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# LONDON to a NATIONAL

# PAY FIGHT

In this pamphlet we explain how the London Teachers Action Committee freed the union from the grip of the bureaucracy through its campaign of unofficial strikes. The campaign against shortages is still continuing. Even if this offer is accepted (and we urge its rejection) and even if this leads to temporary quiet in education, it will not alter the gigantic crisis of the social services. Big struggles are inevitable in the near future. In the pages of this pamphlet the International Marxist Group explains that the experiences of the London Teachers Action Committee has begun to prepare militants in London and nationally for such struggles.

**I.M.G. TEACHERS**

**5 p**

The immediate cause of the summer strikes was the unresolved problem of the London Allowance. This sore has been festering since 1970. Despite escalating costs of housing and the spiral of inflation, the London Allowance was caught in the grip of the 1972 freeze.

The massive struggle which took place despite the union leadership has culminated in a situation where that same Communist Party and right wing leadership is now urging teachers to call off their struggles in the hope of Houghton delivering the goods.

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More Work - Less Pay

We went back to school this term to face still falling wages and a catastrophic decline in government spending on education. The Houghton enquiry has been told by the NUT facts that it should already know: teachers are working harder for less money. According to 'The Teacher' (August 9) it would take increases of around £300 to bring teachers wages into line with white collar workers generally and up to £450 to bring them into line with manual workers. Even the Department of Education's own statistics paint a black picture. They reveal for example that nearly 30% of teachers earn less than £1700 a year and that 67% earn less than £2500 a year.

Shrinking wages are made worse by declining conditions and facilities. The 'Observer' of August 11 commented that "British education is now facing the worst financial crisis in its history". The cuts of late 1973 are now being exacerbated by the affects of inflation. In many areas local authorities complain that they can only keep going by reducing the number of teachers in the schools. As a result of these cuts the Education Committee of Gloucester will have lopped off 20% by the end of this year from its previous year's figure. That is the figure but what does it mean? Well simply that vacancies occurring after the start of this term will not be filled unless the school is absolutely dependent on them being filled; that the buildings will be colder, hot water scarce, telephone calls restricted and letters unwritten. It also means that children in that area will not even go swimming!

The same insane pattern is repeated up and down the country. In London and the South East schools are desperately short staffed whilst at the same time Department officials forecast unemployment of teachers in other areas. This threat has already brought thousands of teachers into action in Leeds. Meanwhile in Norfolk teachers were being told that meat would be phased out of school meals to be replaced by kesp, the high protein spun fibre - courtesy of Courtaulds - made in mile long strips and flavoured to taste like anything from steak to chicken.

Capita list Crisis - Educational Chaos

The prospect then for the working class and their children as term starts in September is of an education system that cannot even mark time but which is declining rapidly. Declining so fast that they are being told that whole areas of education which the trade unions struggles for over the years are being erased. This may be the fate of the youth service in many areas, of adult education and of nursery education (where it exists that is). All this at the same time as paying swingeing rate increases to finance a

declining system. How has all this come about and what can be done about it?

The massive cutbacks in housing, health and education along with all areas of social expenditure that Labour has continued from the Tories are features of the absolutely massive crisis of British capitalism. The severity of this crisis is shown by the prediction of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research last March that the Labour government would fail on four major fronts: balance of payments, price stability, full employment and economic growth. The Treasury itself underlined this when in April of this year they refused, unprecedentedly to publish their projections for the coming year. Now (August 30) the National Institute Economic Review predicts inflation of over 16% this year and over 17% next year.

(This Review prompted one caller to London Broadcasting Corporation's phone in programme to George Gale to wonder whether we were on the verge of seeing the overthrow of parliamentary democracy). Meanwhile unemployment continues to rise and can confidently be expected to reach 1 million by Christmas. In some sectors, construction and autos for example, recession has already begun.

Seen against this background the concessions made by the Labour government to the working class pale into insignificance (The freezing of rents for one year, cutting milk and bread prices and increasing pensions).

This drastic economic decline has led to the sacrifice of public expenditure on a massive scale. In attempting to solve the problems of British capitalism at the expense of the working class, the Labour government has continued and contributed to a generalised crisis of social expenditure. It is in this situation that sections of the working class - such as hospital workers and nurses, local government workers as well as teachers have come into intense trade union activity. The combination of declining wages and a decline in the service they provide gives a very sharp focus to their militancy.

#### What did the NUT Do?

But how did the NUT leadership face up to its responsibilities? They repeated the usual pattern of obstruction, procrastination and sabotage. They called a half day strike at a difficult time (first day of term) and without any preparation, and to their surprise found at least 15,000 teachers taking to the streets on April 29 - some of them for the whole day.

In their ballot of the membership they tried to conceal the fact that the overwhelming view was that the NUT should take action. This was confirmed when the Executive revealed that 800 schools had voted by over two thirds to take strike action. This gave the lie to Sam Fisher who had only just declared at the North London Association that there were no groups of schools within any of the areas balloted that had voted by over two thirds to come out.

Even after April 29 the official NUT Action Committee planned nothing. It did not even plan to meet until May 23. It was in this situation that IMG militants and their supporters raised the need to prepare strike action to great effect. At the meeting of the Action Committee with a lobby of strikers and others. We explained that only this sort of action would demonstrate the preparedness of teachers to strike and strengthen the confidence and experience of those who were already prepared to take action. It was necessary to show that although every militant would prefer to see the Executive organise strike action, words alone would not persuade them to do so. After all they knew already that as 43% in the ballot box were for indefinite action with no lead from them.

#### The Beginning of Action

Because a centralised lead was lacking either from the union itself or from those schools that were prepared to take action, certain schools began to develop their own action. The most notable example was Holland Park. Militants in that school had pushed for indefinite strike action but had been defeated on the issue and had compromised by calling for a mass resignation. The publicity which this action received did not particularly widen the call for resignation but did fan the flames of discontent. More particularly it focused attention on the real way forward and contributed to the debate which opened up amongst militants concerning the problems of organising unofficial strikes. An interesting aspect of this debate was the way in which even leading members of the International Socialist grouping working through their "Rank and File" teacher organisation were forced to enter this debate.

After having caucused with numerous militants from schools all over London the IMG teachers commission had decided that at the May 23 lobby the call should go out for an Ad Hoc Action Committee to be set up. The aim of this committee

would be to prepare the ground in the widest number of schools for unofficial strike action. When the strikes began of course their conduct would be taken over by a strike committee elected by and of strikers. The Ad Hoc committee would in that situation either dissolve or take on a support function. (Publicity, finance, etc.)

In the event and with the aid of a thunderstorm the Mander Hall at Hamilton House was occupied. Leading members of IS continued at this meeting their spirited opposition to the setting up of such a committee.

Indeed on the pavement outside only moments before the occupation, a leading IS luminary had declared petulantly that as far as she was concerned the IMG would call for 'its' action committee but neither she nor any one else would attend. Well in the event they had no choice. But until the meeting inside the hall had overwhelmingly accepted and understood the need for a democratic body to prepare strike action (in the content of trying to force the Union to make it official) the IS members continued to fight their rearguard action. It was an IS resolution for example which would in practice have restricted the activity of the militants in occupation of the hall to pass resolutions in their local associations calling on the Executive to call an official strike. The amendment to this resolution, moved by IMG member, Betty Hunter of Wandsworth, clearly explained the conditions under which the union bureaucracies time and again are forced to take action by the actions of the rank and file. She explained that delay would only assist the government in foistering a deal on the union in the guise of the Pay Board recommendations. If this was to be prevented and a serious movement developed amongst teachers, then it had to begin immediately.

#### The Role of the Internationalist Socialist Grouping

The amendment was overwhelmingly accepted by the meeting, with IS members voting against, and the first preparations were made for the wave of unofficial strikes which followed. It is important that all militants involved in the unofficial strikes last term understand clearly the rôle of the International Socialist tendency. We make these points as a contribution to the discussion of the way forward for next term not for any sectarian reasons. The IS members eventually acknowledged the need for an action committee of some kind to prepare the ground for and assess the possibility of unofficial strike action, but they saw this as a body which would come from the next Rank and File convenors meeting!

This pointed to the centre of the contradiction which IS teacher comrades faced. They were part of an organisation which was supposed to represent all rank and file teachers, therefore they reasoned that organisation should organise the rank and file. But here they found that Rank and File were tailing behind the union militants, many of whom were not in Rank and File and some of whom had never even heard of it! Therefore however useful Rank and File had been as a permanently organised radical and progressive current within the NUT, it could not presume to 'take over' some entirely new action which it had not motivated, had not initially supported and which came in the main from outside of Rank and File.

What became clear was the misconception IS has of the real nature of a genuine movement of the rank and file. In the preparation of this unofficial action, absolute democracy was essential. The same is true of course of official action. Even had the NUT Executive called official action it would still have been necessary to wrest control of the strike out of the hands of the bureaucracy and into the hands of those actually on strike. The misconceptions of IS teachers on this score seems to be generalised amongst other IS members. In the NALGO London weighting strike for example, what was essential was to turn the struggle of a number of branches into a unified fight. An all London body formed from the various campaigns, strike and action committees in the branches and work places should have taken control of the day to day running of the strike out of the hands of the bureaucracy. The NALGO Action Group - dominated by the International Socialists could have played a big part in building this kind of all-London organisation. But again they did not understand what role such a body would or could play.

#### The Settlement

The settlement being recommended by Hamilton House is obviously completely inadequate. The fight against divisive 'tier' systems must continue. The danger of this kind of settlement is that it falls into the trap set by the Labour government. They argue: there is only a limited amount of money available. Share it out amongst yourselves with some sections getting more. The bureaucracy is always calling for unity. One look at this settlement shows who the real splitters are.

In recommending acceptance the Executive are assisted by a number of factors in the present situation. In the first place the findings of the Houghton report will be presented as a major step for teachers on the road to 'professional status'. Secondly, the election will be used as an excuse not to reject the offer. After all, Hamilton House will argue, if there is a change of government we may not get anything.

Also they will argue that inflation cuts daily into the real value of any increase. Better settle now and get what we can.

This line lays enormous traps for the future. But we have to be clear about one thing. Even this offer represents a partial victory for militant action. In the first place a massive portion of London teachers have gained, at least what the Union asked (inadequate as that is) and for this purpose the area of Inner London has been expanded. The danger of this can be seen in the introduction of a new "fringe" area. This opens the door to the creation of fringe areas all over the country.

Throughout this whole action the union bureaucracy has been unable to head off the movement of the NUT ranks. So marked has this process been that they had to capitulate to the London Teachers Action Committee on the July 11 official strike, they were unable to do a deal over the summer and they had to drop charges on the Wandsworth 3.

#### The Action was Undeclared

We must stress this fact: the action in London remained undeclared and despite the lying distortions of the so-called "Workers Press", continued to develop. In fact in the 3 day period of July 3, 4, 5, over 1000 teachers took unofficial strike action. The way members responded to the half-day strike call by the Executive and the unofficial action which led to it, showed that members wanted more than parliamentary lobbying.

The conclusion of the last struggle has not altered the deepening crisis in education. In addition to the cuts in one area after another, which we have outlined, the Tories are now planning even further cuts if they should win the election. Their talk of "parent power" is a mask for more cuts. St. John Stevas wants Local Education Authorities to stall on comprehensive plans and plans for centralisation of teachers pay are well in hand.



## Crisis Continues

It is clear that the outcome of the election, Tory, Labour or Lib-Tory 'coalition' will not halt the crisis. On a national level the Hamilton House bureaucracy will attempt to deal with this crisis by conducting "reasoned" negotiations just like they did over pensions last autumn.

Whatever they do and whatever the outcome of the Special conference, a renewed struggle on teachers pay is on the agenda. This is despite any lull that will temporarily occur given acceptance of the Executive's line at the Special Conference. The depth of the crisis predetermines a continued struggle on shortage and non-coverage.

### From a London fight to a National Struggle

Faced with the certainty of renewed struggle we have to seriously consider the problem of breaking out of London isolation. This is a major political question for teachers. Any action of a London nature is strengthened when coupled with demands around national pay, sliding scale, cuts and shortages. It is for this reason that the London Teachers Action Committee saw these questions as a major component of its work. The best way for London teachers to win teachers nationally is through taking up the struggle on the whole question of threshold agreements, the education cuts and shortages.

Despite itself, the NUT Action Committee has provided an impetus to the struggle in the position it has taken on non-coverage. Local Associations have been encouraged to renew a policy of non-coverage. In many areas throughout the country the lesson of London will be vital. Really representative and democratic bodies will need to be set up if effective action - official or unofficial - is to succeed. The action in London proved that struggles starting in a single school need not be isolated. The existence of support committees can defend, extend and develop such actions over a whole area. But of course once an action begins the task is not only to extend it among teachers but to break out of the confines of the school and turn to other sectors - in the trade unions, among parents and school students.

This is particularly so in any struggle that develops around shortage. The last 'campaign' on this issue was marked by the fact that it was not in any real sense a campaign. This was precisely because teachers realise that there is no short term solution to this problem which is inextricably bound up with the whole issue of pay and educational expenditure. This is the reason that although victories have been achieved in the shortage struggle it never had the bite of the campaign on pay.

In addition to the shortage question, the affects of local authority bankruptcy and the affects of inflation can be taken up locally through conferences of workers such as that organised in Wandsworth through the Trades Council on the initiative of the local association. But as a national campaign such activities will need to be linked to the immediate question of pay. This would provide the focus for taking such a campaign into deeper layers of teachers and the working class generally.

The lessons of the action committee and its organisation of the London Allowance struggle are crucial in the situation that opens up. That is why the International Marxist Group has maintained the position throughout the London Allowance struggle and in all its activity within the London Teachers Action Committee that we must have a total rounded set of demands which can untie the struggle of teachers both in and out of London with the struggle of the working class generally.

We must be on our guard against any attempt on the part of the union bureaucracy or of the Labour leadership to divert the struggle of teachers or any section of the working class into futile Parliamentary charades. We advocate a vote for Labour as part of the process of developing the struggle of the working class, not because we believe that Labour's capitalist policies are of any benefit to the working class. There must be no question of the reformist Labour leaders recapturing and prolonging their credibility in 'opposition'. But we cannot simply say "Vote Labour". We have to qualify this by outlining the type of struggle, politically and organisationally, necessary to advance the struggle towards a workers solution to the crisis. That solution can only be a society with workers control and management of industry and a socialist plan of production.

"Vote Labour but rely only on your own struggles": our demands during and after this election must be framed in that context. In the period that opens up after the Special Conference our demands on wages must be:

- A £2500 starting wage
- A sliding scale of wages based on a workers index
- No more new differentials
- Abolition of existing differentials (graduate/nongraduate)
- A flat rate increase for all teachers equal to the sum necessary to raise scale 1 to the new starting wage
- For a reduction in the number of scales and increments
- No incomes policy under capitalism
- Unity with other workers in struggle.



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