









SJ. I believe you would like to begin the interview by saying a few words about the Workers Press article on Stanley Orme MP which we published on September 29.

EH. Yes, as far as I am concerned the article gives the impression that Stanley Orme is deceiving the working class. I take great exception to this, because if there was ever an honest, courageous man who is not a careerist it is Stanley Orme.

I know that this was meant to be a political accusation in the sense that you believe Stanley is politically deceiving the working class because he is a left and so on, and it would have been all right if this had been made clear.

But I think it does give the impression that he is deceptive and I think this is totally wrong. I would like to say most emphatically that I take great exception to this.



SJ. There has been talk at the TUC Congress and at conference of 'line-by-line' opposition to the Tories anti-trade union legislation. Would it be correct to assume that you are against national strike action taken by unionists and unions to defeat this legislation and also would you be against a political campaign involving industrial action to force the Tories to resign on this issue?

EH. The way I look at it is this. I will certainly have to fight in the House of Commons, equally the workers will have to fight it as well.

If in the course of this fight they hold demonstrations that might well be regarded as strikes is something that the trade unions will have to decide for themselves.

What I believe is that we should have one campaign in parliament and one outside it so that the two are complimentary.

Now you ask me would I be against strike action. My answer to this is that I have shown where I stand in 1969 when the workers of Liverpool went on strike against 'In Place of Strife'.

I spoke at their demonstration and I marched with them. If the workers again decide that this kind of action is appropriate, then it is their decision and I, as a working man, would declare my solidarity with them.

SJ. But do you consider this action appropriate. Mr Heath talks of a general strike if the workers decide to challenge him in this way would you back them?

EH. Let's put it this way. If the organized working class decide themselves that the only alternative is to carry out a general strike—if they see no alternative but to do this—then I will back such a move.

EXCLUSIVE WORKERS PRESS INTERVIEW

'Left' Labour MP Eric Heffer talks to Workers Press

BY STEPHEN JOHNS



Unemployment

SJ. Another great threat facing the whole working class, of course, high unemployment encouraged by the Tory government. How are you going to fight against this and do you support the calls by the Kirby and South Shields Trades Councils for one-day strikes in their areas against unemployment?

EH. I hadn't in fact noticed that there was a resolution to this effect. But we have had one-day strikes on Merseyside on this issue before as a method of drawing attention to high unemployment and I see nothing wrong with them.

I myself have been involved in one-day strikes where we marched in protest to the House of Commons. But what I would like to stress is that this high unemployment is only a continuation of policies pursued by the Labour government.

They talked in terms of getting a proper distribution of labour through the country—which meant, in effect, a general level of 2 per cent unemployment.

But what happened was that unemployment went up to 2 per cent in areas that had none before and in the areas that has it rose to 4 or 5 per cent.

Unemployment must be fought all along the line. But obviously the only permanent answer is to control the economy in a socialist way.

Pilkingtons

SJ. A campaign we have taken up in the Workers Press is for the re-enstatement of the sacked Pilkington glassworkers at St Helens and Pontypool. Do you support this campaign and are you prepared to bring it up in the Party and parliament?

EH. If there are any workers from Pilkingtons in my constituency or connected with my union and are associated with the Pilkington workers and who are prepared to raise this matter with me—in order to give me some legitimacy—I would certainly raise the matter as strongly as possible.

I think that it is absolutely scandalous that this situation has been allowed to develop as it has. After all, the workers took the action they did because they were thoroughly dissatisfied with their existing trade union.

This isn't a comment on the workers, it's a comment on the trade union and its failure to do its job for its members.

SJ. I don't think this can be seen as just an isolated struggle of some workers in St Helens. Remember these workers were sacked for going out on strike. Isn't their defence therefore at the centre of the campaign to defeat the Tories anti-trade union legislation.

sent no delegates to conference because they simply have no money left in the kitty after fighting the election.

Secondly, as we all know, there is great disillusionment in the Labour Party in many left-wing constituencies, many people have left or have become inactive.

This has strengthened the right at conference.

But I think this is a transitional thing and not a permanent feature. I am certain that at next year's conference there will be a swing to the left.

I think we will be more successful in the future if we perhaps stand less candidates because the right do seem to organize better than we have done in the past.

SJ. You called last night (October 1) at the 'Tribune' meeting for a future Labour government to expropriate the city of London, the banks and the monopolists; you say this can be done through parliament. But are not these revolutionary demands and isn't it true to say that they can only be carried out by a revolutionary party?

EH. When I say it can be done through parliament I mean that we must try and do it through parliament. If a Labour government is serious about bringing about socialism it must tackle immediately the financial levers of power. It must take over the banks, the finance houses and the big insurance companies and we should pass an enabling Act to do that immediately we get into power. Once the run on

the pound starts we should act, and act promptly.

Now what you are saying is that will the capitalist class and their supporters take all this lying down.

Of course it is my view that they will not. Whether they will resort to other methods than democratic ones to defeat a democratically elected Labour government—of course I wouldn't like to say. I don't know.

All I can say is that this is a possibility and at such a stage we would have to take the necessary measures to ensure that they were defeated.

SJ. What would those be?

EH. Obviously if they resorted to arms it would be right for a democratically elected government to call on its supporters to defeat such a measure. It is as simple as that.

What I am trying to say is that if by counter-revolutionary means the capitalist class try to bring down a Labour government attempting to bring in socialism—this is an entirely different situation.

Of course, the Labour Party is not a revolutionary party. I don't think there is an existence in this country a revolutionary party.

All I'm saying is that we should pursue a militant socialist policy, and if we were forced into a revolutionary situation this is one thing we would have to meet.

Workers Press

SJ. Finally Mr Heffer what do you think of the Workers Press after one year of production?

EH. Well I must say it's very well produced—though you can't expect me to agree with everything that goes in it.

But it seems to be getting better and better.

Of course, it's like everything else; it's a matter of trial and error. You have to learn as you go through.

But for the Workers Press—what it has done is a great achievement.

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Productivity

But I don't think this is going to come about and I'll tell you why. Firstly I don't think the trade union leaders as a whole will agree to action of this kind. Secondly I think that the Tory government will seek some last-minute compromise rather than go the whole way.

The British ruling class have always been great compromisers before they take the last resort.

But I can answer your first point. The miners are about to go on strike for better conditions and pay, the municipal workers are on strike and other sections of workers are involved or becoming involved in strike action.

If, because of Tory action, they have to spread their strike and call upon other workers to support them, in fact, it became a general strike, then my unqualified support would be with those workers.

SJ. We believe on Workers Press that workers are paying for wage increases by signing productivity deals involving job evaluation, Measured-Day Work etc. Because of the resulting speed-up and labour cuts these deals directly contribute to the growth of unemployment. Are you against productivity deals in principle and, if so, are you prepared to fight for this position in the Parliamentary Labour Party?

EH. Well if you look up my speeches in the House you will see that I am opposed to wage increases related to so-called increases in productivity. I remember when the nurses had their claim in I asked in the House that if the proposed higher productivity would mean that they would have to handle more corpses or bedpans—what in hell did productivity mean here and how do you measure it.

How, for example, do you measure the productivity of a busman—we have got to the stage of one-man double-decker busses and I think this is a very retrogressive move. I am not in favour of all these arguments for productivity, productivity, productivity.

I believe that the workers should have a decent wage on the basis of a normal day's work.

STALINISM IN BRITAIN BY ROBERT BLACK

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