



pamphlet 20p

LABOURING UNDER THE TORIES?

or a SOCIALIST alternative



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As socialists contemplate the possibility of five years under the Tories, it is vital to debate what is in store for us and how we can best fight them. There is a great danger that the left will repeat the *mistakes* of 1970-74 under the last Conservative government.

- **Building mass anti-Tory struggles that limited themselves to calling for 'Heath Out' and the return of Labour on any terms.**
- **Relying on the Labour and trade union left to lead those struggles.**
- **Furthering illusions in Labour by calling for a Labour government with socialist policies or similar variations.**
- **Simply relying on wage militancy to bring down the Tories, without trying to pose wider political alternatives.**

Of course, we welcomed the mass struggles of the 1970-74 period that culminated in the miners' strike and the defeat of the Tory Government. But too often it is looked on as 'the golden years' when we grew and knew who the enemy was. They were also years of defeats and political mistakes – the postal workers, the powerworkers and Fair Rent Act to name but a few.

OUR MAIN TASK

The main task of revolutionary socialists in the next five years, or however long the Tories last in office, is to defeat the Tories while building alternative policies and organisation to the reformist leaders of Labour and the trade unions.

If we are not hard on Tories *and* Labour and just indulge in crude Tory-bashing, we will be failing to prepare militants for the anti-working class policies of the next Labour government *and* letting the last one off the hook! And so the cycle would begin again, with disastrous consequences for building a mass socialist movement in this country.

Why the Tories won

As prominent Labour leaders like Benn start to make left wing speeches in opposition, we should not let anyone forget Labour's record. For it is that record that goes a long way explaining why the Tories had such a decisive victory in the election.

Yet the Labour Government's five years began brightly. Not because of their intentions or policies, but because the government was forced to make concessions in the face of working class demands. The miners' strike, the defeat of the Industrial Relations Act, the freeing of the five dockers and other struggles under the Tories created a momentum that carried on in the first year under Labour. A confident working class forced it to concede large wage increases for many workers, while others pressurised the government to save their jobs through aid or nationalisation, as in the case of British Leyland.

COMMON MARKET REFERENDUM

One factor that turned the tide was the 1975 Common Market result. This was because of the range of class forces pitted against each other, rather than the issue itself. The victory of the pro-market, political and business establishment changed the political climate and gave a salutary lesson to those on the left who see such events as irrelevant. Wage and job struggles can usually be halted or affected by a defeat on the general political terrain.

And at the level of economic policy, the Labour Government had already started a deliberate policy of *encouraging* inflation in order to transfer resources to business and the banks.

The 'Price Code' allowed price increases to cover investment, and the nationalised industries were now required to make a profit, by raising their prices.

The government was forced to bring in these policies earlier than they had intended because of pressure from the international banks like the IMF.

An important by-product of the referendum was the defeat of the Labour left. Its figurehead, Tony Benn, was demoted from Minister for Industry to the Energy Ministry. But instead of resigning and using his influence in the labour movement to challenge the policies of the government, he stayed put. The Labour left was on the retreat from that point onwards.

LABOUR SHIFTS TO THE RIGHT

The following four years saw a steady but substantial shift of Labour's policies to the right. The emergent class struggles of 1970-74 and their impact in moving Labour leftward, had produced a radical manifesto, with its famous promises about 'irreversible shifts of wealth and power to working people'.

But under Callaghan, it wasn't just a case of not implementing election promises. In this case, the left accusation of 'Labour's Tory policies' was literally true. To add to the usual wage controls, we got an economics policy based on squeezing the money supply, big cuts in public spending on health, welfare and education, stricter control of immigration and an appalling record on basic rights, ranging from torture in Ireland, to the prosecution of radical journalists on absurd secrecy charges.

Labours' record

WAGE CONTROL

To restore the profitability of British capital the Labour Government had to hold wages down. To ensure this it devised the 'Social Contract' - known as the Concrick to militants - which went through several stages during the life of the Government.

The result of wage restraint was that real earnings fell by 7% between 1974 and 1977. However, things didn't go too badly for some.

The Royal Commission on Wealth found that the richest one per cent of the population saw its share of the nation's wealth rise from 22.5 per cent to 24.9 per cent between 1974 and 1976. Over the same period the richest 10 per cent saw its share of the wealth increase from 57 per cent to 60 per cent. These figures are not surprising, given that the effect of the British tax system, whose aim is supposedly to redistribute wealth, meant that the richest 2-10% who get 20.7% of income before tax, manage to retain 19.3% after tax.

(Frank Field in the *New Statesman* 30th March '79)

ATTACK ON THE UNIONS

To hold wages down successfully, the Labour Government had also to attack the ability of the working class and unions to organise. A previous Labour Government had tried to control 'unofficial' strikes with its 'In Place of Strife' proposals of 1969.

Callaghan's 'Concordat' with the TUC of February 1979 tried again, and continued the Social Contract tradition of using the union leaders to police workers' use of strikes, picketing and other forms of effective action.

The Labour Government's contempt for rank and file workers was revealed in Callaghan's comment in February 1979, at the height of the public sector strikes.

'Too much responsibility has been devolved from the centre on to local shop stewards who do not follow the basic tenets of trade unionism. And the sooner more responsibility has been gathered back into the hands of officers who do have that understanding, the better it will be for the union, the better it will be for the rest of us.'

CUTS IN PUBLIC SPENDING

In the 1977/78 Financial Year, Public Spending was £7 billion less than Labour promised in 1975. And instead of a promised 13% growth between 1974 and 1978, there was none at all.

In the early 1970's expenditure on the personal social services increased by up to 15% a year. In 1976/77 it fell 1.3%, and in 1977/78 it fell by a further 1.6% (at constant prices).

Government White Papers on Public Expenditure.

UNEMPLOYMENT

At the beginning of 1974 just before Labour took office, unemployment was 500,000. As a result of its policies of public spending cuts, pay restraint, high interest rates, and passivity in the face of plant

closures and redundancies, there were 1,407,000 on the dole queue at the beginning of 1979 - 6.1% of the workforce.

Labour's slogans at the beginning and end of their term of office sound like a sick joke in the light of the figures.

- In 1974 it was, 'Back to Work with Labour'
- In 1979 it was, 'A vote for Labour is a vote for your job'.

WOMEN

Labour had already begun the process of pushing women back into the home and blaming women who worked outside the house for the 'growth of vandalism and hooliganism'. Callaghan, speaking at the Labour Women's Conference in May, 1978 said that,

'We have got to pay much more attention to how industry organises women's role at work, so that her influence at the centre of the family is not weakened'.

REPRESSION

The period of the Labour Government saw the increased repressive role of the police. The Special Patrol Group was increasingly used to terrorise black people. In November 1978 between 150 and 200 of the SPG descended on Brixton and used the 'sus' laws to arrest black youth. In Southall the police and SPG were used to protect the Nazi NF during an election meeting and murdered the anti-fascist Blair Peach.

On the 31st October, 1978, the police attacked women marching against male violence in Soho on a 'Reclaim the Night' demonstration. Commissioner of Police, McNee, advised women to avoid going out at night!

The Prevention of Terrorism Act gave the Police the opportunity to harrass Irish people working in Britain and Irish people travelling to this country. Over 3,000 were arrested between 1974 and 1978. Over Christmas, 1977, Phil Flynn, Deputy General Secretary of one of Ireland's largest trade unions, the Local Government and Public Services Union, was held for two days in Liverpool by the police under the PTA, and only released after pickets and protests. His only crime was that he had criticised the British Government's policy in Ireland.

STATE RACISM

Merlin Rees, Labour Home Secretary, played the numbers game on immigration,

The Government White Paper of July 1978 boasted of the increased numbers of immigrants expelled from Britain.

"Measures to combat overstaying are pursued vigorously and given a high priority. Deportations have more than doubled between 1973 and 1977".

And of course these measures were aimed at black immigrants. In 1977, 381,313 Commonwealth Citizens were admitted from Australia and New Zealand. Less than half as many Commonwealth Citizens were admitted from India and Bangladesh (162,584). In 1978 among 102 alleged illegal immigrants detained on 19th April, not one was of "Anglo-Saxon" descent.

(Anna Coote in the *New Statesman* 22nd December 1978)

LABOUR LEFT CONFIDENCE DENTED

The Labour left, its confidence badly dented by the referendum defeat, was further hit by the defection of left union leaders like Jones and Scanlon and the integration of key figures like Foot, formerly part of the Tribune Group, into the Callaghan camp. They did little to challenge these measures save a few noises and token voting rebellions.

UNWILLING TO MOBILISE

The problem with those who pin their hopes on the Labour left is not simply that they can so easily be removed from positions of influence. It is that, with the exception of a few MPs, they are totally unwilling to mobilise any working class fightback outside the narrow confines of Parliament. It is easy to criticise them for not acting like revolutionaries, but they cannot even function as an effective opposition in purely reformist terms.

LABOUR HOLDING BACK CLASS STRUGGLE

A tired and conservative government, openly lauded as such by much of the Tory press, was bound to have a braking effect on class struggle, especially given the lack of fight from the Labour and trade union left.

Labour is useful to capitalism precisely because of its relationship to the working class, particularly its union links. From the Social Contract onwards, the union leaders fought to limit any rank and file response to cuts in wages, public spending and jobs. It's not that the union leaders were in the main *for* such policies, but to struggle *against* them would involve a break in the organic link which holds British social democracy together — union machines and Labour.

CEMENTING LABOUR-UNION LOYALTY

It wasn't just, however, the blackmail of letting in the Tories that did the trick. Labour did actually deliver some of the goods in the form of abolishing the Industrial Relations Act and creating legislation on things like Employment Protection and Health and Safety. While rank and file workers could take advantage of such measures, they were also a subtle process cementing Labour loyalty among union officials, including a layer of shop stewards, who had more access to facilities and privileges, separating them from rank and file workers. Together with the encouragement to use the industrial courts and tribunals and the machinery of participation as at Leyland, they were important 'hidden' factors contributing to the retreat from struggles. Struggles were fought on the basis of individual rights rather than collective power.

The Labour-TUC 'Concordat', where union leaders took official responsibility to police their own members, was merely the end-product of the evolution of the relations between unions and Labour during the five years.

THE DAM BURSTS

However, the dam had to burst sooner or later and it was the round of wage struggles in 1978 that did it. Initiated by well-organised groups like the Fordworkers and lorrydrivers, but followed through the broken guidelines by low-paid public sector workers, the 5% ended up considerably tattered. Union leaders simply could not hold back any longer, even though they knew they were sinking the government by showing that the special

relationship with the unions was no longer effective. Yet the image of the working class, super-militant and yearning for socialism, was sadly off the mark. Even the wage struggles of the latter period, breaking a long spell of defence and retreat, were largely fought in a sectional and limited way.

THE UNION LEADERS

In assessing the reasons for the limited fightback of the working class under Labour it is inadequate to blame the union leaders, right or left. In the first version, used for instance by the Communist Party, the blame is put on the right wing union leaders. Yet it was among the union left, both at leadership (Jones, Scanlon etc.) and at local official level that some of the sharpest shifts took place in stifling rank and file struggle. This included on occasions CP members like Robinson, the Longbridge Convenor, hopelessly entangled in the participation web. For large sections of the revolutionary left the problems are seen to be located in the union and Labour bureaucracies as a whole. Yet, contrary to left predictions at the start of the period of the Labour Government, the willingness of working class people to struggle was very limited. These limits — what some call the 'hold of reformism' — are inside the whole process of existing ways of struggling and are not as the left often argues, just an external bureaucratic stranglehold.

STANDARD TRIUMPH

Take one example, the defeat of the Standard Triumph workers and the closure of the Speke factory in Liverpool. The management, in the context of Labour's use of the National Enterprise Board (NEB) to restructure industry in capitalism's favour, had a clear plan to close down the plant. The Stewards' Committee didn't have a plan of resistance, an example of how the working class movement is unused to dealing with a state strategy at a general political level. Union leaders went along with the NEB plan. Workers spent 17 weeks outside the gate on a management-provoked strike. When management used the strike as an excuse to shut the plant down, resistance quickly crumbled. The stewards tried to get the workers to fight — but there hadn't been a single mass meeting in 17 weeks.

DELEGATION SECOND NATURE

Delegation of struggle has become second nature to many labour movement bodies. Even if the much-discussed occupation of the Standards plant had come off, its success was doubtful. What were they going to occupy it *for*? We are not used to posing socialist alternatives in industrial struggles.

But that wasn't the only aspect of the sectional and defensive way the struggle was fought. Standards workers at the Speke and Coventry plants have not in the past built any links with each other. Once again they were easily played off against each other. Nor was there any real attempt to involve the community and families of workers, an essential ingredient in any successful battle.

BASIC INGREDIENTS OF REFORMISM

It is these methods of struggle that are the basic ingredients of reformism. It was pointless crying 'sell-out' at the stewards who were in the main good, sincere militants. It was the *politics* at all levels that were limited, not just the leadership. Desperate left calls for militancy without recognising this simply fell on deaf ears.

COMMUNITY AND WOMENS STRUGGLE

Nor are these processes limited to industrial struggle. Community and anti-cuts struggles were fragmented and defensive for the most part, failing to involve many of the working class people Labour measures were affecting. The women's movement became very inward-looking and on the defensive on key questions like abortion — although initiatives like 'Reclaim the Night' demonstrations against harassment and violence against women gave indications of a way forward.

In all these instances it was not just the effects of a recession that was limiting people's willingness to struggle. The political climate had swung sharply to the right and although Labour's policies fed this shift, they did not create it. On virtually every level, Labour (and often by proxy, the left) lost or ducked key arguments — picketing, the power of the unions, race and immigration, public spending, amongst others.

THE ELECTION

It was this political climate that was the determining factor in the elections. The Tories were able to present the crisis as one of 'collectivism', state intervention and bureaucracy. These are products of how a modern capitalist system must function to survive and the social democratic attempt to manage that crisis. But it so easily spilled over into a phoney 'crisis of socialism'.

The right wing defence of the 'freedom of the individual' against 'socialist collectivism' is an international phenomenon. It has roots in literature, like Solzhenitsin's writings on Russia and the 'Gulag' labour camps, and the debates of intellectuals like the 'New Right' in France. It surfaces in grass roots political movements like the anti-gay backlash, and the movement to cut local taxes (the 'Proposition 13' movement) in the USA.

Whereas the Labour campaign was policy-less and built round the conservative image of Callaghan, the Tories geared their's to the idea of crisis and change. Their policies of tax cuts and spending cuts were presented as radical ones and were put in the context of a buoyant ideological conviction in free enterprise. Even though Labour had won some of the arguments it had conceded the terrain on which the debate would be fought.

SOCIALISM — A SOLUTION OR A THREAT?

Labour's defensive stand prevented them from going beyond their traditional core of support, and appealing to wider sections of the population. Their conservative policies whetted the appetites, even of some of their traditional supporters, for the real thing.

The Tories' policies were seen as a radical alternative rather than more of the same — more state, more bureaucracy etc., which Labour offered.

That is why it is wrong to see Labour's defeat as simply resulting from a desertion of its supporters in disgust at its lack of 'socialist' policies.

The reality poses a fundamental problem for the left and highlights its inability to present socialism and socialist policies as solutions to people's current needs — rather than, at best, a boring irrelevancy, and at worst, a threat.

DIVISIONS IN THE WORKING CLASS

So it is clear that a capitalist crisis can increase the divisions in the working class, some sections suffering more than others. Tory policies like tax cuts and sales of council houses cleverly exploit these divisions.

THE LEFT IN THE ELECTIONS

The left, particularly the United Troops Out Movement and Socialist Unity and the campaigns of Pat Arrowsmith and Brendan Gallagher helped to make Ireland an election issue and break the wall of silence with which the traditional parties surround the Irish question. And the Anti-Nazi League was successful in pinning the 'Nazi' label on the National Front. But a more general challenge to Labour was needed that would take up all the key issues. The election could have provided a good chance to do just that if there had been a combined left slate of candidates.

An opposition under the Tories

The groundwork laid by Labour means that the Tories will be **consolidating** a shift to the right. But where the Tories have an added advantage is the new ideological climate created by Labour's defeat: the barrage of media attacks on Trade Unionists during the Lorry Drivers' and Public Sector strikes in the winter of 1978; the attack on Asians and anti-fascists after the events in Southall, in the run-up to the General election; the carefully engineered anti-abortion horror stories that appeared in the press in the same period. All these pressures provide the back-drop to the Tories' central aim..... an aim which is necessary for Capital — whether the Government is Labour or Tory — if they are to solve their crisis. This is the holding down of wages and the increase in the rate of exploitation at work. To do this they need to undermine the ability of the working class to organise, by attacking trade union rights and increasing police powers. The new climate will make the beginnings of a fightback extremely vulnerable and potentially isolated.

Trade union leaders are openly using this as a reason to hold back militancy. Moss Evans, General Secretary of the TGWU told its conference:

"The Tories would love nothing more than seeing all our troops rising out of their industrial trenches carrying the banner of a fixed percentage claim and marching forward into a barrage of hostility like lambs to the slaughterhouse of public opinion."

(Guardian 12th July 1979)

This dangerous isolation was already present under Labour — the isolation of the struggles against closures and redundancies in the regions from the rest of the country showed this.

Despite their ideological victory, the Tories are still faced with the underlying weaknesses of British capitalism — obsolete machinery, underinvestment and a relatively strong Trade Union shopfloor organisation. These fundamental weaknesses guarantee that class struggle will not be repressed, indeed the Tories policies will heighten it.

The Tories' policies

- **INCOMES POLICY:** Thatcher's "responsible free collective bargaining" may not last long under the impact of wage negotiations carried out in a context of increased inflation spurred by government budgets and the scrapping of price controls. And the Tories are continuing Labour's tactic of holding wages down in the public sector.

- **UNEMPLOYMENT:** The failure of the Labour movement to respond to growing unemployment will not be easily changed in the wake of the Tory victory. These dangerous class divisions will persist. The widely predicted growth in structural long-term unemployment caused by technological change

coupled with a Tory policy of using the dole as a weapon of social control could mean, (according to the Cambridge Economic Policy Group) the unemployed numbering 2.7 million by 1985, and 3.7 million by 1990. Even more dangerous is that this unemployment will not be evenly distributed, increasing the difficulties of organising a united response to it. The regions and youth will be especially hit. Unemployment in Liverpool is already nearly twice the national average, and it has more young people on the dole than Greater London and Birmingham put together. The ideologist of the new Tory orthodoxy, Sir Keith Joseph justifies this by saying,

".....the young.....are no longer seen as labour that is versatile and good value for money partly because employers must now pay the full rate at 18, including full national insurance contribution."

● **INDUSTRIAL AND REGIONAL POLICY:** The Tories aim to cut aid to the regions and let industry "stand on its own feet." They will try to sell off profitable parts of State owned industry to private capital, like BP and those owned by the NEB, and also dismantle Local Council Direct Labour Organisations which threaten the price rings of the private builders.

● **TRADE UNIONS:** The Tories want to encourage secret ballots, limit the right to picket and undermine closed shops.

● **CUTS IN PUBLIC SPENDING:** Local Government services are being cut back even further, reducing the social wage and increasing unemployment. But "the cuts" are not just reductions in state expenditure. They are part of important changes in what money is spent on. Making it more useful for Capital (e.g. tying education more closely to the needs of industry) as well as ensuring that state services take a form that helps to shore up bourgeois social relations. (e.g. encouraging the introduction of cash payment for all goods and services, like prescriptions.)

● **STATE REPRESSION:** The Tories are always in favour of state intervention when it helps them and hurts us. This means that basic rights which we have come to accept as normal and essential for organising under capitalism, will come under threat. The attack on democratic and trade union rights will require a broad movement to defend them. But the Left must ensure that its ideas are not submerged by liberal illusions that these rights will in themselves solve our problems. And they will look more favourably on moves to restrict abortion facilities, and equal rights for women, as well as creating a moral climate that pushes women back into the home and gays back into the closet.

New Nationality laws will increase harrassment of immigrants and black people, and will give increased powers to the police, already encouraged by the '71 Immigration Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, into pushing for more powers and changes in Criminal Law Procedure.

● **FOREIGN POLICY:** The Tories are increasing defence spending and will attempt to carve out a more independent role from the USA. For example they will be under strong pressure to recognise the regime of Muzorewa in Rhodesia. They will continue the war against the nationalist population of Ireland unless they are forced to withdraw from war weariness, the impact of a stronger anti-war movement and the resistance of the nationalist population.

The response of the Left

There is no doubt that these Tory policies will bring a response from the working class and labour movement. And this response will be hard and lead to bitter struggles. But what is needed is not just a "re-run" of 1970-74, when the last Tory Government was in power. For what came after them and after a period of intense class struggle culminating in the miners' strike which brought Heath down, was a Labour Government. Not a "left" Labour Government, but a government intent on defusing the mobilisation and combativity that had grown in the last weeks of the Tory Government. A Labour Government that went on to implement the anti-working class measures already described. The key question that faces the Left is how to break out of this cycle of moving from gut militancy to reformist politics and back again, that allows Capital's two faces to rotate unchallenged. The dangers are that many of the major forces on the Left will automatically react with their traditional responses and help to reproduce this cycle of bourgeois politics yet again.

THE LABOUR PARTY

Labour in opposition always appears more credible as a left-wing force as its years in government fade in the memory. The revolutionary left must provide an alternative to the pull which Labour exerts on independent militants, by putting forward convincing arguments on the weaknesses of the parliamentary road to socialism and offering a critique of the Labour Left "Alternative Economic Strategy". The major weakness of the Labour strategy is that it believes in the usefulness of the post-war interventionist state — as they see it, the problem is that it does not intervene enough. The policies they propose do not involve the active participation of the working class in struggle to implement them. In the same way that they did not see the need to involve forces outside Parliament in their (feeble) protests against Callaghan's policies when Labour was in government.

THIRD ROAD

Others on the left of Labour and in the Communist Party, have put forward a "third road" to socialism between parliamentary reformism and the revolutionary road of the smashing of the bourgeois state and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

They recognise the importance of forces outside Parliament in moving towards socialism, but they do not show how representative and direct working class democracy, based as they are on hostile and conflicting class bases, can be combined. Neither do they show how it is possible to "modify from within" a bourgeois state machine that controls the police, army and other forces of repression.

INDEPENDENTS

However discredited the Labour Lefts are, many independent militants will still see the Labour Party as providing a useful framework for their activity, helping them to link up with other people in broader political campaigns. However understandable this may be in the short term, it helps to maintain the credibility of the Labour Party and whatever the intentions of the activists helps to ensure the dominance of the reformists during the next period of Labour Government.

ENTRISM

There is a danger that this problem will be worsened by the tactics of some far left groups. The idea of entrism, joining the Labour Party to push for revolutionary politics, as a tactic or strategy, is rooted in a fundamental misconception about the relationship of the Labour Party and reformism, to the working class. It assumes that the mass of the working class identifies with the Labour Party. The main evidence used is that the majority of the working class vote Labour and belong to the unions that are linked to it. But few working class people vote Labour because they have illusions that it will advance socialism, or even their daily interests. They vote Labour as part of a class vote against the Tories, and it cannot be assumed that because the major unions have an institutional link to the Labour Party that all their members are conscious Labour Party supporters or activists.

RESOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

The equation of membership of a union with identification with Labour leads to the illusion that when entering into debate with reformist you are addressing the whole of the working class. Many working class people, inside industry and out, cannot be reached within the structures of the Labour Party and union branches. And many people, radicalised through their specific oppressions or the general policies of Labour Governments, have found it impossible to work within the Labour Party, both because of the politics of its leaders and because of its practice at all levels. The entrism strategy so often leads to "revolutionary socialism", divorced from the mass of the working class. And when it is seen by working class people, it is often perceived of in a conspiratorial way.

Existing exclusively in a social environment like the Labour Party will inevitably tend to make people's policies less revolutionary, whatever the good intentions of the individuals or group concerned.

In the end, entrism pushes people back towards an identification with Labour, and increases their dependence on those policies which constitute the power held by Labour over the class. It reinforces illusions that people have in Labour, and underestimates the potential of independent workers' activity. And this is at a time when, as Labour leaders themselves admit, Labour Party membership is far lower and the proportion of industrial working class members far smaller, than it was at its peak.

LABOUR — A FALSE FOCUS

Connected to the entrism tactic is the move by some on the left to turn all their attentions on the Labour Party and the Labour leadership — pulling all struggles into the orbit of labourism, rather than building (wherever possible with the Labour Party rank and file) a movement that can break with reformist ideas and structures.

EXPOSURE POLITICS

At its crudest this approach can lead to "exposure" politics — asking Labour and union leaders to carry out politics you know they would never contemplate in order to "expose" to the masses the wrong ideas of its leaders. This strategy backfires because it is stating the obvious, and because it is done in front of a very restricted sector of the working class. In the final analysis this approach is dishonest and elitist, and restricted to recruiting

raiding parties rather than genuine unity in struggle against a common enemy.

Militants must be won to demands and strategies that are "realistic" and winnable. With people organised in struggle around such demands that also increase the level of anti-capitalist consciousness and the organisation and unity of the working class, the hold of capital and reformism can be challenged.

MILITANCY NOT ENOUGH

The other traditional response to a Tory Government is a crude anti-Tory militancy but "home-made", "do-it-yourself" reformism, where the working class relies on its own struggles and not official structures to win wage demands in one factory or industry, will no longer work as it did in the economic expansion of the 1950's and early '60's. A hard-fought struggle today threatens the whole economic policy of capital and comes up against the power of the state.

Similarly, a left policy of having "revolutionary patience" assuming you have the right analysis and answers, and building on the inevitable anti-Tory upsurge, may bring short-term gains in terms of members. But if the cycle of bourgeois politics is to be broken, it is not enough to simply "defend the Unions" against Tory attack. Reformism will not disappear overnight as the revolutionary organisations grow. "Common sense" ideas run much deeper than the reformist leaders of the unions and Labour.

We need more than "a good dose of wage militancy". Now is the time to rethink traditional theories of revolutionary organisation. To give ourselves a chance of not enduring once again the recurring nightmare of right-wing Labour Governments following Tory, the Left must be prepared to learn and produce new strategies, attitudes and ways of organising.

An alternative: from defence to attack

We must push for wider perspectives which allow the link to be made between defensive struggles and a socialist challenge to capital's ideas and control, thereby building a solid basis for fighting the next Labour Government.

However, within this overall perspective, there is no hard and fast one "correct" tactic. Tactics must be open to discussion, and be adapted to suit the particular circumstances within which militants work. There are a huge variety of ways in which we can work.

The workplace

In the workplace we should intervene in unofficial groupings (e.g. Fightback, Ford Workers' Group) and official structures such as union branches, stewards committees, cuts committees. But we mustn't have illusions that everything will be achieved through the official structures and we must always keep sight of the overall aim: the building of a mass democratic rank and file movement.

ALTERNATIVE PLANS

We must develop the germs of new strategies emerging from struggles like those around the Lucas Aerospace Alternative Plan, and that of the Workers Combine at Vickers, against closures.

Reorganisation of industry and the development of new technology demand a socialist response, not blind Luddism. A socialist alternative for industry and society involves more than demands for nationalisation and workers' control. These are only the first steps and on their own they make no sense. Nationalise for what? Control what? And how? A socialist alternative requires thinking about the economy, about the uses of new technology and about the environment. Alternative Plans like those at Lucas Aerospace are ultimately subversive because they challenge the bosses' right to manage and question the neutrality of the work process.

NOT A SUBSTITUTE

But alternative Plans cannot be "the solution" for all workers in industry. Without the considerable time and effort that went into the Lucas Plan — involving all workers in its production and the careful way it has been used — they can be disastrous. An easy option can mean relying on outside "expert" management consultants, focussing only on viable rather than socially useful products. This brings with it the danger of incorporation in the capitalist rationality of corporate planning. The Plan becomes a substitute for more familiar forms of struggle (occupations etc.) rather than an additional weapon.

WHAT ARE WE DEFENDING?

We must defend the unions — but we must also be able to move beyond the crippling sectional and narrow limits which trade unionism puts on struggles. In "defending our unions" we also need to ask what it is exactly we want to defend. The support most union leaders gave to Callaghan's wages policy? The victimisation of the Cowley 9 by the TGWU? The threats to expel the toolmakers by the AUEW?

We're sure none of us would want to defend these policies. But it's not good enough to blame it all on the leadership. If it was all their fault we could simply replace the right-wing leaders with left-wing ones. But then look what happened to Scanlon, Jones and Daly. The point is that unions are riddled with reformism at all levels, right down, very often, to the shop stewards. The dangers of sell-outs are inherent in the very functions of trade unions under capitalism.

The Left must be aware of the dangers of "routinism", and orientate its activity towards the mass of workers rather than a small representative layer. A good example here is the way the Fordworkers group organised meetings and leafletting of the ordinary members before and during the strike in 1978.

Attempts should also be made to involve those affected by industrial action, to prevent a struggle being isolated from the rest of the working class.

It might have been better during the lorry drivers' strike, for example, to have leafletted shoppers and others affected by shortages of essentials, rather than adopting the attitude, which the media played upon, of 'if we can't have sugar, neither can the public'.

RANK AND FILE ORGANISATION

To do this it is necessary to build broad-based class struggle alliances /rank and file groups, independent of any one party. They have to be built from the base up. You cannot launch a national Rank and File movement like you can the latest Ford....

We must never ignore the official structures. While organising independently we also have to establish a presence in the branches, District Committees etc. A rank and file movement will have to fight openly for its ideas in the Trade Union movement. But they must also be prepared to act as an alternative political pole and framework for action to right wing leaderships. Examples already exist like the Ford Workers' Group, Fightback and the Vickers Combine Committee. They operate at a sector or company level, and refuse to accept

the divisions imposed by management, the capitalist organisation of work, and official union structures on workers' unity.

THE RIGHT TO WORK

We must demand the right to work — but we must also fight against the alienating nature of work under capitalism and for the production and provision of socially useful goods and services. Technological change must benefit the working class and not Capital.

Action is desperately needed to bridge the dangerous division between those in work and the growing numbers on the dole. The demand for a 35 hour week, 40 hours pay, unites the needs of the employed and unemployed, by forcing the bosses to take on more workers while at the same time rejecting increased workload through productivity deals.

A London bus worker, at the TGWU conference, warned against bartering productivity and jobs for money.

"The introduction of single manning had meant drivers losing their licences in their thirties and forties because they were stricken with heart conditions, ulcers and other stress diseases."

(Guardian, 12th July 1979)

The inability of the Left and the Labour movement to create a broad-based campaign to resist unemployment, is a major weakness. It may become the weakness in the face of the central thrust of the Tories' economic policy. We need to examine different ways of organising with the unemployed, and within the unions, in order to lay the basis for such a campaign.

AGAINST CUTS IN PUBLIC SPENDING

We must defend public spending and services, but we must also begin to define how we want resources and services to be used, in our interests, not those of Capital and the State.

And we need to involve the users of services in the fight against the cuts. Many women's groups have successfully done this in campaigns against hospital closures and the fight for abortion facilities.

If we are to successfully fight cuts in public spending and prevent the situation where a successful campaign to keep open a school or hospital is only at the expense of closures elsewhere, national co-ordination is needed. This is why organisations like **Fightback**, which link local campaigns against health cuts into a national focus and struggle for a health service based on our needs, are so important. As a recent **Fightback** leaflet explained:

".....being merely defensive is not enough. We must demand democratic control of the NHS, and involve workers, patients and public in defining the kind of health service they want. Industrial workers must make the connection between unemployment, hazards at work, attacks on abortion rights, low pay and stopping the cuts. Campaigners must understand that it is capitalism that is responsible for the conditions we live and work in. What began as a fight to save the NHS must develop into a struggle for a socialist Health service."

The autonomous movements

Similar links and strategies need to be made and thought out within the movements that have arisen in the last decade, relating to specific areas of oppression in capitalist society. Wider perspectives need to be adopted which move beyond the defensive terrain and pose the need for solutions based on the needs of all oppressed classes and groups.

FROM ANTI-FASCISM TO ANTI-RACISM

The Anti-Nazi League mushroomed as a broad movement uniting all those opposed to the NF Nazis, and has had great successes in mobilising new groups of people into activity, with imagination and verve. It has reduced the impact of the NF in elections.

This work must be continued and broadened to include the fight against racist and sexist ideas which underpin reactionary and fascist ideology. These ideas act as a barrier now to the development of a socialist mass movement because they cause deep divisions in the working class.

The major factor that provides the NF with a potential recruiting base is the widespread racism that exists at all levels in our society. More and more working people will be hit by the worsening social crisis in the coming years, and inevitably some will turn on the black community as a scapegoat. The NF could well be able to channel this large-scale social discontent into a new threat of developing a significant fascist party.

The ANL must continue, therefore, its past activities. But much more emphasis now needs to be placed on the fight against racism. If that doesn't happen our fight against the NF will always be a defensive one — a fight we can never win but which we can never afford to lose. The ANL must organise campaigns against all racist practices that accuse black people of being responsible for social ills or that attack and weaken the strength of the black community.

There is an urgent need for a mass campaign against the Immigration Laws and the New Nationality Law. Both are clearly aimed at removing certain rights associated with British citizenship from the black community. Under the guise of searching for "illegal" immigrants the police have been harrasing black trade union and political militants. The Immigration Laws, by giving the impression that one of the causes of the social crisis is "too many black immigrants", merely reinforce racist myths and prejudices.

One other example of state racism that the ANL must campaign against is the "sus" law, which allows the police to pick someone up if they "suspect" them of possibly "intending" to commit a crime. The police have increasingly used this law against black youth who have resisted their oppression.

SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Many on the Left now recognise the importance of the Womens Movement albeit sometimes grudgingly, although some still dismiss it as a "middle class diversion."

Whether the existing Left organisations like it or not, women have demanded and are creating their own organisations and autonomy — and use it to develop their own needs against those of capitalism and patriarchy. This should be seen as a positive step towards class unity, since there can only be effective unity when all sectors of the class are strong enough to ensure that their demands are taken up.

This reality has implications for the nature of the revolutionary organisation, which cannot be simply assimilated or incorporated into existing models. As Sheila Rowbotham says in **Beyond the Fragments**,

"I don't believe it is a matter of adding bits to a pre-existing model of an "efficient" "combative" organisation through which the working class (duly notified and rounded-up at last) will take power. You need changes now in how people can experience relationships in which we can both express our power and struggle against domination in all its forms."

However the Women's Liberation Movement as a whole fails to relate effectively to working class women. A working class perspective is needed in the women's movement and a feminist perspective needed in the struggle of the working class.

Trade unions need to take up issues like maternity and paternity leave that relate to women members, and organise themselves so that all members are fully involved — by holding meetings in work-time, and providing creches for children.

This means working within the Socialist Feminist current of the Womens' Movement to develop a Socialist Feminist theory and practice that can provide a meaningful alternative to the lives of working class women.

PRACTICE AND PROBLEMS

One of several ways that feminists have found to try and involve working class women is through Womens Aid. Refuges have offered women a chance to get out of the oppression and violence of the home and see the possibilities of a different way of living and relating. Often refuges have played a social work role in "sorting out a woman's problems". But feminists have tried instead to involve the women who come there in the decisions and actions which will change their own lives.

Of course there are problems and weaknesses in the womens' movement. The difficulties of generalising from particular experiences and passing on lessons learnt. Lack of structures and organisation can mean informal cliques which make it difficult for working class women in particular to participate. An overconcern with "consciousness-raising" can downgrade the importance of creating a movement that liberates all women. The womens' Movement brings together women who want to remain completely separate from men and other movements, and women who believe in organisational autonomy, but work with and in other groups. There are problems of race and class bias which, along with all the other differences and problems **must** be brought out into the open, and argued if the autonomous Womens Movement is to grow wider and more powerful.

YOUTH

The last few years have seen a transformation of youth culture, music and politics. The ANL, Rock Against Racism, School Kids Against the Nazis, and many other groups have been successful in drawing youth into wider political activity, and relating politics to the needs of youth, by fusing some parts of youth culture with politics through music.

But if the Left is build on this momentum, it needs to develop an analysis of the specific basis of youth oppression and an understanding of the theoretical and practical problems of youth culture and organising. The aim of the Left should be to support initiatives that could develop towards an **independent** socialist youth movement. Independent of any one party and able to develop its own political perspectives. This would have a far more powerful effect on society than each of the Left organisations setting up its **own** little mini youth wings, quickly degenerating into empty shells.

Internationalism

The Left has not broken away completely from a moral view on internationalism. That is, the idea that we "ought" to be concerned about the struggles in other countries because we are principled revolutionaries. But for our internationalism to mean anything in practice, we need to look at the **material** connections between struggles elsewhere and struggles here, and relate international issues to a mass audience.

It is in this context that we should organise around struggles like those in Southern Africa. To quote Manchester Anti-Apartheid:

"As the economic crisis grips Britain with ever more severity, the question of solidarity with the people of Southern Africa is increasingly important: The racist regimes of Southern Africa guarantee super profits and cheap labour with little or no trade union organisation or political rights. For Western employers, in the hunt for profits, Southern Africa is a literal gold mine. An unorganised factory within a multinational is a threat to all workers in that firm, whether the factory is down the road or in South Africa. British workers therefore have a real material interest in building solidarity with the struggle in Southern Africa."

ZIMBABWE

It is because of these material links that the struggle in Zimbabwe will become an increasingly important issue in British politics, to which the left will have to respond. But these links do not only exist at an economic level.

The struggle of the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe is, in part, an anti-racist struggle by black people, to which many members of the Afro-Caribbean community in this country have strong emotional and political ties. The British media has consistently reported the struggle in a way which strengthens the grip of racism on the white working class in this country.

The National Front has linkages with the racist and often fascist white settlers in Zimbabwe; will recruit some of them as they flee to Britain to escape the civil war; and may possibly attempt to make great propaganda play out of future events in that war.

So the liberation struggle of the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe is already interconnected with the struggle against racism and fascism in this country and will probably become increasingly so in the future.

Racism doesn't stick to national boundaries. The racist media coverage of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle doesn't just encourage people to support Smith or Muzorewa — it hardens attitudes towards Blacks in this country. Racist whites will talk in the same breath about sending them all home, and shooting them all in Rhodesia.

IRELAND

Similarly, we need to become more adept at drawing out the connections between the situation in Ireland and Britain.

The struggle against British imperialism's hold on its oldest colony, Ireland, remains as important as ever for the British working class and the Irish people. As long as the British working class movement supports or passively accepts the role of Britain in Ireland it means that its underlying ideology will seriously hinder it in fighting against the British ruling class on other fronts.

TROOPS OUT

This is why it's so important that the role of the United Troops Out Movement, the only broad, non-sectarian organisation calling for an immediate withdrawal of British troops, is expanded and not sectioned off from the rest of the Left's activity.

One way of expressing the links between the two situations is for the work of the UTOM in combatting British Army recruitment amongst unemployed young people, to be expanded.

UTOM should be committed to a number of differing approaches within the labour movement, the womens' movement, the black movement and student movement, as well as the population as a whole.

A challenge to reformism and the Tories

New perspectives and ways of organising in all of these areas have to be brought together at the level of the general political terrain. No magic "formulae" of the correct demands exist which the revolutionary left can counterpose to the "Alternative Economic Strategy of the Left Labour. Their strategy is wrong — it wouldn't work within the context of capitalism. To make British capitalism competitive would mean the devastation of the regions. The Alternative Economic Strategy is anti-internationalist. Import controls and devaluation are an attack on the livelihood of foreign workers, and buttress the idea of a one nation, "we're all in the same boat against the rest of the world" attitude. The strategy is not linked to the active participation of the working class, but is based on the parliamentary road with all its weaknesses.

Ultimately, our alternative is socialism and working class power. But we are dealing in the post-war period with a state that no longer simply "holds the ring", but intervenes in all areas of our social and economic existence. This forces us to come up with attitudes and replies to its initiatives. So we need to go beyond "more militancy" and the promise of socialism at the end of the rainbow. But without getting entangled in the snare of "realism" or putting forward solutions as if we were at present an "alternative government."

FOR SOCIALISM

The Tories have been able to win working class support for their vision of an individualist, competitive society. They have discredited the idea of socialism by skilful use of events like the Indo China wars (and the "Boat People") and by pointing out the mess in which Labour's "mixed economy" ideas have left institutions like the NHS. In our struggles we must reaffirm against all odds the idea of socialism — of a society run on collectivist, non-competitive lines.

But slogans and demands, however correct, will not alone prove to people that "socialism is the answer". Our politics, both in content and the way we put them over, must relate to people's personal hopes and fears. We have to make the struggle for socialism meaningful, worthwhile, and enjoyable.

We do not have any utopian illusions that islands of socialist humanity and personal freedom can be built within capitalism, but we see the necessity to take up the problems of transforming all social relations and relating socialist politics to the problems of personal life, sexuality and culture. The revolution we build without this will always carry the seeds of authoritarian degeneration.

There is the danger that in a society with a new right-wing Tory Government, the Left will be pulled to the right as well. So we must not forget that our objective is a new way of organising society. Within the struggles emerging against the Tories we want to win people to the idea of a socialist society. A society where the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production is a precondition for the wider transformation of social relations that socialism entails. A society where workers and the mass of the people manage the economy and society, with freedom of association and criticism, preventing the emergence of new elites. Where inequalities between manual and mental labour, town and country, women and men, between races, are eliminated. Where rewards and knowledge are equally distributed. Where the economy is planned democratically, so that who produces what, and how, is not assumed, but transformed.

Conclusion

The following letter was recently received by the Big Flame newspaper from a reader in Hull:

Dear Big Flame,

At a time when a lot of the left is hanging out its' "business as usual" signs and waiting for the 'inevitable' anti-Tory upsurge, it was good to see some fresh thinking on the way forward. It should be obvious to a jelly fish that 1979 is not 1970. Mrs Thatcher may be further right than Mr Heath, but she won't be a push-over for all that. In any case, we need to be thinking further ahead than that. If we can't produce a socialist alternative, in 1984 we could be faced with a choice between the Tories and another Labour Government like Wilson's or Callaghan's. What we need now is a discussion about how the socialist movement is going to go about forming an organisation which not only appeals to feminists, industrial militants and black people, but also proves irresistible to sections of the Labour and Communist Parties. Let's not rush into instant regroupments, but let's be clear about the kind of organisation we need to create over the next decade."

It is a message we strongly endorse. 'Business as usual' may bring short term gains, but in the long term will get us going round in circles. We would define the *strategic goal* of revolutionary socialists under the Tories as fighting for a *break in the labourist cycle* — anti-working class Labour Government, disillusionment, right wing Tory government, mass struggles limited to calling for a return of a Labour government, another anti-working class Labour government. That cycle can only be broken by challenging much of the defensive basis of existing politics in the working class movement and stressing rank and file, socialist alternatives in industry, the services and social life in general.

BIG FLAME

Many left organisations and campaigns will play a part in this process. At a time when many organisations will be drifting towards the Labour Party, just hammering the Tories, or only building themselves; Big Flame will be stressing the need for a different approach to struggles, politics and organising. Big Flame has a commitment to building the autonomous movements, independent working class organisations that are not fronts for particular groups, and maximum unity in action between socialists.

We build our organisation out of this commitment and do not subordinate it to the building of our own organisation. We too would like to see the type of organisation the writer of the above letter describes. If there was a possibility we would take it very seriously. But in the short term there isn't. Instant regroupments would cut across the necessary debates and working together in practice that is a pre-condition of further advance.

In this sense, the task is to create the conditions for the emergence of a new kind of organisation. We appeal to militants committed to the autonomous movements, to independent working class organisation and a socialist politics that covers all areas of life, but who see the need for a strong general political organisation, to join Big Flame to help accelerate those conditions.

Big Flame publications

An Introduction to Big Flame: 10p. Our politics, history, structure and publications.

Draft Manifesto for a New Revolutionary Organisation: 1977. 25p. A comprehensive manifesto written to clarify our political positions and as a basis for discussing the organisation of a mass politics tendency.

Portugal: A Blaze of Freedom: 1975. 30p. Twice reprinted pamphlet giving the history and analysis of Portugal after the overthrow of the dictatorship.

Ireland: Rising in the North: Another big-selling pamphlet combining interviews with analysis of the relationship between the class and national struggles. Still useful for basic understanding of the Irish conflict. 20p. 1975.

The Revolution Unfinished: A Critique of Trotskyism: 50p. A non-sectarian critique of Trotskyism, links the strengths and weaknesses of Trotsky's original ideas to the theory and practice of the current Trotskyist organisations.

The Crisis in Education: 30p. A materialist analysis of the education crisis. Takes educational struggles further than fighting the cuts and wage battles. Sections on teachers, pupils and parents, as well as the experience in Russia and China.

A Close Look at Racism and Fascism: 20p. A collection of articles first published in Big Flame Newspaper. Topics covered range from 'Police Harrassment of Blacks' to 'Women in Nazi Germany'

Revolutionary Socialism: 40p. Quarterly. The Journal of Big Flame. Contains analytical articles on a wide range of topics.

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LABOURING UNDER THE TORIES?

The next five years of Tory government will be a hard and bitter time for the working class.

And what happens in 1984? Another Labour government like Callaghan's. Unless we now begin to create alternative policies and organisation to the reformist leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions as part of the fight to defeat the Tories.

There is a great danger that the left will repeat the mistakes of the 1970-74 period under the last Tory government.

This pamphlet argues that we need to challenge the defensive basis of existing politics in the working class movement, and stress instead rank and file, socialist alternatives in industry, the public sector and social life in general.

It is only by doing this that the conditions can be created for the emergence of a new kind of organisation. An organisation that appeals to feminists, industrial militants and black people. That has the possibilities of breaking out of the ghetto of the revolutionary left and linking up with the many socialists who are presently in the Labour and Communist Parties.



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