

THE
POLITICS
OF
Militant

20p

A
**workers'
ACTION**
PAMPHLET

LEFT ACTION

BULLETIN
FOR
YOUNG
SOCIALISTS

SUBSCRIBE +++ SUBSCRIBE +++ SUBSCRIBE

If you, or members of your YS would like to take
LEFT ACTION regularly, or if you would like to
order copies in bulk, write to Linda Gregory,
7 Newman Road, Sheffield, S9 1LP.

The tendency grouped around the weekly paper "Militant" has grown considerably in recent years. It absolutely dominates the Labour Party Young Socialists, is influential in many Constituency Labour Parties, and has much increased its trade union support, notably in the civil service unions.

"Militant" claims to be a Marxist, even a Trotskyist, paper. We believe it is necessary to clearly and sharply assess these claims. Our basic conclusion is that they are worthless. "Militant" is, at bottom, a reformist and not a revolutionary Marxist tendency.

One accusation that will no doubt be thrown at us is that by publishing this pamphlet we are aiding the present witchhunt being organised by the Labour Party right-wing and sections of the Tribune "left". But then it is nearly always easier to smear one's critics than to answer their arguments. Such an accusation would be entirely false. We stand absolutely in favour of the democratic right of "Militant" supporters (like any other tendency of working class opinions) to organise for their ideas within the Labour Party. Not only that, but "Militant's" policies place it in the same camp as Tony Benn and the other left reformists.

The Transfer of Power

"Such is the potential power of the working class in modern society" a "Militant" supporter argues "it would be entirely possible to carry out peacefully and democratically the socialist transformation of society. The introduction, as Clement Attlee suggested, of an Enabling Act in Parliament to take over the commanding heights of the economy coupled with the mobilisation of the 11,000,000 strong trade union movement would render the capitalist class impotent in the face of that power".

After the major (200-250) monopolies had been taken over, "with compensation only on the basis of proven need", they would be run "under workers control and management". This means that the boards would have 1/3rd representatives of the unions in the industry, 1/3rd representatives of the Trades Union Council and 1/3rd representatives of the government; and would be subject to a general "socialist plan of production". So we are told it would be possible to bring about the introduction of socialism peacefully on the basis of present democratic institutions.

Nor was this statement just an individual aberration. Jim Brookshaw, criticising the Communist Party's draft programme in "Militant", writes "The Marxist left in the Labour Party have also held out the possibility of peaceful socialist change...if the Labour government were to nationalise the 200 monopolies in Parliament - backed up by the 11 million strong trade union and labour movement - this would eliminate the economic power of the capitalists, paralyse the army tops, rally the middle classes and politically uneducated workers behind its banner and thus ensure a peaceful change".

(*2)

Now this is a decidedly strange position for a group which claims to be Marxist, and in order to investigate it we need first to consider the fundamental nature of the state itself, something invariably avoided by "Militant". Engels summarised its historical role and function like this:

"The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without...it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state." (*3)

The state arises from the point when society divides into classes and the privileged class needs a special machine of repression to control the oppressed and exploited classes. Thus the present state is not an empty container to be filled with whatever class content one likes; but the absolutely indispensable support for the capitalist economic system.

The well publicised links of top civil servants and generals with big business are not the machinations of evil men but the logical consequence of the nature of the state. These are not people who will willingly give up their power and privileges, they will

fight to defend them. As Marx and Engels pointed out "one thing especially was proved by the Commune, that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes'". (*4)

On the road to socialism the working class will have to smash the capitalist state and substitute a different kind of state corresponding to the needs of the working class as ruling class. It would be fundamentally different. The working class — unlike previous revolutionary classes, such as the bourgeoisie — is the basic productive class. There is no class that it can aspire to exploit. A working class state would — unlike all previous states — assure real freedom for the majority, not just for a wealthy minority. Once the resistance of the capitalists and their agents has been dealt with the need for a special repressive apparatus would disappear and, in time, the proletarian state, as Engels put it, "dies down of itself".

Such a society would be the first, since the dawn of civilisation, which ordinary working people would really control. Today the working class is discouraged from active participation in politics through the struggle to make ends meet, poor education, the constant barrage of propaganda to the effect that its not our place to think politically, and the divorce of parliament from the real centres of power in industry and the state bureaucracy; combined with the lack of any control over the actions of our elected representatives.

A working class state would be very different: based at all levels on representative bodies (workers councils) which not only took decisions but saw to their implementation as well. Councils, whose members could be thrown out of office the moment they lost the support of their electors and who received none of the special privileges and honours heaped on our mis-representatives today.

This conception of democracy is not to be found in the day to day propaganda of the "Militant" tendency. From time to time the question of workers councils is, of course, raised; but only on the level of wouldn't it be nice if a socialist society was run by soviets. They are not seen as being at all central to the struggle for socialism. Instead we are told (unequivocally, no less!) that socialism "can be achieved democratically", in other words through the existing narrow framework of formal bourgeois democracy. But as Engels pointed out, a revolution tears up the existing political structures, to replace them with a far more open and real democracy. The falsity of "Militant's" claim to be a Marxist Tendency is clearly shown here.

So years ago the Labour left had much the same position as "Militant" holds today. Arguing against them in 1925, Trotsky wrote:

"Let us allow for the minute that a Labour majority in parliament results from the next elections and that as a start it resolves in the most legal fashion to hand over the landlord's land to the farmers and the chronically unemployed without compensation, to introduce a high tax on capital and to abolish the monarchy, the House of Lords and a few other obscene institutions. Their cannot be the least doubt that the possessing classes would not give in without a fight, and all the less so since the entire police, judicial and military apparatus is wholly in their hands. In the history of Britain there has already been one instance of civil war when the King rested upon a minority in the Commons and a majority in the Lords against the majority in the Commons and a minority in the Lords. That affair was in the 1640s. Only an idiot, can seriously imagine that a repetition of a civil war of that kind (albeit on new class bases) can be prevented in the twentieth century by the evident success of the last three centuries of a Christian world-outlook, humanitarian feelings, democratic tendencies and all the other excellent things. The same example of Ulster (Trotsky has just discussed the activities of the Ulster Volunteer Force before World War 1) shows that the possessing classes do not play around when parliament, their own institution, finds itself compelled to squeeze their privileged position. In preparing to take state power it is thus necessary to prepare for all the consequences that flow from the inevitable resistance of the possessing classes. It must be firmly understood. If a truly workers' government came to power in Britain even in an ultra-democratic way, civil war would become unavoidable. The workers' government would be forced to suppress the resistance of the privileged classes. To do this by means of the old state apparatus, the old police, the old courts, the old army would be impossible. A workers' government created by parliamentary means would be forced to construct new revolutionary organs for itself, resting upon the trade unions and working class organisations in general. This would lead to an exceptional growth in the activity and initiative of the working masses.

On the basis of a direct struggle against the exploiting classes the trade unions would actively draw closer together not only in their top layers but at the bottom levels as well and would arrive at the necessity of creating local delegate meetings, ie councils (soviet) of workers' deputies. A truly Labour government, that is to say, a government dedicated to the end to the interests of the proletariat would find itself in this way compelled to smash the old state apparatus as the instrument of the possessing classes and oppose it with workers' councils. That means that the democratic origin of the Labour government — even had this proved possible — would lead to the necessity of counterposing revolutionary class force to the reactionary opposition". (*5)

Historical experience confirms these arguments. The workers' revolution in Russia took 3 long years of bloody civil war, despite the determination of the workers, and wide sections of the peasantry, to win. What is more, they were not led by centrists being pushed to the left by "the Marxist Tendency", but by the most revolutionary party the world has ever known — the Bolsheviks.

But, "Militant" supporters argue, the British population is overwhelmingly working class and could render the capitalists powerless to resist. This assumes firstly that the capitalists had lost their grip over all the groups of people they currently dominate politically (especially the army and police) and secondly that there would be no foreign capitalist intervention. The first is unlikely and the second virtually ruled out.

There could be two reasons for this latter assumption: the likelihood of revolutionary mobilisations in the other imperialist powers or that "respect for national sovereignty" has been learned by the capitalists. Such mobilisations would doubtless take place and be of great significance, but would not necessarily be decisive. Events from Vietnam to Portugal via Chile disprove the second argument. In this last case, we are told, that if Allende had taken bold socialist measures from the start against the capitalists and had armed the workers there would have been no coup. The problem with this argument is firstly that there was no chance of Allende's government doing anything of the sort — if there had been the bourgeoisie would have moved sooner — and even had Allende followed "Militant"'s advice it would not have stopped an attempted coup, although it might have ensured its failure.

"Militant" supporters might argue that in this case the violence would be the fault of the capitalists and not the working class. This thoroughly pacifist and moralistic notion — the man who fires the first shot is to blame — would be of little comfort to workers lulled into believing that a peaceful road to socialism was possible, when being butchered by the forces of reaction.

A further illustration of "Militant's" rejection of the need to overthrow the state is contained in the phrase "nationalisation, with compensation only on the basis of proven need". For real Marxists the demand for nationalisation without compensation is important because it strikes at the heart of the system of capitalist private property. It is a demand that arises out of the needs of struggle within present day society; but is also directed towards its overthrow. Any attempt to argue about amounts of compensation inevitably restricts the idea of nationalisation to something granted by Parliament. It excludes the revolutionary concept of the workers seizing control of industry and demanding that the state 'legitimise' their action through nationalisation.

The purpose of the phrase is supposed to be to deflect criticism to the effect that the small shareholder would be hurt. This says rather a lot about the class instincts of the audience "Militant" seeks to address. In any case, even the proposal to reduce compensation to the level of proven need (whatever that may mean), would rouse the violent opposition of the bourgeoisie against a working class unprepared for revolutionary struggle.

It might well be that a proletarian state would grant some compensation to the former owners of industry, as a means of weakening their hostility and dividing them. But the amount of compensation, if any, would be based on what the workers' state could afford, not on any alleged right to compensation.

Much of this criticism can be avoided by a simple device. "Militant" defines the class nature of a state solely by the level of nationalisation of the economy, without considering who runs it. State capitalism is excluded, even as a theoretical possibility. This allows Grant to give certificates of proletarian virtue to countries like Burma on the basis of nationalisations without having to bother with how they came about. This will be taken up in the next section.

The Stalinist States

The Marxist perspective of proletarian revolution seemed to indicate that the revolution would happen first in the most advanced capitalist countries, because socialism was not possible except by building on and surpassing the most advanced societies of capitalism. But in fact the conditions for a successful revolution first synchronised in a relatively backward country. By 1917 the old rulers of Russia could no longer rule, and the capitalists were too weak to take, and hold, power; but the working class was organised, willing, and able to take power. The Bolsheviks, who lead them, believed that Marxists had been right to place the advanced countries at the centre of revolutionary perspectives. They saw the opportunity which opened the possibility for the Russian working class to take state power, as no more than an opportunity for the world working class to begin to outflank the capitalist system which, in Russia, had broken at its weakest link. They expected that revolutions would quickly follow in the advanced countries. This would restore the "natural order" to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, putting advanced Germany in the forefront.

But the uprisings of European workers were everywhere defeated. The Bolsheviks who had the courage to lead the working class to power had repeatedly insisted that Russia, taken in isolation, was not ready for the building of a socialist system. Nevertheless the isolated Bolshevik government had no choice but to maintain itself in power, to "hold on" until the west European workers changed the balance of forces.

In this situation of isolation amidst backwardness a section of the Bolshevik party developed into a privileged bureaucracy. It originated like a trade union bureaucracy but with the vital difference that it controlled the state machine. By the mid 1920's it freed itself from working class control and defeated the Trotskyists who sought to defend both the interests of the working class and the revolutionary perspectives of the Bolsheviks who made the 1917 revolution. Initially it balanced between the working class on one side and the rich peasants and New Economic Policy bourgeoisie (*6) on the other, but without disturbing the economic structure. It was a 'Bonapartist' formation erected on top of the society created by the October revolution. But its own position in society was inseparably bound up with the maintenance of the economic system created by October. So that when the Kulaks (*7), in effect, attempted to restore a free market economy they were suppressed. The bureaucracy emerged from a muffled civil war with the peasants as masters of Russian society, and maintains itself in power to this day.

Logically there are only three possible explanations of the Stalinist state. It either corresponds to one of the 2 main classes in capitalist society, in which case it is either state capitalist or a workers state; or it is an entirely new form of society. The situation was sufficiently new and unexpected to make all three possibilities plausible. While the bureaucracy has many of the nastiest features of ruling classes, it could only be a capitalist class if the whole economic system was capitalist. Trotsky dismissed this and argued that Russia remained a workers state, but a degenerated workers state in which the socialised means of production were combined with a totalitarian bureaucracy. But he insisted on the need for a political revolution to smash the Stalinist state machine and restore workers democracy.

After World War II the West European 'Communist' parties collaborated with the bourgeoisie to stabilise capitalist regimes, and the revolutionary movements of the working class were derailed and defeated. However in East Europe, China, Cuba and Indochina capitalism was overthrown. After much discussion Trotskyists decided that these new states were deformed workers states corresponding to the social forms of the Russian degenerated workers state. They came into existence using it as a model or as the result of Russian army action, aiming to make Eastern Europe safe for the interests of the Russian bureaucracy.

Despite different assessments, the key ideas were that the old capitalist states were destroyed either by CP-led armies (or in Cuba the 26th July movement) or the Russian army, and that the old ruling class retained no control. It was never a matter of the state substituting itself for a ruling class that continued to live in suspended animation — as the Nasserite Egypt, or present-day Syria.

While Militant's theory also uses the terminology of degenerated and deformed workers states, its essence is very different. Grant argues that the smashing of the old state machines by CP-led armies was inessential to the Yugoslav and Chinese revolutions. It was the needs of the productive forces, which could only develop in a statified economy, that was fundamental. Revolution was not necessary. The Stalinist

states were Bonapartist military, police dictatorships. Even when such Bonapartist states originated as the protectors of capitalist property relations, they could peacefully evolve into Proletarian Bonapartist states, Grant uses this idea to explain the unexpected stability of the Stalinist regimes and the experience of Yugoslavia and China, where after the revolutionary seizure of power the regime evolved relatively slowly towards transforming society. For "Militant" the key idea is now Bonapartism which is given a far greater importance than Marx, who coined the term to explain the French bourgeois revolution, would ever have suspected.

The central error in this theory is the failure to understand the central significance of the revolutions carried out in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and Vietnam. By minimising them Grant has rendered himself incapable of distinguishing between revolutions which have rooted out capitalism and the development of state capitalist regimes such as those in Syria and Burma — which "Militant" insists on describing as deformed workers' states. In reality the Bonapartist regimes in these countries have not destroyed capitalism, but act as locum for it; leaving open the possibility of restoring a market economy, as has occurred in Egypt.

It must be recognised that all the theories which seek to explain the nature of the Stalinist states have serious difficulties inherent in them. This is hardly surprising given the complexity and unexpectedness of the problem. But the consequences of "Militant's" error are massive. The idea of the autonomy of the state, of the transformation of a given state from one class character to another destroys the entire Marxist conception of the state, class and revolution. It is this theory that opens the door to the idea of a peaceful socialist revolution being possible.

In fact, Grant's theory of a Bonapartism that can retain its being, while changing its class character and role, is in reality a theory which explains the Stalinist states as a new form of class society. Although "Militant" might deny it, what they describe is a stable social formation which takes power, maintains its social being and identity; and then — at will — transforms society on the model of the Soviet Union in the phase of utter Stalinist degeneration. That is a new type of society. It is not a working class revolution, it is not a revolution made by deformed workers' parties or by a genuine radicalised petty-bourgeois nationalist movement, nor is it capitalist; it is an entirely new combination.

The Labour Movement

The most obvious feature of "Militant's" propaganda is that it consists almost entirely of advice and pleas offered to the existing Labour Party and, to a lesser extent, trade union leaders. In 1973 Grant wrote that "criticism" of these leaders "must be skilful and friendly. It should be positive, contrasting the Marxist programme, ideas, methods and policies with the lame and inadequate policies of Left Reformism." (*8) We would not deny the necessity of relating to the leaders of the official Labour movement, both 'left' and 'right', but the key questions are with what aim and what expectations.

"Militant's" position is based on a scenario which expects the right-wing in the Parliamentary Labour Party to split away and form a National Government with the Tories, leaving the Tribunites in control of the party. They will be pushed to the left by the working class so that they occupy a centrist position. A strong 'Marxist Tendency' (i.e. "Militant") could then persuade the leadership to carry through a socialist transformation of society.

Such a split is unlikely at present. It is probably true that we shall continue to see an erosion of the extreme right wing of the P.L.P. towards some kind of 'centre' party position. But most of the leadership and the parliamentary party have no intention of cutting themselves off from their one marketable asset, the party's working class base. The disquiet of even the right-wing at the possible effects of the recent deal with the Liberals is evidence of that. The Tribunites don't want a split either. Despite the pyrotechnic displays of opposition to the government's policies produced by some of them, they have made it quite clear that they put loyalty to the government above fighting for their politics. Less than half the "Tribune" group's paper membership was prepared even to abstain on the March 1976 Public Expenditure White Paper, and they duly jumped back into line when the question was rephrased as an issue of confidence in the government. If they are prepared, supported incidentally by "Militant", to declare their confidence in a government which is making greater attacks on workers' living standards than the Tories could even have attempted, then they will clearly do everything possible to avert a split.

"Militant's error is based on the belief that the Labour Party is fundamentally divided between a consciously reformist wing and one that seeks to fight for working class interests. They argue that a split is unavoidable in times of social crisis. But the Labour Party is not like that. It was formed by the unions to carry their basic function of bargaining within the system into the sphere of parliament. It first took on real life, when the Taff Vale judgement made the reform of the law relating to trade unions an urgent necessity. Of course many workers have turned to the party looking for more than just a few reforms; but only to be cruelly tricked by the party leadership as a whole. Even in 1920, Lenin was scathing about the party, which had only recently adopted that self same Clause 4 so dearly beloved by "Militant" today. Speaking at the 2nd Congress of the Communist International, he said that "although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries; and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie....(it) exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns"(*9) In passing it might be noted that Clause 4 is a thoroughly Fabian aim. It assumes that "common ownership" and "popular administration" will be organised from above, and not by the workers themselves. It is permeated with the "religion of gradualness".

Grant's "skilful and friendly" criticism looks rather odd, when compared with Trotsky's comments on the Labour and trade union bureaucracy: "The Labour Party and the Trade Unions.....are the fundamental support of the domination of the British bourgeoisie. The latter cannot be overthrown without overthrowing the Labourite bureaucracy."(*10) "If there were not a bureaucracy of the trade unions, then the police, the army, the courts, the Lords, the Monarchy would appear before the proletarian masses as nothing but pitiful, ridiculous playthings. The bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British imperialism."(*11). It is only because the working class is misled by the trade union leaders, and indeed the whole structure of the Labour movement, that the system has lasted this long. 'Militant' supporters might argue that this is proof of their argument that if the leaders were to fight for socialism it could be achieved tomorrow. But it is not just through some theoretical error or mistake that the bureaucracy supports capitalism. It has specific and anti-revolutionary interests, from which no sections are likely to break without major independent working class struggles.

Yet this bureaucracy is going to turn into its opposite, leaping out of its comfortable niche within capitalism, under the impact of friendly criticism. Ted Grant must indeed be a persuasive man!

However, the leaders of the official Labour movement do retain the allegiance of most working people. It is our task to break that allegiance and reconstruct the movement in such a way that it can achieve socialism. That, clearly, cannot be done by ignoring the bureaucrats, or engaging in purely ritual denunciations of their crimes. Our basic approach should be to demand that the leadership break with the capitalists' class and act instead in the workers' interests. This involves raising demands for a sliding scale of wages, work or full pay, the index linking of social spending and so on. But it must be done by coupling demands on the leaders with action at rank and file level. Thus the sliding scale of social expenditure implies a vigorous struggle against all cuts.

By concentrating attention on demands that the leadership change society, "Militant" not only help maintain illusions in the bureaucracy; but also undermine independent working class action. They focus attention on the Palace of Westminster and not the factory floor as the base from which to overthrow capitalism. Nobody except the more hysterical sections of the Tory Party and apparently "Militant" expect to see Tony Benn leading the British revolution. Yet "Militant's scenario sees him, or men and women like him, doing just that (albeit under the influence of friendly criticism!). This can only help Benn to retain his left-wing credentials. It fosters illusions like those of the women of Imperial Typewriters in Hull, who occupied their factory and hung a sign over the gate saying "We stay here until Wedgie says we can go".

Both faults are apparent in "Militant's favourite election slogan of "Labour to power on a Socialist Programme". It can mean virtually anything. To most workers a socialist programme means more schools and hospitals, limited nationalisation and better social benefits; to "Militant" it means the nationalisation of all major industry and a society run by the workers. By mixing up the two, the revolutionary content is drained from the concept of socialism and the left credentials of the leadership are boosted. Confused though the Imperial Typewriters workers were, they were prepared to fight to save their jobs. But the logic of "Labour to power on a socialist programme" is not indep-

endent action coupled with demands on the leaders which actually do relate to workers' needs and illusions. It is to counterpose appeals to the bureaucrats and rank and file action. This same trait is to be found in their idea of "workers' control and management" where they demand that the boards of companies be composed of $\frac{1}{3}$ representatives of the unions in the industry, $\frac{1}{3}$ from the TUC and $\frac{1}{3}$ government appointees. This is a possible scheme in a workers' state (it was adopted in Russia during the period of War Communism). But under capitalism it amounts to class collaboration, for this is not just a general proposal for the future; but it is advocated here and now for the nationalised industries. Even under a Labour Government the boards would at best consist of $\frac{2}{3}$ labour lieutenants of capital, and that assumes real workers' representatives not local union bureaucrats as the other third. As the experience of the Social Contract shows, such a board would be far more concerned with the 'national interest' than with the workers' interests. In any case, given the nature of the capitalist economy, any scheme which involves workers taking responsibility for management ends up as a do-it-yourself exploitation and should be opposed. Of course, we want a society which really will be run by the workers, but schemes, which involve workers in the machinery of running the capitalist economy cut away from and not towards that goal. This is different from the degree of control 'from below' that exists in well organised factories, where the management's decisions are, in effect, vetoed by the action of the workers.

It is not surprising that a tendency which is so concerned not to be nasty to the existing leadership, is none too principled in its defence of democratic rights within the movement. It might, after all, upset their relationship with the Left wing of the bureaucracy. Of course, when it suits them, "Militant" can shout as loud for democracy as anyone. When their rights were being suppressed at the 1976 Conference of the National Organisation of Labour Students, they rightly exposed the manoeuvrings of its Tribune leadership. Yet when they are in control, their methods are hardly by-words for democracy. This can be seen in the notoriously platform-dominated LPYS Conferences. It is quite usual, in a major debate, to have a report from the National Committee, followed by the proposing of *Militant's* composite resolution, a series of "Militant" supporters being called from the floor, a reply from the platform and voting; without alternative resolutions being called or their supporters allowed to speak.

A more striking example was provided last Autumn in Chester LPYS where "the regional YS secretary Mick Slater, a "Militant" supporter, excluded a "Rebel"/Workers' Action supporter from a meeting with the clear intention of preventing a comrade moving a resolution condemning Nick Bradley's support for the 'Social Contract.'"^(*12)

In Cardiff a meeting was called to set up a branch of the LPYS's Youth Campaign Against Unemployment. "At the end of the meeting it was decided to elect a convenor of the campaign, and, to the fury of "Militant" a Workers' Action supporter was elected. Since then "Militant" supporters have tried a number of manoeuvres to oust the convenor — such as calling a meeting without informing all the YS members — all of which have proved unsuccessful. "Militant" supporters finally decided to withdraw from the campaign to set their own one up from scratch — in the process, running off with the money collected at the YCAU's inaugural meeting".

As this report comments: "The political back-stabbing and undemocratic practices, not to say sheer dishonesty, of the "Militant" grouping in this whole affair does not augur well for the campaign nationally."

So weak-kneed are "Militant" that they sometimes cannot even bring themselves to mount a principled defence of their own rights. For instance, in Cardiff South East, Callaghan's constituency, Workers' Action supporters in the Young Socialists proposed a resolution to go to the General Management Committee, opposing the witchhunt. The "Militant" (sic) majority in the meeting rejected it on the grounds that it might provoke the right-wing into closing down the YS branch. In other words, don't rock the boat! This episode vividly shows "Militant" in its true colours; as a tame opposition to Transport House.

If the history of the witchhunt in the 1960's is anything to go by, this timidity will turn to active collaboration as the attack on the left intensifies. To take the best known example, in 1964 one S. Mani — a prominent "Militant" supporter — actively aided the expulsion of a "Keep Left" supporter. His excuse: the issue was hooliganism not politics. His action was endorsed in a special leaflet enclosed with each copy of the paper.

The General Strike

"Militant's" disbelief in working class self-activity comes out very clearly in relation to the most militant and unified form of working class struggle: the general strike. For "Militant" it is always a question of calling on the leaders to take action; never of relating to the workers separate from and against the bureaucracy. Thus they completely miss the most important aspect of struggles like the May 1968 events in France: their spontaneity. The French general strike and occupations which reached nearly insurrectionary proportions developed against the barely veiled hostility of the trade union and Communist Party leaders, who took every opportunity to derail it.

During 1972, there was a spontaneous general strike in Quebec over the jailing of three prominent union leaders. Although the issue involved was the defence of officials, it got at best lukewarm support from the trade union leadership as a whole. It is worth quoting at length from a contemporary account since it shows up clearly the potential of a spontaneous strike and the barrenness of "Militant's" conception:

"It all started in Sept-Iles, a small heavily industrialised town with a population of 18,000 and a highly unionised working class..."

"The day after the imprisonment of the union leaders a spontaneous strike broke out, which rapidly involved the whole of the labour force. A demonstration led to clashes with the police who were bottled up in the police station. To prevent reserves being brought in, the workers blocked the main road, took over the airport, and jammed all the telephone lines.

"The Quebec Minister of Justice complained that the workers had taken over the town and he was correct. The local radio station was occupied by the strikers and used to spread the news of the strike."

"The workers even forced the Mayor to plead with the provincial government for the release of the three union leaders....."

"Within days the strike had spread, to a greater or lesser extent, to every town and city in Quebec, and seven more towns had been taken over by striking workers. In effect, there was a general strike...."

"In Sept-Iles the shops and stores were only allowed to open by consent of the strikers who imposed rigid price controls.....a rudimentary police force was formed to patrol the streets and also to keep an eye on the state police. Elsewhere newspaper offices were broken into and the papers censored. Anti-strike editorials were taken out and replaced by union notices. At least a dozen radio stations were taken over and used to strengthen the strike."(*14)

Of course, given the lack of a clear revolutionary tendency of proven mettle, the reformist leaders were able, in time, to reassert control of the movement. But it clearly proves that there is more to socialist agitation than demands on the leaders.

"Militant's" passivity is reinforced by a far too cataclysmic idea of the consequences of a general strike. We are told: it "inexorably poses the problem of power. It is either/or. The workers take control of society or are defeated. There is no middle

way."(*15) But this is much too rigid. If the bourgeoisie manage to contain the situation, derail the strike with the aid of the union leaders and retain power; it does not mean that they have automatically dealt a shattering blow to the working class. The confidence and militancy of the French workers since 1968 and the 689,000 votes for revolutionary candidates in the last presidential elections are testimony to that fact. The betrayal of the 1926 British General Strike WAS a shattering blow because it hit a movement already in retreat, fighting defensive battles and threatened with unemployment. In addition, it was sold out before the struggle had reached a decisive pitch.

The cataclysmic view leads to passivity and illusion-mongering in relation to the real struggles of the working class. This was nowhere more clearly shown than in the battles to defeat the Industrial Relations Act and the Heath government's pay policy. We were told that it is impermissible to call for an all-out general strike, for such limited ends, because the question of power would inevitably be raised.

This scared "Militant" so much that they dared not raise the necessary steps to deal with the Tories' policies. It took the beginning of generalised industrial action and the threat of more to come to persuade the Tories to put their anti-union law on ice (from which it could have been taken when the situation changed). It took a national miners strike which crippled the economy to break Heath's Phase 3. The logic of the situation was constantly pointing to the need for a general strike. Instead "Militant" contented

:themselves with calling for maximum support for the TUC's two, deliberately feeble, attempts at calling one day strikes; which were clearly not enough, and were designed, as even Grant admitted, at siphoning off militancy.

In reality if the struggle over the Pentonville Five had developed further prior to their release, it would have very likely developed the momentum to smash the Industrial Relations Act for good and could well have gone on to challenge the whole bourgeois order. The key demand of a general strike to smash the Industrial Relations Act was not a limit on the struggle but a focus for it. Not a bar to raising the question of who rules society, but a road to it. Militant's ultra leftism was a road.....to Congress House.

Of course, there are some limited demands that actually do limit the struggle in advance. One was the Socialist Labour League's persistent call for a general strike to force the Tories to resign — to elect a Labour government on a socialist programme. In March 1973 "Militant" quite correctly, if rather unexpectedly, criticised this as parliamentary cretinism. But 8 months earlier their slogans had been: "The TUC must organise a one day general strike!", "Force the Tories to resign", "For a Labour government committed to socialist policies!" The only difference: "Militant's" method would not actually force the Tories out of office!(*16)

Workers' Unity

"Militant has an entirely abstract view of working class unity. they favour it. So do we—but working class unity must be understood as unity IN ACTION round class demands. For "Militant" the abstract forms of unity are often counterposed to the actions of specially oppressed sections of workers.

This led them to oppose the strike by Asian workers at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester who demanded equal opportunity for training and promotion. The white workers and their notoriously racist district officials opposed the strike and scabbed on it. "Militant" attacked the strikers for splitting the workforce and delivered a pious lecture on the need to win over the white workers. In fact this had been tried and had failed, in part due to the bureaucratic strangling of their T&GWU branch.

"Militant", having told black workers that there must be unity at any price, then tell them not to fight to achieve it. The setting up of black caucuses within the unions is also supposed to be divisive. So black workers should sit back and hope that racism will somehow disappear by itself, with perhaps a little paternalist help from Mentmore Terrace. But racialism will never be stamped out unless it is dragged out into the open, confronted; and this necessarily means that it must be organised against.

Their formal position has improved over the last year. They are now prepared to accept the idea of "supporting black self-defence groups that have been set up". They could hardly oppose them in the midst of last year's racist attacks! But the whole emphasis of their propaganda is to counterpose multi-racial labour movement defence to them. In reality, genuine unity will only be built in the present situation by white socialists and militants supporting black self-defence and attempting to draw their unions, Labour Parties etc. into the struggle. Labour movement defence in the abstract is both a daydream and an attempt to avoid the thorny problems of the real world. We must aim to build on black self-defence groups, not counterpose Labour movement defence to them.

This entirely abstract conception of unity is again to be found in their view of the struggle of the Palestinian masses against Israel. They condemn the struggle of the Palestinian guerillas as terrorism and argue that the Middle East conflict can only be ended on the basis of the unity of Arab and Israeli workers. But that unity can only be achieved on the basis of the Jewish workers breaking from Zionist ideology and supporting the Palestinian struggle. Otherwise the Israeli ruling class will always be able to prevent the working class from challenging its rule by stressing the 'need' to defend their settler state against the Palestinians.

The same view of class unity is to be found in "Militant's" opposition to the independent organisation of women to fight sex discrimination. They deny the specific oppression which affects nearly all women as women, regardless of their class position. Working class women are supposed to have nothing in common with ruling class women. This is simply not true: the turning of people into sex-objects, breeding machines and general drudges runs throughout society. Of course, it affects the working class to a far extent and plays a specific role in maintaining the subservience of our class as a whole. It is also only the working class which has the power to put an end to the conditions that give rise to sexism. But not to recognise the oppression of women as women under

capitalism inevitably prevents a serious struggle against it.

In summary: the working class is divided, up to a point, both by race and by sex. This will not be overcome by pious appeals for unity; but by the specially oppressed sections organising to fight their oppression. That is not to say that racism and sexism are the concerns of blacks and women only; these divisions hold back the working class as a whole. That is why all socialists must support struggles for equality and go forward to build real fighting unity on the basis of them. We want unity: but the unity of the barricades, not the graveyard!



Ireland

This is not the place to take up all the problems associated with Ireland, but only those of most immediate importance in assessing "Militant's" position.

The border is now the central feature of Irish political life. As Connolly predicted, partition has created thoroughly reactionary states North and South. It has allowed the ruling class to ossify the sectarian division of the working class in the North; and the rule of the priests in the South. Its destruction would immediately unfreeze the situation. Once the Protestant Ascendancy was broken, Orange workers would have to maintain their living standards as workers and not as a sectarian labour aristocracy. No worker in the North would endure the appalling social services and reactionary legislation of the 26 County state. The basis would thus be laid for united struggle by the entire Irish working class. This is the logic of removing the border, which would tend to operate to some extent whether it was removed "from above" as British imperialism would like; or "from below" by the Irish people. Of course, if the imperialist strategy of getting rid of the non-viable, expensive and politically embarrassing Orange state was successful, they would seek to guarantee the 'stability' of the situation; but with little prospect of long-term success. Clearly the unification of Ireland by the people is vastly preferable. It will probably not be achieved except as part of a socialist revolution; but that should not hinder our solidarity with those who are fighting to achieve it by other — Republican — means. This is not a question of spreading illusions in the politics or methods of struggle of the Provisionals (although they are grossly slandered by "Militant"); but of stating clearly where we stand: for or against the struggle for national unity and freedom.

People who call themselves socialists in Ireland are faced with a choice: either they clearly support the national struggle, but fight on that basis for socialism; or they seek to avoid it. They talk of the need for socialist measures in the abstract, underestimate the division of the working class, and end up becoming quite hysterical when their cosy 'socialist' nook is upset by the unpleasant facts of the real world. Of 'socialists' like Trotsky once said they should be "branded with infamy, if not with a bullet"

There can be no avoiding the fact that sectarian divisions run very deep in the North. They affect all areas of life including the trade unions, making "Militant's" idea of a non-sectarian defence force an absolute non-starter. Even in their structure the trade unions are in part sectarian, with protestant workers tending to belong to the Irish sections of British trade unions and catholic workers to the the 6 County sections of Irish unions. Discrimination in employment means that a higher proportion of Loyalists than Nationalists are unionised. Besides, the unions are only able to function at all by agreeing not to discuss religion or politics!

The whole idea depends on the assumption that sectarianism is the property of a few "psychopaths" outside the working class. But the man who is an AUEW shop steward at work is quite likely to be a UDA member at home. Even allowing for intimidation, the strength of sectarianism was vividly shown by the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike.

Research has shown that those convicted of 'para-military' offences are roughly a cross-section of the 6 Counties working class. The majority were employed, often in skilled jobs and had no previous serious convictions. (*17) They do not correspond to Militant's image of lumpen, criminal or lunatic elements.

Finally the idiocy of the trade union defence force demand can be shown from one example. The Sirocco Engineering Works in East Belfast stands in the Catholic enclave of the Short Strand, where there is 70% unemployment. An enclave in which every pub has been bombed at least once by Loyalist gangs. Of the factory's 600 workers, only four are Catholics. Can the people of that area really trust a trade union defence force?

While "Militant" do call for the immediate withdrawal of British troops, their coupling of it with the demand for a trade union defence force can only spread the illusion, peddled by the press and government, that the troops play a peace-keeping role. The logic of this is that the troops should not be removed until the peace-keeping defence force is ready to take over, although this is sometimes denied by "Militant".

"Militant" sees the "Better Life for All" campaign run by the Northern Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions as an important step forward, with its demands for jobs and houses for all. They criticise the unions for its sluggishness; but, even apart from bureaucratic inertia, there are very definite reasons for this. Any attempt at non-sectarian measures is inevitably seen by Loyalist workers as a threat to their relatively privileged position. They might agree to such measures in the abstract, but any attempt to fight for them would bring them into direct conflict with the entire sectarian structure of the Northern state. They will not accept a struggle on that basis. Similarly the call for an all-Ireland mass party of Labour might seem reasonable to the less diehard protestant workers; until they realised that its first and central political task would be to tear down the border. "Militant" claim to get a good hearing among protestant workers, but this is only by avoiding the central and urgent political tasks.

"Militant" have an evolutionary conception of class relations ripening towards socialism. Even they can see that this isn't happening in the North of Ireland, so, hoping to make things come right, they add something entirely voluntarist: the class appeal to workers as workers that will bring enlightenment, and, in the course of a few quick lectures, dispel the sectarianism of centuries.

For this to be credible the Republicans must be discredited. Apart from apolitical abuse, their position comes down to accusing the Provisionals of individual terrorism and of being outside the Labour Movement. But, as we have seen, they could only be in the Labour Movement as an organised force by giving up the struggle for national unity, by ceasing to exist. In fact many Republicans are active trade unionists, some are shop stewards representing both catholic and protestant workers.

The argument about individual terrorism confuses aims and methods. The Provisionals base themselves on the Nationalist community and have deep roots within it; they are not isolated individuals. But they are fighting a guerilla war and that, inevitably, involves them in individual acts of violence. It does not require a great knowledge of military science to see that a force armed with assorted rifles and home-made bombs is going to be defeated in an open battle against an army equipped with armoured cars, helicopter gunships and sophisticated communications equipment.

"Militant" does not tell us that the Tan war which led to British withdrawal from the South was individual terrorism, although it was fought by similar methods. Most members of the present "Militant" editorial board supported the struggle of the FLN against French imperialism in Algeria, although it was a far more bloody affair, again waged on guerilla lines. All "Militant" succeeds in doing is putting a 'Marxist' gloss on their support for the ravings of the bourgeois press about terrorism.

They would have one believe that the Provisionals aim was to drive all Protestants into the sea and extend the present 26 County state into the North. But the Provisionals have generally opposed sectarian violence as such, while regarding the military and economic representatives of imperialism, together with the Loyalist paramilitaries as legitimate targets. Their programme, "Eire Nua" promises the protestant community wider measure of self-government in a federal Ireland than they had under the Stormont regime.

In passing it is worth noting that the Provisionals' economic proposals, which "Militant" attack, are much the same state capitalist recipe that Benn proposes in Britain and which "Militant" adapts to!

If their line is bad in Ireland, it is doubly treacherous in Britain. It is not the task of socialists in an imperialist country to make their support of liberation struggles against 'their own' imperialism, conditional on the methods of struggle adopted. Our task is to state uncompromisingly that we support the struggle of the Irish people to rid themselves of British imperialism, by whatever means they see fit. To the extent that we do support them, we gain some right to criticise the methods of struggle adopted. This has

nothing in common with "Militant", who blamed the Republicans, not British imperialism for the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other repressive legislation. Their logic is quite clear: if you do not struggle, nobody will need to repress you. It is the logic of the scab and not the Marxist.

Portugal

The struggles which followed the overthrow of the Portuguese dictatorship on April 25th 1974 were undoubtedly one of the greatest movements of workers in Europe since World War 2. They provide, or at least should provide, many lessons for workers elsewhere.

Unfortunately "Militant's" conclusions are the wrong ones. We are told that "the developments in Portugal.....have given the working class one of the most favourable situations for peacefully carrying through a socialist revolution in a European country." (*18) Yet the Right made two major attempts at a counter-coup. At the time of the second, on the 11th March 1975, NATO naval forces were taking part in specially arranged exercises off the Portuguese coast, and troops in Britain were alerted ready to fly out. In the event, the attempt flopped before NATO had a chance to intervene, but the plans had clearly been laid.

If this was imperialism's reaction to the radical MFA regime which tried to balance between the classes, then how much more determined would they have been to smash a really revolutionary government? It is unlikely that there would have been sufficient mobilisation of the workers in the other NATO countries to prevent intervention in Portugal, although it might have stopped an extended war there.

But then "Militant" was in some doubt as to which class did rule in Portugal. In August 1975, we were told that "the expropriation of CAPITALISM is a giant step" (our emphasis)(*19). By Easter 1976 "the economic basis for workers' rule had been laid", "only the shadow of the capitalists remain. But that shadow will try, if given the chance, to regain its substance and power." (*20) This is a classic example of "Militant's" equation by which nationalisation equals a workers' state. But the very question is who controls the state and therefore the nationalised industries? After all, widespread state control (sometimes called 'war socialism') was a feature of most capitalist countries during both world wars. In fact capitalist control was never destroyed. For a time it was made largely inoperative but given its petit-bourgeois class character the MFA was unable, and, in part, unwilling to break the links decisively. "Militant" believed that they were seeing yet another example of a bourgeois Bonapartist regime growing over into a workers' state.

Having decided that the nationalisations had overthrown the class power of the bourgeoisie, "Militant" contented itself with a series of reform demands, to achieve workers' democracy. Significantly the demand for a complete 'saneamento' (purge) of all officials linked to the old regime was not stressed. The Portuguese workers who raised this demand saw the immediate tasks far more clearly than the 'Marxist Tendency's' experts.

"Militant implies, though does not clearly state, that the vehicle for achieving workers' democracy will be the Socialist Party, though not under its present leadership. The entirely cosmetic, 'Marxist' programme adopted its December 1974 Congress is praised and the resignation of Manuel Sena, together with large sections of the party's left wing criticised. The bureaucratic stage-management of the conference was ignored.

Indeed "Militant International Review" tells us that the Socialist Party has moved from reformism towards a centrist position. The way forward was seen as through the Socialist Party: "The organisations of the rank and file were unmistakeable. Here were the human raw materials out of which a great revolutionary party could have been built. A Marxist tendency could have won the overwhelming mass to its banner, thus determining the victory of the revolution".(*21)

But the SP is not deeply rooted in the working class like the Labour Party (or the Portuguese CP). The real weakness of the party in the working class was shown by their need to combine with the reactionary Maoist group, the MRPP, to win trade union elections. While many workers voted for the party, as a better option than the Stalinists, militant workers do not generally look to it for a lead.

But perhaps the most damning condemnation of "Militant's" position is simply that the Socialist Party now governs Portugal. Yet attempts are being made at denationalisation, land reform is being reversed, workers' living standards have been slashed

and some 20% of the population is unemployed. In other words, Portuguese capitalism is being stabilised.



Conclusions

The central key to "Militant"'s ideas is perhaps to be found in their analysis of the Stalinist states. The theory that a Bonapartist bureaucracy erected for the defence of capitalism can coldly and independently expropriate the bourgeoisie has massive implications. It justifies "Militant"'s equation of nationalisation with socialism and allows the conception that the Labourite bureaucracy in Britain can peacefully overthrow capitalism. The revolutionary Marxist conception of the struggle to smash the capitalist state by force is dismissed as the adventurist dream of sects.

If the official movement can be pressed to introduce socialism, then a sharp struggle to dispose of the current leaders is obviously unnecessary. It is the job of the "Marxist Tendency" to convince them that they are on the wrong track and should change course. "Militant"'s idea of socialism is, as they often say, summed up in Clause IV Part 4 of the Labour Party's Constitution, which starts, "to secure **for** the workers...." (our emphasis). In other words, socialism from above, granted through the agency of the capitalist state, with the aid of the labour lieutenants of Capital, not seized from below by the revolutionary struggles of the working class.

Of course, "Militant" is quite capable of using shreds of Marxism. But a 'Marxism' completely gutted of its revolutionary content, more often used against the struggles of the masses than to explain and deepen them. The Marx we see in the pages of "Militant" is a pathetic being: scared of the idea of a general strike, afraid of the labour bureaucracy, strong only in aiding the bourgeoisie to denounce the struggles of the oppressed against imperialism. A very different individual from the revolutionary fighter who speaks through his own writings.

But "Militant"'s ideas are not new. They have long held a great deal of currency in the British working class. They are nothing more or less than Fabianism under a new guise. The Fabians thought that socialism could only be achieved from above, through the activities of a leadership within Parliament, the state bureaucracy, and the committee-rooms of power. They rejected the struggle to overthrow the state. They were even capable of using Marxist ideas to cover their reformist nakedness.

The only major difference that "Militant" has with the original Fabians is that they have evolved from revolutionary Marxism to their present reformist position. This enables them to hide more effectively behind so-called 'Trotskyist' arguments. Potentially, it makes them better able to lead the working class to defeat than their ideological brethren in the "Tribune" group. We say to supporters of the "Militant", not that you are conscious enemies of the working class; far from it. But if put into practice your politics will inevitably lead the workers to a catastrophic defeat.



1. From letter by Nick Bradley published in the *Guardian*, 26.1.77.
2. *Militant* no. 345, 4.3.77.
3. From F.Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property & the State: Marx & Engels Selected Works in one volume*, p. 576.
4. Preface to the 1872 German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, quoted from page 8 of the Progress Publishers edition, Moscow 1969.
5. From L.D.Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going*, quoted from pp.68-9 of Chappell and Clinton (ed), *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.2 (New Park, London, 1974).
6. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced after the end of the civil war in Russia. It allowed a limited return to private enterprise within the framework of a generally planned economy, and a substantial class of small capitalists grew up during its life.

7. Rich peasant farmers.
8. From *British Perspectives and Prospects*, *Militant International Review* no.6, January 1973.
9. From Lenin's speech on affiliation to the British Labour Party, 6th August 1920. Quoted from V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol.31, p.258 (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1966). Noske and Scheidemann were leaders of the German Social-Democratic Party responsible for the defeat of the 1918 German revolution.
10. From L.D.Trotsky, *The Errors in Principle of Syndicalism*, 1929. Quoted from Chappell & Clinton (ed), *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, vol.2 p.248 (New Park, London, 1974).
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Rebel*, no.2, February 1977.
13. *Ibid.*
14. From an article in *Workers' Fight* by Paul Itizé, reprinted in *The Industrial Relations Act and the Fight for a General Strike* (Phoenix Pamphlets, London, 1973).
15. *Militant*, no.148, 23.3.73.
16. See *Militant* nos. 115 (28.7.72) and 148 (23.3.73).
17. *New Society*, 6.5.76.
18. From *Spain and Portugal*, discussion document for 1976 LPYS conference.
19. *Militant*, 15.8.75.
20. As note 18.
21. From *Militant International Review* no.11, August 1976.



Rebel

A BULLETIN FOR YOUNG SOCIALISTS

Contact REBEL at: 28a West Green Road, London N.15

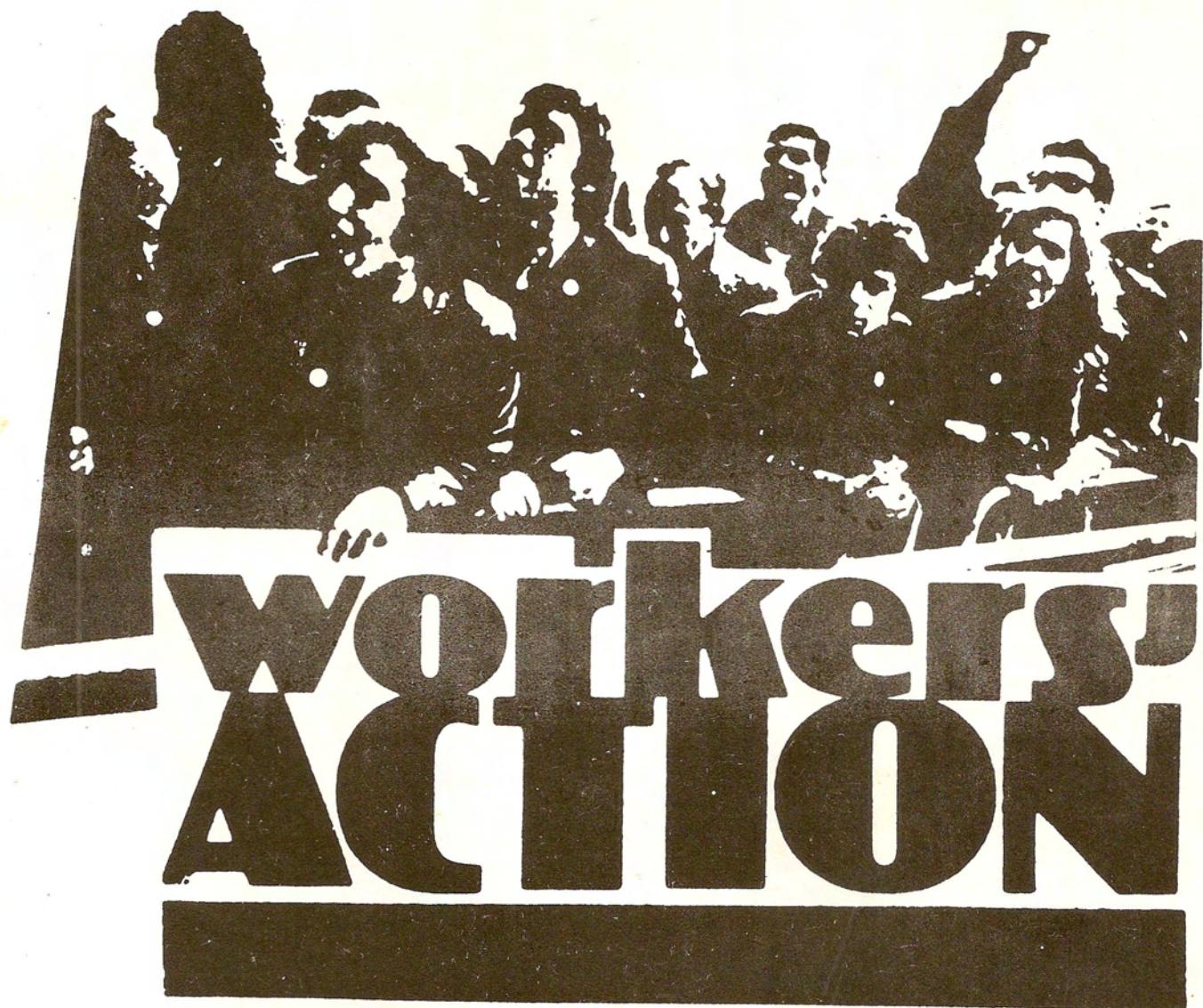
THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

**A
workers'
ACTION
PAMPHLET**



15p

Published by Workers' Action. 49 Carmar Street, London E.C.M.



Workers' ACTION

Available from:
49 Carnac Street
London SE27

A
**REVOLUTIONARY
SOCIALIST
PAPER
weekly
10p**