

# RED WEEKLY

## ORGANISE NOW FOR 20 APRIL

The most urgent task confronting militants attending the Leyland shop stewards' 'rank and file TUC' in Birmingham this weekend is to begin to organise a socialist opposition to the betrayals meted out by the Labour leaderships.

No trade unionist could disagree with the Conference organisers that the 'only part of the Social Contract to stick has been the wage restraint'. Now steps must also be taken to bring an end to the rest of the miserable policies in this deal.

The best way to defeat Phase 3 is by smashing Phase 2. Unions like the NUM and the AUEW are likely to reverse their policy of support for wage restraint. But it's no good to limit the fight to pressuring current negotiations for Phase 3. A fight needs to be launched now to regain wages already lost under the Social Contract.

The grand strategy of the AUEW/TASS leaves a lot to be desired. Its 'campaign on four fronts' shies away from any confrontation with the Government over Phase 2. It consists of nothing more than: informing the membership of what they have lost (as if the effects haven't yet been felt!), restoring differentials for highly paid workers (but what about the less well-off?), pressing equal pay claims, and pushing claims for low pay allowed under the Employment Protection Act. In refusing to mount a fight now, all the plans in the world will lead to little more than a further round of pay restraint.

### STRIKE

Organise to force union leaders to call for a national general strike against the Social Contract on 20 April. This is the day Parliament re-assembles. What better time to show these mis-leaders that the whole rag-bag of Social Contract policies needs to be kicked out: unemployment, social services cuts, inflation and wage restraint. 20 April on its own will not end the attacks of the working class. The Communist Party are con-

tempt to organise one-off protest actions to convince 'the left trend of the movement of their mistaken support for the Social Contract'. The 'left' leaders like Bob Wright are happy to say they are opposed to wage restraint and at the same time support Labour's Manifesto. Yet the Social Contract is at the centre of the Manifesto.

### BLATANT

Scanlon doesn't go in for such niceties. His class collaboration is blatant. His support for the Social Contract leads him to side with the bosses and tell the toolroom workers 'Go back or get the sack'.

These leaders cannot be relied upon to take up the job of smashing the Social Contract. What is needed is rank and file action which can force national strike action from union leaders.

Organise militants at every level of the union and the community into a socialist opposition fighting for socialist policies. The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions put out a call at its November meeting for local committees of trade unionists. Factory gate meetings, town public meetings, mass leafletting and widespread picketing are the best ways to turn these committees into fighting bodies. 20 April will be a major focus for the work of these in the near future. But it is not enough.

Immediate steps must be taken to make these committees into ongoing bodies waging a fight against the Social Contract on all fronts. Local conferences of the workers' movement, centred on opposition to the Social Contract, provide an opportunity to thrash out a set of alternative socialist policies essential to a united fightback.

# BUILD A SOCIALIST OPPOSITION

One sure thing that the Lib-Lab pact signifies is that this Labour Government's days are numbered. One governmental crisis after the other will be in store for these Labour leaders. They have brought it on themselves — through the class collaboration policies they have pursued.

This pact — which means the continuation of Labour's vicious measures — must be broken. The Liberals have assured us that socialist policies will now not see the light of day. Labour never intended they should.

But a united fight around a socialist programme is exactly what is needed to end the poverty and misery Labour has forced down the throat of the working class since it took office.

This is the only way that Jones' and Murray's attempts to cobble together another round of wage limits can be stopped. These mis-leaders claim the Social Contract is more than an incomes policy. Much more it seems. They say it holds the key to solving the crisis 'for the nation as a whole'. What nonsense!

It certainly serves the interests of the bosses. But for working class people it means a never-ending round of cuts in social services, losses in jobs and spiralling prices. And the working class is expected to exercise wage restraint in exchange for this!

### CHALLENGED

The architects of Phase 3 deserve to be treated in kind. That's the only way they can be challenged. Calls for a return to free collective bargaining won't be enough to do the job. What is needed is an organised fight for a set of alternative policies — a socialist strategy in the interests of the working class.

At every level of the workers' movement — whether it be in the community or in the factory — a socialist opposition to the class collaboration of Murray and Jones must be launched.

The wages policy is a central plank of the Social Contract. All of the union leaders are clamouring in their support for yet another phase of this wage-slashing alliance. Only a clear alternative which unites all workers — whether skilled, unskilled, low-paid, or women — will guarantee that the fragmented and isolated struggles of today become a concerted challenge to the mis-leaders tomorrow.

A socialist opposition to do just that must fight to end unemployment, to put a stop to the cuts in social spending, and to deal a death blow to all the anti-working class policies of the Labour leaders. On wages, militants armed with policies to unite the struggle will give the lie to the bureaucrats' claims that 'their' members will go to the wall if there is a 'free for all'.

For across the board increases. The wage cuts of Phases 1 and 2 must be restored. Workers are not to blame for the capitalist crisis and shouldn't bear the brunt of it.

Protect wages against inflation. For every 1 per cent increase in prices, there should be an automatic equal increase in wages. Only then will workers be in a position to improve real wages. An end to the constant chase to keep up to price rises.

Any delay in payment of automatic increases is out of the question. Heath's 'threshold agreements' were hopeless. Workers had to wait until prices went up a full 7 per cent before any increases in wages were forthcoming. And while they were waiting, they suffered wage cuts.

For a cost of living index drawn up by the unions. Automatic wage increases must reflect real price rises felt by the working class. The Government's indexes are useless. They include items that aren't even part of the working class budget. Not surprisingly, these items are ones that tend to rise in price more slowly than the basic items like food. Food has risen 22 per cent. Yet the Government's index says the figure is only 15 per cent.

An end to low pay. Equal pay now. For an immediate £50 minimum wage. Alan Fisher calls on the low paid to support an incomes policy rather than a 'free for all'. But to succumb to his arguments means to shirk the fight for the whole labour movement to take its responsibilities in protecting the interests of the lower paid. The fate of the lower paid can't be left up to the Government's wage slashing policies any longer.

Equal pay means more than just pay equal to the lowest paid men. It means ending women's low wages through low grading of jobs. All grading schemes that discriminate against women must be opposed.



## DUTCH WORKERS WIN INFLATION LINKED RISES

BY 18 February in the Netherlands, every nine months. This waiting 40,000 Dutch workers were on strike for inflation-proof wage increases.

25,000 demonstrated in Rotterdam. 10,000 were on the streets in Amsterdam. Ports in both cities were closed. Street car drivers, airline workers, and employees in the print trade downed tools.

This massive show of strength ended in a victory for workers in many industries. They won the right to keep their agreement negotiated in 1971 for automatic increases in wages in line with price increases. They also won an additional 2 per cent overall increase.

It was the nature of these gains — however limited — which ensured the massive show of strength which was unleashed by the workers' movement in February. That's because any policy which protects the



# Remove AUEW Strikebreakers!

THE DISGUST felt by many members of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers over the decision of the Executive Council to support British Leyland's management's threats to sack Leyland toolroom workers is still rising.

Many branches and shop steward quarterlies have disassociated themselves from the EC's action, and it is common knowledge that if the toolmakers had stayed out they would have attracted support from large sections of the AUEW membership. Many factories and toolrooms had already met prior to the decision of the toolmakers to go back and voted to support the Leyland workers if they were sacked.

## AWARE

The AUEW Executive is well aware of this feeling and it has rushed out a four-page document containing its statement, those of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, and that of British Leyland management. The management document of 14 March being circulated by the AUEW includes the following: 'In the event that toolroom workers do not report for work, then they will be deemed by the company as having terminated their employment.'

The CSEU statement of the same day endorses 'the decision of the AUEW Executive Council not to support its members if they refuse to return to work forthwith'. The AUEW circular of 15 March to all branches of the union states: '.... Accordingly and unanimously the EC of the Engineering Section of the AUEW .... have issued the attached statement endorsing the company's statement!'

The unanimity of the decision to play the role of strikebreakers means that Communist Party member Les Dixon, and Maoist Reg Birch collaborated on this attack on the toolmakers.

## SPEED

But the most interesting thing about the AUEW branch circular is the speed with which it was rushed out — a speed which was lacking when the historic Trico dispute was taking place. Then, the AUEW Executive failed to send even one circular during the entire 21 weeks of the strike. Clearly, strikebreaking has an infinitely higher priority in the bureaucratic circles of the AUEW than has women striking for equal pay.

In response to these actions of the AUEW Executive a number of branches in the union have expressed their anger in the best way possible — by moving resolutions calling for the removal of the AUEW Executive. This they are entitled to do under rule 15(5) of the union which states: 'The EC or any member thereof may be removed from office by a ballot vote of the membership of the union provided that such a ballot is demanded by 10 per cent or more of the branches and that not less than two-thirds of the membership are in favour of such a removal.'

## REMOVE

Last Friday Strichley AUEW branch unanimously voted to invoke this procedure after the motion had been moved by a Leyland toolroom worker, and Engineering Charter has also decided to launch a campaign to kick out the Executive.

The accountability of union officials is thus being posed in a real way. All AUEW members are urged to mobilise the existing feeling of anger against its Executive and to build this campaign to remove the strikebreakers from office.

JOHN GRAHAM

\*Two weeks ago the Birmingham East AUEW shop stewards quarterly voted to organise a lobby of the Union's National Committee against the Social Contract. However when the resolution was moved at the District Committee



AUEW Executive Council — calls for their removal from office grow

the following Tuesday to lay on transport to Eastbourne, the right wing voted against and received a narrow majority.

Although the right lost the vote on the resolution the previous

week they are now attempting to sabotage the mobilisation by making it physically impossible for the lobby to take place. However plans for a lobby are still

going ahead and it is hoped that the shop stewards committee can be won to taking up the fight that the District Committee has undemocratically scabbed on.

# Phase 3 Cutting Wages

Workers have a bag of goodies to choose from in the hedge podge being cooked up by Callaghan and Murray in their dealings with Lord Watkinson of the CBI. At least that is what they are being led to believe. Phase 3 offers endless possibilities — apparently suited to everyone's taste.

It could be 'flexible'. Differentials may be restored. Or they may not. Phase 1 and 2 rises could be consolidated into basic rates. On the other hand, this might go a bit far. Whatever formula these hard-nosed negotiators come up with, one thing is clear: just like Phase 1 and 2, the third phase will mean nothing more than a wage cut in the interests of the bosses.

Jones and Murray are trying to hide this unsavoury fact. They have taken out their shopping bag of promises yet again. Unemployment will disappear. Weaker sections of the community will be looked after. Inflation will be under control.

In fact, if Jones and Murray are to be believed, workers and bosses alike will rejoice at what is in store for them. What nonsense! If this sales pitch isn't enough in itself to put off militants from swallowing the next round of attacks, the facts

will help to do so.

**ARGUMENT:** Wage restraint is essential to cutting inflation. **FACT:** Prices rose 15.1% between January '76 and '77, according to latest retail price indexes. Food prices — one of the largest chunks out of the pay packet — have gone up faster, by 22.7 per cent. Healey now admits inflation will be running at 15 per cent by the end of '77, not his past 9 per cent forecast. Average earnings have risen only 12 per cent. On average working class people have had real wage cuts of £10 a week.

**ARGUMENT:** The Social Contract helps the weak and low paid workers.

**FACT:** An estimated 20,000 families found themselves worse off after a £6 rise because of extra tax payments and loss of benefits. The majority of low paid workers did not receive the full £6 possible under Phase 1. In Phase 2, those earning less than £50 got a maximum of only £2.50 a week. In April 1976, 10 per cent of male and 75 per cent of women manual workers earned less than £44 a week.

**ARGUMENT:** In return for wage restraint, women will get equal pay.

**FACT:** Two thirds of women workers have low paid jobs not comparable to men's jobs. Of the remaining one third covered by the Act, 10 per cent still get nowhere near equal pay.

**ARGUMENT:** The Social Contract will tackle unemployment.

**FACT:** Unemployment has increased under Labour and is expected to stay at over a million on the dole till the 1980s. There are 140,000 school leavers without jobs.

**ARGUMENT:** The Social Contract will care for the old, homeless and the ill.

**FACT:** Labour has cut £80m from the hospital building programme. It has halved projects for residential homes for old people, children and the handicapped. There is a half

# Workers unity against low pay

The Social Contract was sold to the trade union movement with promises that it would protect low paid workers and make unemployment an evil of past times. Below, TESSA VAN GELDEREN looks at how the lowest paid — especially those in industries controlled by Wages Councils — have fared in the past 3 years.

£11.6 million of wage arrears due to many of the most exploited workers in the textile and retail sectors remain in the pockets of the bosses. This was the conclusion of the April 1976 report of the Low Pay Unit, which took a hard look at workers whose wages are supposedly 'protected' by Wages Councils.

And if these offending bosses are caught the maximum fine available is a mere £100. Even this action is remote now that the statutory inspection of employers in Wages Council industries has dropped to an all-time low. A full 90% of such employers are never inspected at all!

These facts sum up the continuing plight of the lowest paid — many of them immigrant, black and women — under the pay policy of the Labour Government. 'A severe problem of underpayment' — the verdict of a 1974 Report by this

same body — opened up a wide and continuing debate on the role of the Wages Councils themselves.

They were set up at the turn of the century to act as guardians for workers with little collective bargaining power. Yet many trade unionists at the recent TUC Women's Conference felt that far from protecting the weaker sections, these Councils have allowed them to remain isolated and unorganised. Homeworkers are a case in point.

Under Phase 1, 625,000 workers in this category did not receive the full £6 allowed for. In fact, in the handful of cases where the Wages Councils applied for the full rate, they used it to maintain cash differentials — the very policy which the flat rate was supposed to guard against in the interests of the low paid. This occurred because claims were submitted for only older or higher grade workers.

But even when workers were awarded the full £6 thanks to Wage Council agreements, the cash never appeared in their pay packets. The loopholes open to employers are immense. They are only bound to pay basic rates laid down by Wages Councils, not increases specified by them.

## PEANUTS

Needless to say, the basic rates are peanuts anyway. And so as the Wages Councils are prodded into proposing increases, the bosses happily hand over a few pence just to bring up workers' wages to the dismal basic rates. The rest of the proposed increases never see the light of day — except in the profit columns of the firms' books.

Phase 2 was little better for these workers. The increase is a percentage one which automatically works against the low paid. And — as with the £6 — this 4½ per cent is treated as 'earnings supplement', not consolidated into the basic rate. So the lower paid work on overtime rates set as long ago as August 1975.

But the assault on the lower paid does not stop at the wages policy. Take Healey's decision to raise income tax levels in April 1975. Even workers with children in Wage Council industries were then caught in the net of taxation with its new, lower starting point well beneath the official poverty line. Under Phase 1, 20,000 workers kissed good-bye to improved standards of living as official figures estimated that they were worse off through extra tax payments and accompanying loss of benefits.

## POLICY

The wages and taxation policy, coupled with cuts in social spending which have run Welfare State services into the ground, make up a bundle whose message is loud and clear for the low paid — less take-home pay, more taxes and fewer facilities is the reality of the Social Contract. And this for the workers in whose interests the policy was peddled!

The answer to the plight of the lowest paid is not to 'improve' the Social Contract. It is to smash through the Social Contract in a united offensive. The responsibility of the low paid rests on the shoulders of the workers' movement as a whole — not with the Wages Council Inspectorate, the Industrial Tribunals, nor even with the next phase of a new deal between the TUC and Labour Government.

The fight for a national minimum wage tied to inflation, equal pay, solidarity with all unionisation efforts, and the fight to improve conditions on all fronts — not just the wages question — must be placed at the centre of the fightback.



Yardley equal pay strikers emerge from their overnight occupation of Transport House for union backing from the T&GWU.

# Women strike for equal pay

Three hundred women at the Yardley factory in Basildon voted against the Transport and General Workers Union leadership to continue their five week strike for equal pay last week. The strike was sparked off when the Industrial Tribunal rejected the application of three women workers for equal pay with men in packing cosmetic products.

The women were laid off for refusing to do work they claimed was not in their job specifications. Management retaliated by stopping production for eight days. This was the setting when 400 workers walked out, leaving an equal number of men — including the union convenor — scabbing on the struggle.

Yardley workers provide yet another indication that the Tribunals cannot be relied upon to win women's rights. And, as the Trico workers found out the hard way, women are also up against the backwardness of their fellow workers. This same message came across at the Rally for Women's Rights held in London on 26 February.

action on a national level would have brought the car industry to a halt, upsetting the delicate balance achieved with the Social Contract.

Biased grading and job evaluation schemes — one of the main ways women's jobs remain tied to low pay — is a problem not even mentioned in the legislation.

Struggles launched by women to defend and extend their rights, both in the home and at work, must be placed at the centre of the fight for a socialist opposition.

ANNE CESEK

The Social Contract is increasingly being hung over the heads of workers launching struggles, by both bosses and union leaders alike. Employers at a garage in Bury St. Edmonds recently refused an equal pay claim. They argued it fell outside the framework of the legislation and would thus challenge the pay limits.

This same idea no doubt was in the minds of the AUEW



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## WHAT NEXT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS?

Support the meeting called by the Working Women's Charter Campaign.

Saturday 2 April, 2pm at Friends Meeting House, Room 44, Bull Street, Birmingham

Further details from Jill Daniels, 01-701 4173.