

Ch 6. Fighting for Unity

How we can organise against Divisions

Anyone working in a reasonably large workplace knows that most of the divisions in the workforce are caused by differences in money and workload. Alongside this go differences in working conditions – for example between staff and hourly paid workers.

How can we fight these divisions? We don't think we'll get very far by just shouting 'unity' at the different sections

of the working class. For a start, in our experience it's unusual to find groups of workers who're relatively better off supporting those who come off badly. Occasionally it does happen – for example at Grunwicks, or when the Yorkshire miners went on strike in support of the nurses. Fighting for this kind of powerful solidarity will always be a part of the struggle for greater unity.

But right now we'd place equal importance on supporting the right of worse off sections of the working class to organise themselves independently, and start the fight for unity on their own terms. We're right behind the idea that assembly-line stewards at Ford should hold separate meetings to fight for a line-workers' allowance, better conditions and equal overtime with off-line workers; we think that the unemployed should organise themselves to fight for their needs; we support the low paid in their demand for a narrowing of differentials and a guaranteed minimum wage.

In supporting all this, we are sometimes accused of splitting the working class. That we deny. The working class is already split up and divided. By helping to build the strength of different sections of the working class, militants are making the most important contribution possible, since there can only be real unity when all major sectors of the working class are strong enough to ensure their own demands are taken up.

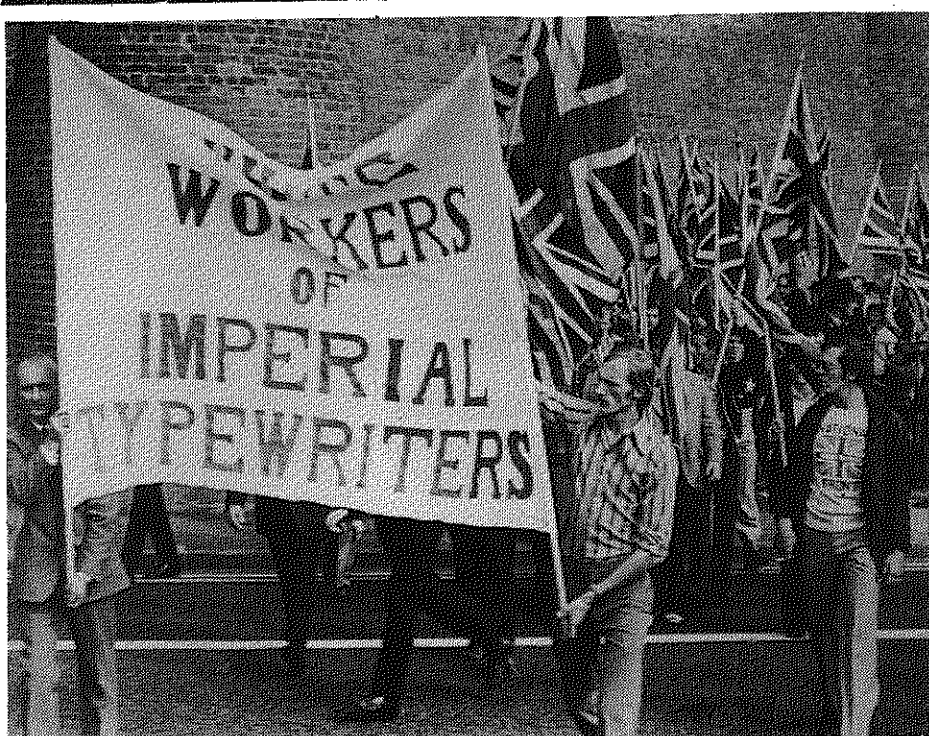
What this means in practice

In every workplace, militants should start by making an analysis of how the workforce is divided, and go on to work out how to start an effective campaign by the people who're losing out. It may be small things – a campaign for rotation of jobs, where the work is not fairly shared out, or for the jobs to be shared out equally; or an overtime rota; or for manual workers to enjoy the same fringe benefits and conditions as the staff. Too often socialists just ignore these problems as though they were unimportant. But for management – they're the mechanism of control.

Photo: Chris Davies (Report)



Photo: Dave Evans (IFL)



No support from white workers at Imperial Typewriters during the 1974 strike. That's the importance of black workers organising independently to build their power.

Tearing apart the working class:



Women at Tetley Tea prepare to march for equal pay. May 1975. (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)

If there's a racial or sexual division of work — with black people or women doing the lowest paid jobs, or only certain kinds of jobs — this should be brought out into the open through mass leaflets and straightforward discussion in the stewards' committee and the union branch. When struggles by women for equal pay, equal opportunities, nurseries at work or against sexist abuse and discrimination do start — and when struggles by black people fighting their

specific oppression at work also start, the job of militants who're not directly involved is to give full support, and argue for solidarity among the rest of the workforce.

These struggles are on the increase. Black militancy is growing. This is clear from the wave of strikes by Asian workers in the midlands in 1974 (like Imperial Typewriters) to the actions of black youth in Leeds, Notting Hill, Lewisham, Southall and now Bristol against the police, to the riots at Ford Dagenham, to the strike in East London factories against racist attacks in the streets, to the struggles at Grunwick, Booth's Gin, Maple Mill in Oldham and today at Chix.

At the beginning of August, Asian workers at Maple Mill in Oldham came out on strike for better conditions — like meal breaks — and against speed ups that had been brought in splitting white from Asian workers. Racist supervisors at Oldham encouraged these divisions. The strike was won in a week. It was supported by some white workers, but many scabbed. Now the strikers have also forced the union to agree to their electing twelve shop stewards, and to provide translation facilities.

(From a report in *Big Flame*, September 1979)

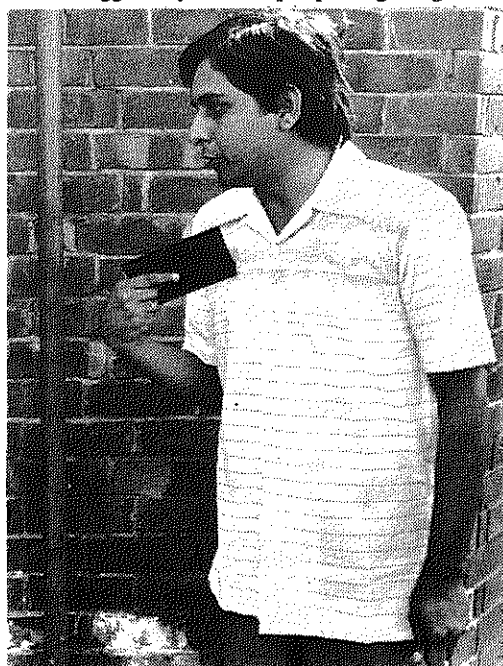
This is what black self-organisation means, and we should be right behind it. In the same way, it's crucial to fight for:

- * women's caucuses
- * women's officers in the unions
- * all union meetings in work time.

And obviously we fight for positive discrimination in favour of women and black people for all full time union posts. For example, for women in NUPE, many of whom are part-time workers on very low pay and without many of the benefits attached to full time work, this is vital — otherwise their interests get left behind as in the 1979 wage settlement.

But neither racism nor sexism can be fought only in the workplace. They're both wider social and political problems with deep roots in the way people think. Racism has a lot to do with our history of British colonialism. And underpinning sexism is the traditional role of women as unpaid workers in the home. That's why the broad independent movements and struggles of women and black people are so important. For example, the campaigns of the Women's Liberation Movement against the sexist way women are seen, for the socialisation of housework and for men to do their fair share, for a women's right to choose whether or not to have a child, and for a guaranteed income for all women as of right. Struggles by women and black people outside the workplace have a major impact inside the workplace:

'The most important thing in making the atmosphere more militant in this plant was the Southall riot. Hundreds of Asian workers here went on strike — accompanied by a handful of white and West Indian workers — and fought against the police riot in their area. They felt it to be a victory — and their new strength



racism on a Bolton street.

(Photo: J. Sturrock, Report)

and confidence was soon felt in disputes in the plant.'
(Shop steward, Ford Langley)

Organising with the unemployed

Today, there is the *potential* for a mass movement of the unemployed. In areas like South Wales, there is real anger — that was clear when Keith Joseph visited the area during the steel strike. If that anger could be organised right across the country, then the unemployed could become a powerful political force.

But unemployment is now less of a risk to the bosses and their system — both politically and socially — than trying to hold down workers' wages directly through an Incomes Policy. That's why the bosses now feel free to use mass unemployment as their way of disciplining and controlling the working class — and holding down wages. In other words, that's why they've gone over to monetarism.

In the 20's and 30's in Britain, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, as well as organising the famous Hunger Marches, also organised lightning attacks on factories working overtime and paying below the union rate for the job. They'd take over the factory, stop all machines and stay in occupation until the boss agreed to cut overtime with no loss of pay, to pay the union rate and to hire more workers.

Over the last few years, there have been two examples of campaigns against unemployment: the Right to Work campaign and the Campaign Against Youth Unemployment. Both have shown the possibility of getting a lot of unemployed people involved. But neither has met up to the challenge of building a permanent, strong mass organisation to fight unemployment. For three reasons. Firstly because they are primarily front organisations for a political party — one for the SWP, the other for the CP. So they're not independently controlled by unemployed workers with the aim of building a broad based autonomous mass movement.

Secondly, they never developed strong



The 1978 Merseyside Right to Work marchers carry their message to the gates of the Fairweathers site. But is the Right to Work Campaign tied too closely to the SWP?

local roots — based on consistent work among the unemployed and among workers fighting against loss of jobs in an area. Both campaigns rely on occasional national demonstrations — to TUC or Labour Party Conference — to get publicity: local organisation is seen as secondary to the needs of the national campaign. Finally, they've never organised successfully around the direct needs of the unemployed for more money on the dole. This has got to go alongside the fight for more jobs.

In our view, a movement of the unemployed can only be built by taking

up issues like the recent cuts in benefit, and by developing a strong local base in as many parts of the country as possible. In this connection there are some important developments: the formation of branches of the Unemployed Workers' Union in Newcastle and Spennymoor and TGWU branches mainly for unemployed workers in Liverpool. Together with local Claimants Unions and Right to Work groups we're certain that an effective mass movement could be built, linking up with workers fighting closures, redundancies and productivity deals, and having a powerful political impact.

Photo: John Sturrock (Report)



Southall April 1979. Neither racist nor sexist divisions in the working class can be fought only in the workplace.

Ch 7. Building Workplace Organisation

Developing Rank and File Power

The whole strategy we've outlined in the last chapter depends on one thing: work place activity. This might seem obvious, but unfortunately the political and practical skills for winning a real rank and file base are given a very low priority by many socialist organisations.

Instead their main concern is to teach their members how to win leading positions in trade union branches and shop stewards' committees — without their necessarily having the support of the majority of workers — and how to recruit new members to their organisations. Their justification for this is that the most serious problem facing the labour movement is the lack of 'correct' leadership with the 'correct' programme of political demands.

We reject this approach. We say that the only political programme that's worth having is one developed *inside* the class struggle. It's too easy to blame every single defeat on our union leaders. All too often problems at the top of a union are a reflection of problems at the bottom,

among the rank and file. Reactionary and pro-management ideas, sexism and racism *are* real problems on the shop floor, and it's no good socialists kidding themselves that they can all be solved by changing leaders.

Mass work in the workplace

The main aim of this pamphlet is to stress that working class resistance will not work unless the nuts and bolts of that resistance — workplace organisation — is got right. After years of social democracy, the priority must be patient rebuilding of work place organisation.

What does this mean in practice? The first principle is to talk to people — to find out the everyday problems, grievances and struggles facing the various sections of the workforce in their everyday lives. Then we've got to show how these problems can be understood from an openly socialist perspective. This perspective includes not only those political issues whose effects are experienced immediately at work and in the surrounding community, but also those

wider political issues such as inflation, energy policy, the lack of investment, which have a more hidden but equally drastic effect on working class life.

When action by a group of workers does start over an issue, our job is first to publicise and explain what it's about to win maximum support and counter the lies coming from management (and sometimes from the union too). Secondly we've got to bring out into the open the *anti-capitalist content* of what's going on. Many of these struggles directly pose the question of *power*, challenging management's 'right to manage.' As workers start to fight for their needs, they come up against the logic and organisation of capitalism, and it's at this time that they see the point of socialist ideas. As a steel picket told the *Guardian* in the 10th week of the strike:

'I never really bothered about politics until now. I never realised there were two classes. This government has shown me that there are.'



Celebrating their power: the Trico women's Victory Conference in October 1976. (Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report)

Mass leafletting

Mass leaflets are one of the most important weapons of mass organising. They're directed at the majority of workers and therefore immediately involve them. They can help organise solidarity for sectional struggles — explaining why it's happening and countering the propaganda of management. They can build support for the actions of other groups of workers — a local hospital or factory closure for example. They can be used to start arguing for alternatives under socialism — a people's health service, the production of alternative products such as those proposed in the Lucas Combine Committee Alternative Workers' Plan. Most important, they can put into an *anti-capitalist* perspective all the day to day problems and struggles which are the concern of the workers.



PAY CLAIM LATEST BEWARE A SELL-OUT

With four months to go to our pay claim, the national union officials and convenors have already begun preparing the sell-out. At a rowdy meeting in London on Monday, convenors and senior shop stewards from all Ford plants in Britain met with national trade union officials to finally decide our pay claim — which goes to the company in November.

And to the amazement and disgust of many senior stewards — particularly from Southampton, Halewood and Swansea — the convenors and union officials refused to name any target figure for the pay claim. They're just going to approach the Company cap in hand, and see what the company offer.

There's only one way to describe the claim the convenors are putting forward — a woolly, vague load of waffle. These are their 5 points:

- * a substantial increase linked to the cost of living
- * a shorter working week
- * line workers' allowance
- * better pensions
- * longer holidays.

UNDEMOCRATIC

The words "a substantial increase" might sound good, but they should not fool anyone. Because it's well known that in trade union language it's a clever formula for saying nothing — for refusing to say how much money you're willing to fight for.

When some Halewood lads tried to put an amendment calling for

1972. A mass movement of workers wins! In protest against the jailing of 5 dockers under the Industrial Relations Act, work has stopped in every port, production of all national newspapers has ceased and the London food markets have closed down. Two days later the government backed down and ordered the release of the dockers.

But to be effective, leaflets must come out regularly — not just when there's a major issue or big struggle. They should be short, punchy, humorous and well laid out. It's also important to involve as many militants as possible in writing, checking and rewriting leaflets.

Political work in the unions

We have stressed the importance of political work among the mass of rank and file workers. But that doesn't mean that we think that work in the official structures of the trade union movement — union branches, district committees, trades councils, stewards' and representatives' committees — is of less importance.

In our opinion, every socialist militant trying to organise at work should be active in their union branch. We'd encourage any militant who's built a real base to stand as shop steward or branch officer. We're against militants getting themselves elected into positions without mass support — either because no-one else wants to stand or because hardly anyone bothers to vote. Socialism is about extending workers' democracy, not about manipulation. We also see it as a vital part of the work of any effective rank and file group to win increasing influence in the stewards' committee and the union branch.

What should we be fighting for? Union democracy is key. We cannot hope that

people will defend the unions until they feel that they are *their* unions. From top to bottom — General Secretary to shop steward or rep — there are undemocratic traditions which must be changed. This is now so bad that many members are cynical not only about outside officials but about convenors and stewards/ reps as well.

So in the stewards' committees, we've got to lead a fight against this. This means fighting in the committee for full support for any section in dispute over staffing or manning, safety, pay, conditions — even if they're 'in breach of procedure.' We've got to try to get stewards to see the unification of the workforce as a number one priority. We should be arguing for regular section meetings, mass meetings and a shop floor bulletin. Finally, in stewards' committees we should be encouraging links between stewards of the same company or industry both in Britain and abroad.

Union branches are the base for the campaign to democratise the national structure of any trade union — fighting for all officials to be elected to office and subject to regular re-election. The trouble is that most union branches are themselves bureaucratic and lifeless affairs, and participation is not made easy for

women, black or young workers. We've got to fight for branch meetings in work time, and to make them relevant and lively for the members. We should be inviting outside speakers and getting films to show. Our overall aim must be to build a tradition of open political discussion and debate in the workplace — starting first with the political content of the struggles connected most closely with the workers in that branch, and generalising to all other political issues from there.

Broad based rank and file groups

In any reasonably sized workplace, in all probability the number of revolutionary socialists will be tiny. But nevertheless, within the workforce there'll be a clearly defined *left* (the militants), the *centre* (the moderates, those who waver) and the *right* (scabs, company men and women). Our job — through mass work — is to find and organise the militants and to increase their power and influence so that the left can win over the centre and isolate the right.

That's the importance of broad based rank and file groups within a single workplace, within one company, within a whole industry and inside a trade union. Today, there's a growing number of organisations like these: Building Worker,

the Ford Workers' Group, a group on London Transport, Rank and File Hotel and Catering Workers, the Collier group, NALGO Action, Fightback, Engineers' Charter and left-wing caucuses in many unions.

There's three points we want to make about groups like these:

1. These groups must be broad based and non sectarian. Too often rank and file organisations are just a front for one particular socialist organisation or party. That kind of organisation never really grows because workers are rightly aware of being manipulated.

2. The groups have got to be openly socialist. Throughout this pamphlet we've argued that wage militancy won't get us anywhere unless it's combined with the idea of building a working-class offensive against the way that capitalism is re-organising itself against us.

3. It's no good having a group that's just a clique of socialists, cut off from the rank and file. The main reason for building rank and file organisation is to carry out mass work which requires hard, consistent day to day organising. It means building an organisation with growing credibility, that workers can *rely on* to be there supporting them whenever there's a struggle.

A socialist rank and file movement

How can we build a socialist rank and file movement with real authority in the working class?

1. It has to be built by bringing together organisations which have already established a strong base:

- * rank and file groups within workplaces and industries
- * democratic shop stewards' committees
- * left-wing caucuses in the unions

- * local anti-cuts campaigns
- * broad-based national campaigns against unemployment, racism, cuts in public spending, wage restraint.

At present, few of these organisations do have a real mass base, or an open commitment to socialist politics. So our first priority must be to develop a tradition of mass work and socialist agitation in these organisations.

2. It must be genuinely broad based and democratic, not just an industrial front organisation for one particular socialist group or party.

3. It has to be openly internationalist in outlook, helping rank and file workers make direct links with workers abroad.

How does the Rank and File Movement organised by the Socialist Workers' Party compare against these points? The first thing to be said is that it is absolutely the best example of all the recent attempts to build a grass roots workers' movement. But it does have serious problems.

First, it has no real local roots in the working class. Many of the local and sectoral rank and file groups associated with the SWP Rank and File are very weak with no base. Secondly, the Rank and File Movement has always been too dominated by the needs of the SWP. It was brought into existence as a national organisation long before the necessary groundwork had been done on the shop floor or in stewards' committees, union branches and rank and file groups – or before sufficiently strong national caucuses had been built up in a wide range of unions. There were too many token delegates from union branches and stewards' committees who in truth represented very little – so the Movement has never had the authority to call even limited action. Its steering committee and conference have always been stage managed by the SWP rather than being truly democratic.

Finally, the Rank and File Movement has restricted itself to fairly narrow 'economic' demands and defence of trade union rights, while leaving the SWP to take up the 'political' issues. So Rank and File has never been an openly socialist movement. As we've explained, in our view today this split between 'trade union' and 'political' questions is today itself a reformist one, and it certainly won't help us beat the Tories.

But in saying all this, it's important to stress that there are very positive aspects of the Rank and File Movement. For example, it's clearly concerned to build the confidence of the mass of workers. It hasn't been obsessed with attempts to change or 'expose' leaders as a solution to everything. We think that if the SWP could learn some of the lessons we've outlined above – in particular respecting the independence of the movement – then the Rank and File Movement could be transformed in the longer term into what's needed. If such a movement could be successfully built, it would be a major step forward in breaking the monotonous cycle of alternating anti-working class governments, first Tory then Labour.



We need a mass movement combining the power of the rank and file with socialist politics that mark a real break from the reformism of our trade union leaders. (Photo: J. Sturrock, Report)

THE FORD WORKERS' GROUP (COMBINE): HOW ONE RANK AND FILE GROUP PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE.



Example of how one rank and file group using mass work tactics was able to make a big impact: the role of the Ford Workers' Group in the 1978 national Ford strike

The Ford Workers' Group was founded in April 1978 specifically to co-ordinate the fight for a claim that was worth striking for: £20 and 5 hours off the week with no productivity deal. That involved a campaign in all the stewards' committees, in trade union branches and on the shop floor.

The organisation didn't come out of the blue. Its first meeting was called by three workers' groups which already had a long history: the Ford Langley Action Committee, the Ford Dagenham Workers' Group and the Ford Halewood Big Flame Group. All three groups were already well known in their plants because of regular mass leafletting and an important role in some of the big guerrilla strikes by assembly line workers fighting unpaid lay-offs and speed ups.

So that first meeting brought together a wide range of militants from nearly all the main Ford plants. Most were independent socialists or militants on the shop floor. But among those in political groups and parties were members of the SWP, Big Flame, IMG, Militant, a small Marxist-Leninist group, and dissident members of the CP. The whole atmosphere was non-sectarian, and that's the way it has continued ever since. I should mention that right from the beginning, women were involved in the group. Most Ford workers are blokes, and we made it clear that we though it was important to get wives and girlfriends involved.

The first thing we decided was TO GET THE CLAIM RIGHT. Throughout the Social Contract, the convenors and officials had deliberately worked out woolly, divisive claims *behind the backs of the membership* which weren't worth fighting for. They didn't want a big claim - to take our wages back to 1974 levels - and a UNIFYING WAGE DEMAND. That's why we were for an across the board money claim which would narrow differentials - not a percentage rise which

would give more to the higher paid grades and less to the lower grades.

Then we were arguing for 5 hours off the week with no loss of pay. We argued for this, and not 35 hours because some plants already work 37½ hours - so we thought it would unite us better. And the most important thing we were stressing was NO PRODUCTIVITY DEAL - it would mean harder work, worse conditions and more unemployment.

These were the arguments we used in a big campaign of mass leaflets in every Ford plant in the country to win support for the claim on the shop floor. We produced a wage claim badge, and sole thousands. And we co-ordinated a fight in every stewards' committee and union branch where we had supporters to push our claim through. Finally this resulted in us getting it through the convenors' committee - by 13 votes to 12! The shop floor campaign was a big success and when Ford made their 5% offer - within the government's guidelines - there were spontaneous walk-outs in Southampton, Halewood and Langley.

During the strike we tried to build up independent rank and file activity - through regular pickets and mass lobbies of the negotiations. To be honest, that was difficult because there was not much picketing to be done. Ford is a closed shop so no-one was going in, and we got total solidarity from dockers, drivers and train drivers.

We also put out a weekly strike bulletin - the only way the rank and file got any information except through the press, because the convenors held no mass meetings at all. In the bulletin, we put over the latest news, mobilised pickets, and we kept arguing for the full claim from a socialist point of view: the importance of winning shorter hours to get less unemployment; how we were fighting for all other sections of the working class against pay restraint; why we should support British Leyland workers even though their company made a small loss.

But the most radical thing was the action of the Ford women's group which was part of the Ford Workers' Group. In the middle of the strike, the TV tried to organise a back-to-work campaign among Ford workers' wives. With a small group of wives, they called a demonstration in Southampton - and to their great surprise they were hugely outnumbered by a demonstration in support of the strike by wives and girlfriends of Ford workers. It stopped the media campaign dead in its tracks. That shows the importance of getting our families and friends behind the claim right at the beginning - preventing them dividing us up.

Jack Brown, Secretary of the Ford Workers' Group

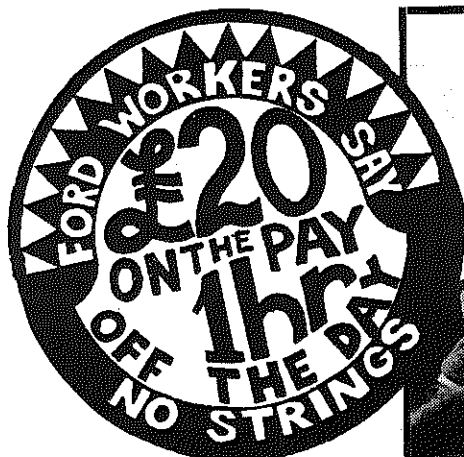


Photo: Chris Davies, Report.

Ch8. Defeating the Tory Offensive

Rank and File Power and Socialism

One thing is certain. We won't beat this offensive by relying either on Labour or on our trade union leaders to lead our struggles. After all, this offensive *started under Labour* – with the major cutbacks in public spending, the massive rise in unemployment, the encouragement to scabs by Callaghan to cross picket lines, the free hand given to the police to smash picket lines and harass black people and their campaign that a woman's place should be in the home.

The point that we've got to hammer home in every workplace, in shop stewards' and reps' committees and at all levels of the trade union movement is that Labour is no real alternative. Even in opposition they've refused to commit themselves to the complete repeal of the Employment Act or to restore the Tories' spending cuts.

The Labour Left

And history has repeatedly shown that it's a mistake to place all your hopes on electing new, left-wing leaders like Wedgewood Benn. Barbara Castle was a leader of the Labour Left. She introduced 'In Place of Strife' in an unsuccessful attempt to smash working class power in 1969. Michael Foot was the great hope of the Labour Left – but on becoming Deputy Prime Minister he defected to the Callaghan camp. Wedgewood Benn was himself a cabinet minister throughout the government, with no evident record of great dissent. And as Energy Minister he helped to push through the divisive productivity deal in the mining industry which stopped a major clash over the Social Contract. We confidently predict that unless his politics have changed fundamentally in less than one year, he'll go the same way as Castle and Foot.

Our trade union leaders

Equally, there's no chance that the trade union leaderships will mount any serious challenge to this offensive. We only have to think back to the last Tory government:

* Union leaders let the post office and power workers get beaten without offering any real solidarity.

* They registered under the Industrial Relations Act with few exceptions – despite TUC policy.

* They did nothing to support the three jailed building workers – the Shrewsbury three.

* It was only a mass *unofficial* strike movement that got the five dockers out of Pentonville Prison in July 1972.

Under Labour, the trade union leaders were *actively* involved through the Social Contract (of which TGWU leader Jack Jones was the main architect) in organ-



Happy families. Jack and Jim share a joke at our expense. Under Labour, trade union leaders were actively involved with the government in holding down working class living standards. Jack Jones was architect of the Social Contract. (Photo: John Sturrock, Report)

ising *against* working class attempts to get better wages and conditions. The restrictions on picketing in the 'Concordat' between the Labour government and the TUC were in many respects worse than those in the Employment Bill, showing that union leaders fear rank and file power almost as much as the Tories.

It's no mystery why trade union leaders behave in this way: it's their job. Trade unions exist to get the best possible deal for their members in capitalism. The problem is – if workers win all their struggles for better pay, less work and better conditions, capitalists go bankrupt and workers end up on the dole. Our solution is to fight for a better system. But union leaders have 'solved' this problem by pressing for better wages and conditions only when the employers can 'afford' them.

So, trade unionism accepts the existence and the ground rules of capitalism – the exploitation of workers by bosses. The aim of union leaders is not to *win* struggles, but instead to *compromise*, using mass industrial action only as a threat or a bargaining counter. That's why they're against any sections of the rank and file developing independent strength and organisation.

Over the past twenty-five years, successive governments have seen the potential stabilising influence of 'responsible' trade union leaders. They've given them knighthoods and ermine. More important, they've drawn them increasingly into major government committees

'trying to make British industry successful.' So it's hardly surprising that the AUEW has supported the Edwardes Plan for 'rescuing' Leyland, or that Len Murray spoke these words to a chorus of boos at the TUC demonstration on March 9th 1980:

'We say to the Government: "get round a table with us. Let's together sort out the problems of this country's economy and get it working."'

For all these reasons we say it's not enough to build your whole industrial strategy around the perspective of changing right-wing union leaders for 'left wing' leaders *to do the same job*. This strategy – favoured particularly by the Communist Party – has nearly always failed. Both Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon were 'left wing' candidates in the TGWU and AUEW – supported by the Broad Left. We have to begin to understand that it's the pressures on these men because of the way their job is defined that lead them to turn against the working class.

Obviously, we think it would be much better for the working class if trade unions were all led by people with similar politics to Scargill. But the fact is that they would only get there because of growing rank and file militancy. And the only way to prevent even people like Scargill going the same way as all the others is strong pressure from a powerful rank and file. At present, this isn't happening. In fact some of the *right-wing* union leaders have a large amount of support in their unions: in elections over the past three years, right-winger Terry



Arthur Scargill leading the miners at Grunwick. (Photo: Andrew Wiard, Report):

Duffy beat 'left-winger' Bob Wright in the AUEW Presidential election, and in the TGWU, Moss Evans (a 'moderate') got far more votes than Alex Kitson — the Broad Left's candidate.

In our view, trade union leaders represent all of the weaknesses and none of the strengths of the working class in this country. That's why we can't rely on them to lead a struggle against the Tory measures. The only way forward is to rebuild rank and file power and militancy.

Defy the law

Take the Employment Act. Lobbies,

marches and leaflets — even one day stoppages — spread the word and demonstrate opposition, but they didn't stop the Act becoming law. So some socialists are arguing that we should force the TUC to call a General Strike. We think that's wrong. We're all in favour of a General Strike if there's a growing and powerful rank and file movement calling for that kind of action — and capable of sustaining it in the likely event of a sell-out by the union leaderships. That is not the situation today.

Instead, we've got to take a longer

view. Now that the Employment Act is law, the only way it's going to be defeated is for rank and file workers to *defy the law* and get overwhelming support from all sections of the working class. We believe that it's only by *organising* along the lines described in the previous three chapters that we can move towards such a situation.

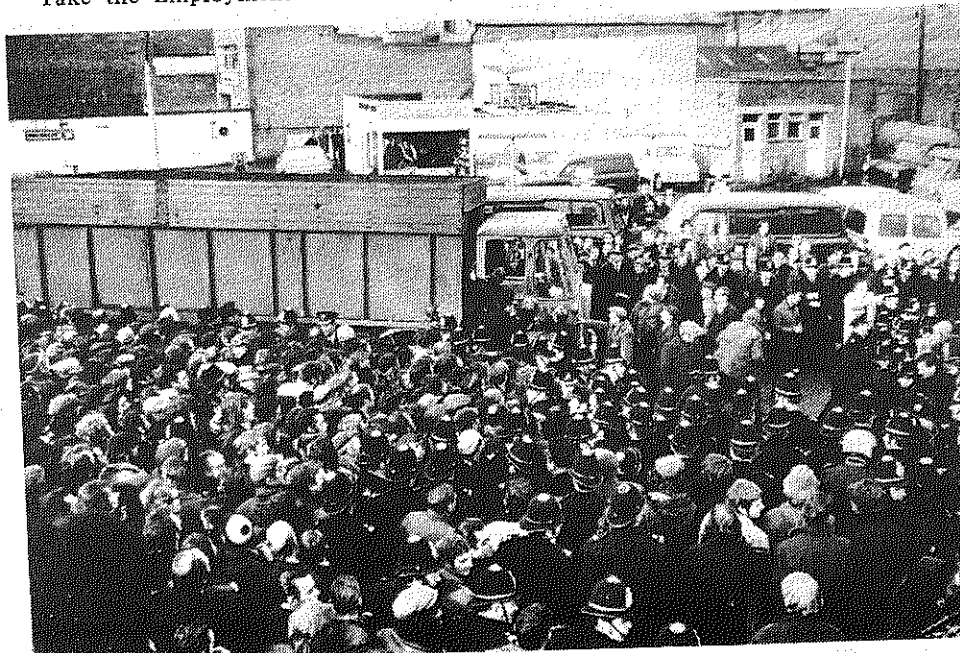
Conclusion

There's only one way to defeat the ruling class offensive. That's by building a mass movement which combines the power of the rank and file with socialist politics that mark a real break from the reformism of the trade union and Labour leaders.

In the past eight years, we've seen the potential political power of the rank and file — the miners and dockers during the Heath government, and the Ford workers, lorry drivers, hospital workers and local authority workers under Callaghan.

But if that power is used simply to return a Labour government unconditionally, then we'll have achieved nothing. We'll be back in the old cycle of anti-working class Tory government followed by anti-working class Labour government.

So over the next four years — or however long this Tory government stays in office — we've got to begin to prepare the ground for a break from this cycle. That means preparing people for the anti-working class policies of the next Labour government, and starting to build a mass movement which represents the organised political independence of the rank and file from Labour. *In other words, a socialist rank and file movement.*



Engineers and miners shut the Saltley coke depot during the '72 miners' strike.

Ch9. About Big Flame

The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation

This pamphlet has been about organising at work. But we've made references to revolutionary organisations. What exactly are the connections between the two?

In Britain today there are many revolutionary socialist groups. They all share the aim of demolishing the power of the employers over us, and organising a new society in which working class people will have power and control over the wealth. Why then so many organisations? Basically, there are differences in the socialist movement over two questions: what kind of society we're trying to create, and how to get there. We know that people find it confusing and off-putting to see so much fragmentation. But we still think there are overwhelming reasons why militants should try to discover more about these organisations, make a choice and join one. Here are some of the reasons:

1. It gives you an idea of what communism might be like; it starts you thinking about many new things.

Whereas capitalism appeals to the anti-social side of people's nature – greed, individualism, thinking only of yourself – socialism and communism appeal to the social side: to solidarity, support and co-operation. The best of the revolutionary organisations try to 'practice what they preach' – their members treat each other as equals, who are not status or power hungry for themselves, and who are actively opposed to sexism, racism and anti-gay prejudice.

Being a member, you'll also be in a better position to learn from, and contribute to the body of theoretical knowledge which is the rock on which any socialist group must be built. However, theory is not a holy writ. All members should be able to take part in the democratic process of adding to and changing theory.

2. It helps you make a break with the politics of compromise.

There's no doubt that work in the unions and in the Labour Party is important. But in the long term, on its own, such work limits you to the defensive perspective of these bodies. A revolutionary organisation puts you in contact with a wide range of militants who share the same aim – not of getting the best deal in a bad society, but of fighting for a new society where there's no exploitation of men and women.

3. It provides support and breaks isolation.

As a socialist or militant, you're more likely to be out on a limb at work. Among your mates, you're probably most likely to get involved in 'aggro' with management. You may be labelled as a 'commie' by management, and the label is picked up and used against you by some of the workforce. The victories are

usually few – and there may be long demoralising periods of no struggle at all.

Belonging to a socialist organisation gives you a longer-term perspective – of working towards working class unity, slowly, but surely. It enables you to understand why a defeat has happened. Surrounded by militants and comrades in similar situations, you realise that it's the world that's insane, not you!

The organisation can also provide practical help, ideas and the benefit of the experience of others to help you produce a leaflet, a branch bulletin, show a film, discuss something you've read or a new document your management have presented to the stewards' committee.

4. It helps you see beyond your immediate problems to see the need for change in society as a whole, and it gives you an international perspective.

Capitalism operates as a whole social system – part of the socialist organisation's job is to help link up the various groups and forces fighting to change society. Take the example of women working in factories or hospitals. The fact they're on the lowest grades and get the worst rates is caused by the position of women *in society as a whole*. So no organisation which has a workplace as its only focus (e.g. a union branch) can do much about the super-exploitation of women in the workplace, *unless* it makes links with those social forces fighting for the liberation of women in the wider society e.g. the women's liberation movement.

Becoming a member of a revolutionary organisation can also help you develop an internationalist outlook. Time and again, the bosses have thrown workers into battledress to fight their brother and sister workers from another country in defence of their bosses' interests. The slogan of all revolutionary socialist groups is 'workers of the world unite', and most socialist groups have international links. These can have very practical results too. For instance during the steel strike, contacts made through socialist groups helped striking British steelworkers to raise support from rank and file steelworkers in several other countries.

5. At a much later stage in the class struggle, political organisation has a key part to play in leading the working class to seize power from the capitalists.

So what about Big Flame?

Many people are put off left groups because they are small, or because they're often dogmatic and self-important. So why should Big Flame be any different?

We don't claim to be free of all problems – but we're trying to find answers to some of the important ones:

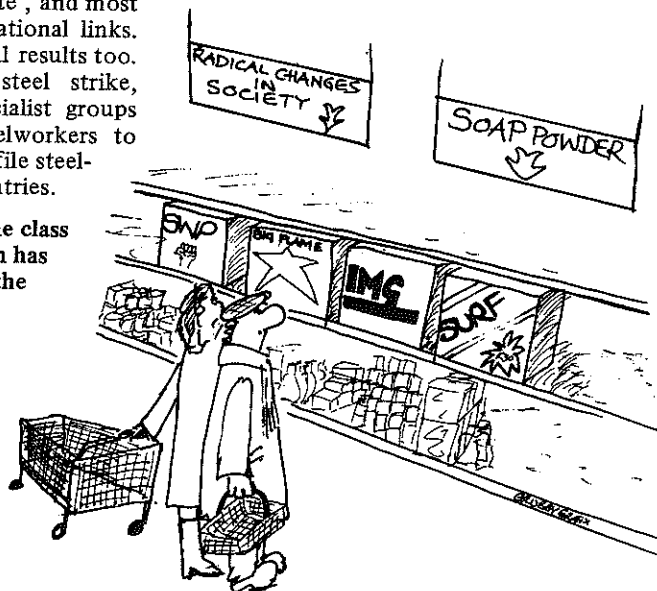
● We say class first, party second. Revolutionary organisation must be the servant of the class struggle, gaining its strength through its efforts to help create mass organisations of the working class, and *earning* the right to give a lead. Class power and party power grow together.

● We believe in the need for the political independence of the movements, campaigns, and rank and file groupings we work in and with. The women's movement, black organisations, industrial rank and file groups must be free to develop the struggle for the needs of their sections of the class.

● We try not to be dogmatic or sectarian. All revolutionaries have a lot to learn. We'll work with anyone or any grouping as long as we agree on the particular question on which we're to work together.

● Our politics starts not from abstract principles, but from the real needs and everyday struggle of working class people.

We know that there is little we can write to convince militants to work with us or to join us. Many organisations say they put the class struggle first. We know that the only way of convincing militants is in what we *do*. Therefore we say to anyone reading this: work with our members in the Ford Combine, in Fightback, in trades councils, in health and safety committees and on shop stewards committees, and join us in the debate about this pamphlet. Then you can decide how genuine our claims are. You can also find out more about what we have to offer, and about our politics more generally. Our first priority is to develop a political dialogue and to carry out political work together with our sympathisers – asking you to join comes after this, not before.



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Organising to Win

Over the past few years, the working class has taken a hammering. Five years of Labour government has left workplace organisation in many sectors seriously weakened.

And now we're in the second year of a Tory government which is mounting an all-out attack on the *rank and file*.

This pamphlet is about why we've been losing so many struggles at work, and how we can start winning once again. And it's about how we can defeat the Tories.

— other 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 the basis for discussing the organisation of a mass politics tendency.

Labouring under the Tories or a Socialist Alternative? 20p
A new pamphlet which argues the 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.

Century of the Unexpected 65p
Another new pamphlet which puts forward new insights about the nature of 'socialist' societies arguing that they should be seen as a new mode of production — state collectivism.

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

The Crisis in Education 30p
An analysis of the restructuring of education which argues for taking 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
Articles from the Big Flame newspaper covering such topics as fascism and women, the National Front and youth, police harassment and black people, and includes an interview with A. Sivanandan.

Sexuality and Fascism 30p
A reprint of papers from a Big Flame dayschool on women in Nazi Germany; women and the NF; and the NF and masculinity and fascism.

The Past Against our Future: fighting racism and fascism 50p
A new pamphlet which examines the history of racism and fascism, the role of racism and fascism in the present crisis and their relationship to sexism, the history of the anti-racist, anti-fascist movement including the lessons to be learned from the ANL and the future directions the struggle should take.

Revolutionary Socialism 50p
The magazine of Big Flame. Subscription: 4 issues for £2.
Back issues available:

No. 5. Articles on the Labour Party, workers' plans, socialist feminism and the left, the left in Europe. Includes interviews with Raymond Williams and Mike Cooley.

No. 4. Articles on local organising, health, communal living and childcare.

No. 3. Articles on recent events in Italy, the Labour Party, shop stewards, women and the labour market.

No. 2. Articles on black autonomy, youth culture, abortion, the crisis of the revolutionary left.

No. 1. Articles on Socialist Unity, Argentina, Middle East and Portugal.

Also available:

Ireland: rising in the north 20p

Portugal: a blaze of freedom 30p

Chile si! 30p

Women's struggle notes issues 2 to 5 15p each

All these publications can be obtained by writing to Big Flame, 217 Wavertree Road, Liverpool 7.

Make Cheques and postal orders payable to Big Flame Publications and include 10p postage for each item ordered.