
Communist Federation of Britain (ML)

Letter from Workers Broadsheet & Editor's reply

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Letters

Dear Comrades,

We would like to congratulate you on the leading article in the February "Struggle" - "Kick or be kicked" - for your informative analysis of the present economic situation of capitalism. Then in the final paragraph you change over from analysis, not to attack but to defence.

"Our job is clearly to defend our interests by continuing to increase wages.... If the explosion is to end with workers in control, we must also make certain that they polarise to the left. We must also make certain that WE KNOW (our emphasis) exactly what to do when they arrive. We will only be successful if in every wage struggle we continually SHOW (our emphasis) how only Socialism under workers' power can resolve the present crisis".

It is not only you - or we - we have to know "exactly what to do" when that expected crisis "arrives" - it is also the many thousands, even millions, of militant workers who will have to do the job of revolution if it is to be done at all - not just a handful of Marxists. Our job as Marxists is to explain to these tens of thousands what is to be done, and to do it now, before it is too late. To do this we have to SHOW not just to say that we can bring about people's power.

We agree with our Coventry correspondent's judgment that it was mobilising the Confed that made January 12th in Coventry much better than December 8th had been, because the appeal was much wider. Of course, we should ALWAYS unite all who can be united against the main enemy, in this case the Tory Government. But the negative aspect of the Coventry strategy is also shown in the same correspondent's report of the "criminal anti-climax" (his words) of the platform speeches. So in Coventry and everywhere else we have to move on from January 12th and from February 21st. It is no good building our hopes on E.Cs. of "left" trade unions, who are liable to let the struggle down as the E.C. of the A.U.E.W. did on February 4th, and as Jack Jones is doing in the contrast between his "radical" speech last year at Blackpool, and his present "reasonable" attitude towards negotiations between T.U.C., C.B.I. and Carr.

In 1926, the C.P.G.B. and the Minority Movement it was leading made the basic error of calling on the traitors in the T.U.C. leadership to take all power. Never again should socialists make such a mistake. "All power to the Soviets" - NOT to the Communists, and certainly not to the compromising "democrats" who were than in the majority in both Government and Soviets - was correct in 1917 in Russia. Today in Britain "all power to our elected shop stewards" could become the needed slogan, if we socialists do our job correctly.

But if we call, as you do in your editorial comment, on the T.U.C. to "swallow its present pacifism" and to "lead a general strike", this is simply renewing the illusions of 1926.

Socialists have to build a militant organisation from the shop floor, and to develop it to be so strong that "the left", Jack Jones, C.P.G.B., and all, will have to go with the workers or be left behind as were the Mensheviks in 1917.

Socialists cannot use anti-revolutionaries as stalking horses (the Trotskyist illusion). They have to lead with a practical programme (again the opposite of Trotskyism) that will convince the people, as Lenin did in 1917 with "peace, land, bread". To "continue to increase our wages" is not a programme. Capitalism is in crisis, and yet supposedly revolutionary socialists everywhere put forward slogans of pure economism.

"Struggle", "Workers Broadsheet", and all who aspire to the name of Marxists-Leninists should be actively co-operating in putting forward a practical programme for socialists to bring the idea of a general strike for working people's power from theory into practice. 1968 in France showed the whole world how it could be done - and also the fatal effect of a non-revolutionary leadership. We have before us a great opportunity and a correspondingly great responsibility.

Signed Alex Hart and Paul Noone
of "Workers Broadsheet".

Editor's reply

We are pleased that the two writers have expressed their criticism of our article on the strategy of the Tories in their attack, and our line on the correct policy for the working-class at this time. We are publishing it in full and answering it in a detailed way because the views expressed are similar to those met in many discussions in factories up and down the country.

1. In Britain at this moment the working-class is on the defensive: it is the rights of workers that are being frontally and politically attacked at the moment, not those of the employers. Our argument was that this struggle to defend trade union rights must be linked with the overall crisis of the system and constant explanation of the need for the socialist revolution. This will allow the present struggle to develop an overall conscious political character, i.e. we will then, and only then, be on the attack.
2. We are accused of building our hopes on 'left E.Cs' and following the C.P. line in 1926 which is said to have been "calling on the traitors in the T.U.C. leadership to take all power."

But the immediate question is not how to take power - however much we would like it to be. It is how to mobilise the millions of workers who are realising the nature of the present attack. In that task of mobilisation the AUEW resolution is an important tactical weapon. The nature of its contribution and its weaknesses are discussed in our March issue. We stressed the need for local organisation and action. But we recognise the difference when the call to strike against the Bill is official. March 1st and March 18th brought out four times as many workers as the previous strikes. Four times as much debate on the meaning of Tory attacks, and what to do to kill the Bill, of the dangers of T.U.C. compromise, and of official union misleadership. We have again and again warned of the dangers that the writers mention but what they ignore is the need to instigate action through official union policies as well as through factory-based agitation. Only in struggle do people learn lessons in a deep way.

3. The writers talk of leading with 'a practical programme' but provide none. In "Struggle" for the last four months at least, we have pressed a 'practical' policy (see April editorial) which we think experience has proved to be correct.
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The writers manage to be both syndicalist and sectarian. 'Syndicalist' by talking of 'a general strike for working people's power' with no regard to the need for developing a revolutionary party.

Sectarian because they wish to stay apart from the influence of the official trade unions, which is where the mass of workers are. Sectarian because they do not see the need to defend working class living standards as important. There were plenty of 'revolutionaries' in France in May and June 1968 who wished to ignore the nature of the actual struggle and pretend to make it something purer by shouting from the sidelines. French workers however listened to the trade union leaders. Many British workers will continue to rely on their own union leaders unless revolutionaries learn to use all possible tactics to develop the political struggle which is at present a rising tide in Britain. While the T.U.C. and trades union remain organisations to which workers pay close attention, we will continue to press there bodies to lead actions such as those of March 1st and 18th while pointing out the vacillations and weaknesses of the present moment.

Anyone who believes that a General Strike can be developed without official union support and that of the T.U.C. is living in a dream world.