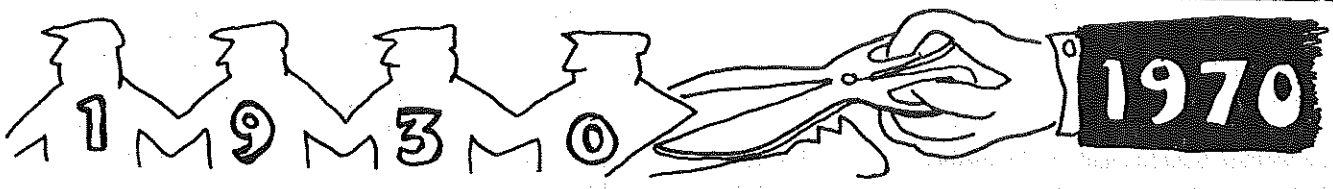


MODERN CAPITALISM and REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

In order to build the struggle of the working class against capitalism, we need to understand how modern capitalism works. We need to understand how capitalism, the state and the working class relate to each other. The system doesn't operate in exactly the same way as it used to before the Second World War. So to fight the system as it now is, we cannot simply rely on the ideas and strategies of revolutionaries who were fighting at the end of the nineteenth century and the begginning of the twentieth.

PRE-WAR CAPITALISM

In the later parts of the 19th and the first years of this century, the more far-thinking capitalists decided it was time to do something about skilled workers. Skilled workers were the backbone both of industry and the trade unions. Throughout the world it was the skilled workers who spearheaded the militancy of the whole working class. But the problem facing the capitalists was that they needed these workers as long as industry was based on skill and ever more complicated engineering.

So the idea – pioneered by the likes of Henry Ford and F.W. Taylor – was for mass production. Break the job right down and rely on semi-skilled labour. This sort of labour was there in mass. Especially in the US the wholesale introduction of unskilled workers – usually native or immigrant farm workers and peasants– had the effect of destroying traditional trade union organisation, since this had been based on skilled workers with a history of militancy. This process was slower in Britain than elsewhere, but it went on in all advanced capitalist countries.

The attempted destruction of workplace solidarity was parallelled outside the factory by the demolition of working class communities, some of which (eg. Clydeside 1915) had been the basis ofmilitant organisation. In their place were built the soul-less, barren and isolated council estates on the outskirts of the major towns. Coupled with the tendency for families to live in units seperated from their relatives, this new form of social life created new problems and increased the workload and pressure on housewives.

However, the new techniques of mass production and the increase in the plunder of the colonies – driven on by the thirst for increased profitability – led to the world-wide economic crisis of the 1920s. The hunt for profit led to a massive over-production of goods, which the impoverished masses could not buy. Capitalism was chaotic, unplanned.

The attempt to 'solve' this crisis by wage cuts led to the British General Strike of 1926, led, significantly, by the miners, the one group of workers who had maintained their workplace and their community organisation intact. Although the strike was defeated, paving the way for the mass unemployment of the 1930s, ruling class strategists realised that they could not allow such a threat to develop again.

THE POST-WAR CAPITALIST PLANS

After the Second World War, leading members of the ruling class and the governments (both Labour and Tory) accepted the recommendations of the economist Keynes, who said that if production was to go on increasing without booms and slumps, workers must go on getting higher wages (and benefits via government spending) to buy the increasing number of goods.

Keynes believed that the crisis could be solved by incorporating the working class and its struggle for a better life into the system. Wages were to be allowed to rise according to local negotiations; welfare benefits were increased; and HP facilities were increased to expand demand and maintain production. In those days, a mild inflation was what the system encouraged.

What has not been so clearly recognised is the related dynamic of the capitalist state to control not just the national ecomic life, but every other aspect too. Thus the economic plan has its counterpart in the social plan. This is not a capitalist conspiracy, it is part of their response to the strengths and de- But the key to the Keynesian idea was the changed role of the state. After the Second World War, the state was to become the overall co-ordinator and stimulator of the economy. Post-war Labour and Tory governments recognised the need for nationalisation of the basic services that private capitalism couldn't handle (railways, health, gas, electricity etc). And state spending in the public sector became the largest source of employment in this country. The state used grants to determine where industry should be sited, contributed to the setting of production targets throughout industry, set interest rates and regulated imports and exports.
mands of the working class.

The working class had demanded elements of the welfare state as early as the late nineteenth century, and by the middle of the 20th century the state realised that it was in its interests to meet these demands. It makes Keynesian economic sense for the state to spend money on welfare benefits and on the medical and social institutions and their supplying industries. And it is obviously in the state's interest to have a healthy and suitably educated workforce. But just as important to the state is the control it now has, through these agencies, over the social and personal lives of the working class. The state now penetrates right into everyone's home, further regulating our spending (via control of rents, gas and electricity prices, and the extra payments we have to make for medical and educational services which were once free). The state can now have far more influence over our social and personal behaviour through the ideology put over in schools, and through the 'helping hand' of social workers, education welfare workers and probation staff.

The welfare state is, in part, the product of working class strength, so its not surprising people have been slow to recognise its recuperation, its use by the state against the working class. Nor has sufficient attention been paid to the fact that the dream of capitalist propaganda, the 'Happy Families' of the the Kellogs advertisements, is being shattered as meaningless work, futile leisure and the intolerable personal strain of life in capitalist society can lead to ever increasing use of tranquillisers and other drugs, breakdowns, broken families and so-called called 'senseless' vandalism, hooliganism and truancy.

> "Housework is vital to the economy. It is the housewife who sends the worker back to the factory – fed, clothed and refreshed. It is the housewife who will produce tomorrow's workforce. The housewife reproduces labour power."

WORKING CLASS RESISTANCE

The increased role of the post-war state required the help of the trade union movement. The newly elected Labour government was guaranteed TUC support, and the succeeding Tory governments maintained friendly relations by increased welfare spending. There was no reason for the Tories to try and regulate wages and the success of shop stewards in local and sectional negotiations, especially amongst engineering and car workers, meant that traditional forms of labour militancy appeared to pay off. Thus the trade union leadership and the Labour Party, never wholly opposed to capitalism, now finally became wedded to the state.

But, by the mid-1960s, things were not so rosy. The consistent rise in workers' real incomes and the increasing refusal to tie rises to productivity deals, meant that the capitalist's rate of profit was declining. The 1968 sterling crisis showed that international capitalism no longer had confidence in the British economy and, focused by the International Monetary Fund, pressure was brought to bear for the state to control working class demands.

The late 60s and early 70s saw the highest point in class struggle since the war as a succession of strikes rocked the Tory government, forced it to withdraw its major effort to break shop floor organisation (the Industrial Relations Bill) and finally forced it out of office. Not only was the struggle in the factories, mines and docks. Workers in education, hospitals and local government, having seen their skills whittled away, their pay and conditions becoming more and more like those of the manual working class, recognised that only militant action against their employer (the state) would restore their standard of living. The public sector, recognising its new role in the state plan, fought back. Black workers, led by the Asians at Mansfield Hosiery, Imperial Typewriters and elsewhere, made a resounding impact on class struggle. And the working class communities, beginning to re-establish their organisation, saw the Housing Finance Act for what it was – an attack on their living standards, just like wage restraint, and an attack on the principle of council housing – and entered the struggle with a wave of rent strikes. It's for these reasons that we insist that working class strength is part of the reason for the crisis of the sytem – eating into the rate of profit, struggling for more money and less work in the factories, social services and communities. We are not just victims.

THE NEW CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE

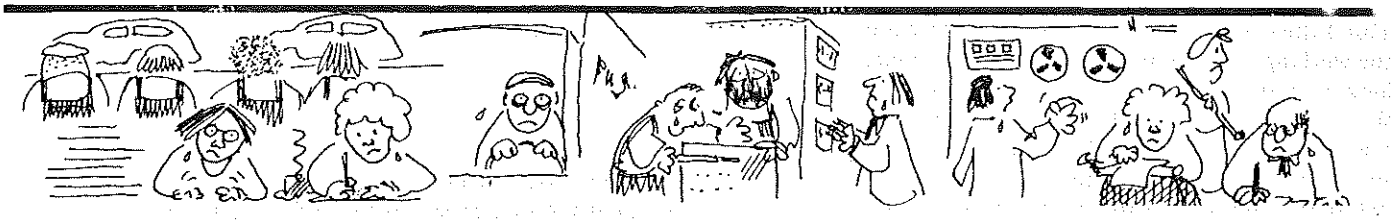
While working class struggle reached a new pitch, it did not depart from the sectionalism which has always bedevilled working class organisation. The 1974 Labour Government won the support of the so-called left union leaders, and the working class has by and large accepted the argument that it cannot go on getting wage rises. And the state has accepted the dictates of the international financiers, that British capitalism must be restructured if it is going to have any chance of survival. The Keynesian 'solution' has run out of steam, unable to deal with the co-existence of high unemployment and high inflation. The new ruling class measures are detailed elsewhere.

WORKING CLASS STRATEGY

But the whole context of class struggle in the post-war period is a new situation revolutionaries now have to face up to. It requires new perspectives and strategies. The traditional demands, often located in the needs of the old skilled workers and based on the conditions of the 1930s, are far less relevant than they were. Demands for nationalisation and further state planning, for instance, can no longer be the lynch-pin of revolutionary strategy, since this is precisely the direction most suited to the needs of modern capitalism. In fact, state planning is now the main agent (through the cuts in social spending) by which the working class is induced to pay for the crisis. While nationalisation may be a viable tactic for the defence of jobs, it cannot be the basic socialist demand.

> We have to develop workplace strategies which pose the question of the nature of work and the question of power. Outside the workplace there is the same need for revolutionary organisation – among housewives, the unwaged reproducers of labour power, and in the community where the state increasingly exerts its power over our social and personal lives. The working class struggles every day in every aspect of its life. Our job is to articulate and develop the communist content of working class struggle.

FOR WORKING-CLASS POWER



THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING CLASS

INTRODUCTION

As Marxists, we understand that the basic fact about society is that it is made up of a constant class struggle. In our society, a class struggle between the bourgeois ruling class and the working class. But it is clear that while this class struggle is permanent, the working class in Britain is not yet in a position to seize power.

Some revolutionary groups explain this weakness by talking about the 'level of consciousness' – that is, the way that the ruling class has a hold on working class thinking and ideas. We are taught in the schools and in the press not to believe in socialist struggle. Obviously, this is an important factor, and there has to be a real fight against the false, lying ideology that the bourgeoisie spreads around. Although we must add that working class consciousness is a complicated thing – it is not *just* socialist or *just* bought off by bourgeois ideology. Many different ideas, progressive or reactionary, swim in the same sea.

But the limitations and problems of working class consciousness have to be seen in the context of the *material*, real-life divisions that the working class lives in.

"The conflict between workers and bosses is *antagonistic*. One side has to win, the other to lose. Inside the working class class there are other conflicts. For example between men and women. But these conflicts are *non-antagonistic*. Out of that struggle – for equality and genuine unity – we are all winners".

So we must add a materialist analysis of the reasons why the working class is not yet willing to take on its revolutionary role. For us, the other fundamental problem is that the working class is divided. Different sections of the class are often more willing to fight for their seperate interests than for the interests of the class as a whole. We say that these conflicts within the class are non-antagonistic – they are in the process of being overcome, and they are secondary to the basic antagonism between the working class and capital. But it is essential that we identify these conflicts, that we understand how they come about, and that we have a clear revolutionary perspective for speeding up the process by which working class unity is achieved.

Broadly speaking, we locate the divisions within the class as being between men and women and between blacks and whites. We see further divisions between those who have wages and those who do not, and there are also important divisions between those who are waged. And there are divisions between the youth and the older workers.

Some sections of the working class suffer from a double oppression – for example, women are oppressed both as *members of the working class* under capitalism , and as *women*. In our view, socialists have to give complete support to those sections of the class who suffer such double oppression and who have created their own organisations to pursue their interests against capitalism and other sources of oppression. Women and black people have done this. They have created autonomous organisations to deal with the oppression they have experienced, both at the hands of the ruling class and at the hands of the rest of the working class.

In these circumstances Big Flame does not make abstract calls for working class unity, which often mean unity on the terms of the stronger sections. But we do try to develop a process in which such unity can be built; we see this growing through *autonomous struggle.*

We maintain that class unity is forged through these autonomous struggles. Women organising as women against capital may often challenge the short-term interests of working class men. The resolution of this conflict, when men are brought to support the women, is a step forward for the class, since unity is found and women become more powerful, both within the class and against capitalism. The same goes for black people. Each time they win their demands, their power, and the strength of the class, visibly grows.

In this situation the question of class alliances assumes a new dimension. The question is not any longer that of trying to win over the 'middle class' or 'peripheral sectors' to the industrial working class and its programme. The primary question is that of politically re-unifying the various sectors of the working class. That of recognising the particular nature of the struggles of each sector and its need for autonomy as the springboard for unification.

This is the context for our discussion of the composition of the working class and the potential for class unity. We now look in more detail at each major section of the working class. We concentrate on the industrial workers because, although it is central to our analysis that other sectors have great anti-capitalist power and potential, there is no doubt that the industrial working class has the best stranglehold on capitalism.

1. THE COMPOSITION OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKING CLASS–ITS ORGANISATION AND STRUGGLE

Basic changes in the organisation of production have occurred since the beginning of this century, which have profoundly changed the composition of the working class and its consciousness. The most important source of this change has been the development of mass production factories.

a) The introduction of the assembly line (Fordism) and the consequent organisation around it both in the factory and at the social level (Taylorism) are the starting point for our analysis. The assembly line, ie the breaking down of the process of production into a series of short, simple jobs, to be repeated continuously, up to now represents the most 'revolutionary' innovation by capitalism since the introduction of the factory system itself. Its consequences were, and still are , of paramount importance.

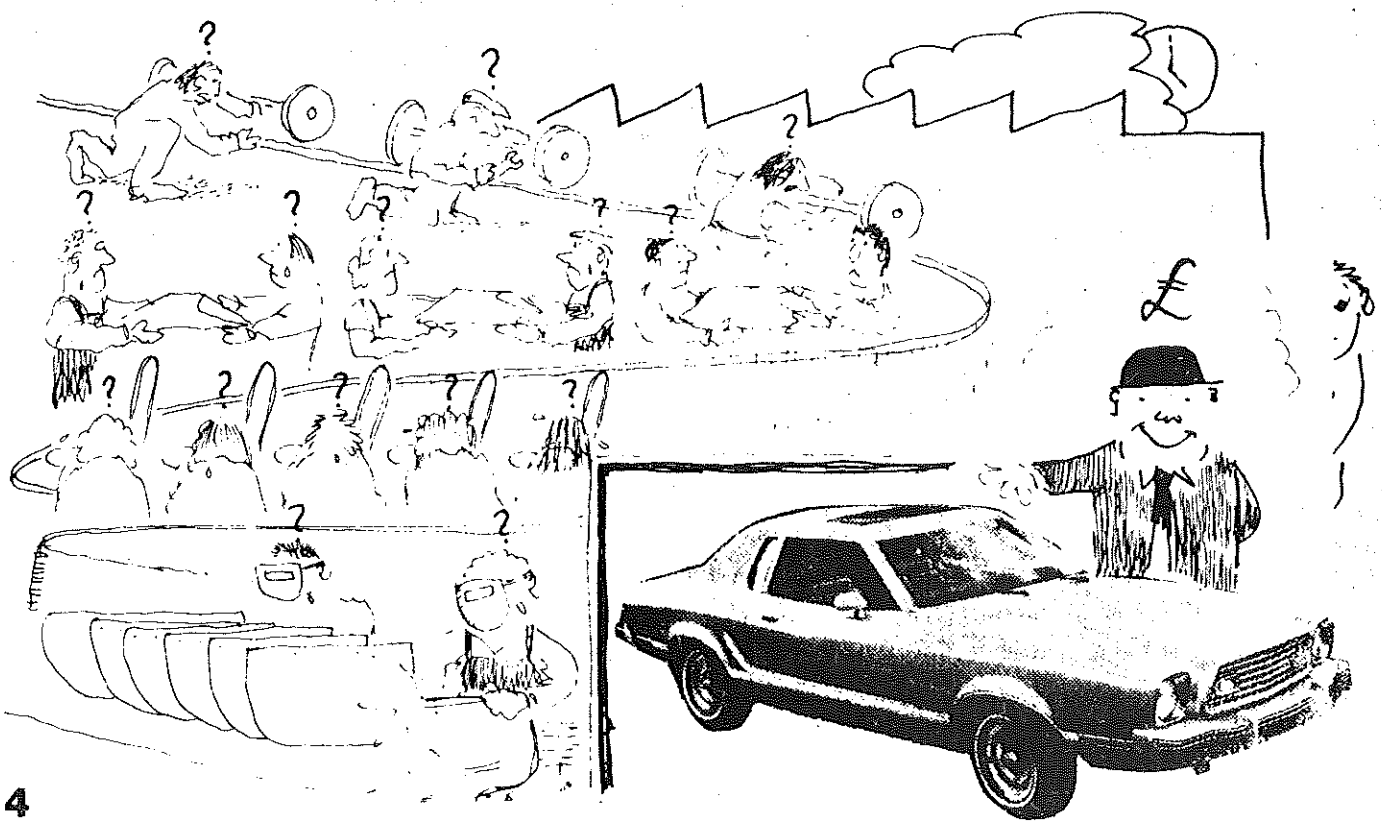
The whole face of the working class was to be changed because of it. In most industries the figure of the old skilled worker who had almost total knowledge of the production process, tended to disappear. Also, the number of totally unskilled labourers tended to decrease, while the mass of workers tended to become the 'semiskilled workers' (the mass workers). Skilled workers retained their importance only in 'side' processes to the productive cycle, eg. toolmakers, maintenance workers, electricians, fitters etc.

Whereas in some countries this process was very rapid, as in the USA, or helped by fascist regimes (Italy and Germany), in this country it was very slow and to a certain extent can be understood only now. The reasons for this are:– (i) the strength of the organisation of the working class in Britain – the unions based on and led by the skilled workers put up a continuous resistance against the deskilling involved in the process. (ii) the structure of the British engineering industry which was the oldest in the world and very much based on a large number of small workshops. (iii) the relative importance of sectors where changes would necessarily be slower.

b) It is in this context that we can understand the abolition of piecework. Due to the strength of the industrial workers, piecework, which had begun as a system of payment to tie wages to productivity, had often become a weapon to be turned against capitalist accumulation, in the sense that it was used by the shop floor to push wages up further than the dynamic of capitalist development could allow. The abolition of peicework and the introduction of Measured Day Work and similar systems of payment all over industry was a vital step in the rationalisation of industry which is taking place now. The struggles at British Leyland, before and after the government stepped in to bail it out, are a case in point.

c) Despite the long and contradictory process, the long-term tendency is that radical changes in the organisation of production, radically alter the working class – its values, attitudes and behaviour. The 'old' worker, with a consciousness born of being a producer and his degree of control over that production, proud of his job, is *slowly substituted* by the new worker, almost totally alienated from the productive process, with no identification with the job except for financial reasons, and seen by the employers as flexible and mobile – to be moved where needed, to do what is needed. This change is bound to have an effect on the content of struggle.

The potential political content is increased by the necessity of having to confront the goals and organisation of capitalist production.



d) With the progressive integration of the trade union apparatus inside the state apparatus, a consequence of the changes in capitalism in the post-war period; the working class developed its shop floor organisation – the stewards. Not necessarily representatives of struggles, as they had been thirty years before, they certainly represented the capability of the working class to exploit the period of boom and relative backwardness of British capitalism.

The end of the boom and the introduction of Measured Day Work, coupled with the total offensive by capitalism at the structural level (rationalisation) and at the ideological level (the appeal to the 'national interest'), and the desire on the part of the national union leaderships, the employers and the government to exercise control over the stewards by forcing their adherence to nationally negotiated 'procedures.' – all this has restricted the independent power of the stewards. Their expected role, the objective nature of their job *often* tends to make them perform as shop floor policemen.

However, two qualifications have to be made to this. Firstly, in sectors where struggles and organisations are lower, eg.the health service, the stewards movement and even union branches are often more representative of shop floor struggle. They have not yet been institutionalised.

Secondly, even in traditional sectors the process is uneven. Stewards committees are sometimes the only means of organising and the best militants tend to go for the stewards job.

The essential point is that the stewards committees and union branches have to approached tactically in the light of what actually advances workers' power.

e) Despite the fact that due to the changes in capitalism and the capitalist strategy in this period of recession no lasting victory can be achievedhrough sectional struggles, the working class remains trapped in this . In this respect, as we will spell out later, it is the public sector workers who seem to put forward consciously points of a programme towards unification of the working class.

The last times that industrial workers managed to unify the class around them was in 1972 (miners and dockers) and in 1974 (miners). In those situations these sectors were a mass vanguard for the whole of the class. The fact that a situation like that has not happened again, since the referendum, reflects the hold that trade unionism has over the class.

But when we identify mass vanguards within the class we cannot only look at the factor of consciousness. For instance, car workers like those at Fords, represent a vanguard in the class. We say this is *not* so much because of the structural importance of Fords in the capitalist economy, which makes Ford workers powerful in relation to capital – which is true.

Nor because Fords represents one of the most advanced managements in the world; if you beat them, then you are setting an example to all the others – which is also true. *Nor* because Ford workers in the past have given a clear lead (first equal pay strike in this country, smashing of the pay policy in October 1974, in election period), the recent advanced contents of struggles at Dagenham and Halewood) – although all this is true.

But *mainly* because the organisation of production in a place like Ford tends to create a workforce whose daily activity is that of fighting that very same organisation.

It is in this struggle that the main content of the struggle for communism can be found – the fight against wage labour. We are not saying that the mass of line workers in the car factories, for example, are communists. But that daily life in those factories means a constant struggle against the very essence of capitalist society: work that has no meaning and which destroys; power wielded ruthlessly by management and foremen; the creation of vast wealth by the working class, but owned and controlled by a small elite. It is in such places where historically the working class has manifested its sharpest autonomy from capitalist development and reformism alike. It's the numbers, the balance of forces, the power that can be generated. The struggle of the mass of car workers does not come out of the desire to be privileged, to enjoy differentials. It comes out as a *mass* struggle, from the very heart of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

2. WHITE COLLAR WORKERS

No-one doubts the power of the industrial workers, but what has frequently gone unrecognised on the left is the power of other sections of the working class. It follows, both from our emphasis on the unification of the class and from the material changes in the nature of capitalism, that revolutionaries must organise outside industry as well.

a) Offices, shops and services.

Half of the waged working class are to be found outside industry. While the proportion of industrial workers in the population has remained static since the war, the proportion of clerical workers has jumped to 13%. But these are not the privileged, high status clerical workers of the 19th century – two thirds of them are women, and the average weekly wage is lower than many manual jobs.

The rapid growth of offices has meant that the workforce had to be systematised and controlled in the same way as the industrial workforce. This has led to the 'factory-office' methods, similar to those used in industry, ie. de-skilling (no one person is responsible for the entire process), assembly line set-up (eg typing pools, measured day work, the institution of a complex hierarchy of management at all levels, employees readily interchangable etc.) This, together with the low rates of pay, has led to the proletarianisation of a large section of the workforce. The one difference with industrial sectors is that this field of enployment expands with technological advance rather than declines. It is therefore important it is to the employer to have a weak, poorly paid workforce

The same can be said of the retail sector, ie. shop assistants, distributors, advertising etc. As capitalism expands, the necessity to market commodities itself becomes big business – 'spend money to make money' is their slogan. Yet another large sector of workers is sucked into and processed in order to make profits for capitalists. Here again we see a majority of women employed.

Service occupations (catering, laundries, hairdressing health, transport, education etc.) are no longer luxuries enjoyed by the ruling class and paid for out of their profits. They have become profit making and necessary to produce and reproduce controlled labour power. Again new jobs are created and organised to suit the needs of the ruling class.

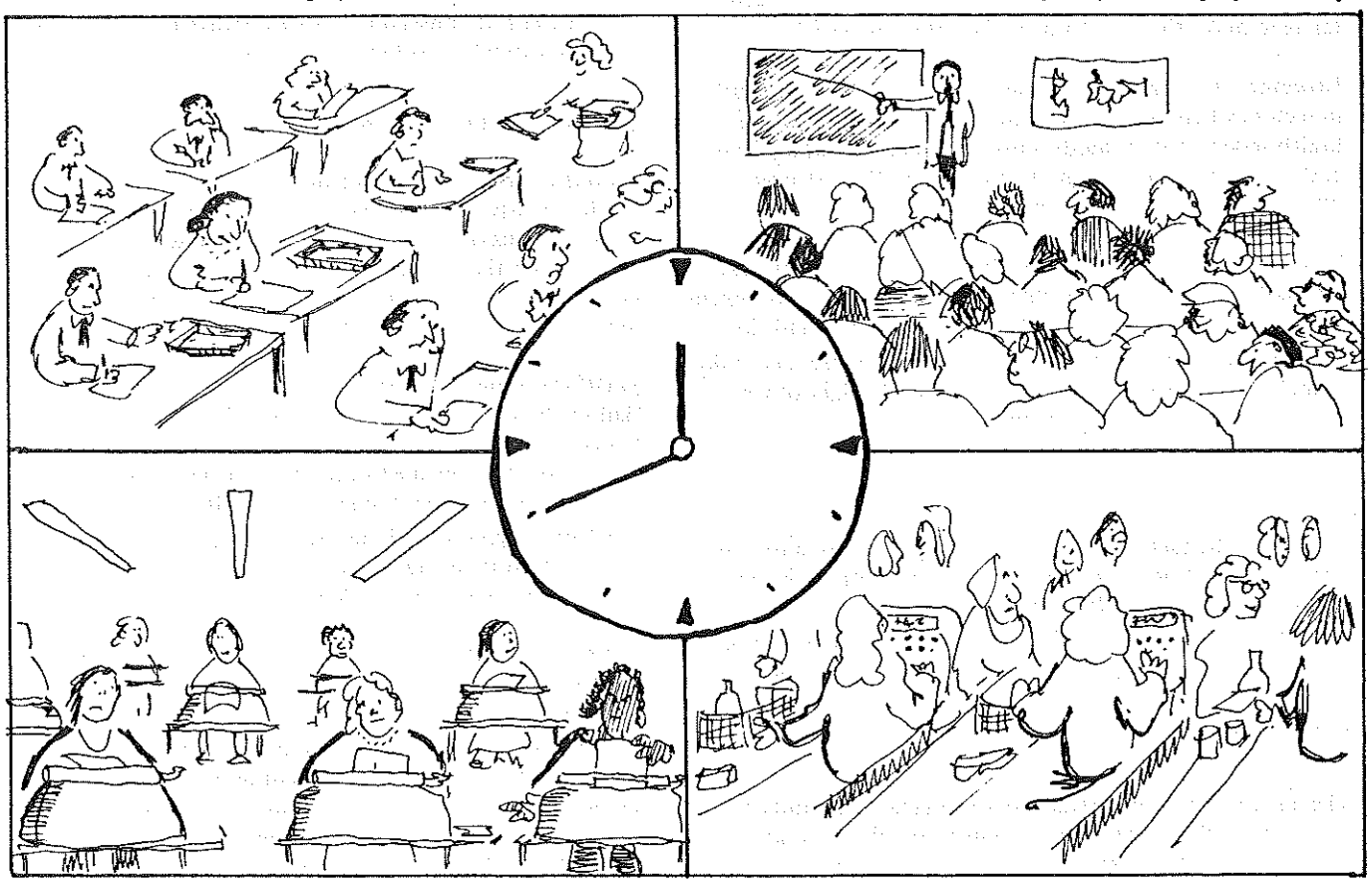
The rise in numbers in this sector of the workforce is parallelled by its rise in importance to the economy. As Britain's industry loses its competitiveness, particularly in the northern towns which industrialised first, whole areas begin to rely on office and service work for their economic viability. In Leeds, for example, employment in the town's traditional industries (tailoring and engineering) has been in decline for years, and resources are transferred to offices and shops as Leeds makes a desperate effort to avoid decline. In towns like this, while socialists must make every effort to save jobs in industry, political activity must also relate to the white collar workers who are becoming the economic backbone of the area.

Nor should anyone doubt the power and consciousness of these sections of the working class. The massive demonstration by public sector unions against the cuts (November 1976) showed the awareness and combativity of people who have been dismissed for too long by the left.

But although sectionalism and elitism characterise the struggles of these workers, they can no longer be excluded from our political concern. Like the white collar workers, as their conditions of work decline, as their jobs are downgraded or restructured, and as their wages fail to rise with prices, the potential for these groups identifying themselves with the working class struggle increases. Our role, therefore, must be to encourage this process.

STUDENTS AND YOUTH

Higher education students face similar privileges and contradictions as professional workers. Less and less are they the educated children of the bourgeoisie. The realities of their future are more and more imposing – unemployment or jobs



b) Professional workers.
Capitalism has created a new middle layer of employment which cannot easily be fitted into the definition of 'middle class' or 'working class'. This portion of employment embraces the engineering, technical and scientific workers, the lower ranks of mangement, professional employeees occupied in marketing, finance, treaching, medicine, government services. Like the working class they possess no economic or occupational independence, they are employed by capital and must sell their labour power in order to live. But, in contrast, they enjoy, depending upon their specific position in the hierarchy, the privileges of exemption from the worst features of the working class situation, including job security and higher pay. The struggles in this sector are sectionalised and strive to enhance the differentials among workers, both in pay and privileges. For example, the ASTMS union members' card bears the slogan 'elite of the white collar workers'.

whose pay and status are declining. Furthermore, the cultural, educational and independent character of education tends to disappear as methods of 'learning' are introduced to gear the institutions closer to the needs of capitalism.

School students too have an important role to play in the struggle for socialism. Lacking any real independent income, frequently the butt of the anger and frustration felt by their parents, incarcerated in schools which, however hard the progressives may try, are more often authoritarian and irrelevant to the students' needs. . . all these factors contribute to their growing hostility to the system. As yet, school students often react individually – by violence, vandalism and the refusal to attend school. The few collective actions – walkouts over uniform or petty discipline – are sporadic and unsustained.

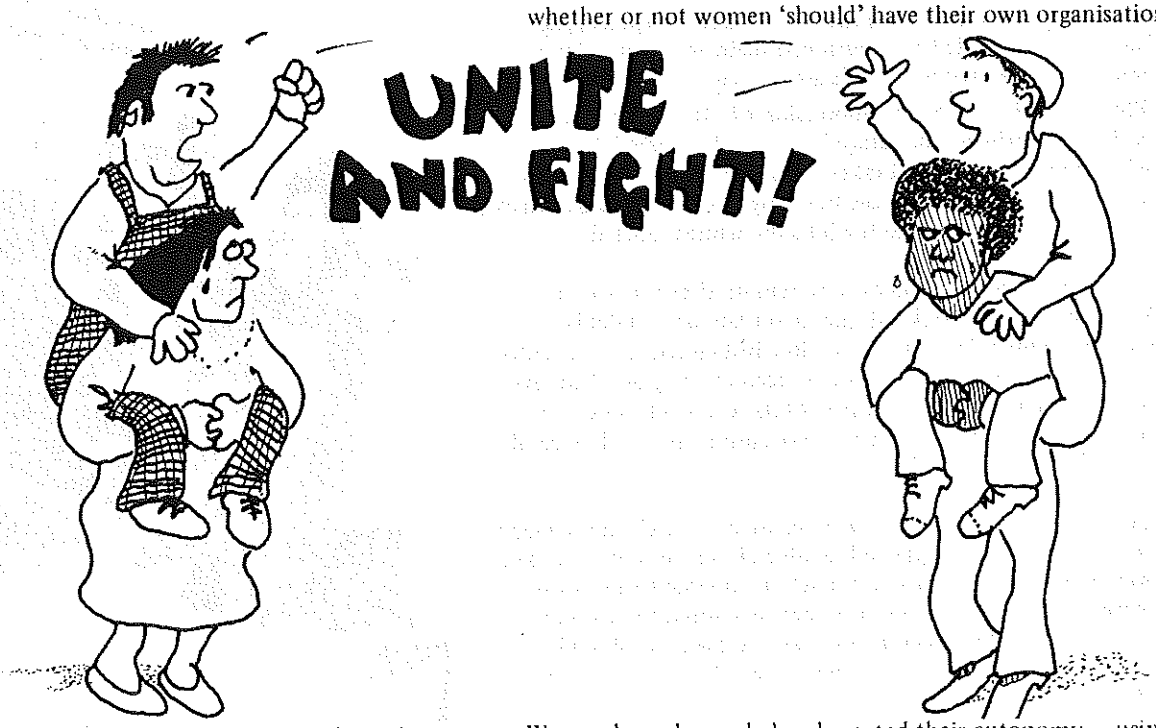
Similarly, the growing ranks of unemployed youth fight against their oppression in spontaneous and unorganised ways – theft, football violence– or content themselves with a sep-

erate youth culture. Some of them are prey to the false 'solutions' offered by the fascists.

The left in Britain has tended to treat young people as raw recruits for their organisations. Big Flame seeks to build the independent power of youth, to help them create their own organisations which meet their own specific needs. Although these organisations may have to oppose the arbitrary and often oppressive actions of adults, one of their main purposes will be to unite with other sections of the working class in the fight against capitalism.

4. THE AUTONOMOUS STRUGGLES OF WOMEN

So far, we have discussed the composition of the working class mainly in terms of its relation to production. But the class is not only split in this way, it is also divided on sexual and racial grounds. Women are to be found in many economic positions in industry, in white collar work, in services, and also in the unwaged, and therefore unrecognised economic role of housewife. Economically oppressed even more than male workers – less money, worse jobs and prospects, and always having a second job in the home – women also suffer the oppression of a culture which defines them as inferior to men.



These are the material conditions of life for working class women. Although sexual divisions existed before capitalism, the modern economy has used them to its advantage. Having created a 'welfare state' and transferred many of women's traditional roles to institutions (hospitals, schools etc.), capital has then employed women in these places. Women are told they are in the 'caring professions', and therefore require lower wages than men would accept. If they are working in other sectors of the economy, women are said to be working for 'pin money'.

Women have always been a force to reckon with in class struggle and the last few years have proved this again. Because of their double oppression, as workers and as women, they have created their own organisations. Initially the struggle was mainly ideological, with the Women's Liberation Movement campaigning against the way women were seen and treated. But there developed parallel struggles for equal pay, equal rights and equal opportunities. Women's struggle has taken up issues that combine material and ideological issues, like the fight for a woman's right to choose over abortion, or the setting up of refuges for battered wives – creating the National Abortion Campaign and the Women's Aid Movement. A vital by-product of this process was making clear that the community was an important area of struggle, especially in the context of the attempt by the state to control social life through the welfare state and housing policy.

Housewives have continually led struggles on estates to pay less rent, against gas and electricity cut-offs, for nurseries, play facilities and safe roads. All these can be important political issues.

Latterly, as the trade union leadership has knuckled down to the social contract, women have been quick to exploit the space won by the struggle for equal pay, the Trico women especially showing resolution and solidarity which was an inspiration to the working class as a whole. Now we are witnessing the same strength in the women's struggle to save the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital.

In this context – militant independent struggle based in material needs – it is irrelevant for men in the left to argue about whether or not women 'should' have their own organisations. Women have demanded and created their autonomy – using their own organisations to develop the struggle for their own needs against capitalism.

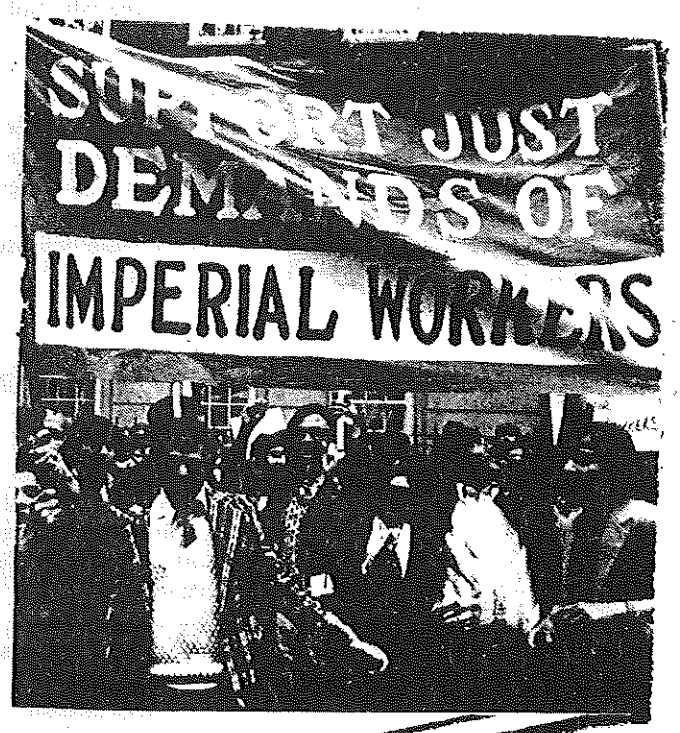
In Big Flame we welcome this fact and see it as a positive step towards class unity, since there can only be effective unity when all major sectors of the class are strong enough to ensure that their own demands are taken up. But we have no illusions about the real state of this unity. Leaving aside the opposition of many men, there are also divisions among women. Some middle class feminists simply demand equal rights within capitalism. Others refuse any political co-operation with men. The Women's Liberation Movement as a whole fails to relate effectively to the needs of working class women. Big Flame fights for a working class perspective in the women's movement, and a feminist perspective in the struggle of the

The working class as a whole can get nowhere unless the demands of women about women – feminist demands – are

accepted as the demands of the whole working class.

In particular, we demand the socialisation of housework – that is the setting up of child care centres, laundaries etc, *paid for by the state,* in order to help free women from the home. We demand a guaranteed, independent income for all women as of right (like for pensioners, the unemployed etc), and we support the struggle against the division of labour between men and women inside or outside the home.

Combined with demands for equal pay, for free abortion on demand and the demands of the women's movement, this perspective can make a real contribution to the development of women's – and class– power.

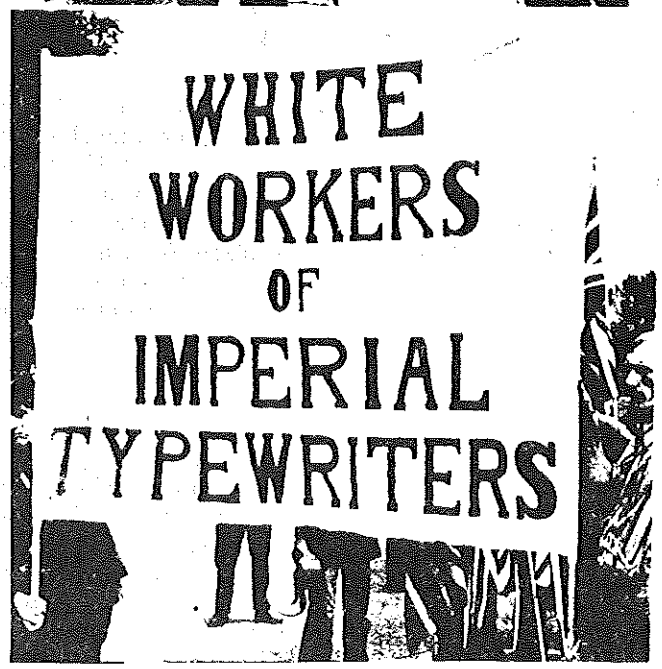


5. THE AUTONOMOUS STRUGGLE OF BLACK PEOPLE

Like women, black people are to be found in all areas of the working class. They too suffer dual oppression as workers with the worst jobs and conditions, and as victims of the racist discrimination that runs throughout our society. Similarly, black people have developed their own organisations to express their specific needs against capitalism.
The material roots of the oppression of black people lie in white imperialism. Encouraged to come here after the war, when white workers had taken advantage of the labour shortage to take the jobs with the best wages and conditions, black workers were forced into the jobs the whites refused.

Other European economies were rebuilt after the Second World War on the backs of immigrant labour – notably Germany which uses the Turks. But Britain had used its culture and religion to destroy the African identity and had given British citizenship in return. While Asian culture was not destroyed, they too were given citizenship and a full dose of British propaganda.

Thus the roots of racism in Britain are complex and the black community is highly divided. Ruling class attitudes are mixed. Almost without exception, the white imperialists despised 'native' culture but, when it became economically expedient, some decided that black people were human and should be respected. They also recognised that they could rule more effectively if they created an upper level of blacks, integrated into the system, to rule on their behalf. Thus today some sections of the ruling class maintain that they are not racist and are keen to develop a black middle class in this country, being particularly aware of the threat posed by black militancy at work and in the community. Hence the legislation against discrimination, and the money poured into the community and race relations bodies.



Similarly, white working class attitudes are mixed. The whole of the white working class has some material basis for its hostility to black demands for equality. Improvements in working class conditions in the 19th century were based on the gains made from exploiting the black empire and the relative comfort of todays working class depends upon the shitwork done by blacks. So parts of the working class are easy prey to those sections of the ruling class who seek power, both by becoming 'popular' and by dividing the white from the black working class, by fanning the flames of racialism.

On the other hand, the socialist current in the working class maintains an anti-racist position. But with a Labour Government openly capitulating to racist pressure and introducing discriminatory immigration acts, the anti-racists in the working class have had a hard time.

Divisions among black people make these problems worse. West Indians and Asians are culturally miles apart. The forcible imposition of British culture on West Indians has contributed to the nationalist tendency among some blacks who seek a distinctive black identity and reject socialism. It has also resulted in the desire of some to become part of the black middle class. In the face of these currents, black socialists have a major battle to establish autonomous organisations.

The Asian community is similarly divided. Active socialist groups, allied to organisations in Asia, struggle in Britain both against the white bosses and against the rapidly growing Asian middle class of doctors, lawyers and businessmen. And Asian youth are less and less attached to their parents culture and life style.

There is no doubt that, despite these divisions, black militancy is growing, from the wave of Asian strikes in the midlands in 1974, to the actions of black youth in Leeds and Notting Hill against the police, to the riots at Ford Dagenham. While these struggles have been autonomous both organisationally and politically, there are many eamples of blacks fighting alongside whites – on the November '76 cuts demonstration and against the fascists for example.

Faced with these struggles and the divisions within its own ranks, the ruling class is now attempting to both contain the black revolt with more race relations legislation, and to further divide the working class by removing black people's rights as citizens, giving them the non-status of migrant instead.

In this situation, white socialists have a clear role. We have to support and build links with autonomous black organisations – sharing information, discussing perspectives and developing common strategies wherever possible. We have to support all initiatives aimed at building the power of the black working class, and in particualr support for their efforts to organise self-defence for their communities against fascist, racist and police attacks.

Secondly, we have to counter racialism among the white working class. We have to build anti-fascist committees, to deny the National Front, National Party etc. the right to organise and spread their poison. We have to fight against the racist immigration controls, supported by all the main political parties. And we have to show that the genuine grievances of whites can be solved, not by fascist scapegoating of blacks, but by programmes of revolutionary socialism.

6. THE STRUGGLE IN PERSONAL LIFE

When we talk of divisions in the working class we must alsc recognise that life in capitalist society is also sliced up and compartmentalised. According to the work you do, or your lack of a job, or your race, sex or age. Yet another split is between your private and public life, between home and work.

As capitalism destroys much of the potential for pleasure and meaning at work, it has attempted to create an illusion of satisfaction in the home. Either singing the virtues of family life or offering us 'easy sex', luring us into buying consumer goods, creating a leisure and hoiday 'industry', capitalist society tries to dull the pain and make us forget its harshness. But, especially at a time of economic crisis, the contradictions break through.

It is increasingly obvious that the nuclear family is the source of both great satisafaction and great tension, that consumer culture is often an empty shell and that our 'freedoms' are not really freedoms at all. The lynch-pin of the fetish of personal life is sex. By using sex as a commodity, as a means of both selling goods and selling ourselves, capitalism strips the human core from one of life's basic pleasures.

This is why we maintain that political struggle must cover *every* aspect of people's lives. In particular we support demands which go towards the removal of sexual oppression – for the rights of lesbians and homosexuals, for sex education, free contraception and abortion on demand and an end to all sexual stereotyping.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