.

We must decisively reject the programmes of these  
Labour 'Lefts' for nationalist and isolationist solutions to  
the crisis of British capitalism. Their campaign to withdraw  
from the Common Market—a campaign that sees a 'British  
Capitalism' as preferable to a 'foreign' European capitalism  
must be vigorously opposed. In or out of the Common  
Market the tasks of the workers' movement remain the  
same: to develop and strengthen international unity in the  
workers' movement: we must build international trade union  
organisations to fight the employers, international combine  
committees and co-ordination. To oppose all nationalist  
solutions advanced in the workers' movement. We must  
oppose the campaign of the 'Lefts' for Import Controls.  
This programme for a British capitalism protected by tariff  
walls, offers only a perspective of collaboration between  
British bosses and British workers to save jobs in Britain at  
the expense of workers elsewhere.

**15. THE QUESTION OF GOVERNMENT**

**The Question of Government.**

The traditional goals and methods of struggle, the  
sectional wages struggle, 'leapfrogging', first-in/last-out,  
the reliance on the Labour Party in Parliament for social  
reforms are inadequate as a coherent strategy to resist the  
capitalist offensive. Above all they are insufficient to bond  
together a coherent class-wide counter-offensive.

Neither is propaganda for 'socialism' adequate to the  
living struggle to the sharply felt needs of millions of  
workers and their families. Only around such demands can  
organisations of struggle develop which will not collapse  
when faced with the betrayals of the existing leaders of the  
working class movement. Only around such a programme  
can the necessary forces be mobilised to provide a workers'  
answer to the crisis.

This answer is necessarily a Governmental answer. It  
must be a programme for depriving the bosses and their  
agents not simply of parliamentary office but of controls  
over the real state forces—the army, the bureaucracy and the  
economy. This transformation is not a matter of taking over  
the existing machinery of class rule, but of breaking it up  
and replacing it with democratic mass organs of working class  
power. It means convincing millions of workers, at each  
stage of the struggle, that this task is an unescapable necessity.

The most immediate governmental task facing militants is  
to break the strangle hold the Labour and trade union  
leaders exercise over the organisations of the working class -  
to convince those workers willing to fight Labour in office  
over *their* dispute, that the whole orientation of Labour's  
policies is anti-working class through and through, that all  
struggles against these policies must be supported and no-one  
must hold back to preserve such a government. If Labour  
chooses to stand or fall in defence of the bosses, then it is  
responsible for its own fate.

To those workers who believe that Labour can be made to  
act consistently in their interests, we have to say: "Let us  
prove it in practice. Together let us build a real fighting  
movement which can either force Labour to settle accounts  
with the bosses (as you believe it can) or when the Labour  
leaders compromise and betray (as we are sure they will) move  
forward to do the job ourselves."

We mobilise to get the organisations of the Labour  
movement - industrial and political - to demand the following  
from a Labour Government:

- 1) Workers must not pay for capitalism's crisis - the Labour  
Government must abandon all attempts at controlling wages.  
No Incomes Policy under capitalism.
- 2) Workers must not pay for inflation - the Labour

Government must

a) enforce a legal minimum wage of £70 per week  
b) introduce a one percent increase in wages for each one percent increase in the cost of living of workers and their families

c) immediately introduce equal pay for women.

3) Workers must not suffer unemployment - the Labour Government must:

a) Nationalise without compensation all firms declaring redundancies and recognise workers control of them.

b) introduce a legal 35 hour week with no loss of earnings.

c) make it legally obligatory for all employers who cannot find work for their employees to pay them at full trade union rates.

d) Introduce a plan for useful public works under Trade Union control (hospitals, schools, houses, nurseries etc) in which all 'surplus' labour could be employed.

4) The Labour Government must tackle the real cause of economic chaos.

a) It must abolish 'business secrecy' and open the records of all companies, banks etc to workers' inspection.

b) It must nationalise the big banks and finance houses centralising them into one state bank subject to workers control and inspection.

c) The Labour Government must restore all cuts in social expenditure. It must:

i) cancel the ruinous interest repayments and debts of the local authorities which effect both workers and the lower middle class.

ii) It must nationalise the building and construction industries under workers' control.

d) It must nationalise, without compensation and under workers' control, all the major industrial and trading companies.

5) The Labour Government must repeal all remaining anti-trade union laws (or clauses in laws), enact legislation clearly protecting trade unionists from conspiracy charges, establishing the right to picket, and to join a union.

6) The Labour Government must disband the Special Patrol Group and the SAS, and establish the legal right of the members of the police force and the armed forces to join trade unions and political organisations, have free access to their press and the right to attend and organise meetings etc. The immediate repeal of the 'anti-terrorist' legislation, and the withdrawal from NATO and all other Imperialist alliances. Further we demand the disbandment of the police and the armed forces and their replacement by an armed workers' militia.

7) The Labour Government must immediately withdraw all British troops from Northern Ireland and release all political prisoners held there and in Britain. It must give material support to defence against the Orange pogromists.

8) Repeal the racist Immigration Acts, legally recognising the right of immigrant self defence against racist harassment.

9) Grant immediately the full right to women for free abortions and contraception on demand, the right to work and to free 24 hour nursery and creche facilities.

These demands represent an arsenal of weapons to struggle against the bosses and their Labour supporters. We do not present them simply as a list for propaganda purposes - although we in no way conceal that each and every one represents a vital objective need of the class struggle in the period of developing capitalist crisis. We raise them singly or in combination with others where they can be a focus for united struggle.

However, only a Labour Government which set out to implement such demands as a whole - particularly those measures which place real power, *militarily* and economically, in the hands of the workers organisations, could claim to be a workers government. As we have said we believe that such an outcome is very unlikely indeed. But even if a future labour government - under massive pressure from working class organisations did tackle these tasks then it could be nothing else but a short transitional stage to the establishment of the full political power of the working class over the exploiters - the dictatorship of the proletariat.

# WHERE WE STAND

**1** Capitalism condemns the vast majority of mankind to poverty, insecurity and war. Once a progressive system which vastly enlarged the productive forces on a scale hitherto unknown, it always rested upon the concentration of ownership and control in the hands of a few while the vast majority laboured in conditions of poverty and squalor.

Capitalism, having as its source the exploitation of the working class, is constantly impelled to increase the rate of exploitation in the interests of the competitive survival of each unit against its rivals. Blind production for profit, ever sharper rivalry and competition, result in periodic, more or less sharp, economic crises of over-production. Capitalism is torn with contradictions internal to itself; the most general is the conflict between the tremendous expansive powers of modern large scale industrial production and the fetters imposed on it by production for profit, national barriers and the planless rivalry of world market. The constant revolutionising of science and technology and the potential this holds for improving the lot of mankind is never realised under capitalism. Millions starve in a world of abundance. Indeed, the gap between the wealthy and the poor becomes ever wider.

The so-called communist countries are not communist or socialist. The proletariat does not hold state power in these countries. The mode of production is bureaucratic state capitalism and the bureaucracy is the ruling class.

The increasing intensity of competition between multinational cartels and nation states (including the Stalinist states) threatens mankind with economic ruin and war. The capitalists and the Stalinist bureaucracies are driven to intensify their exploitation of the working-class to escape from the crisis of their own making. From the deepening crisis and stagnation capitalism can only escape by crushing all the independent organs of resistance of the working class.

**2** Imperialism marks the maturing of capitalism into a conflict ridden world wide system of exploitation. It marks the opening of the epoch of wars and revolutions

Imperialism condemns two-thirds of humanity to super-exploitation and systematic under-development of their countries, crushing the development of their productive forces and making them sources of super profits and raw materials for the 'advanced countries'.

The exploitation and oppression practised by capitalism and imperialism call forth forces of resistance both from the working class-the proletariat- and the oppressed masses and nationalities.

The working class, itself the product of capitalism, has shown its power to challenge and overthrow this system in a series of struggles unprecedented in the history of all exploited classes.

The exploited nationalities, victims of imperialism, have also shown their ability to challenge and overthrow the forces of the strongest imperialist powers. The successful socialist outcome of such struggles, however, depends on the conscious leadership of the working class in national struggle.

les under the leadership of a revolutionary party basing its programme on the theory of the permanent revolution:- the independent organisation of the working class for power, the leadership by the working class of all anti-imperialist forces, the spreading of the revolution beyond the boundaries of a single state. The working class must take up, as its own, struggles of all oppressed classes and social strata: peasantry, oppressed nationalities, races, women etc. It must take up as its own, every serious democratic demand of the broad masses. It alone can lead these struggles to final victory.

**3** The bourgeois state must be smashed by the working class. It must be replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat over the exploiters. Democratic collective control over the means of production and distribution is possible only by a state of workers' councils. The dictatorship of the proletariat is only a transitional period, ending with the complete withering away of the state and the abolition of classes - Communism.

Though a workers' state can come into existence in a single country, prolonged isolation opens the way to defeat or degeneration. The proletarian revolution must expand internationally or perish. The working class is the only class capable of leading an international onslaught against the bourgeoisie, though all oppressed classes and nationalities have a direct interest in supporting and forwarding its struggles.

**4** At the same time, the nature of capitalist production, the development of technology, its increasing concentration makes more and more possible and necessary the replacement of bourgeois relations by true social production - democratically planned production for social need.

Only a social revolution led by the working class can accomplish this transformation. Such a revolution would transfer the means of production into common property and abolish the division of society into classes, liberate all the oppressed and rid society of distinctions of class, creed, race and sex.

The working class gains the experience to revolutionise society by constant struggle against the ruling class, through mass organisations created in the course of that struggle - trade unions, factory committees, workers' councils, and through the struggle of the oppressed for their own liberation.

**5** However, the more intense and concentrated the class struggle, the deeper the social crisis, the more does the bourgeoisie seek to divide and confuse the forces of the working class, attempting through its various agencies to sow sectionalism, craft consciousness, nationalism, sexism and the worst poison of all, racism.

In the class struggle the working class must develop a clear class strategy for conquering power. History has shown that the indispensable instrument for this is a party basing itself on a Marxist programme and rallying the most class conscious militants to it.

The party sets as its tasks the overcoming of the unevenness of working class experience, the fighting of bourgeois ideas and forces in the working class, the presentation of the lessons of past struggles and the bonding together and unifying of all fragmented struggles. All this with the aim of developing a conscious and coherent offensive against capitalism.

Such a party must consist of revolutionary working class militants, it must be the real vanguard of the class. The creation of such a party is the urgent task of all revolutionaries and working class militants.

The revolutionary party cannot be built on a national basis alone. We fight to build an international democratic centralist party - to combat the bourgeoisie on the basis of an international programme for workers' power. Such an international programme and party must be built on the lessons and experience of the first four Congresses of the Communist International and the re-elaboration of the 1938 programme of the Fourth International.

Workers Power does not believe such an international party exists. Neither has the necessary programmatic work been completed. The Fourth International needs to be re-created around a re-elaborated transitional programme, on a democratic - centralist basis.

**6** In the twentieth century capitalism's survival has principally been the result of two forces:-

i) The reformist and Stalinist leaderships in the international labour movement. After World War I, capitalism, challenged by the first workers' state and a mass revolutionary wave, was saved in its heartlands by the reformist parties of the Second International. The incorporation of the reformist workers' parties and Trade Union leaders has remained a vital component of capitalist stability.

After World War II capitalism could not have survived and consolidated without the conscious support of the Stalinist parties. Notably in France, Italy and Greece the Stalinist parties disarmed the potentially revolutionary forces, giving power back to the bourgeoisie. In East Europe independent working class, peasant and nationalist movements were subordinated to the interests of the Russian bureaucracy (stability and shared spheres of interest) by the creation of client states to the Russian bureaucracy.

Born of the isolation of the Russian Revolution, nurtured on the destruction of the vestiges of workers' power in Russia and the elimination of revolutionary vitality in the Comintern, the Stalinist parties crossed to the camp of the bourgeoisie. In Russia and East Europe they have created states that must be destroyed by workers' revolutions. In the West they offer only collaborationist, national reformist programmes.

Stalinism and Stalinist parties are reactionary, an obstacle on a world scale, to the Socialist Revolution.

ii) In addition to the conscious counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinist and reformist workers' parties, capitalism has only survived as the result of the wholesale destruction of capital in two imperialist world wars and the subordination of the world economy to American Imperialism's massive expansion after World War II.

The exceptional stability and expansion of world capitalism after World War II has to be understood primarily as a result of these two factors. However, capitalism in the twentieth century cannot free itself from the pressures of inflation, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, increasing instability and a sharpening of competition on a world scale except at the expense of the working class.

**7** The working class has, over the last 150 years, fought to create organisations capable of leading the struggle for Socialism. The early workers' organisations ( e.g. the Char-

tists in England) the Social Democratic and Labour parties the Communist parties of the 1920's, all, at their foundations, were looked to by the workers to accomplish their emancipation. Yet the bourgeoisie and its agents in the working class exerted enormous pressure to corrupt and destroy them as weapons of class struggle.

This corruption has taken the form of reformism and capitulation to chauvinism. That is, the supposedly gradual transformation of capitalism through parliamentary reform and the identification of the working class with "its" nation and ruling class against the workers of other nations. The Labour and Communist Parties are thoroughly corrupted in this way — although many of their members and supporters sincerely wish to destroy capitalism.

**8** The Labour Party, in its programme and policies, is firmly tied to the bourgeois state, committed to managing capitalism. It is a bourgeois party. In periods of boom, under working class pressure, it has enacted limited reforms which, however, leave the fundamental power bases of the ruling class intact. In periods of gathering storm like the present it acts as the bosses' most subtle weapon to claw back the concessions made over decades, attacking workers in struggle again and again.

Yet the Labour Party is a party rooted in the working class movement. The Trade Unions finance and support it and provide it with most of its activists. The vast majority of workers vote for it and see it as their party — as the one that should act for them and against the bosses. It is a bourgeois workers' party. In this contradiction lies the possibility of overcoming the crippling illusions in a peaceful parliamentary road to Socialism. We fight to strengthen every anti-capitalist action of the rank and file members within the Labour Party, every attempt to use it in the service of the class.

The Labour Party claims to be the party of the working class based on the Trade Unions. We defend the right of all varieties of Socialist thought to exist and organise in the Labour Party.

**9** The revolutionary Left consists of fragmented and disunited groups stemming from the only consistently revolutionary tradition to emerge from the collapse of revolutionary communism in the 1920's and '30's, the followers of L.D. Trotsky and the Fourth International movement. Opportunism, sectarianism and dogmatism have wreaked havoc within this movement. However, the recreation of revolutionary parties and an International can take place only on the basis of the fundamental elements of this doctrine and method applied creatively to the new period of capitalist crisis opening before us.

The Workers' Power group sets itself the task of fighting for revolutionary unity based upon a principled programme. The elements of this programme are the basis for our current work and activity. We will co-operate in a non-sectarian fashion with all who agree with us in whole or in part. We seek fusion with all those with whom we have fundamental programmatic agreement.

#### THE PRINCIPLE PLANKS OF OUR PLATFORM

For a workers' revolution leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The parliamentary road to Socialism is an illusion demonstrated time and time again, most recently in the Chilean catastrophe.

For a revolutionary party based on a transitional programme and organised according to the principles of democratic-centralism — full freedom of political debate, disciplined unity in action.

For the reconstruction of the Fourth International on the basis of an international transitional programme and a democratic-centralist practice.

For unconditional support to all national liberation struggles against Imperialism and practical opposition to "our own" ruling class' policy of oppression.

No platform for Fascists. Against all forms of racism and immigration controls. For the right of immigrants to organise in their own defence. We fight mercilessly against racist ideas and leaders in the Labour Movement and for Labour Movement based united fronts to fight for these policies.

We support the workers of the so-called Communist states against their bureaucratic oppressors, considering that only a workers' revolution can transform them into true Workers' States. Such a revolution would mean the creation of Soviets, the smashing of the secret police and army and its replacement by a workers' militia, the smashing of the bureaucratic state apparatus and its replacement by soviet democracy and democratic, workers' controlled planned production. We adopt a defeatist position in any conflict between the Russian/East European bureaucracy, itself imperialist, and U.S. / West European Imperialism. We, however, defend Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, China against imperialism as these countries are non-imperialist powers.

We fight for complete social and political equality for Women, supporting their fight against male domination a feature of capitalism as of all previous class societies. We fight for all immediate demands promoting this aim while recognising that only the transition to Communism will remove the last vestiges of women's enslavement. In particular we fight for working class women who suffer both oppression as women and super-exploitation within the workforce at present. We fight against male chauvinism and the unequal treatment of women in society and the Labour Movement, for full and equal rights in the workplace. We fight for a woman's right to control her own fertility, for the socialisation of housework and for a mass working class women's movement. We support the struggle of gay people against discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation.

In the workers' movement and the Trade Unions we fight for:— the total independence of the Trade Unions from the State and from all legal shackles on the right to organise and to strike.

We fight to democratise the unions, putting them under the control of the rank and file. We fight for militant class policies; for all immediate and partial demands which increase and strengthen the morale and confidence of the working class. Against all attempts to make the workers pay the enormous cost, in terms of the loss of the partial gains made by generations of workers' struggles, for the British bourgeoisie to rationalise and re-structure industry for their own benefit.

For a working class counter-offensive, fighting to impose workers' control (not participation) of production, the only conclusion to this struggle is a planned economy and a workers' state. It is the duty of revolutionaries to convince the masses of workers in struggle and step by step, of the inevitability, necessity and possibility of achieving Socialism the only alternative offered to mankind is barbarism.

For practical solidarity with workers in struggle throughout the world. For the international unity of trade unions and especially for links between the rank and file of different countries.

We commit ourselves to polemic, debate and discussion with other tendencies of the Left to clarify the political differences, the possibilities of joint work, and to lay the basis for a principled regroupment on an international and national basis.