

Workers power

INDUSTRIAL SPECIAL

Victory to the NGA!

STRIKE AGAINST THE ANTI-UNION LAWS

FIERCE mass picketing at Warrington on November 29th, and a 1000+ NGA rally in Manchester the following night expressed the determination of rank and file trade unionists to bring Eddie Shah to his knees in the *Stockport Messenger* dispute.

Now over six months old, the battle that began with the NGA over the sacking of 8 (now 6) printers in defence of the closed shop, has become a watershed struggle that has serious implications for the whole working class. It is a battle that the working class can and must win.

If Shah wins - backed as he is by the Thatcher government and the Institute of Directors - the Tories' 1980 and 1982 anti-union laws will have succeeded in demoralising whole sectors of the working class. Every fight over wages or conditions that requires solidarity action could be undermined by the fear of coming up against these laws. It could prove a bigger watershed than the failed steel strike of 1980.

If the NGA are beaten, the Tories will no doubt round off their victory with further legislative attacks on the closed shop. The present proposals to weaken the trade union financing of the Labour Party will go through unopposed and hardened up.

The bosses are backing Shah all the way. They were given the green light when the cowardly Broad Left dominated POEU Executive climbed down in the face of a court injunction. Shah then

acted on an injunction on November 17th which had been granted a month earlier. This upstart boss sums up the Thatcherite project: a small provincial employer for whom the widespread introduction of new technology in a non-union firm is the key to industrial growth in new areas. Thatcher is out to keep these new industries free from the unions.

For the Fleet Street barons, a victory for Shah over the NGA would be a big boost. They have not yet been able to beat the powerful print unions on the national papers. The NGA in particular stand in the bosses' way. If Shah could deal a blow to the NGA, the drive for new technology and big job cuts amongst the national dailies would be rapidly intensified.

What is at stake for the NGA is their existence as a union. The NGA bureaucracy has negotiated away its members jobs over the last ten years, but on condition that their members retain control of the new technology and maintain their present high wage levels. If Shah defeats the closed shop, the way would be clear for the realisation of the publishing bosses' dream. They hope to do away with NGA members' jobs altogether in the composing rooms, and get NUJ members to do their jobs on computers. The barons hope to break the closed shop and drastically reduce wages for the new de-skilled occupations.

This explains the willingness of the NGA bureaucracy to go as far as they have. They can remember that the ISTC lost half its members in the aftermath of the steel strike, when they were defeated in a similar test-case battle.

Despite their apparently intransigent stance, the NGA leadership cannot be trusted to see the fight through to the end. The Fleet Street printers came out on a token strike in support in November, and were sent back despite the open splits within the publisher's organisation. Instead of challenging the subsequent lock-out with an all-out strike, the printers all went back to work, allowing the press barons to race to the courts for redress.

When challenged about whether they are calling for mass pickets, Wade and Dubbins have retreated behind phrases that will confuse the rank and file: "spontaneous demonstrations of support" and suchlike. They are drawing back from the consequences of their struggle: they are failing to call for mass defiance of the law.

In place of TUC treachery and the NGA leaders' evasive tactics, we need a programme of action that can win.

The mass picketing is essential and must continue. Importantly, its existence takes the political initiative out of the bureaucracy's hands and undermines their chances of engineering a sell-out. Yet the beatings handed out on November 29th show the urgent need for organisation, for disciplined picket defence organisations.

The pickets must also be forums for political agitation. The arguments must be had on the coaches and on the picket line for solidarity and *General Strike* action. Mass picketing must become a springboard for strike action, not a substitute for it, as it became at Grunwicks in 1977. On that occasion pickets became stage-managed shows for the union bureaucrats and the Labourite charlatans to wear their bleeding hearts on their sleeves. We must not forget that this substitution led to the *defeat* of the Grunwicks strike.

We must look instead to the example of Saltley Gate in 1972 during the miners' strike. Then it was mass strike action by engineers that provided the raw material and political clout for mass pickets.

Every union that has policy against the laws, and every union supporting the NGA must come out on strike now. Every militant in every union and workplace



Don't let the law muzzle the unions

must fight for strike action now in support of the NGA, as well as support for the mass pickets. The whole of the printing industry must be brought to a standstill.

Not only would this put the frighteners on the bosses, and have the weaker elements amongst the Fleet Street barons putting pressure on Shah to back down, it would also deprive the bosses of a mouthpiece for their lies and attacks on the NGA.

Despite the recent mergers between NATSOPA and SOGAT, and the NGA and SLADE, and the Common Code of Practice between the NGA, NUJ and SOGAT, there still remain chronic divisions between the print unions, especially between the NGA and SOGAT. While these divisions remain, the bosses will continue to play one worker off against the other.

The new technology cannot be halted indefinitely. But one industrial union for all print workers - writers, technicians and distribution workers - would help ensure that print workers do not suffer job losses and wage cuts

as a result. Both here and in the call for all-out strike action, the emphasis must be placed upon rank and file democratic control. Accountability, recallability, the strengthening of the chapels and building rank and file control of the present dispute, are urgently needed to prevent a sell-out and inter-union rivalry.

An all-out print strike and solidarity action from every other section of workers are imperative. Every militant must fight for such strikes now. But it is equally vital that we force those who claim to lead us to actually do that - the TUC must be forced to call an indefinite General Strike. Such a class-wide action can reinstate the Stockport Six. It can put the repulsive Shah in his place. It can destroy the plans of the Fleet Street magnates. Above all else it can and must SMASH THE TORY ANTI-UNION LAWS!

ALL OUT FOR THE DEMONSTRATION IN WARRINGTON CALLED BY THE NORTH WEST T.U.C. - Wednesday December 7th - 3.00 pm

Labour leaders bow to law

The leadership of the Labour Party is joining in the attack on the NGA. Kinnock, Kaufman, Hattersley and John Smith have all raced to prove that their loyalty to the bosses' law far outstrips their loyalty to the trade unionists whose votes put them in parliament.

Kinnock criticised the Tory laws for being clumsy, but went on to denounce "any consequent violence whoever provokes it". This was a condemnation of people who, because they won't accept the sack lying down, have been shoved, punched, kicked and clubbed by the police thugs.

When the struggle at Warrington got really bitter, Kinnock decided not to speak at all. In the interest of rebuilding the "responsible" image of the Labour Party - that is, proving to the bosses that Labour can be trusted to attack the workers, the faint-hearted and evasive Kinnock kept mum. He sat back and let Hattersley, and Kaufman and John Smith do the talking.

Hattersley attacked the pickets so

vigorously he was praised by the leading Tory John Biffen! Smith has repeatedly denounced the "violence" of the pickets, while remaining silent about the tactical support units which have been smashing them up.

The left of the party - Heffer, Benn Hoyle and others - have infuriated the press by refusing to condemn the pickets. Instead, they have bleated about the "bad" and "impractical" Tory laws. However, they have not yet opted to forswear their MP's oath of respect for the rule of law, by using the parliamentary platform to call for mass defiance of the laws.

These MPs must not be allowed to sit on the fence. In the local Labour Parties rank and file members - including the 44% of the NGA members affiliated to the party - must raise the call for support for the NGA from the party and from the "Left" leaders.

The local Labour Parties must mobilise massive support for pickets, their facilities opened up for the use of the NGA, their meetings addressed

continued on back page

WHY THE BOSSES NEED ANTI-UNION LAWS

THE BOSSES HAVE long had laws that could be used to undermine the effective trade unionism. The notorious "conspiracy" laws could be used against anyone meeting with two others in private to plan something. The "something" does not have to be a criminal act!

This law was used against the Newbury pickets in the aftermath of the 1972 building workers' strike. Similar laws have been used against countless pickets. Leon Brittan recently reminded the police of the laws on "unlawful assembly", "riotous behaviour" and "breach of the peace" which come in handy when dealing with picketers.

In addition to these laws, the bosses have specifically anti-union laws. These laws are useful up to a point, but they have the disadvantage of making the state responsible for launching the legal action. Indeed, the Tories' first crack at implementing anti-union laws fell foul of this problem.

The Heath government's Industrial Relations Act allowed the state, via the National Industrial Relations Court, to intervene against strikes, picketing and so on. The Act itself opened the way for the government to be charged with "unlawful" interference in the industrial bargaining process. As such it ran the risk of provoking - as it did - political attacks against it.

The two Thatcher governments have maintained the objective - legal shackles on the unions - but have modified their means of achieving it. The laws were brought in installments. By doing this, the Tories deliberately avoided a confrontation over legislation. They created, usually without resistance, a legal framework to "break the union grip".

The *Economist* put it: "These laws are more specific than any previous legislation in 'outlawing' all forms of necessary and effective trade union action. Instead of creating a new court to deal with industrial disputes, the new laws simply give employers the right to ask the ordinary courts to ban specific actions that interfere with their business. Once the court has issued such a ban in the form of an injunction, a continuation of the action becomes a criminal offence from a dispute with the employers into contempt of the courts themselves."

There is no limit to the penalties the courts can then impose. Nor is there any limit to the force which the police or army can use to enforce these penalties.

In adopting this course of action, the Tories are clearly banking on the widespread belief that, whatever the rights or wrongs of the initial dispute, nobody has the right to break the law. This is not only the argument of Bill Sirs and Terry Duffy, it was also essentially the reasoning behind the surrender of the POEU to Mercury. Yet the whole argument is a myth. How can Eddie Shah and the NGA members be treated equally by the law when Shah's Tory friends have deliberately written the law so that his actions must be legal, while the NGA's must be illegal? No employer needs to mount picket lines or black goods, but any striking trade unionist does need to do such things in order to stand a chance of beating the employer.

The law is supposed to defend private property equally. The problem is that society is not made up of equal property owners. A tiny minority of people, like Eddie Shah, own property of a rather special sort - land, factories and capital - which enables them to exploit the labour of others. These "others" - the vast majority - have no property that brings them in a livelihood, except for their ability to work for wages. Thus the law protects Shah's "right" to sack workers, to deprive them of their livelihood. If they protest, strike, attempt to prevent their employer replacing them with scabs, then in move the massed squads of police and the courts.



Police on Warrington picket line Picture: John Smith (IFL)

Compare the law's "defence of private property" in this case, with its perfunctory "defence" of a worker's home against burglary. Immediately the ludicrous idea that the law is neutral appears for what it is, just a means of fooling the sacked worker into accepting him and his family being thrown into the direst poverty in the name of the law.

But surely the law is equal when it comes to human life? Whilst it is true that capitalist law does not, by and large, allow a boss to shoot a worker, it reserves that privilege for the state forces - who have a monopoly of violence. A policeman murdered Blair Peach, a policeman tried to murder Stephen Waldorf. Trained soldiers murdered 13 unarmed civilians on the streets of Derry. If you can't pay your rent, the landlord can steal your personal belongings, provided he gets permission from the supposedly neutral courts. The law cannot be neutral. It provides the framework in which society operates. Present day society is capitalist society - by definition an unequal society in which the minority who own the means by which society feeds, clothes, houses and transports itself, also control the lives of the majority of citizens. The entire purpose of the law is to maintain that state of inequality. It

lays down the limits beyond which the have-nots may not go, it defines the point at which the bourgeois state will use its monopoly of armed force to keep them down.

The new anti-union laws are a clear illustration of precisely this. Look at what they have made illegal - mass pickets, blacking, solidarity action, political strikes, enforcement of closed shops - each of them a vital weapon in the working class' battle to maintain and improve its living standards.

Since 1974, the Tories have not only learned something about the kind of law to introduce, but also about how and when to introduce and use it. Prior's act was passed in 1980, Tebbit's in 1982, yet neither had been used on any significant scale until the summer of 1983.

The reason for this can be seen from the laws themselves. They are laws designed to be used against unions in struggle, militant unions. Thatcher and Co. relied, in their first period of office, on the hard-nosed management style of Edwardes and MacGregor - driven on by fear of bankruptcy in the economic recession - and the impact of soaring unemployment, to hold the workers down.

Successful as this was, they knew it would not last for ever. They recognised that the first signs of economic upturn, even if slight, would rekindle militancy. They introduced the laws before they would be needed, precisely to make sure they were ready for use when the working class began once again to move to protect its interests.

That is why *Workers Power* was absolutely correct, throughout the Tories' years of preparation, to concentrate on explaining what they were up to, and why the laws had to be defeated before they were on the statute book.

The working class is in a more difficult position now, because the anti-union bills were allowed to become law, than it would have been if action had been taken to stop them. However, the working class has not been decisively defeated. It can fight and it must fight. Its target must remain what it should have been before. Not the alteration or restriction of the laws, nor waiting for a Labour government to repeal the laws, nor protests at the laws' interference in "bargaining", but a battle to destroy those laws and the system they are designed to protect. ■

TUC: never off their knees

The TUC has a lousy record of campaigning (let alone fighting) against Tory anti-union laws. Their knee-jerk response to the first proposals, in 1979, was to beg for beer and sandwiches with Jim Prior - their "friend" in the Tory Party.

They promised him they would stick to their "Code of Conduct", agreed with Labour, which, according to Murray, was intended "to prevent unruly behaviour" of pickets. They are saying to the Tories "we can live with your laws".

When Prior said "No dice", Murray begged for further talks. Persuasion, he informed his members, the way forward: "We shall try to persuade the government to change course". Then, when a struggle erupted in 1980 - the steel strike - the TUC prevented it from succeeding. It stood in the way of their efforts at persuasion. They stopped a general strike in Wales, called a Sunday demo on May 14th. This effectively sabotaged the steel strike and doomed May 14th. It was not even effective as a protest.

The most pathetic aspect of the TUC's 1980 campaign was its pleading to the bosses themselves to oppose the law. Murray begged: "All employers should warn the government and the CBI". However, when the law finally went through in the summer/autumn of 1980, Duffy said: "We will be telling our members not to break the law of the



Duffy at the TUC

land...We do not see the need for conflict". Emboldened by the sight of the white flag flying over Congress House, the Tories pushed forward a second set of proposals - Tebbit's law. The TUC did not call a single protest action against this. Their campaign was non-existent. There were to be no repeats of May 14th, merely a leaflet campaign.

Prominent TUC leaders were to be seen in such public places as bus stops, handing out brochures to bemused passers-by, detailing the harmlessness of trade unions. The Employment Policy Committee of the TUC in January 1982 resolutely rejected calls for any form of protest actions, and for withdrawing from their talks with Tories and bosses in the National Economic Development Council (NEDC). At a special conference in April, the union leaders swapped cheques, agreed not to talk to the Tories (except via the NEDC), and to help any union that had a run-in with the anti-union laws. This was aimed at leaving the "employers in no doubt

that if they use this proposed legislation, they will be guilty of causing disruption and damage", according to the TUC.

The reply to Tebbit's latest proposals was the pathetic *Hands Up for Democracy* campaign. With only 65,000 copies of this brochure distributed, the message of the campaign was clear enough to friend and foe alike: "Hands up. We're giving up without a fight!".

The support the TUC offered to unions in the event of the use of the laws has been shown for what it was - rhetoric. They deliberately stalled on giving support to the NGA. They will treat other unions that fight in the same way.

The TUC are never off their knees. Over the summer they were in an even lower posture. In shameful breach of the Congress decision not to talk to Tebbit, Murray, Keys and others opened discussions with him. They then got the support of Congress for this last September.

Now they are hoping to build a constructive relationship with Tom King, the Tory Employment Minister. In the interests of these talks, they are disgracefully betraying the NGA. They did the same with the steel strike. They will do the same again.

Malignant creatures like Alistair Graham of the CPSA will continue to get prime time TV to attack workers on behalf of the bosses, unless and until the rank and file are mobilised to put their foot down - preferably on their leaders' necks. ■

WHAT THE

So far the Tories have brought in two necessary for the effective existence of based on the idea that a gradual but the unions to fight for their members workers leaving the unions that they w bosses' plans.

The 1980 Employment Act (Prior's Law) Picketing by anybody not themselves direct solidarity action such as the Warrington Mounting a picket anywhere except your company) - this made the original NGA All secondary picketing - all flying pickets Political strikes or any other strikes over It also created a fund to compensate scab agreements.

When no effective resistance was shown the Tories recognised that they could the Act (Tebbit's Law) allowed employers cases:

All action not "wholly or mainly" related to his own employees. Disputes between "workers and workers" Political strikes and all action not aimed All strikes relating to matters outside Britain All union-only contracts. It also introduced the principle of 5-year contracts for the workforce or 85% of those voting was closed shop effective.

Building on the ease with which, until these laws, the Tories are now poised re-writing the rule-books of union by not to outlaw unions but to make the

Secret ballots for all Executive Committee members chances of the Right by adding to the in Secret ballots before strikes can be official and increased power of the trade union Secret ballots to decide, once every ten years. Redefining the "political" actions that a political fund, then it will have no right that the action is political. ■

WHY WE NEED A GENERAL STRIKE

THE VICIOUS assault on the NGA by Eddie Shah and the NPA, aided and abetted by the courts, the police and the government, has sharply revealed yet again the fact that "British justice" is class justice, that the law is bosses law.

It has revealed the judges as the hirelings of the employers. They are eager to seize and confiscate the funds and resources built up by ordinary trade unionists' contributions that make resistance possible against their millionaire masters.

It has revealed the police as thugs specially trained to physically bust up any effective trade union struggle. In short, it has revealed that the state is no neutral embodiment of the national will, but a mighty weapon in the hands of the bosses.

The attack on the NGA is aimed at making effective resistance to sackings, to the tearing up of hard-won gains, is the matter of fire for the Tory Anti-Union Laws. If they succeed, then every employer will resort to the courts to cripple, bankrupt and turn the police loose on their workers everytime a serious attempt is made to resist them. Thus the NGA's fight is the fight of the whole working class.

Given the willingness of the employers and the Tories to escalate this struggle into an all-out attack by their class - via the state - on the only section of our class that has so far stood up to the Anti-Union Laws, the only sure and certain way to defeat them is by a class-wide counter-attack by us - a general strike.

The Tory government, the directing centre of the bosses' offensive, is mobilising and coordinating against us. The Institute of Directors is standing firm behind Shah, and is urging a massive police crackdown on the strikers and pickets.

Every worker, every militant must demand that those who claim to be the "general staff" of the labour movement, the TUC, cease their treacherous attempts to negotiate a surrender; stop their blackmail and arm-twisting of the NGA leaders into a sell-out, and put the full resources of the TUC and the individual unions behind an all-out general strike to force the repeal of the Anti-Union laws, the restitution

LAWS ARE

laws which ban activities of trade unions. Their strategy is continuous erosion of the ability of will, eventually, result in so many will no longer be an obstacle to the

are banned:

are pickets involved in a dispute - this makes pickets illegal.

own place of work (even in the same picket of Warrington illegal.

extraneous matters.

who lose their jobs in closed shop

by individual unions or the TUC, go further. The 1982 Employment to sue for damages in the following

to a trade dispute between an employer

e.g. demarcation or unionisation disputes, at a specific employer.

tain - boycotts and blacking.

ly ballots for closed shops - 80% of the majority required to make a

Warrington, they had introduced to consolidate their attack by laws. Once again, the central aim is less effective.

the place is designed to increase the influence of the media.

al - this means a cooling-off period officials to organise a No vote.

years, if a union should have a political

union can take. If a union has no to publicise its case if the judge rules



Demonstration against the Industrial Relations Bill (1970) Picture: Gail Clarke Hall (Report)

of pilfered union funds, the release of any trade unionists that may be gaoled in the coming battles.

Every shop stewards committee, union branch, district committee and trades council must flood Congress House with the demand - stop grovelling and start fighting!

Why do we need a class-wide strike which sets itself the goal of wiping the anti-union laws from the statute book? Because only such class-wide action can have the be-wigged pick-pockets and the bootboys in blue not knowing where to turn. Whilst they can take on one isolated section or industry, if all the major sections of the labour movement went on strike, if every city and town was stopped in defiance of the judges and the Tories, they can be hurled into headlong retreat.

Why do we need to demand the unconditional and total repeal of the laws? Because even a victory for the NGA alone will leave other and weaker sections at the mercy of the law once the solidarity action is demobilised. This was the lesson in 1972 when strike action approaching general strike proportions freed the Pentonville Five, but left the Industrial Relations Act intact, and gave the judges the chance to fight another day.

How do we get a general strike? Certainly not just by demanding that the TUC calls one. The best "demand" is direct action now - in solidarity with the NGA. Solidarity action from the best organised sections, from those most directly affected by the present attack: the printers, the POEU, or from those with experience in fighting the government and its anti-union laws: the miners, transport workers and engineers. These workers can give a lead to the millions of workers who hate the Tories and are under attack from them. They could win the support of the millions of unemployed.

How can solidarity action be mobilised? Firstly, by turning the shop stewards committees into democratic strike committees by linking up those unions willing to take action into fighting councils of action, by expanding the mass picket into defence squads capable of taking on and seeing off the SPGs.

Action Councils and organised mass picketing forces can co-ordinate transport and distribute food supplies. They can ensure that working people and their families do not suffer during a general strike. They can approach, fraternise with, and win over the troops that the government would doubtless mobilise against such a strike.

To all this, many honest militants will say: "Come off it, this is all pie in the sky, when we've been suffering defeats over pay and redundancies. If our members won't back us over their own jobs or their own pay packets, how can we get them to take on the law, the police, parliament and so on?"

All this ignores the reasons why so

many workers have been unwilling to take on the government in the last two years. They feared isolation and they did not trust the leaders they had seen stab the steel unions in the back. Their shop floor leaders had failed to win them to action by convincing them in protracted discussions around the issues at stake and by winning them to a mass democratic decision on action.

The real prospect of united action against the Tories can completely alter this mood. It can set an infectious example. The action of militant sections of print workers, miners, car workers and others, can start an avalanche.

Every worker on strike, no matter how small scale the struggle, experiences a sudden release from the paralysed acceptance of the bosses' ideas churned out by TV, press and the radio. Mass solidarity action would release a thousand times more energy and daring. It would demonstrate the power of the workers to themselves as a class. It would show the limits of the bosses' power and indicate the way it can be crushed and overthrown.

Unfortunately, those "Socialists" or "Communists" who should be fighting for such a course of action are doing their best to fight against it. The British Communist Party limits itself to calling for mass support of the picket lines in defiance of the law. It cheers on union "lefts" like Joe Wade and Moss Evans, effectively allowing them to set the terms of the struggle. Despite having prominent, indeed key union leaders (like Mick McGahey) in their ranks, these leaders have not said a word about strike action in support of the NGA.

Others, who call themselves Trotskyists, like *Militant* and

Socialist Organiser, call on the TUC to call a "one day general strike". They say this because they regard an indefinite general strike as not on the cards at the moment. They see a one-day strike as some sort of "preparation". They would be hard put to prove that workers would be more willing to undertake a one-day protest demonstration which clearly will not budge the Tories an inch than to join in a determined struggle with the perspective of forcing the government to surrender. Those willing to do the latter will take all-out solidarity action now. This, on top of other forms of solidarity action is the only "preparation" that will actually lead to a general strike.

Of course, such pressure may oblige the TUC to call a one-day general strike. If they do this, we must fight like tigers to oppose a return to work after one day. How can socialists do this if they have already been the ones to call for a *one day limit*? They have in advance given the TUC an alibi.

We would hope that *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* will change their minds on the day - but what would workers make of such weathercocks who one moment ask for a 24 hour stoppage, and the next attack the bureaucrats for doing just what they asked?

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) are also terrified of being laughed at if they propose a general strike. Indeed, the SWP has always been terrified of this slogan. In 1972 the TUC got round to calling a general strike (albeit for one day only) before the SWP dared utter the two terrible words. Why is this when SWP militants are fearless

fighters on the picket line? There is, of course, physical courage and political courage, and it is the latter which the SWP leadership lacks.

Basically, they fear a general strike led by the TUC. Thus, whilst they castigate the latter for not calling "a one day national strike", they limit themselves to advising workers to "Move resolutions of support calling for your union to take official strike action in support of the NGA and pledging the union branch and shop stewards committee to initiate and support unofficial action if the official call isn't forthcoming" (Print Strike Special No. 1).

The SWP has a superstitious fear of demanding the TUC to call a general strike - one which does not appear to extend to the activities of the individual union leaderships. They hope to circumvent the problem of class-wide leadership by calling for a mass strike. They hope that such a strike will be out of the control of the bureaucrats. Against the treacherous TUC they set up a "spontaneous" mass strike.

They are wrong to imagine that France in May 1968, "spontaneity". In France is needed "spontaneity" led to the CP and CGT (the CP union federation) leaders recovering control of the strike and selling it out. What is needed is revolutionary leadership and a class-conscious working class movement. Neither will develop spontaneously or behind the back of the present union leaders. These traitors must be put to the test of action, held to account, exposed and replaced. Workers can learn to do this in struggle a hundred times more quickly and surely. Indeed, it will never be done aside from mass action and class-wide struggle.

Thus the call for the TUC to organise a general strike is not and should not be counterposed to any form of solidarity action now, or to action by individual unions. It should be accompanied by agitation for councils of action composed of rank and file delegates and for a national action council based on the local ones.

In this way, from the outset, a powerful brake can be put on the sell-outs and betrayals of the leaders. Thereby a means of preventing another 1926 sell-out will exist. The action councils will be able to mobilise the fight a hundred times better than conclaves of bureaucrats afraid of their own shadows. They will prove to be organs of workers' democracy within which a new militant, revolutionary leadership can emerge.

The general strike, as Trotsky pointed out, poses the question of who shall be the master of the house, of who rules in society. **The task of revolutionaries and working class militants is to win the mobilised working class to a decisive answer to that question. The answer must be that the Tory government and its courts, its police thugs and its army must be overthrown and replaced by a real workers' government based on the mass democratic organs of struggle created by the general strike. ■**

DEFEND PICKETING! DEFEND PICKETS

The ability to picket effectively lies at the very heart of effective trade unionism. Each and every employer has the legal right to sack "his" workers at will or close down "his" factory. No matter that the workers lose at a stroke all but the barest livelihood, lose all security for themselves and their families. Not a judge in the land will grant them an injunction against their boss. All the redress they have is their combined numbers.

Yet when they picket their workplaces, up roll the police picket-busters to protect the scabs' "right to work" or the bosses' right to dispose of his own property. There is a plain and absolute conflict between the bosses' rights and those of the workers. Plain too is the fact that the judges, the police and the government stand for the bosses' right all along the line.

Pickets can be effective only if they persuade the scabs morally and physically to stop scabbing, if they can win other trade unionists' support in stopping the boss transporting his

goods and raw materials.

Such pickets would be largely "peaceful" if the police did not arrive in force and attack the strikers; escort the scabs into work, etc. Employers and scabs - a tiny minority of the population - are generally not inclined to cause trouble on their own.

In periods of social peace and economic plenty, employers, governments, judges may turn a blind eye to picketing. But since the crises of the early 1970s they have sought to put an end to it. They have trained special patrol groups to smash picket lines and demoralise pickets through snatch arrests. When workers responded to mass police thuggery with mass pickets, the Tories moved to outlaw them.

The defence of the picket line is now a harder task than ever before. Against the trained police riot squads we need disciplined workers' defence squads. It is the urgent task of the unions at rank and file level to train the youngest and fittest workers, to

recruit to our side the youth who, thanks to the Tories, cannot get a job, to help in this task.

If the struggles of the 1970s added the mass picket as a key tactic to meet the bosses' offensive, the struggles of the 1980s call out for organised, trained disciplined defence squads. Under the guise of football, gymnastics or martial arts clubs it can be done - indeed it must be done. Our ancestors fought against illegality and brutal state repression to create a trade union movement. As the Tories try to restore these conditions, we must fightback, illegally wherever necessary to preserve the unions. ■

PIN THIS ON YOUR UNION NOTICEBOARD

Workers Power

STOP THE TUC TRAITORS

Build a Rank and File Movement

HOW RANK AND FILE ACTION BEAT TORIES

THE T.U.C. LEADERS live in mortal fear of workers defying the law. When workers took on Heath's Industrial Relations Act in 1972 and 1973, the TUC worked overtime to prevent the battles leading to a real showdown between the working class and the Tory government.

Under the Industrial Relations Act, trade unions were required to register with, and prove their rule books acceptable to, an official Registrar. The act established a National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC), with the power to order strikers back to work for a "cooling off" period, order a ballot during a strike and adjudicate on "unfair industrial practices".

This act was only eventually wiped off the statute book by a Labour government due to a militant fightback in the engineering industry and the docks, and resolute solidarity action from the organised working class.

The Communist Party led Liason Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions (LCDTU) organised demonstrations and one day strikes against the proposals in 1970. So too did the Broad Left-dominated AUEW. It was this pressure that pushed the TUC to belatedly launch its own educational campaign against the Tories' plans.

The TUC leaders merely wanted the government to adopt a more flexible negotiating position. However, after a massive 500,000 TUC demonstration in February 1971, a special conference in March committed the TUC to complete opposition to the Tory laws and non-cooperation with the NIRC.

PENTONVILLE FIVE

As soon as the conference policy threatened to push the TUC onto a collision course with the government the leaders backed down. They mobilised no solidarity for the striking mipers in January 1972. When, in March 1972, the TGWU was fined a total of £55,000 for "unfair industrial practice" and refusing to attend the NIRC, the TUC immediately changed their policy so as to allow unions to recognise the NIRC.

While the trade union leaders ran for cover, looking for ways of avoiding a conflict, rank and file trade unionists kept alive the determination of millions of workers to destroy the Tory anti-union laws. Despite pressure from the TGWU leadership, the National Ports Shop Stewards Committee continued to black inland ports in defiance of the Industrial Relations Act.

In July 1972, the NIRC ruled against the picketing of Midland Cold Storage by London dockers. The dockers continued picketing, and refused to attend the court. Warrants were issued for five dockers who were duly arrested and taken to Pentonville gaol to "purge their contempt".

The gaoling of the dockers acted as a detonator to a massive strike wave aimed at freeing them. The dockers struck, followed by the Fleet Street printers. Scores of engineering works and building sites ground to a halt. Huge demonstrations took place daily. In the face of a growing strike wave of

general strike proportions, the TUC General Council called a one-day general strike to take place one week after the dockers were locked up.

Challenged by growing rank and file militancy, and the prospect of a general strike which could rapidly get out of the control of the TUC leadership, the government backed down. On the recommendation of the government's "Official Solicitor", the court freed the dockers. They were carried shoulder-high from the gaol, still declaring their contempt.

At the end of 1972, Heath's government tried to use the courts again, this time to undermine the right of the AUEW to discipline the notorious scab James Goad. The union was fined £5,000 in November, and a further £50,000 in December. Engineers struck in protest in January 1973, and the AUEW refused to pay the fine. The TUC remained dormant, refusing to mobilise workers in line with their official policy.

This inaction gave the go-ahead to the employers of Con Mech in Woking to take the AUEW to court in September 1973, for their official strike action against the company. The NIRC ordered £100,000 of the AUEW's funds to be sequestered. Two one-day protest actions organised by the union with no backing from the TUC failed to stop the action of the NIRC.

DIRECT ACTION

In March 1974, Con Mech successfully sued the AUEW for damages and the union refused to pay. The union's funds were sequestered and it faced bankruptcy. Finally, it called a national strike in May. Within one day this strike forced the hesitating Labour government to repeal the Industrial Relations Act. Workers' direct action was responsible for wiping the legislation off the statute book, not the TUC's "campaign".

The fighting strength of the working class, at Saltley, Pentonville, in the AUEW stoppages, had been more than enough to destroy the legislation in its entirety in 1972/73. The will and the force that could have built a general strike to smash the act was there. It was the TUC leaders who made sure that this force was given no lead.

Today they are doing the same. The vital lesson of the struggles in the 1970s must be heeded by militants today. The battle against the Tory laws must be combined with a struggle to clear out the union leaders who will not fight, and replace them by ones who will. ■

IN DEFIANCE OF Congress policy on overtime working, Lionel Murray and other TUC General Council elders are working every hour god sends them. For the first time since the 1982 Health Strike, Congress House has become a hive of activity. Then, as now, the activity is geared to one central objective - sabotaging a strike that threatens to mobilise the working class against Thatcher's government.

The High Court's legal thievery of the union's assets shows that the credibility and operability of the anti-union laws are at stake. When the unelected judges spit out phrases about the law being above the unions, Lionel Murray, Terrence Duffy and William Sirs trip over themselves to agree. To watch these so-called representatives of the working class, cap in hand, cringing and pleading before the arrogant representatives of the bosses is enough to turn anybody's stomach.

Murray has declared that "mass picketing is counter-productive". Duffy warned the NGA that an escalation of the dispute would damage "the image of the trades union movement as a whole...We will not support the NGA if they continue to break the law".

LOYAL LACKEYS

For these men the law - framed by and serving the interests of the ruling class - is sacrosanct.

The whole history of trade unionism is one of repeated attempts by the bosses to crush or neuter the unions by legal means. To put the law above the unions is to announce in advance your willingness to sell away, step by step, all the gains made over 150 years.

That is precisely what Duffy and his ilk are in business for. It is their personal image as loyal lackeys of the bosses that they fear their "roughneck" members may sully. It is their prospect of peerages from the monarch that they fear they will lose. At best they mutter about the "impracticability" on "unjustness" of the laws.

The flunkey-like attitude of the TUC leaders to the bosses goes unmentioned upon by the TUC lefts. Such fire-eaters as Scargill and McGahey have been deafening in their silence. King Arthur, who many will remember talking about going to jail, defying the laws, bringing down the government by strike action, has said nothing as yet.

The whole gamut of TUC left loudmouths have been struck dumb as the right wing scurry about their job of isolating, splitting and condemning the NGA. Here we have the left bureaucrats in a



Workers protest against the Industrial Relations Bill (1970)

Picture: Gail Clarke Hall (Report)

nutshell. At the decisive moment when action and not merely words are needed, they cravenly cede the leadership to the right wing. Perhaps they will, like Moss Evans, go so far as pledging "moral, physical and financial support". But not a hint about the only decisive support - strike action alongside the printers.

The crucial action required is not, in the end, support of the mass pickets, important as that is. It is striking with the printers that will pave the way to victory. The TUC right are dead against such an escalation. To go for it would mean an open fight - taken to the rank and file of every union - against Duffy and his cohorts.

MILITANT MINORITY

This is something that goes against the grain for Scargill and Evans, because like Duffy, they too are bureaucrats. They too have an interest in maintaining the unity of the caste of officials and time-servers, rather than promote unity of the ranks in struggle. They stand to lose their privileges, their monopoly over negotiations, their control over their members, should a real united general strike against the laws come about.

In the end, the "left" are tied to the right and are incapable of challenging them. Despite their platform speeches about going to jail, when faced with a real test, they are just as likely as the right to bow down before the courts.

The fundamental unity of the bureaucracy poses an urgent task to those militants involved in this dispute or other disputes, and those who support such struggles. The existing leadership needs to be put to the test of struggle, and all those found wanting, replaced. To do this an organisation, a movement, is needed. Such a movement will, in the present period, be based on the militant minority of workers - those who are prepared to fight.

In every town, militants within and between industries need to come together, plan their action, mobilise support for it, and take on the officials. Within and across unions, such networks of militants must be established nationally. The goal must be a national rank and file movement.

The present battles reveal the desperate need for such a movement. They also reveal its tasks. Such a movement must fight to democratise and transform the

unions, turn them into weapons of struggle against the Tories. Every closure must be met with an occupation. Every wage demand won by a strike. The fight to smash the Tory anti-union laws with a general strike would be a central element of a rank and file movement's strategy today.

The rank and file movement must not be an admiration society for "left" bureaucrats. Today the words of the "lefts" must be tested out. Scargill, Buckton, Bickerstaffe, Evans and their like need to be forced to bring their members out now in support of the NGA and against the laws. They must fight on the TUC General Council for a general strike and, if need be, go straight to the rank and file of all unions to get one.

If they fail such a test, and we think they will, then the rank and file movement needs to replace them with fighters who will stick to their guns. In any case, a rank and file movement must make part of its struggle to transform the unions, a campaign to regularly re-elect accountable officials who will fight. They will be revolutionary fighters, armed with political answers to the bosses' attacks, answers that can mobilise the mass of the working class to move forward against the bosses.

ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP

If the TUC is forced into some kind of support, it will only be because of the mass pressure from below and the obduracy of the bosses. Moreover, the support will doubtless be hedged about with conditions and concessions that will oblige the NGA to cripple its own struggle. The NGA members should resolutely oppose the handing over of their interests to the TUC. The TUC will "lead" the battle only to strangle it. The NGA members must have the decisive say in their own struggle. Let the TUC bring its troops onto the field of battle. Without that, all they will have to negotiate is a sell-out.

The rank and file movement can be built in the present, struggles. It must be built as an alternative leadership to the bosses' men or empty windbags who lead us today. It must answer their pleas for respect for the rule of law with a determination to smash that law. It must be won not merely to creating better trade unions, but to mobilising those trade unions in a mighty offensive against the bosses' system. ■

Continued from front page

by NGA strikers. Cash donations must be given to the strike fund, and leaflets produced arguing the printers' case and calling for solidarity strike action. These must be given out at key workplaces and on major estates in every constituency. The Labour Party's local machinery, usually used to gather in the votes, must be turned to organising a wave of supportive action for the printers, and decisive working class opposition to the legal attacks.

The Labour Party leadership must be called to account. Hundreds of resolutions must be sent to the NEC demanding that Kinnock, Hattersley and Co. publicly retract all their

attacks on the NGA, and declare their 100% support, and that of the whole party, for the NGA.

Unfortunately, this is not likely to be forthcoming. The Labour leaders agree with the Tories that direct working class action is a threat to "parliamentary democracy". Their belief in this, their whole perspective for gradual and increasingly meagre reforms, ties them to the bosses' system. They are agents of the bosses masquerading as friends and representatives of the workers. When the bosses' system, or even only one of its laws, is threatened by workers taking action, these men will betray the workers. ■