

# THE ROAD TO WORKING- CLASS POWER



A **workers** power PAMPHLET

30p

# Introduction

The 1984 miners' strike has put all the strengths and weaknesses of the British labour movement under the spotlight. For all those who sneered at the "decline" of the industrial unions or compared "trade union militancy" unfavourably with the gains to be made by "left advance" in the Labour Party, the strike has shown the centrality of direct action struggle against the Tories. A miners' victory will signal an advance along the whole line of battle wherever working class people are defending hard-won gains or vital services and rights. A miners' defeat would unleash a torrent of reaction which would dwarf the losses of the last five years.

The strike has demonstrated the enormous courage and fighting strength of whole mining communities. A mass support movement of wives, daughters and other women from these areas has grown on a remarkable scale. Young miners have shown great courage and endurance in this the longest strike the union has waged since 1926. The rank and file militants of the whole labour movement have rallied to the miners' side.

Yet the strike has also shown the weaknesses of our movement, political and organisational. Above all it has shown the chronic failure of fighting leadership. Only last Autumn, the TUC was swept away by a "spirit of realism". Lionel Murray asked "What do we gain if we sit and sulk in our tents?". Terry Duffy of the AUEW proclaimed: "The Tories are entrenched in power for at least five years, and if we want to soften any of the measures they are proposing, we have to get to talk to them".

The only alternative for these "leaders" was sulking or pleading. That they should leave their tents to fight was beyond their ken. Yet pleading and begging proved even more unrealistic than sulking. During the whole length of the miners' strike, TUC leaders and the chiefs of the AUEW, ISTC, EETPU etc have sat like vultures on a dead tree - motionless apart from the odd croak of disapproval. Only if the miners looked like facing defeat would these scavengers descend with their offers to negotiate a sell-out to the Tories.

Yet these leaders control the organisation, finance and resources of our movement. While miners' families are suffering, the general secretaries draw their fat salaries and sit on the funds that could see the miners to victory. They hold back their unions from a battle with the government that could enormously aid the miners. They fail to take action whilst miners are arrested on the picket lines and whilst the very right to organise is trampled on.

In this pamphlet we outline the extent of the crisis that we face, the scale of the attacks the Tories contemplate, and the forces our enemies have behind them. We look at the state of our movement and how we can sustain and intensify the fightback and outline a strategy for victory. Unless the whole workers' movement undergoes a revolution in its ideas and methods of struggle - in its fundamental political objectives - then the Tories can score greater victories yet. It is to help prevent this outcome that we offer this pamphlet for discussion in the councils of war in the coming months. We dedicate it to the fighting miners and the womens' support groups.

**VICTORY TO THEM!**

# Their system in crisis

The ten years between the 1974 miners' strike and that of 1984 have been eventful ones for the British labour movement. The triumph of '74 gave way to confusion and disarray as the Labour Government turned on the working class imposing cuts in social services, wages freezes and unemployment. Labour ministers master-minded productivity deals and participation schemes whose effects were to weaken or divide the strongest battalions of the working class — the miners and the car workers. A massive revolt against Labour's anti-working class policies drove Callaghan into an election which brought Thatcher to power. In the post-1979 Tory Government we witnessed the complete breakdown of the post-war consensus whereby their predecessors had not fundamentally called into question the 'gains' of the first post-war Labour Government. Now nationalisations, the social services, the co-existence between organised Labour and the bosses, embodied in the role of the TUC as an "estate of the realm", and the ideal of full-employment were all under attack. Thatcher took the axe to the root of all these fundamentals of the post-war class collaboration.

What is the reason for this brutal demolition job on a system which for thirty years served Britain's bosses well enough in warding off any fundamental attack on their system of exploitation? We need not look too far for an answer. The last 10 years have seen a dramatic slump in the fortunes of British bosses. They have little room for compromise. They must try to take on and beat the miners and thereby break the spine of the labour movement.

The closure of pits and the shutdown of steel mills is not a feature unique to British capitalism. The economic crisis is world wide. The most glaring signs are the staggering waste of human and technical resources in the midst of a world of starvation, poverty and squalor.

The enforced idleness of unemployment is the fate of over 30 million in the industrialised West. Hundreds of millions more in the Third World suffer the same fate. 800 million wretch-

es do not have enough to eat while £6 billion a year is spent on destroying and storing food in the EEC.

Behind the waste, suffering and inequality lies the root cause of human misery today; the exploitative system of capitalist production. It cannot join the skills and strength of millions of workers to the technological wonders and raw materials of our planet to meet human need. It is a system that cannot offer employment or set the wheels of production turning unless this can be done for the profit of a tiny handful of parasites. Thus coal can remain unmined, production lines be silent, steel mills be closed whilst people around the globe cry out for homes, schools and hospitals.

Alongside mass unemployment, inflation exists as a permanent feature of the system, constantly eroding living standards. Despite Thatcher's and Reagan's attempt, it cannot be "squeezed out of the system" since it is the last resort of the bosses who hoist prices to safeguard their profits.

In the 1970's and '80's, the rate at which profits are being extracted from the working class has slowed to a trickle. In the USA, UK and West Germany profit rates have fallen to a half or quarter of what they were in the 1960's. As a result investment has slumped and with it production itself has stagnated.

Since the end of the post-war boom, each slump is worse than the one before, each upturn more shallow and faltering. Thus, the world recession of 1979-82 is worse than 1973-75. In the ten years to 1980, annual growth in the advanced capitalist countries barely reached 2% compared to double that the previous decade.

The small economic upturn since 1982 is highly restricted by the ever-present features of crisis. The election year 'boom' of Reagan is strangled by high interest rates themselves the product of the huge mound of debt which chokes the US and world economy. In Europe, recovery hardly fails to distinguish itself from slump as most countries still hover below or at pre-slump levels of production.

Of course, the contraction of profitable production leads necessarily to the shrinking of world trade. This, in turn, heightens competition and friction between the major capitalist blocs, between USA, Europe and Japan. The commercial rivalry and trade wars further threaten working people as they are dragged into making sacrifices to boost the profits of their own nation's bosses.

Yet the major cleavage in world politics today which threatens humanity with war and destruction on a scale never seen before, is that between the 'Western' imperialist powers on the one hand and the anti-imperialist struggles of the Third World and the self-defence of the USSR and the other non-capitalist countries on the other. Thatcher and Reagan have targeted the struggles of the workers and peasants of Central America for the basic decencies of life, for land, for jobs, for democratic rights. They are determined to prevent the Soviet Union giving them any aid or support. They wish to isolate and break up the states where capitalism has been overthrown and a planned economy instituted.

## FALKLANDS WAR

The fruits of these policies have been seen in Thatcher's £2 billion war in the Falklands, intended as a warning to the countries of Latin America to keep their hands off Britain's bosses' property in their countries. It has been seen in Reagan's invasion of Grenada and his 'dirty war' against Nicaragua and in El Salvador. Around the globe, Reagan and Thatcher bolster racist regimes South Africa and Israel — against those they exploit and oppress.

Nearer home, Thatcher continues the 15-year long war against the nationalist population in Northern Ireland where 25 000 troops defend the Irish Protestant minority in their artificial statelet, carved from Ireland in 1921. By this division of Ireland, the South is maintained as a docile obedient area for exploitation by British, German and American capitalism.

Now Thatcher — the victor of the Falklands — wants a domestic triumph. The miners are her target. This confrontation has been long planned for. The extent of this preparation reflects the fact that the strength of the British labour movement and, in particular, the miners stand between the bosses and any fundamental solution to the problems besetting British capitalism.

The domination of Britain's economy by the City of London (the great banks and finance houses) has long meant that a very high proportion of the bosses' profits has been made abroad.

Their complacent neglect of domestic industry resulted in a chronic lack of investment. As a result, by the time of the miner's strike of 1972, British capitalism had a profit rate and productivity performance between a half and two-thirds that of its rivals. The UK share of world export slumped from 20% to 10% in the twenty years up to 1973.

For the last 20 years, the British ruling class have struggled to find a leadership strong enough to make the working class pay the full cost of a fundamental restructuring of its system. The Labour Government of 1964 -70 and 1974 - 79 relied upon inflation, incomes policy and state directed investment in collaboration with the trade union chiefs to police the rank and file. But the slow erosion of working class gains that resulted was insufficient. The Thatcher government is the result. Thatcher and her class do not stand alone. She has united the bosses at home and she has the international backing and solidarity of bosses' governments in Europe and North America. The miners likewise need to take an international class stand in the present struggle. If they do not request and get practical support *now* from dockers, miners and transport workers abroad, then the strike will be seriously undermined. In return, however, they must give support to workers around the world fighting the same enemy and the same attacks.

Moreover, the possibility and potential of an international struggle against the world crisis has been demonstrated time and again in recent months. The slight economic revival in Europe in 1984 has instilled confidence into millions of workers. In Italy, a million strong demonstration to defend wage indexation took place in March. Belgian workers have struck in near general strike proportions in recent months to defend jobs and social services. French steel workers have struck against the so-called Socialist Mitterrand's austerity plans. Even now in West Germany, tens of thousands of engineers and printers have taken the offensive to tear a shorter working week from the bosses. The British miners' strike is one important link in this chain of workers' resistance to the international offensive of world capitalism.

Everywhere from the old capitalist heartlands to the countries in bondage to the International banks and transnational corporations, governments are imposing austerity measures to solve the crisis on the backs of the workers and poor farmers. The British working class must stretch out its hand to these struggles — to its class brothers and sisters and help them to bring Thatcher and Reagan to their knees.

# Our every gain a Tory target

In the 1970s the historical weaknesses of British capitalism became critical. The City of London and the Confederation of British Industry backed the "radical" solutions of Thatcherite monetarism and an all-out assault on all of the post-war gains of the working class. This marked the breakdown of a 30-year consensus.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, fear of revolution, communism and the sort of upheavals that followed the 1914-18 war induced Britain's bosses to tolerate the Labour government introducing measures such as the nationalisation of certain industries, the National Health Service, a universal secondary education system and a system of social security.

The boom conditions of the 1950s created "full employment" and allowed Labour councils to build council housing on a massive scale. The improved living standards, wages and conditions were won by union pressure. Local services were won by electing Labour councils. None of these gains posed a threat to an expanding capitalism. They were, not as Labour sometimes claims, piecemeal steps towards socialism. Benn now calls them "welfare capitalism". He is nearer the mark.

Yet now British capitalism can no longer afford these concessions. Thatcher has targetted each and every one of them.

## THE NATIONALISED INDUSTRIES

The British bourgeoisie tolerated nationalisation where the maintenance, or creation, of an essential industry required greater investment than any single capitalist, or group of capitalists, could, or would, afford, or where such investment would not be profitable. Nationalisation of the mines, for example, ensured cheap coal for manufacturing industry, guaranteed profits for machinery suppliers and handsome profits for the banks in the form of interest charges - £366 million in 1983 alone! In addition, the ex-coalowners were compensated to the tune of £164.66 million (1947 prices!), and an added bonus of £74 million in royalties.

Yet where these huge state capitalist trusts performed important services for private capital-

ist firms, and provided profits to the banks and to suppliers, overall their losses represented a tax on the total profit-level of the capitalist class. Also, the nationalised industries and the government were an easier object of pressure for the unions in terms of maintaining jobs, services and other "social objectives" that are no concern to the private capitalist - driven only by the profit motive.

It is true that the National Coal Board, British Rail, the Post Office, British Shipbuilders and British Leyland have all embarked on major job-cutting programmes (with Labour Party and trade union approval!). But in terms of forcing the capitalist class as a whole to sustain losses, rather than unloading them immediately onto the backs of the workers via unemployment, nationalisation represents a gain to be defended.

Other motives exist for Thatcher and the Tories' attacks. Developments in technology make certain areas highly profitable which were once only marginally so. The new technology, computerisation and telecommunications made the monopoly of the Post Office an obstacle to profit-making in these areas. Where state investment has restructured and modernised industries which private capital allowed to collapse, the capitalists now want to take them back into private ownership.

In their first four years, the Tories sold off mainly state holdings in private companies, gained as a result of the massive handouts to the bosses from Wilson and Tony Benn. Holdings worth £2.05 billion were sold off. But the projected scale of privatisation for the next four years is much greater. Approximately £11.3 billion-worth of the nationalised industries are to be sold off. Chief targets now are British Telecom, British Airways, Sealink Channel Ferries, the Royal Ordnance Factories, the National Bus Company and the profitable sections are to be sold off. Chief targets now are British Shipbuilders, British Steel and British Leyland. The privateers' eyes have also lit up at the prospect of getting their hands on profitable sections of the NCB and even of British Rail.

The scale of destruction this will mean to the jobs and communities can be gauged from the

past four years of Tory "successes". In BSC, BL, British Airways and Rolls Royce, job losses have run at between one quarter and one half of the work force.

**Workers must defend, with the most effective and militant tactics, their jobs and the state industries against privatisation. Every job must be defended by strikes and occupations. In every state industry, workers must demand the abolition of the secrecy that cloaks the plans to sack workers, slash services and privatise. Open the books, the records, the committees to workers' inspection. Fight for a workplace union veto over managements' actions.**

**Neither capitalist nationalisation nor re-privatisation offer a way forward out of the crisis. As long as production is geared to profit it will be subject to capitalist slumps. The best defence is attack! Nationalise all the major industries, banks and finance houses with no compensation! For workers' control over production and investment. Production to meet human need, not private greed!**

## THE WELFARE STATE

The system of social insurance, health services and pensions established after the Second World War is a major target of the Tory attack. The "welfare state" accounts for over half of government spending, and this is seen by the Tories as a root cause of their profits squeeze. Such spending, unlike the other major government expenditure area - defence - is not essential from capitalism's point of view. A working class that is accustomed to the provision of medical services, and financial support for the aged and the unemployed, will be more difficult to cow into accepting lower wages and higher productivity, than one which lives in permanent fear of bankrupting illness or hunger and privation caused by loss of jobs.

In addition, the welfare services are themselves employers of very large numbers of increasingly militant workers. Breaking up the welfare state, privatising the health service and encouraging private insurance schemes not only opens up these areas for direct exploitation for profit, but also breaks up the unions that those workers have created and which have proved to be a major obstacle to government plans.

In fact, due to working class resistance, the really large-scale onslaught is only just beginning. Last year saw the government make £2 billion cuts, and 'savings', mainly through the abolition of the earnings-related supplement to unemployment benefit. They have as their overall ambition to cut the real value of the dole, and to "unburden" the state and the employers of sickness benefit and industrial injuries payments, handing these areas over to private insurance.

They have a similar strategy on pensions - allow the state provision to deteriorate to Poor Law levels, and allow private schemes to cater for the middle classes and the highly skilled workers.

The same strategy applies to their attack on the NHS. Already the drug companies make £200 million a year out of the NHS. Already there are 120 private hospitals in the UK. The Tories aim to achieve a 25% slice of the health sector for private medicine. The NHS is to be allowed only a 0.5% annual growth for the next ten years. Since it needs 3% per annum just to stand still, this will mean a massive erosion of services and employment levels.

**The unemployed, the workers in the NHS and the millions of working people who use the services of the welfare state have a common interest in defeating these vicious plans. A united campaign of industrial action, uniting miners with nurses, ancillary workers with car workers, needs to be waged. Isolated days of action and waiting for a Labour government has clearly failed as a strategy for resistance. It was precisely this strategy that demobilised and demoralised the great pay campaign of 1982.**

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Many of the post-war reforms, such as education, housing, public transport and the hospital service were administered via local government bodies. Here again this did not prevent private capital making money out of the services provided, but did remove them from their direct control.

Now that the bourgeoisie want to curtail the level of spending on locally-provided services, the elected councils stand as potential obstacles in their way. Especially in the major cities, such councils are under direct pressure from the working class to maintain services and standards.

The Tories' answer to this has been to propose the abolition of those councils which have shown the most resistance to public spending cuts - the metropolitan counties and the Greater London Council. None of these bodies wield decisive power, even in the services which they administer - the funds are generally drawn from central government. None of them have undertaken to fight against the huge interest repayments made to the City of London.

They are, however, a line of defence of both services and democratic rights which needs to be held against the Tory attack. Only the direct mobilisation of the workers employed by the councils, together with the workers in the private, profit-producing sector, will force the government to abandon its plans.

**Such mobilisations should aim not only at the defence of the status quo, but also the return**

of the funds already cut from local budgets, the reinstatement of jobs lost, the withholding of interest payments and a freeze in rent and rate increases.

### **TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND ORGANISATION**

None of the gains made in the last forty years was won without a fight. The maintenance of relatively full employment, the nationalisations, improved education opportunities and welfare services all had to be wrung out of the ruling class. Through these struggles the organisations of the working class, particularly the unions and shop floor organisations of shop stewards, grew in size and influence.

First and foremost, it is these organisations that the Tories want to break down. Already they have made effective strike action unlawful. The anti-union laws enacted by Prior and Tebbit make solidarity action and all but token picketing actionable in the courts. Huge fines can bankrupt the largest union. The Tories have created special police squads to break up pickets and have mounted huge para-military operations to stop flying pickets.

In all areas under attack, be it in industry, local government or the welfare state, the dismantling of effective union organisation through the banning of the closed shop and the introduction of the right of employers to sue unions for losses caused by industrial actions, has been a central aim of the government. In this they have been aided at every step by the refusal of the leaders of the unions to mount effective resistance through the mobilisation of the rank and file.

So essential is the breaking of trade union organisation and power to the bosses that only a counter-attack of general strike proportions will force them to abandon these laws. For this reason the demand that the TUC call a general strike to smash them must be raised in all actions in defence of working class living standards and rights. However, no reliance should be placed on the existing "General Staff" of the labour movement. Militants must themselves undertake the necessary action to launch a general strike through the linking of struggles, the creation of local action councils and the formation of defence squads against police and military attack.

### **WOMEN WORKERS**

In the boom years, and even into the 1970s, working class women came to represent an ever-larger proportion of the workforce and the trade unions. Nearly 60% of women are now in paid employment on either a full- or part-time basis. Whilst they did not achieve real equality of pay and job opportunity in this period, their struggles,

those of the Fords machinists, the Leeds clothing workers and the Trico women - alerted the whole labour movement to the fact that women could no longer be assumed to be passive, "moderate" or unorganisable. Gradually, this arrogant attitude of male trade unionists, officials and militants alike, has begun to change. The struggles of the women health workers and the growth of a mass movement of women in support of the miners' strike have continued this trend. It has indicated the power of working class women organised directly in, or in support of, the unions.

Women have plenty of issues to struggle over. Margaret Thatcher - Britain's first woman prime minister - is no sister to the working women or working class wife and mother. The Tories want to close hospitals, old peoples' homes, nurseries, and throw the sick, the elderly, disabled and the very young back into the home. The nauseating hypocrisy of Thatcher's "victorian values" are meant to sanctify this process. Thatcher and the women of her class have no intention of "returning" to their own kitchen sink. They want to see working class girls there as domestic servants! They want to return working class women to the isolation of the home where, at the mercy of smarmy headfixers like Jimmy Young and Tony Blackburn, they will be pushed back into being a force for conservatism.

The cuts in welfare provision, the attacks on womens' jobs, the assault on whole communities through pit, factory, steel mill and shipyard closures, must be resisted by women. The 1984 miners' strike has shown the enormous role women can and must play. The vast number of "Women Against Pit Closures" groups that mushroomed out of the first "Miners' Wives" groups are an object lesson to the whole working class. They must not be disbanded with the end of the strike.

Such womens' committees can take the lead in linking up with women trade unionists. They can form the basis of a mass Working-class Womens' Movement, ready to intervene in all the campaigns and struggles of our class. They can help recruit unorganised women into the unions, organise women on the housing estates, fight within the unions for measures to allow women to play a full role - meetings in work time, extra training so that women can become stewards.

The unions in turn must defend a woman's right to work, and must fight for the free nursery, contraception and abortion facilities necessary to turn this demand into a reality for all working-class women.

### **IMMIGRANTS AND BLACK WORKERS**

In the boom period, capitalism was short of labour. Britain, along with its European and North

American allies and rivals, encouraged immigration. In Europe, Arab, Turkish and Greek workers were brought in as "guest workers". In the USA, immigration from Latin America was encouraged. In Britain, the bosses promoted immigration from the Caribbean and then from the Indian sub-continent. Black workers were taken on in large numbers in low paid and exacting, dirty jobs. They have become an integral part of the working class in Britain.

Yet as soon as the boom faltered, they were made the scape-goats. Enoch Powell, the very man who ran "Come to Britain" publicity campaigns as Health Minister in the 1950s, became the front-runner for vile racist abuse and persecution. Discriminated against in jobs, education and housing, subjected to racist abuse and attacks, and reduced to second class citizens by racist immigration laws, immigrant and black workers are being made to bear the brunt of unemployment and cuts in social services. The bosses and their allies hope to play the racist card to divide the working class, the better to carry through their attacks on all workers.

**To unite the whole working class in an offensive against the bosses, it is necessary for all workers, black and white, to resist these attacks, to defend the rights of immigrants to jobs, housing, education and full democratic rights. We**

**must force the repeal of the immigration laws, and unconditionally support and practically assist immigrant workers defending themselves against racist attacks by the police and fascists.**

## YOUTH

As capitalism attempts to force the costs of its crisis onto the working class, it lashes out in particular against working class youth. Unable and unwilling to give them their rightful place in society, and incapable of offering worthwhile jobs and training, it throws them onto the scrapheap before they are out of their teens.

The only employment it seeks to force them into is at below-subsistence wages, as cheap labour to undercut older workers and turn generation against generation. To contain the anger and frustration of the unemployed, specialised police patrols tour the inner cities to harass the young who have nowhere to go but the streets. Cheated out of social security benefits, the young are thrown onto the charity of their relatives.

For increasing numbers, the only prospect of obtaining the necessities of life, let alone its pleasures, is through turning to crime. For a growing number, the numbing oblivion of drugs is preferable to the vacuum of unalleviated poverty and boredom. The working class stands to lose by this process its most energetic and enthusiastic





members. The youth must not become criminalised, demoralised lumpenproletarians. If they do, they will become the raw material for strike-breaking and even for reactionary fascist gangs.

To prevent this, a mass working class youth movement must be built out of and uniting a series of struggles - of the young workers for full trade union rights, of the unemployed youth on the government "training schemes". The central demand must be for jobs or maintenance at full trade union rates. The "Peoples Marches for Jobs" in 1981 and 1983 showed the militancy of youth, and its potential even though the trade union leadership and its Communist Party NCOs stifled them with bureaucracy, and failed to use these marches as a springboard to create an organised mass movement. The spearhead of the flying pickets in the 1984 miners' strike has been the young miners, who have shown great bravery, loyalty and determination.

These are the vital forces that can create a new battalion of the labour movement. The press rightly sense something when they "smear" the young miners as "Scargill's Red Army". They did the same thing with the young Rotherham steel workers' flying pickets in 1980. These forces can be the crack troops of a revitalised labour movement able to take on and see off the police heavy mob - the SPGs and Tactical Support Units. To do this they need numbers, organisation and training. A working class youth movement can prepare for struggles - involve the militants from struggles in permanent organisation and educate and train them for the class struggle and for the struggle against all oppression.

One of the most striking features of the specific oppression suffered by youth is that of young gays and young women. Young gays suffer not only the general persecution meted out to all gays, but are also forbidden by law to have gay relationships until they are 21. Young women are the butt of the Tories' "back to the home" policy - no job or independent life for them, but a round of domestic drudgery, excluded from important areas of social life.

A working class youth movement would lead the fight against the threat of world war and nuclear destruction. Working class youth will be the first in the firing line in any war waged by imperialism. They will be treated as cannon fodder as they have been so many times before. Capitalism's economic decline is drawing the prospect of a new round of mass slaughter - with the added horror of a generalised use of nuclear weapons - ever closer.

Against this threat pacifism of the CND stripe is useless. It offers only moral or individual protest against the weapons of destruction. It has no conception of fighting the system that breeds

such weapons and will cause their use. It opposes all violence - a strategy that would, for example, leave the pickets in the miners' strike at the mercy of the police thugs. What is needed is a militant working class anti-war movement. A movement that mobilises the working class - and particularly the youth - in action against capitalism's war threat, and against the profit system itself.

## FOOLING US AND RULING US

### The media and the law

The Tories have got as far as they have by a consistent strategy of divide and rule. They have tried by their policies to pit workers in private industry against workers in the public sector. They promise tax cuts to engineers on the basis of job losses amongst nurses or steel workers. They try to set the unemployed against employed workers fighting for their rights.

To the employed they say "There's three million people waiting for your job if you don't like the wages and conditions your boss offers you". To the unemployed they say "scab on these selfish strikers - that's fighting for the Right to Work". They set white workers against blacks by suggesting that the latter are "lucky" to be in Britain and somehow have taken the jobs of the unemployed. The same insidious suggestion is made about women workers who "should be in their proper place - the home".

The Tories seek to stoke up the fires of craft consciousness and the skilled workers' feeling of superiority to the unskilled. On the basis of taxcuts, home ownership, private medicine schemes to jump the ¾ million long queue for hospital beds in the NHS, the Tories have wooed the "workers aristocracy".

Election results in 1979 and 1983 show they have had some success. And yet these workers too will feel the lash of privatisation and new technology designed to undercut the high wages their skills and union organisation have brought them.

Against every sign of resistance, the Tories mobilise via their lie machine called "the Media", a massive barrage of propaganda on the theme "there is no alternative". Thatcher calls mass unemployment "creating *real* jobs" and none of the servile journalists dares contradict her. She calls scabbing "the Right to Work". She calls a war drive and re-armament "Peace through strength". The BBC has become openly a slavish government propaganda agency whilst the 'Independent' commercial channels are at the mercy of their millionaire owners and advertising customers. In the yellow press - each

paper vies with the others to pour out hatred of workers in struggle.

The print workers have begun to use their strength to demand the right to reply to these slanders. The hypocritical cries of "censorship!" and "press freedom" should be challenged with this demand. If it is refused then the presses must stop and the TV and radio plugs be pulled.

But the labour movement needs its own 'media' — its own press. Every work place should have its bulletin or newsheet, run and controlled by the workplace organisation, the branch or shop stewards committee. This can counter the bosses lies and educate the membership. It can immunise the rank and file against the sick ideas of racism, sexism and national chauvinism. The unions need to expand their papers, turning them from dull records of the doings of the leaders to real mobilisers of struggle.

The labour movement as a whole needs a democratic daily press — one or more papers that report struggles, transmit calls for solidarity, argue with backward ideas and arm the militants. The TUC and the labour leadership — the Murrays and Kinnocks — cannot be relied on to either create or maintain such a press. Their predecessors first seized control of the once lively Daily Herald, turned it into a boring "official", safe and uncritical paper and then scuttled it altogether.

But if the Tories still depend to an important degree on fooling us with their media they have enormously strengthened their apparatus for ruling us against our will.

## POLICE PREPARE COUNTER ATTACK

The 1972 miners' strike sent a seismic shock through Britain's bosses and their military, police and civil servants. At Saltley gates the NUM mass pickets and the Birmingham engineers made a revolution in British trade union tactics. The flying picket and mass solidarity strike action created forces the police could not handle. Unknown to the workers, regular troops were on standby, armed with 'Northern Ireland' riot gear. Yet the government did not use them. Why not? The reasons were debated in the bosses' press at length. Brigadier W.F.K. Thompson wrote, in the Daily Telegraph, that, "the police must be acceptable to a majority of citizens while the army, final repository of arbitrary force, needs no acceptance." However, to use the army against the citizens it is supposed to protect is a desperate last resort of any government. It poses the question of whether the troops will obey orders.

From 1972, the Tories set in motion, and after 1974 Labour carried on, a revolution in police organisation and tactics. The fruits of this have been seen in Nottinghamshire in the 1984 miners' strike. In 1972, the government set up a National Security Committee with representatives of the police, the military and key government ministries. Across the country, and modelled on the Metropolitan Police's 'Special Patrol Group', para-military units of police, called, variously, SPG's, Task Forces or Tactical Support Groups, were hurriedly formed. In February 1974, the Sunday Times noted their adoption of "snatch squads" and "wedges" in demonstrations, and the use of roadblocks, all "based on the Army's experience in Ulster". (Sunday Times 3/2/74)

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) was developed as the hidden centre for a national police force — in theory not supposed to exist. Behind the SPG's stood a much larger force, capable of being mobilised in an emergency, the Police Support Units. These consist of 34 person units, each under a unit commander. They are trained in riot control and, by the early Eighties numbered some 12,000. In all probability their number has since risen sharply. By 1981, the amount of firearms training had enormously increased. Again, some 12,000 officers have been so trained.

Under Labour, the National Security Committee was renamed the Civil Contingencies Unit. It oversees sixteen, "essential services and industries" and has the power to co-ordinate the setting up of roadblocks outside the main metropolitan areas; it can cut off 95% of the country's telephones and has plans available for rounding up shop-stewards and interning them in emergency camps such as Rolleston. Thatcher, who wept crocodile tears over the suppression of Solidarnosc in Poland, has all the powers and resources to do a Jaruzelski if she needs to. In the event of a prolonged 'state of emergency' the country would be handed over to 12 regional commissioners, each assisted by a three-man body consisting of a Regional Military Commander, Police Commander and a Controller — an executive officer of a major council.

In the last ten to fifteen years a similar growth has taken place in the British secret political police, the Special Branch. In the early 60's it had only 200 members. By the early 80's the figure stood at 1,259 in England and Wales alone. Over four hundred of these are concentrated in Scotland Yard. The rest are distributed throughout the regional forces.

The scale of their surveillance and spying is extensive. The Police 'C Department' computer has half of its 1.3million records allocated to the Spec-



Picture: John Smith (IFL)

ial Branch which itself has over a million files (New Scientist 18/1/79). In addition the Police National Computer can use, and has used in 1984, records of cars, coaches etc of trade unionists who have no 'criminal record' or status. In 1977, under Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees, the Special Branch's terms of reference were extended from those, "who would contemplate the overthrow of government by **unlawful means**" to, "activities which threaten the safety or well-being of the State and are intended to undermine or overthrow parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means".

Under this rubric, the Special Branch has expanded its surveillance from left wing or socialist groups to the Labour Party and trade union activists. In 1979 officially admitted phone taps were running at 1,500 a year. This is undoubtedly only the tip of the iceberg.

This apparatus has been revealed to full view in the 1984 miners' strike. Working class people, even union leaders are shocked. There has been much talk of jackboots, fascism, a police state etc. Shadow Home Secretary Gerald Kaufman has protested that, "the police force was not

an arm of the state but a servant of the community." Tony Benn has stated that we, "have moved two giant steps towards a police state."

Kaufman, no warm supporter of the miners, is, firstly, a hypocrite and, secondly, plain wrong. His hypocrisy lies in the fact that the last Labour Government, and its Home Secretary Merlyn Rees, presided over the creation of this streamlined strike-breaking apparatus and **knew exactly what it was for.**

His error, or rather his deception, is about the nature of the police. They are an arm of the State. The 'community' either via parliament, or the local authorities, has no real control over them. Certainly they have none over how they operate, this would be deemed 'political' interference. Thus, the unelected Chief Constables, like the unelected judges who seize and sequester union funds and jail miners, are indeed an arm of the state. All that has happened in this strike is that this arm has been revealed for what it is. It is parliament, the local councils and our "rights" to picket, strike, assemble, travel on the highway, conduct private communication by phone or post, that have been shown to be unreal, **or, rather, they**

are only as real as we have the power to enforce them.

Our rights rest not on the law, which is in the hands of the uniformed and wiggled servants of the ruling class, nor on a Constitution which, in itself, is not worth the paper it is not written on, but on the fear of the ruling class of an angry and mobilised working class. The present struggles have revealed a truth which Marxists have always argued — that the modern state is an executive committee of the ruling class. It is a class state and a class law. The courts are their courts, parliament is their talking shop, the police are their boot boys. Only the professional pedlars of illusions in the Labour Party and the unions have a vested interest in keeping up the pretence in its neutrality or its Democracy which is "above the classes".

Of course we must defend our "rights" and "freedoms" because they are the gains of past struggles and part of the means to carry on struggling. But we should never sacrifice the struggle itself to the illusions about democracy or parliamentary majorities. Events across the world — in Chile only ten years ago — indicate that the boss class will not observe the rules of the game when their vital interests are at stake.

## THATCHER DICTATORSHIP ?

At the moment our rulers, and Thatcher, are observing the formal rules or rather using them to divide, weaken and demoralise us. Yet, under the gaudy charade of British parliamentary institutions it is the (in the last resort armed) forces of the state which are being mobilised against the working class.

If Thatcher can win by merely bending the rules, by using her huge parliamentary majority to legalise her every move, by using the judges to provide her with decisions and injunctions and the police and army to carry them out, then "dictatorship" or an open breach of the legal niceties will not be needed. Yet, neither she nor we can bank on that. We do not live in either a "police state" a "bonapartist dictatorship" or under a "fascist regime". It is false radicalism to say this. False and not so radical because it suggests that the working class has already lost a battle which it has yet to fight.

The effect of describing Thatcher's government as some kind of military dictatorship is to exaggerate its strength, to encourage a defensive passivity in workers fighting it. For, in fact, the ruling class has ahead of it the option of a complete break with parliamentary institutions and normal legal procedures. What

could lead them to take this action ?

At the moment, Thatcher's government rests on the lower middle class and backward working class voters who elected it. But this alone would not be enough. It also rests on the grudging support of the Labour leaders, the trade union officials who will not fight the Tories. Using the excuse of her, "democratic mandate" the leaders of our movement acquiesce in her rule, in her attacks, by paralysing resistance to it. Thus, while Liberals, SDP'ers and the Labour Party denounce her in parliament they mobilise support for obeying her in society.

However, things can change. If Thatcher's monetarist policies continue to demolish industry and commerce, if the next crisis, which will succeed the present feeble "boom" is worse than this one, then bankruptcies can multiply and the middle classes will feel the full brunt of it. Then the working class and the lower middle class base of the three major parties will turn violently to 'radical solutions'. If the working class can find the right leadership, the right programme for its radical solution, if it can move decisively and overwhelmingly towards the seizure of power and the creation of a planned economy, then the middle classes and the unorganised workers will move in behind it against the parasite bankers and monopolist industrialists.

If, on the other hand, the working class is held back, demobilised by its Labour leaders and union officials, then the other classes will look to an anti-working class radical solution. Here they will meet up with the bosses and the bankers, now desperate not only to weaken and restrict the unions but to destroy them; and not only the unions but all political parties and organisations that the workers use for resistance.

This mass reactionary movement has a historic name — Fascism. To bind itself together it must have an ideology — racism. The dire consequences of this outcome were felt by the German, Austrian, Italian and Spanish working classes in the inter-war period of capitalist crisis.

These crises and dangers cannot be avoided as the leaders of the official Labour Movement advocate by slavishly keeping within the law and the parliamentary game or by giving Thatcher what she wants now in the hope that she may be satisfied. Indeed, this whole political approach has brought the Labour Movement to its present condition. It is a crisis of leadership that affects our organisations at every level.

# A crisis of leadership

When Thatcher came to power in 1979 she faced what looked like a formidable army. The number of workers in Trade Unions stood at an all time high of 13,289,000. Never had there been such a dense network of shop stewards' organisation covering not only industry but commerce and the public services as well. In 1979 alone there were more strikes than in any year since 1926. Yet within a matter of a few years this formidable army suffered a series of defeats that cut Trade Union membership by 16% and decimated shop floor organisation. In the militant British Leyland plant at Cowley a shop floor organisation of 190 stewards in 1979 was cut to one of only 40 in 1983. How could this happen?

The seeds of the defeats of the 1980s were sown in the 1960s and 70s - decades of advance and victory for the trade unions. They lay in a crisis of leadership which developed at all levels of the labour movement. At the political level, the national Trade Union level and at the shop floor level.

The shop floor strength of the working class was developed and extended throughout the long boom of post war capitalism. Shop stewards, particularly in the engineering and motor industries, were strong enough to impose mutuality on the employers. Wage rates were pushed up through local strength and shop floor bargaining rather than by the national wage agreements and rates negotiated by the full time Trade Union officials.

Initially this shop steward based organisation was strong enough to repulse successive attempts to break its strength. Wilson failed to turn his 'In Place of Strife' anti-shop steward proposals into law. Heath's anti-union laws were ripped to tatters when mass strike action freed the 5 dockers imprisoned in Pentonville. Massive working class solidarity helped the miners to victory in 1972. In 1974 Heath lost a 'who rules Britain' election held to force the miners back to work.

## DEMobilised BY LABOUR

Yet within 5 years the effects of these great victories had been completely dissipated. The

reason was that the militant miners, engineers and dockers who had been the crack troops of these victories were demobilised by the election of a Labour government. This government appeared far to the left of the previous one, with people like Michael Foot and Tony Benn prominent within it. Labour was elected on a manifesto that promised a "fundamental and irreversible shift of wealth and power towards working people and their families." Moreover the Labour government faced a different TUC to the staid and conservative body of the 1950s and 60s.

This was a product of the strength of shop floor organisation and militancy which was reflected in the election of a number of left wing Trade Union leaders in the major manufacturing unions. In 1967 the 'Broad Left' in the AUEW broke the stranglehold of the right with the election of Hugh Scanlon to the post of President. The 'left' Jack Jones headed the TGWU. However militants were not prepared or organised to fight them when these left leaders set out to break the strength of the shop floor organisation hand in hand with a Labour government and the bosses.

The 1974-79 Labour government was wise and wily enough not to repeat Harold Wilson's disastrous mistake in 1969. After the minimum necessary reforms such as repealing Heath's Industrial Relations Act and replacing it with a (largely toothless) Employment Protection Act Healey, Wilson, Callaghan and Foot set about tackling the *fighting* power of the unions in a more subtle way.

Phases one, two and three of the Social Contract slashed real wages by between 10 and 15%, a feat never achieved by a Tory government since the war. This was possible because the government had the collusion, not only of the right wing in the TUC but because the "terrible twins" of the left Scanlon and Jones backed this policy to the hilt.

As a direct attack on the strength of the unruly shop stewards the union leaders and the government re-ordered pay negotiations so as to weaken their bargaining strength. In the car indus-

try this took the form of continuing the work of replacing piece rate working with national wage agreements based on measured day working, bargained with full time officials.

In the mines, where national pay negotiations had been the rallying point for the enormous organised strength of the NUM, Labour tried a different tack. Tony Benn was the architect of a productivity deal that set miners in 'high productivity' pits and areas against those in low productivity areas. The great strength of the NUM from the late sixties to the late 70s was that its national claim under the Power Loading Agreement unified it. The Labour government, aided by Joe Gormley, targeted this strength.

The process of participation schemes, such as Ryder in British Leyland, greatly weakened shop floor organisation. Instead of the stewards defending their members on even the tiniest issue, they were drawn into productivity drives and joint committees with management. This opened up a fatal gap between the erstwhile militants and the rank and file. The fruits of these schemes were to prove bitter ones. Indeed under Labour appointee Michael Edwardes, British Leyland was to be savagely dismembered with massive job losses. When the fighting structures for shop floor resistance were needed they were paralysed, bureaucratic and in no fit state to offer resistance.

The fact that the Labour government imposed cuts in wages, cuts in social services and relentlessly increased direct taxation to pay for what remained, embittered and alienated many Labour supporters and union members. The fact that the official left in the unions were so prominently involved in this onslaught further discredited them within the unions. The right began to score significant victories in union elections. In 1978 Terry Duffy and John Boyd took over the AUEW.

By the time working class anger exploded in the great strike wave of the "winter of discontent" the disorientation amongst the militants was enormous. The whole strategy of channelling trade union militancy into achieving left leaders in the unions and a left Labour government had ended in grisly fiasco.

This was by no means the first time that a wave of union militancy had given way to demoralisation and defeat. But whereas after the great defeats of 1921 for instance, a small but important revolutionary alternative had existed in the Communist Party of Great Britain and in the Minority Movements in the mines, the railways and engineering, this was not the case in the late 1970s. And this was precisely what was needed - a political force with a strategy to turn the tide. Such a nucleus of the best militants, given correct

leadership could have prepared the resistance to the Tory onslaught and built a real alternative to the treacherous official leaders who were totally unfitted to face a determined class warrior like Margaret Thatcher.

## TORY'S FIRST BLOOD

It was Thatcher who reaped the harvest of Labour's years in office. Wilson and Callaghan had sapped the strength of organised labour but far from destroyed it. That was shown clearly in 1979 when millions of workers revolted against Callaghan's 5% pay limit. Thatcher set out to take every advantage from the on-coming capitalist recession. She exaggerated its effect with deflationary measures and used the massive unemployment that weakened and undermined the unions.

Thatcher's success story started almost immediately. In 1979 the engineering employers felt confident enough to lock the engineers out and the Leyland management to sack convenor Robinson at Longbridge. Having tested their mettle and seen the cowardice of the trade union leaders the Tories moved in for their first major battle. They took on the steel workers in 1980.

They had chosen a section of workers weakened by craft and regional divisions. The ISTC leaders were some of the most spineless bosses' men on the TUC. Yet rank and file steel workers took over the organisation and prosecution of the strike. Mass pickets and flying picket squads battled to keep the strike solid and to bring out the private sector. The Welsh TUC and the South Wales NUM pledged themselves to a general strike. Yet aided by Len Murray, the ISTC leaders snatched a terrible defeat out of the jaws of victory.

The lefts in the South Wales NUM and TUC responded to Murray's appeals to put off the general strike in favour of 'national action'. This in turn was delayed for months. When it came as a 'day of action' on May 14th 1980 it was fiasco. Meanwhile after nine weeks the steel workers, betrayed by their own union, by the TUC and deserted (in terms of action) by the 'lefts' in the other unions were forced back to work in defeat.

And what a defeat. Eighty thousand jobs, 52% of the already decimated steel industry were lost as a result.

## DEFEATS AND RETREATS

The defeat of the steel workers enormously encouraged the bosses and the Tories. It disorientated and disheartened millions of workers. In the aftermath of the steel strike organised labour entered a prolonged period of isolated defeats, retreats and general disarray. Leyland workers,

railway workers and health workers all fought their own struggles against the Tories. Each of them saw their struggle betrayed and undermined by their own trade union leaders.

Having sent the union leaders scurrying for cover the Tories could confidently let world capitalist recession rip into workers' living standards and jobs. By 1982, manufacturing output was 17% down on its 1979 level.

The workforce in British Leyland was halved. Huge job losses followed on the railways, in ship-building and in engineering. Official figures put unemployment today at over 3 million. Hundreds of thousands of married women who want to work are not registered. Over 668,000 young people have been shoved into useless 'training schemes' so as to launder the unemployment figures. The true number of unemployed now stands between four and five million.

The Tories have notched up an enormous success for their class against the powerful NGA at Eddie Shah's Warrington plant. They ripped up the right to join a trade union at GCHQ. Drunk with their own success they decided to

take on the miners, who they had gingerly avoided facing for nearly five years.

## GUTLESS LEADERS

While the Tories have grown more determined and confident the trade union leaders have been thrown into ever more abject betrayals and surrenders. "New realism" is the name given by Murray and Graham to unconditional surrender. The TUC stopped the NGA calling an all out print strike. They squealed when Thatcher brought in her GCHQ ban, but organised no effective action to stop her. Yet the so-called lefts on the TUC - Moss Evans, Buckton and Co - have not raised a finger to mobilise workers' anger against the traitors of Congress House. No wonder then that the Tories feel confident. Whilst millions of workers hate them, they don't see the possibility of fighting them and winning.

The Tories have not got away with all of this because workers have willingly embraced the dole queue or Thatcher's policies. Not at all. There



Picture: John Sturrock (Network)

has been ample evidence that workers have wanted to resist, have been prepared to struggle but have not been *led* into battle. Unless the working class can overcome this crisis of leadership in its own ranks it will continue to pay the price and see the Tories arrogantly revelling in their victories.

The history of the last decade shows all too graphically that the trade union leaders and the huge machinery of the official trade union movement is increasingly incapable of defending the most elementary interests of the working class. The overwhelming majority of officials have made their own peace with the bosses. Their salaries, and the union machines that provided them, are dependent on bargaining with the employers, not fighting to destroy the system of exploitation and unemployment. Their conditions and standard of living are separate from and distinct from that of the workers they represent. In the majority of cases they are subject to little or no control from the members in whose name they speak.

They hope, by negotiating no-strike deals and offering their services as tame house unions to the employers to preserve their own status and incomes. This is a vain hope. Thatcher and her class have had their appetite whetted by the extent and ease of their victories. Len Murray, Alistair Graham, Eric Hammond, Terry Duffy, all think that they can negotiate surrender and thereby placate the bosses by offering them a neutered non-political, yellow unionism. But approaching Thatcher on hands and knees and offering to lick her boots only earned them a savage kick in the teeth.

On the GCHQ, Graham of the CPSA offered Thatcher everything - no strike clauses and anything else that made effective union organisation impossible except their membership cards *and their dues*. But it was no deal. Where these traitors control our unions a united front of all willing to resist and oust them must be formed to put an end to their open scabbing. The "new realists" must be brought to the bar of their own unions and removed from the General Council of the TUC. No junior Murray must succeed him.

## THE BENNITE LEFT COLLAPSES

For three years after Labour's 1979 election defeat a reform movement, centered around the figure of Tony Benn gained strength in the Party. At the 1979 and 1980 annual conferences and at the special Wembley conference in January 1981 the left alliance won significant victories - mandatory re-selection of MPs, and the election of the Party leader by an electoral college. The price for these advances was the defection of a section of the hard right MPs led by the infamous 'Gang of Four'. The result was the formation of the SDP

Liberal Alliance and a massive press campaign against the left.

The Bennite left had as their central objective 'never again a Labour government like the last one'. Their method of achieving it was inner-party democracy: election of the leader, re-selection of MPs, conference and NEC control over the manifesto, election of the shadow cabinet and a general broadening of accountability within the unions affiliated to the Party. The Bennite campaign at first thrived even when the working class was suffering severe defeats.

A 'local government left' carried on a similar struggle in London, Sheffield, Lothian, Liverpool Manchester and other major cities. The high point of the movement was Benn's near miss in the campaign for the deputy leadership where only decimal points separated him from Healey.

But a miss as they say is as good as a mile. Indeed six months after this last great battle of the united left a meeting of parliamentary and trade union leaders at Bishop Stortford had agreed to a secret treaty between Benn and the right-wing. To this treaty Benn has remained fiercely loyal. It is summed up by his words, "**The existing leadership, the existing policy, the existing membership.**" The right have broken that treaty with the expulsion of the Militant editorial board but under Foot and Kinnock it has remained broadly in force, with sections of the Bennite movement moving over to Kinnock in the name of 'unity' and electoral success.

The 1983 election led to a changed subject of the "Never again...." slogan. Never again a defeat like 1983. Never again the 'divisions in the Party'. This puts the seal on the decision of the Bennite left to accept Kinnock's leadership and a shadow cabinet and future Labour government dominated by the right and the soft left. That is *precisely* a Labour government like the last one except that Benn does not press his claims to a ministry.

The Bennite left has shown that despite its rhetorical 'left' positions - on the Falkland War and on the 1984 miners strike - faced with the threat of a split or all out war from the Labour right they will pipe down. They dare not link up with the militant rank and file in the unions to oust the right in the Party and in the unions - they are an alternative that will not lead. They will surrender leadership to the right at every decisive moment or point of the struggle.

The reasons for this lie in the very essence of Reformism - the systematic sacrifice of the working class' basic historical need for state power to haggling over minor or political reforms within the parliamentary talking shop. Once in office the Labour Ministers act as a bosses government. In boom times Labour sells the workers short on



reforms to mollify the City of London or the CBI. In the crises of the last decade Labour has 'persuaded' the union leaders to agree to give-backs of past reforms. A future Labour government, elected in an economic crisis- like Ramsay MacDonalds in 1929 - would be much worse than Wilson's and Callaghan's.

## BROAD LEFTISM

There is another, complementary 'alternative leadership' in the unions grouped around the Communist Party and the Labour lefts. These 'Broad lefts' won big victories in the 1960s and 1970s in electing leaders like Scanlon, Jones and Co. In recent years they have had successes in the NUM, the FBU the NUR and the POEU. But in the unions where they were strong - especially in the AUEW they have not been able to decisively regain the leadership. The 'New Left Labourite' dominated alliances in the CPSA and the POEU have shown themselves no better in action against Thatcher than the old-style version.

The fundamental weaknesses of the Broad Left strategy flow from its reformist perspective of a 'left Labour government' under pressure from left-led unions enacting a piecemeal abolition of capitalism. In reality this perspective gets no further than electing left leaders who are then corrupted in office by bureaucratic privilege, by Labour governments who use them to put pressure on the working class for "sacrifices in the national interest", and ultimately by knight-hoods and peerages. Doubtless not all left officials go the whole hog but to rely on one person's integrity is a foolish strategy.

Rank and file democratic control and the abolition of high salaries and privileges is the only sure method. Yet the Broad lefts, whilst they may at first mobilise the rank and file tend constantly to turn this mobilisation into a purely electoral one. Once in power, the 'Broad left' bureaucrats turn this movement into a machine for re-election.

## SYNDICALISM

There is also a more militant rank and file Syndicalist tradition in the British working class movement that mistrusts officials and stresses trade union militancy pure and simple as the answer to every problem.

In and of itself this apolitical trade union militancy has failed to generate any alternative that could mobilise the rank and file against retreat and betrayal. The layer of militants reared in the struggles of the early 1970s has been dispersed and demoralised to a great extent. However fiery as fighters many of these were, the

tradition of relying on their own sectional strength and struggles left the field clear for Labour and the TUC to administer their political programme for the bosses. The tradition of "unpolitical militancy" proved helpless against the real bosses' politics of Callaghan and Wilson. The tradition of workplace organisation - while possessing enormous strengths - left the union machines in the hands of 'left' bureaucrats.

## NEW LEADERSHIP

Only a clean break with all these hopeless traditions can pave the way to advance. The trade union movement must be transformed from top to bottom. The unions must be turned into instruments of class war against the capitalists. The working class needs unions that are based on the mobilisation of the workers and are in the hands of rank and file members. They must be committed to destroying the capitalist system and organising themselves to achieve that end. That includes:

- \* organising them effectively as industrial unions,
- \* basing them on factory committees in every workplace,
- \* fighting for workers' control over production, against the bosses as part of the struggle to organise the working class to destroy the power of the capitalist class. No to all participation schemes. For workers' inspection and opening the books of the capitalists,
- \* ensuring that every union official is regularly re-elected, permanently recallable and receives no more than the average wage of the workers who elect them.
- \* opening the doors of the union to the unemployed. Organise the unemployed into a National Unemployed Workers Union affiliated to the TUC.

To effect such a change we must link together the militant minority that exists in every union and every workplace. That is why we must build a Rank and File movement across the unions to turn the unions into instruments of class war.

The history of the last decade shows that the defeats suffered by the working class have their roots in the political weakness of the militant workers. They were disarmed and defeated at the hands of Labour and the TUC. They have tried to fight Thatcher with the same leadership...and failed. That is why it is an urgent task of the hour to build a new revolutionary communist party, one which can assemble in its ranks the cadre of a new revolutionary working class leadership that can lead the way forward to oust the traitors from the leadership of the labour movement and lead the struggle for power.

# The road to working class power

**THE MINERS' STRIKE** still has the potential to turn the tide against the Tory offensive. For the second time in a decade the National Union of Mineworkers is leading the working class in a struggle against the Government.

In the early 1970s the miners strikes turned into duels with the Government which were objectively political. But only a minority of militants understood this and even they thought that political victory was assured with the return of a Labour Government.

**They were right to see the 1974 election as a temporary defeat for the ruling class. They were wrong to believe that a Labour Government was more than an episodic benefit to the working class or that it would fulfill its promise "to bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in power, in favour of working people and their families."**

By April 1975 an austerity budget had been introduced. The "Social Contract" became a full-scale incomes policy. Unemployment shot up to 1¼ million and the second round of incomes policy saw earnings grow by 9% whilst inflation was still over 14%.

The collusion between TUC and Government to cut wages and social services exploded in the "Winter of Discontent" revolt and the scuttling of the Callaghan Government. Thatcher took up where Healey and Callaghan left off.

Now after two crushing electoral victories for Thatcher and victories over the car workers, steel workers, the health workers and the printers, the miners step forward as the only force in the immediate future capable of rallying the whole working class in a general counter-attack. This fight-back can and must reach the scale of a General Strike.

Such a strike could reach mass proportions as a result of advancing separate sectional struggles in solidarity with the miners. Or it could erupt as a political general strike - the result of state repression against the miners - seizure of funds, death or serious injury to pickets, arrest of prominent leaders.

**The NUM and militants throughout the workers movement should simultaneously fight to generalise the anti-Tory struggles, both trade union**

**and political (defence of local authorities etc.)**

**They should also demand that the TUC maximises official solidarity action on behalf of the miners and calls an immediate indefinite General Strike against the Anti-Union Laws and in support of the miners' demands for no pit closures.**

## NO NINE-DAY WONDERS

If such a strike is not to be a nine day wonder sold out by the TUC leaders, a General Strike cannot be left in their hands whether in the towns and cities or at a national scale.

At the base level - in every town and city, indeed in every pit village a council of action made up of delegates of every workplace and union must be elected. This can be launched from existing miners' support committees, from the more active trades councils and union branches, but above all from the NUM lodges and the shop-stewards committees of the larger work places.

On such councils special representatives of the miners wives support committees should sit. The unemployed, the black community and students should also send representatives or observers proportional to their organised strength or ability to take action. Thus the Action Councils can group around themselves a massive social force which can paralyse the police force.

The Action Councils must take control of the transport and supply of food, to ensure that working class areas receive essential supplies. Disciplined defence squads can defend the Action Councils, union premises and funds, the pickets and the workers' leaders against police harassment and arrest.

**Only this mighty mobilisation of working class force can paralyse Thatcher's apparatus of coercion - her courts, police force and by winning the ordinary soldiers to our side.**

The bosses lie machine - the media - must be shut down. A workers' press and radio service must be organised.

Thatcher and the whole spectrum of the ruling class will shriek and yell about a "challenge to democracy" and a breach of the constitution. Alas these cries will fall on the all too ready ears of

the official leadership of the Labour Movement. Murray and Kinnock will be floored by it from the outset. Worse they will try to floor the whole Labour Movement with it.

We should expose the fraud of the Tories' parliamentary mandate now. Did anyone but a handful of company directors consciously vote to put 4 million on the dole? Did millions vote to close down the Steel or Mining industry, to slash the NHS to shreds?

This holds true also for the fraud of the five yearly ballot box trick itself. On all issues which vitally affect the vast majority of the population - jobs, wages, war and peace, social welfare - parliamentarism is a fraud. The bosses parties (and the Labour Party too) don't admit what they are really going to do. Nor can they be instantly removed when they fail to fulfill their promises.

The millionaire press makes a further mockery of this democracy. In addition, the law, made by unelected judges, and imposed by unelected and unaccountable Police Chiefs, undermines what "democracy" remains.

**Indeed it is the latter who are the State.** It is a class state. A dictatorship of the capitalist class. Of course "democratic rights" exist but these are the product of the struggles of the working class and exist for only as long as the bosses fear to abolish them altogether.

**Against this weapon we have the power of our numbers. But this is an enormous power only if it is organised in Councils of Action. It has the power first to paralyse and then to disintegrate this permanent bosses' dictatorship. A General Strike raises the question, which class rules in society, who is to be the master or mistress in the house.**

The working class needs the General Strike to defend its vital interests - its jobs, its welfare services, its democratic rights; all its gains **within capitalism**. But in "defending" itself effectively - in the only successful way - it inevitably poses the need to break out of the capitalist system and to smash the forces and institutions of the bosses' state.

It must also, in the very process of this struggle create the basis of a new, genuinely **democratic** order. This "rule of the people" will be genuine because it is the rule of the working class - blue and white collar **ie. that of the overwhelming majority**. It is also a necessary instrument of repression but this time against a tiny minority by and in the interests of the vast majority.

Yet we would be wrong to believe that the mere declaration or even the full development of a general strike will throw power into the hands of the working class. To gain power the working class must consciously seize it.

In a general strike, millions of workers will call for the bosses' government, the Tories, to be overthrown, kicked out. They will be right. They will want to see a government which rules for the workers. Here too they will be right.

## WHAT IS A WORKERS GOVERNMENT ?

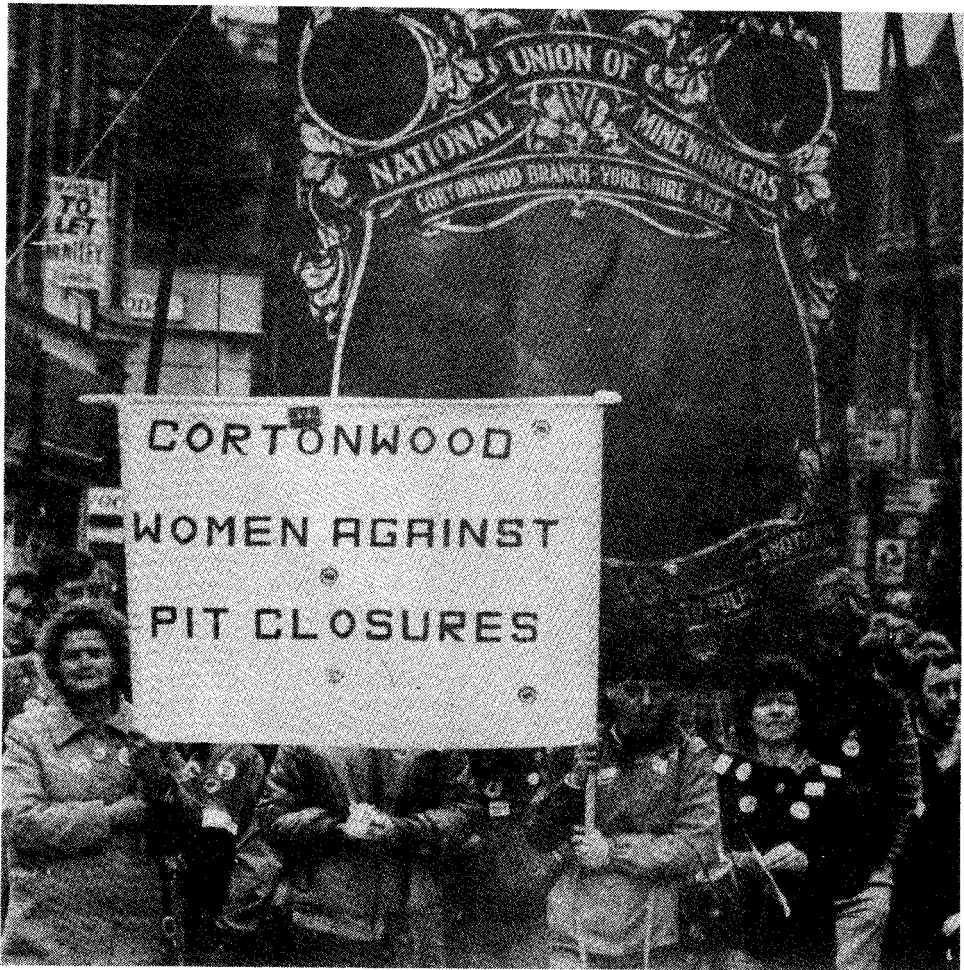
**But what is a workers' government? Millions will answer - a Labour government. So will the union leaders. So obviously will all the Labour leaders from Healey to Benn. But we revolutionaries argue that a Labour government acting within the straight-jacket of the bosses' state, with the police force and the judges that bludgeoned the miners, with the City of London and the millionaires who throw millions onto the streets, that such a government cannot act for long or consistently in the interests of the workers.**

After less than one year of very modest reforms in 1974-5, the last Labour government took up the cudgels against the working class. This time, with a worse economic crisis, if the working class demobilises or lowers its guard for a minute, the same thing will happen - only this time worse.

If a successful general strike provoked the resignation of the government, and a Labour government was returned in an election, the working class would have to stay mobilised in its Action Councils in order to prevent a replay of 1974-5. It would have to exert mass direct action pressure on the government and the bosses, even to get any serious reforms.

What should we demand of such a Labour government elected in the aftermath of a victorious general strike?

- The repeal of the anti-union laws, and the dissolution of the picket-busting police squads, the Association of Chief Constables, etc.**
- The cancellation of the closure plans and privatisation schemes in all the state industries.**
- The full and immediate restoration of all the cuts - Labour and Tory - made over the last nine years.**
- The repeal of the racist immigration laws.**
- The immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland, the Falklands and all overseas bases.**
- The nationalisation of all firms declaring redundancies without compensation, under workers' control.**
- Get Britain out of NATO, and clear all US bases - with their nuclear weaponry - out of Britain.**
- A massive programme of public works paid for by a massive wealth tax - to build houses, nurseries, hospitals, schools, homes for the**



Picture: John Harris

elderly, recreation facilities for the young.

- Reduce the working week, under trade union control and with no loss of pay, to absorb the 4 million unemployed.

### GOVERNMENT OF CRISIS

Only such demands go any way towards meeting the immediate needs of millions suffering under the lash of the capitalist crisis. Yet in today's conditions, a government that introduced some, all, or indeed any of them, would be a government of crisis. The ruling class would sabotage it from its inception, and seek by every means to undermine and eventually overthrow it.

A Neil Kinnock-style "normal" Labour govern-

ment would simply directly attack the working class. It would carry on the Tories' measures, only with much hypocritical handwringing and calls to make sacrifices "for Britain".

In fact, given the depth of the crisis of British capitalism and the desperate determination of the bosses to solve it at the expense of the working class, a Labour government - even one stuffed full of Tony Benns - would be an almighty betrayal of a general strike.

**A general strike poses by its very nature great revolutionary tasks before the working class, through the paralysis of the bosses' state forces and apparatus of repression.**

To meet the needs of the working class and counter the chaos of capitalism necessitates the creation of an economy planned for human need.

This must mean the wholesale expropriation of large scale industry, finance, commerce and agriculture, with no compensation to the parasites who have exploited us for so long.

To do this means disarming and removing the reactionary high command and officer caste of the armed forces. It means winning the rank and file soldiers to our side, helping them to achieve the democratic election of officers and receiving from them arms for a workers' militia. It means dissolving the police force and replacing it with a popular militia.

**These tasks alone lead to the power of the working class. No Labour, socialist or "peoples" government that leaves military and economic power in the hands of the bosses and their agents is in reality a workers' government.**

Yet there is already a minority in the labour movement who argue for a combination of "direct action outside parliament" with a parliamentary government. As a project this is highly dangerous. The only safe capitalist is a disarmed and dispossessed one. A parliament would not long be reconciled to the competing power base of workers' councils. To prevent the bosses using "their" House of Commons against the mobilised workers, full political power would have to be forcibly transferred to a national congress of workers councils.

A government which was a workers' government not only in name but also in deed, would inscribe on its banner the slogan "Arm the workers, Disarm the bosses!". The rats' nests of counter-revolution - the high command of the armed forces, the judiciary, the civil service mandarins, "Scotland Yard" and their hangers-on must be crushed.

The enormous power of the banks and finance houses centered on the City of London must be nationalised and placed under workers' control. The business secrecy of the bosses must be abolished at once, and the secret workings of the profit machine thrown open to the light of day. Only then can real planning for human need be contemplated.

On the basis of the immediate nationalisation of the major industries, including the building industry, a massive programme of public works should absorb in months the unemployed millions.

The working day should be slashed and the full benefits of science and technology used to provide the free time necessary for working people to plan, control and direct society themselves.

## ENEMIES AND ALLIES

A Britain in revolution would be surrounded by capitalist and imperialist enemies, particularly the NATO powers of North America and Europe. Yet we would also be surrounded by countless

millions of allies - the workers' of Europe and America, the workers and peasants of the so-called "Third World" and the working class of the workers' states, where a caste of bureaucrats has usurped political power.

How to break through to them? First, the sheer fact that British workers are settling accounts with the oldest, wildest ruling class in the world will be an enormous trumpet call to revolution in other countries. Secondly, a British workers' government would say to the workers and peasants of the world: "take into your own hands the 'British' investments and companies that have for so long exploited you!" British bases and military installations would be withdrawn, to complete the destruction of the bosses' worldwide system of exploitation.

In a reversal of the bosses' policies, a workers' Britain would and should send economic and armed help to embattled revolutions and to all countries resisting imperialist aggression - to Nicaragua, to the ANC and Namibian Freedom fighters against apartheid, to the PLO. It would offer defensive support to the workers' states against imperialism's war drive, but will also offer help to the anti-bureaucratic workers' opposition in these countries, helping them to overthrow their bureaucratic oppressors and institute a workers' democracy like its own - based on workers' councils.

**Across this bridge of measures, the British working class can cross to the full establishment of workers' power. Concentrated fully in the hands of workers' councils, this power can be used to plan the economy.**

Inequality can be tackled by raising all to the level of today's skilled workers, by helping the oppressed and poor of the world to build a decent life. There is no need for steelworkers, miners, car-workers, textile workers to be "redundant" when 80% or more of humanity has hardly the fuel, clothing, housing, transport and medicine necessary to keep life and limb together.

To overcome the horrors of capitalism will be an immense task - a task for decades of a planned economy. It is a task which, like the conquest of power itself, above all needs a leading and directing revolutionary party: a many-thousand strong vanguard of the working class, rooted in every mine, factory, mill, office, college and school.

Workers' power alone can open up the road of liberation for the working class and poor peasantry, for blacks and for women. It is the road to socialism and human freedom! A general strike in Britain in the coming weeks or months could be the first step on this road. ■

## WHERE WE STAND

**WORKERS POWER** is a revolutionary communist organisation basing itself upon the programme and principles developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the nineteenth century, by V. I. Lenin and the first four congresses of the Communist International in the first decades of this century, and by Leon Trotsky and the first two congresses of the Fourth International in the years up to 1948.

Capitalism is a system based on the systematic exploitation of the proletariat. It is doomed to recurring crises caused by the contradiction between the enormous expansive powers of socialised production and the fact that private ownership determines that such production must be for profit.

The competitive struggle between capitals brings anarchy into national and world economy. Millions starve while food is destroyed to maintain prices. Commodities rot or rust unsold in a world of acute want for the majority of humanity.

In its final, imperialist stage, the major capitalist powers - USA, the EEC countries and Japan - cruelly exploit the "Third World", crippling its economic development within the limits that can realise super-profits for the great banks of Wall Street and the City of London, and the transnational corporations.

Only the abolition of private property in the large-scale means of production, and the creation of a planned economy can end forever exploitation and oppression. Only the abolition of class society can remove the root causes of the oppression of women. It is not men, as a sex, who developed and perpetuate this oppression, as feminists claim. Working class men are the natural allies of working class women. They are not the enemy. It is a class system based on private property in

the means of production that requires for its continued functioning the use of women as unpaid domestic labourers that ensures the continued existence of this oppression.

Only the working class can lead the oppressed masses of the planet to the achievement of this historic task. To do so requires a social revolution that smashes the armed power of the capitalist class - its state, replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat, founded upon workers' councils and the armed militia of the working class.

Such a revolution must be Permanent. Whilst starting from the immediate tasks facing the workers and peasants - which in the "Third World" includes the land question and national independence - it cannot stop at intermediate "democratic" stages without the working class suffering a heavy defeat. The political power of the proletariat (in alliance with the other oppressed classes such as the poor peasants) is essential to resolve these "capitalist" tasks as well as to move forwards towards a planned economy and socialism. The latter is indeed impossible to achieve within an isolated nation. Thus the revolution must be international - its fundamental task is its extension.

The so-called "communist" countries are in fact degenerate workers' states. They are workers' states in that the bourgeoisie has been overthrown and capitalist exploitation suppressed. Yet their planned economies remain hampered by a parasitic caste of bureaucrats. This caste has usurped political power from the proletariat and pursues a counter-revolutionary international strategy - "socialism in one country". The "Communist Parties" in these states, and their supporters throughout the world, are Stalinists. While

revolutionary communists (Trotskyists) defend unconditionally the workers' states, they are also a force for political revolution within them to smash the bureaucratic caste and restore or create workers' democracy based on soviets - workers' councils.

In the advanced capitalist states, the proletariat is repeatedly held back from the struggle for power by the social democratic (or Labour) parties, the trade union bureaucracy and the Stalinist parties. These bodies - whilst based on the workers' organisations - pursue a bourgeois policy, sacrificing the historic aims of the proletariat to reforms within capitalism. However, in periods of crisis, capitalism seeks to recoup these concessions and a crisis of leadership ensues in the labour movement, which the proletariat must resolve in order to win.

To this end we fight inside the workers' movement to link existing struggles - even ones for only partial demands - to the struggle for working class power. In each struggle for pay, against closures, for political rights, we fight for forms of organisation and elements of workers' control that bring workers into conflict not only with an individual capitalist, but with capitalist power, and the capitalist system. Through transitional demands the masses can find a bridge between their present struggles and everyday demands, and the tasks of socialist revolution.

On the basis of these principles we give unconditional support to all national liberation struggles, including that of the Republican movement in Northern Ireland.

We stand for no platform for fascists. Against all immigration controls. Against discrimination, deportations and harassment meted out to blacks by the police. For the right of blacks to organise in their own defence, and for the duty of the labour movement to practically assist them. Against racism and racists in the trade unions.

We fight for complete social, legal and political equality for women. Equal pay for equal work. Free abortion and contraception on demand. We stand for a working class womens' movement that can fight as an integral part of the labour movement for workers' power. Only working class power can socialise domestic labour and release women from their centuries' old oppression.

We fight for the liberation of gays from the persecution and discrimination that is their lot under capitalism. We fight against the oppression

and super-exploitation - via the family, the state and at work - that youth suffer.

In the unions we fight for the total independence of the trade unions from the state, for militant class policies, for immediate, partial and transitional demands which link today's struggles under capitalism to a united and coherent offensive to overthrow it.

We stand for a rank and file movement of the militant minority to win the regular election and recallability of all union officials and the fixing of their salaries at the average of their members.

We fight to build a revolutionary alternative leadership in the unions, and a revolutionary wing in the Labour Party and the LPYS as part of our fight to build a revolutionary party. Our goal, as our name proclaims, is workers' power and nothing less.

Workers Power and its fraternal allies, the Irish Workers' Group, the Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany) and the Groupe Pouvoir Ouvrier (France) are by no means yet parties capable of challenging Stalinism and social democracy for leadership across the whole range of working class struggles. We are restricted by our size to arguing for our programme, our tactics and strategy with the proletarian vanguard, who still, by and large, give allegiance either to the reformist parties or to various centrist organisations. But we seek at the same time the maximum involvement in the class struggle. We fight for our ideas whilst rendering the maximum assistance to workers in action.

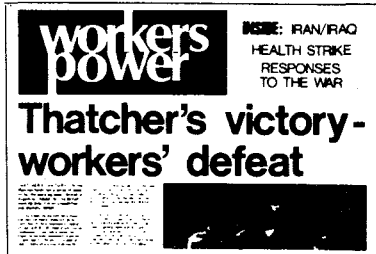
As well as new revolutionary parties, the working class needs a new revolutionary international. The last revolutionary international, the Fourth, collapsed into centrism between 1948 and 1951, and disintegrated organisationally in 1953. Only its degenerated fragments exist today. What is needed is a democratic centralist international, a true world party of socialist revolution.

As a first step along this path, Workers Power with its Irish, German, French and Chilean co-thinkers has founded the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI), with the object of achieving an international democratic-centralist tendency. On this basis we can and will go further along the road to building national revolutionary parties, a revolutionary international, and the establishment of the world socialist order. ■

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