INTERNAL BULLETIN No. 1
JANUARY 1982

National Committee Minutes 22/23.8.81
The Mole and the Bear ....................... Parsons
The General Strike: document for December NC: Kinnell
The General Strike .......................... Morrow
Sixteen Questions on the General Strike ...... Reynolds/Kinnell
Trotsky on the General Strike ...............
Towards an understanding of Solidarnosc ...... Evington
Poland: a proposal for solidarity ............ McVicar/JQ

IB no. 3, containing other material already submitted, will appear shortly. Articles for IB no. 4 should be sent to Kinnell at the centre by March 1st, preferably typed A4 on Aoneo stencils.

20p
Abbreviated minutes.

1. APOLOGIES

Harding, Johnson - late (work)
McVicar - financial reasons
Ransley, Keith, Oliver - holiday
Hunt - community service
Garry H - resigned.
Absent without apologies: Chorley.

2. POLITICAL REPORT

Introduction by Pilkington
Supplementary introduction by Steve G on rail dispute
Discussion on to what extent imperialism is on the offensive, or rather trying to 'hold the line' after serious defeats.
On rail dispute: agreed that we should not only go for a recall conference, but for local commitments to resist continental shifts etc.

3. LOTHIAN

Introduction by Riel on the Labour council's collapse, and short discussion.

4. E.C. MINUTES

Spilling raised the question of the sponsorship of the paper.
O'Keefe replied: a campaign is planned to get several sponsorships.
Armstrong: on the dispute in the Midlands area about James not being on the AC. The two resolutions from the EC were unsatisfactory: O'Keefe's recommending the Coventry branch to add James to their AC representation, because areas not branches elect ACs and not every shade can be represented; the general recommendation that NC members be on ACs, because there are so many NC members in the Midlands.
Smith: EC has further discussed the matter and proposes following guidelines - a) all NC members should have access to AC without voting rights; b) we recommend to areas that NC members should normally serve on ACs, but of course areas are free to elect whom they choose.
After some discussion, these guidelines were agreed:
  - a), unanimously.
  - b), with 1 vote against (Booth).

Smith reported from the EC on Jo Q: EC would be inviting him to attend next meeting to discuss the allegations he had reportedly made against some comrades of being 'Stalinists', having a secret faction, etc.
emergency committee by Jonathan H and another S. supporter. Important to get a broad group formed in NUJ to avoid repetitions. Macaulay: we should take a clear line in the paper.

10. INTERNATIONAL WORK

Smith reported. TILC meetings at summer school had mainly been reports from sections. There was not time to vote on the resolutions - they will be duplicated and circulated.

The US fusion is a necessary step. The SL (DC) was facing a dead end if it did not fuse. But the FWL comes from a sectarian background, and remains sectarian and rigid in its internal regime. The fusion faces many apparently organisational problems. Pilkington, O'Keefe, and Smith are nominated for the TILC Secretariat.

Short discussion. Agreed Johnson should also attend TILC Secretariat meetings, though not as a formal member.

11. COMMISSIONS

Following commissions were decided; with Steering Committees of NU members.

Middle East: BROOKS, Lamarre, Keith, Landis, O'Keefe, Booth.
USA: KEITH W., O'Keefe, Glover, Smith, O'Malley, Todd, Pilkington
China: REYNOLDS, Noonan, Hotchkiss, O'Keefe
France: NOONAN, Todd, Reynolds
Australia: REYNOLDS, Ramsey, Tony R.
Spain/Latin America/Portugal: PILKINGTON, Harrison, O'Keefe
Turkey: O'MALLEY, Keith, Brown, Johnson
West Indies: ALAIN-POURNIER, Keith
Italy: LAMARRE, Pilkington
South Asia: TONY R., James, Morrow
Denmark: GRASSAC, Tony R.
Germany: MADDox, Foster, Gunther
Anti-apartheid: SMITH, Wheeler, O'Keefe, Piggot, Tony R.
Anti-racist/anti-fascist: JAMES, Swing, Keith
Gay: RIEL, Brown, Traven
Ireland and Irish work: PILKINGTON, O'Keefe, Foster, Spilling, Connolly, Macaulay
Youth: FRASER, Brown, Appleyard, Hunt, Macdouglas
LP: MACAULAY, Ramsey, Landis, O'Keefe, Noonan, Maddox, Booth
Women: LAMARRE, Landis, Daly, Todd, Eliot, Grassac.

(Comrade named in capitals is the convenor. In the case of the women's commission, Lamarre is the convenor of the steering committee and Todd is the convenor of the full commission).

12. IRELAND

Foster reported briefly.

13. YOUTH

Hunt reported on a successful intervention at the official youth summer camp.

Morrow reported on an opposition in M. in Leicester.
Further discussion, including on other local opposition groups in M.

14. **AREA REPORTS**

Reports were received from all areas.

15. **SHORT REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Todd - on National Child Care Campaign booklet on creches
O'Keefe - on the magazine
Alain-Fournier - on finance
Morrow - on fund-raising

Landis: handed a letter to the chairperson objecting to the way comrades had reacted to Gunther's pessimistic assessment of the St Mary's occupation. Danger of establishing obligatory optimism by branding any other assessment as like our political opponents.

- Letter was noted, and it was agreed the EC should discuss it.

O'Malley - on recruitment.
The Mole and the Bears.

The article by Martin Thomas "New International Committee fails test of French struggle" (p. 67) gave our readers little on which to base any concrete assessment of the recent split in the F.I. (I.C.). It also contained various sweeping statements which were either unsubstantiated or reflected the narrow insular national Trotskyist world which is sadly the limited horizons of many "would be Trotskyists" (to use Thomas' phrase) in Britain.

Contrary to Professor. Thomas' view the attitude of the O.C.I. towards Mitterand and the French Socialist Party has not been "well known for years". I am certainly not familiar with this attitude and have yet to read any substantial critique of the O.C.I.'s practice in this regard.

The article ends with the view that "the lesson of the split is the need to have International regroupment on solid political foundations, developed through honest discussions rather than hasty self-proclamation". This, of course, sounds very Bolshevik and principled and I might add, very smug. To the average reader of a French paper it means nothing. What are the solid political foundations? How will the discussions be organised? Who should be involved? The article has nothing to say about these questions for one simple reason - the author is not interested in ever asking them.

The F.I.(I.C.) was a brave experiment which we stood outside of. The test of our correctness will be shown graphically by the failure of the T.I.L.C. to win any significant forces which were involved and it's further decline as an International tendency.

But more is involved. The W.S.L. and the T.I.L.C. bears a portion of the blame for the failure of the F.I.(I.C.) and for the political weakening of the U.S.F.I. in the earlier period. By refusing to co-operate with those International groupings, by standing outside of the struggle to build a revolutionary International we contributed to the recent split. Where in the F.I.(I.C.) was there a national Trotskyist group with authority in it's own class struggle to match ours? If we had been in the F.I.(I.C.) we could have attempted to wield that authority against the splittest moves we could have demanded a discussion on the issues and even if we had failed we would have immensely strengthened our forces internationally.

The failure of the F.I.(I.C.) should not lead us to deepen our sectarian approach. Cde. Thomas' article suggests that the U.S.F.I. and F.I.(I.C.) are built on diplomatic silence. Now the article does not go on to justify this simplistic judgement by explaining what is meant nor does it attempt to use the example of the T.I.L.C. to show a different approach.

The hoary old chestnut of the 'open conference' is trotted out to show that the F.I.(I.C.) was not interested in discussion of outstanding differences. It is all very well for us to say this but when has the T.I.L.C. tried to organise an open conference. If the comrades in favour of such a non-event are serious about it they should organise one. I hope they don't because it will be a catastrophe.

Even if the nature of the T.I.L.C. allowed us to write freely about the T.I.L.C. we would be unable to do so because the T.I.L.C. and in particular the W.S.L. bears all the hallmarks of a "diplomatic alliance".

The U.S. fusion brought together two groupings with fundamentally different methods of work. The forces of the old R.W.L. did absolutely nothing about the P.A.T.C.O. strike which we considered important enough to headline on. If the S.W.P., which the R.W.L. considers to be correct, had behaved like that we would have had a field day. In the event we maintained a diplomatic silence - in the face of the destruction of a whole union by the Reagan government.
In Britain we fused the I.C.L./W.S.I. on the basis of a perspectives document even some I.C.L. N.C. had not seen and a platform document which we are unable to publish because it is more obviously a "something for everyone" document than any I have ever seen produced by the U.S.F.I., the F.I.(I.C.) or any organisation on the left for that matter. Diplomatic silence - not organisational difficulties prevented discussion and votes over issues in that document not to worry - we have ignored the whole document anyway. It was simply an organisational device to cement a fusion we all wanted, or so some might say.

Since the fusion no serious attempt has been made to resolve the outstanding issues noted by the founding conference. The dates scheduled for solving the differences around the E.E.C. and the General Strike have come and gone and EASTER 1982 (the date for agreeing a position on Afghanistan) looms even nearer. Diplomatic silence comrades?

However, it is not possible for me to read the sort of article which was written by Cde. Thomas and remain silent and in breaking silence my motives have been positive.

While I do think that there is a strong element of diplomatic silence around the internal divisions within the movement and that more could be done to resolve the differences I think also that our own fusion should have helped us to understand that life is not so simple as we have sometimes maintained.

If we are to learn anything from the F.I.(I.C.) split then lets direct our comrades to studying the programmatic questions at issue, let us realise the sorry state of our world movement at a time when it is bigger than ever and let us not miss anymore opportunities to influence thousands of Trotskyists who like ourselves are struggling for the clarification of the movement and the building of a world party.

Above all let us not satisfy ourselves with simplistic assessments and characterisations of forces which have played and will continue to play a central role in building the F.I.

I hope this short note will encourage an "open Discussion" in the movement about the prospects for the future of the Trotskyist movement. I have left holes in my arguments in the hope that replies will be forthcoming. I have already prepared some answers to these but don't pretend to have any blueprint, just an attitude I want more comrades to adopt and develop.

A. Parsons.
The General Strike

1. The AL dispute posed the task of organising for a general strike because:
   a) Several important sections of workers were more or less simultaneously coming up against the Government's 4 per cent limit. The immediate needs of the struggle called for united action alongside the first section to go into struggle.
   b) Edwards' threat to sack the strikers made the dispute more than a wage dispute - it made it a test dispute over the general class issue of the right to strike.

2. We therefore raised the call for a general strike in concrete connection with the conditions and needs of the actual struggle: calling on sections of workers with claims outstanding to join a united fight against the 4 per cent limit, and calling on unions to start an all-out strike if their members in BL were sacked.

3. This method was sharply different from the abstract sloganising use of the general strike call as a general solution to everything and anything (and therefore to nothing), unrelated to any concrete possible development of the immediate struggle.

4. The call for a general strike posed the following perspectives:
   a) The general strike could immediately smash the four per cent limit and the sacking threat.
   b) To the extent that the confidence and the consciousness of workers developed in the struggle, it could go forward to win positive demands: sliding scale of wages, repeal of the Employment Act, a halt to public sector cuts and closures.
   c) Such head-on defeats would undermine the Tories' ability to govern, and could force them to call a general election.
   d) Once seriously under way, a general strike would make it necessary for the workers' movement - at first at local level - to take over the running of essential supplies, communications, traffic control, law and order, etc. It would pose implicitly - and, as it developed, more and more explicitly - the question of which class was master in the country. Revolutionaries would argue for the local workers' councils to link up and to struggle for state power.

5. Revolutionaries must explain the full perspectives of a general strike, and fight for their maximum development. But our call for a general strike is not conditional on that maximum development being guaranteed or even probable. As we pointed out in an editorial, 'If the Tories retain power after a general strike, they will quickly counter-attack. So indeed would a Labour government led by the present Foot-Healey-Shore team. But that is the round after this one. The task now is to mobilise the full forces of the labour movement to win this round - to defeat the 4% limit and the Tory government'.

6. In line with the above perspectives, we raised the call for a General Strike (explained concretely as in point 2) together with the call to Kick the Tories Out.

Whether this agitation was effectively the same as 'General Strike to Kick the Tories Out' or not would depend on the material fact of how the perspectives outlined in point 4 would develop - specifically the relation between (c) and (d).

For theoretical completeness it would be desirable to work out a full common understanding on these perspectives. But in any case, given that:
   a) It is necessary to fight to kick the Tories out, even if the immediate alternative is only a Labour government, and to urge the labour movement to use all means available in this fight;
   b) In a general strike we would fight for the development of workers' councils, and for these workers' councils to link up and struggle for power;
   c) We would oppose any moves to demobilise a general strike in favour of a general election;

no concrete problem is foreseeable in putting forward a revolutionary line in the agitation for and in the development of a general strike.
And any theoretical difference would be solved by life itself in the development of the general strike.

7. When it is appropriate to raise the call for a general strike, we should propose organising for it as follows: (cf. our previous editorial):

a) Spread the idea and explain the power of workers' unity.

b) Organise joint meetings of different sections of workers—especially those most immediately likely to be involved (e.g. round the BL dispute, those immediately facing the 4 per cent limit). Fight for local Trades Councils and Labour Parties to give a lead in this activity, and to organise local action committees to coordinate the struggle. As the struggle develops, those action committees may flower into genuine workers' councils.

c) Press the demand for the leaders of the labour movement—TUC, Labour MPs, Labour councils—to break collaboration with the Tories and start a fightback. Demand the TUC organises the general strike.

d) A general strike will be won through the network of workers' committees and organisations developed in struggle—shop stewards' committees, combine committees, trades councils, Labour Parties, ad hoc action committees. Fight to gear these bodies to the urgency of preparing for a head-on clash with the Tories, to strengthen the links between them, and to equip them with a fighting political perspective against the Tories—the perspective of a workers' government, a government based on and accountable to the workers' movement, taking decisive measures against capitalist power and privilege.

e) A general strike can only develop if those in the front line give a lead. It can never develop if each group of workers, faced with an immediate struggle, ducks the fight and waits for a general strike. Every time the labour movement ducks a fight, the Tories get stronger. That's why waiting for the next general election is no answer—and also why waiting for a general strike is no answer. In the wages fight, and in the fight for jobs, we must argue for maximum mobilisation by the workers in the front line—and then for a drive to draw other workers into struggle.

Reynolds
6.12.91
We are a movement of some 300 members, of whom well over half are industrial workers. At present we have not even organised the vanguard of the class around our politics, let alone begun the task of drawing the masses of workers around that vanguard. This is, I think, an important point because, no matter how dialectical the leap in consciousness of the class may be under mass strike conditions, the 'almost miracle' as Keefe put it at the N.C. - the working class will not suddenly, spontaneously become politically armed for the historic task of seizing power. It is for that reason that we have in the past rejected the O.C.I.'s conception that the development of class consciousness is an objective, inexorable process.

The working class will spontaneously engage in massive struggles with capital, it will not spontaneously develop revolutionary consciousness.

When Stephen Jont wrote, "considered as an historic and organic process, the formation of the proletariat's class-consciousness is drawn from the analysis of the development of the class struggle and puts an end to metaphysical discussions about class-consciousness brought in from the outside as well as those about the self-proclaimed vanguard," he was in practice abandoning Leninism. The Marxist programme becomes no more than the 'most finished expression of the spontaneous Trade Union struggle.'

What we have here is not Marxism but the dialectics of Karl Marx, who saw Marxist theory as being simply itself-consciousness of the (objectively) revolutionary working class. That is the road along which we must choose to clearly not to follow.

But in that case, we must soberly examine the role of revolutionaries in a general strike, and the ways in which we go about combatting that Trade Union consciousness, directing it toward a revolutionary Marxist consciousness. The ways in which we convince, train and steal the vanguard, and raise the movement to the level of the Marxist programme. For, as we know, a pre-mature insurrection by the most-advanced or impatient layers of the class would be a catastrophe. In any case, it seems to me that in any general strike, given the present balance of forces, our main task would be to draw the vanguard of the class around us in the fight to prevent the bureaucrats from selling-out, not preparing the insurrection.

The way we will do that will, of course, be through urging the development of new organs of workers self-organisation: inter-factory strike committees, industry-wide joint-strike committees, district or town-wide councils of action. And in these we will argue for the development of elements of workers' control - in supply and distribution of food etc. for example, or of transport.

Each of these will strengthen the independence of the class and its self-confidence. But even the emergence of such bodies will not of itself warrant insurrection. For these we will encounter the same reformists, leftists and opportunists who we are already familiar with, together with new layers of radicalised militants. It is a question of politically winning the vanguard and through that vanguard winning the majority of the class to our programme. That would not, I would suggest, happen overnight. Russia in 1917, Spain in 1931-36, France in 1935-37 and, more recently, Poland, gives us some idea of the level, intensity and duration of struggles we can expect. Whilst we agitate for a general strike we should be aware that there will, in all probability be many. What we are talking about is a process not a single event.

So, how should we raise the call for a general strike? Reynolds has argued that we need a clear simple demand which does not limit us, for example: "General Strike to stop Anti-Union Laws" or "General Strike to Stop the Cuts" or "General Strike to Smash the 4% Limit". It's a nice idea, but it ignores,
in my view the reality of the class. The labour movement is sectionalised, with different and sometimes conflicting immediate interests. The key question is, how do we mobilise the strength of the whole class, or as much of it as possible? 

It seems to me that Reynolds' type of slogans are not only self-limiting, i.e., confined to a single issue which is unlikely—except in very exceptional conditions—to mobilise mass support, but are also those which most clearly allow the government and the ruling class to retreat, regroup and then retaliate, e.g., with 1925. They are also the type of demands which offer most lee-way to the union leaders to stick-up a sell-out deal.

In contrast, the demand for a General strike to Bring Down the Tory Government posed around specific struggles like the steel strike, BTL etc. and the fight to extend those strikes, has a very different effect. Firstly, as Reynolds and O'Keefe have previously admitted, such a slogan already has a resonance, amongst militants. In addition, it provides a real and concrete reason for busmen, public sector workers etc., to unite with others—because they are perceived, even by backward layers like teachers, to be attacking jobs, living standards etc. In short it generalises the experiences of the class.

Just as importantly however, it runs directly counter to the political line of the right wing union leaders and their pals in the P.L.P. Why else have they constantly declared their opposition to defeating the government by extra-parliamentary means? They oppose it because it takes the initiative out of their hands, because it legitimises an approach to politics which is the antithesis of reformism and parliamentarism.

It seems to me that a decision by workers to bring down the elected government by class action would not only represent a massive political development but would also be a major blow to the whole reformist notion of representing a cross class electorate. Such action would be focussed on class accountability with a vengeance. As such it would go way beyond the 1926 experience or the events of May/June in France. Far from being a general strike for a general election as Reynolds argues—and thereby strengthening reformism. For the working class to decide to bring down the government would mean in practice that there is something higher than parliament and its precedents.

It is worth remembering that the English Bourgeois revolution began on the basis of who would make decisions, parliament, or King. A decision by the working class that they—not the Queen or Prime minister—decided when governments must end, when it has ceased to be entitled to govern, would be parallel to the demands which compelled Charles I to reconvene parliament in November 1640. A general strike to bring down the Tory government would be a demand that power be exercised in the interests of the working class—the first timid posing of the question of power. As such it would be fertile ground for us.

Against this slogan Reynolds has argued that translated into reality it can only mean either a General Strike for an insurrection or one for a General election. I have, I think, already made clear my attitude on the first point. So what of this second point? Are we calling for this massive show of force just to achieve a trivial goal like a General election. I confess that I think that the Cde. must be either a triffla naive or else equally confused. He consistently assumes that the slogan "Bring down the Tory government" leaves us with a General election as a ugly maximum, the most that can be achieved. That in some way we are thus ourselves limiting the mass action. But in trying to impose such an interpretation on the slogan Reynolds is obliged to contradict his own admitted views on the developments within a General Strike.
As Trotsky pointed out in "Once again Whither France"
"Wherever may be the slogans and motives for which the general strike is initiated if it includes the genuine masses, and if the masses are quite resolved in struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all classes the question: who will be master of the house."
And again,
"Every general strike, whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has an internal tendency to transform itself into an open revolutionary clash, into a direct struggle for power."

(my emphasis)

Now, if we accept Trotsky's argument, which I do, then we are also obliged to apply the logic of it to the situation under discussion i.e. a mass strike to bring down the government. Why must a general election be the maximum that is possible? Surely it is in fact the minimum, the initial lowest possible common denominator of that class action. The very least that the bureaucrats could attempt to offer to a mobilised class. But, at the same time, because it poses at once, in a form comprehensible to all workers, the fact that power, who makes decisions in society, is a class question demanding class action, it also opens up countless political possibilities for us. What we have is not an artificial limitation on the general strike but a vital political starting point.

We can see this if we consider it correctly. Were we to succeed in mobilising or forcing class wide action to bring down the Tories it would be on the basis of widely varied sections rallying to a common struggle for different reasons. In this situation each would also have its own demands which it would wish to bring forward - defense of jobs, no wage cuts, etc. - and throw them into the general political melting pot. Such are the conditions in which revolutionaries could seriously take their programme to the class. Such are the conditions in which we could really begin the transformation towards a mass party, beginning with the winning of the vanguard in action. And this would be no simple Trade Union dispute but an openly political struggle.

The possibilities in such a struggle would depend upon our own ability to win and galvanise that vanguard, and begin to draw the mass movement into a dialogue on what our goals should be. But they would undoubtedly, as BS suggests in the reply to Reynolds in the joint bulletin, exist. There would be countless possibilities as to how things would develop.

I would agree that the right wing reformists, and maybe even the lefts, would wish to divert the whole action into "let's have a general election", but I think we need to distinguish between such a move, as in France in 1968, where the demands of the workers were confused and ill-defined in many cases, and a situation where the class itself starts by proposing the kicking out of the government. In such a situation we are far better placed to argue for the continuation of the strike on the basis that the Tory government means also Tory policies.

That we do not accept any policies that attack the working class. That we want a government which acts for and in the interests of the working class. Here would be the condition to transform the discussions on democracy and accountability to a new level, and, by bold political initiatives, rupture the links between the right wing leaders and the class itself, whilst all the time establish new independent fighting organs of the class.

And should a general election result, as the least we could achieve, I believe it would represent a major blow to the Tories and the capitalist class and give an important confidence to the whole class awakening to its strength. We only need to consider the confidence of the miners - and their standing in the class after 1974 - to realise this. That, despite the narrow victory of Wilson.

But that, as I have said is the minimum. The worst thing we could do at present would be to tie ourselves up in narrow schemes for fear of what the reformists
might do. We should begin rather from the historic tasks of the class and the possibilities for our intervention as a subjective factor and the role we would seek to play. In my view "General Strike to Bring Down the Tory Government" is not only a correct way to present the slogan but an absolutely necessary formulation. The mechanical, one-sidedness of Reynolds contribution to the discussion are what limits us at present.

MORROW Jan 1982
1. "Boot out the Tories"... just who is to do the booting, by what means, under what conditions...?" (JL)

Who? The organised working class. How? By forcing an election, i.e. by making the government unable to govern, through militant industrial action for workers' demands and through compelling the Labour Party and trade unions to break collaboration with the Tories. And by mobilising the Labour vote.

2. Why just 'militant industrial action'? Why not a general strike?

If the working class were sufficiently conscious, confident and well-organised to deliberately plan a general strike to kick out the Tories, then long before it would have been able to bring down the Tories by lesser means. As JL points out: "in real terms a general strike will arise not from some abstract and arbitrary decision by the whole working class".

But, conversely, if a general strike develops through the explosive escalation of some immediate struggle, then it makes no sense to direct it towards just kicking the Tories out. The perspectives outlined above (question 1) become completely outdated. The question of class power is posed. To direct the struggle merely towards changing the government is to duck that question and limit the struggle.

3. But don't you propose directing the struggle towards even more limited demands?

No. We advocate proposing the general strike as a weapon for immediate demands; explaining that, whatever the initial demands, a general strike once underway opens revolutionary perspectives; and trying to direct the general strike, once started, through appropriate transitional demands towards workers' power.

4. Can't the government make concessions on immediate demands to head off the general strike?

If the ruling class quickly grants all the immediate demands the workers fight for, then there will be no revolutionary development - whatever slogans we use.

The revolutionaries can fall down by posing the immediate demands not boldly enough. But that's a problem of using immediate demands intelligently. (Thus, for example, in July 1972, argued for 'Smash the Act' as the immediate demand rather than 'Free the Five', which the CP and IS/SP focused on). There is no way we can simply jump over the inherent limitations of immediate demands.

The in the course of a general strike the workers will gain more than concessions. They gain control over factories or over whole area. We would try to develop that control as quickly as possible, to explain its revolutionary significance, and to fight for maintaining and extending it. The concessions on the initial demands of the strike could be just a first stage in the escalation of the struggle.

'Kick the Tories out' is different. A general election, which would only be called after the general strike had developed seriously, would inevitably mean an ebb in the strike. Or if the strike continued to escalate, the election would not take place.
5. But the comrades who argue for 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' also argue for directing the general strike towards workers' power.

Yes - though in JL's document there is no clear mention at all of any political perspective from a general strike other than a Labour government of one sort or another. I think that is because the slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' makes it impossible to pose the revolutionary perspectives of a general strike clearly. More on this later.

6. But we're agreed that "in real terms a General Strike will arise...from the extension of a particular struggle or wave of struggles (with their own specific and limited demands)" (JL) and that "in a general strike revolutionaries would strive for the development of workers' councils and for the power of workers' councils"?

Yes.

7. So where's the difference?

We distinguish between the immediate demands which may rally the working class to initiate a general strike, and the revolutionary perspectives towards which we try to direct the general strike once started. JL tries to make 'Kick the Tories out' serve both as the limited initial demands of the general strike and as the revolutionary perspective towards which the strike can be developed.

This double use of 'Kick the Tories out' is based on ambiguity. To the militant reformist workers who sympathise with 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' it means 'force a general election'. To the revolutionaries who use the slogan, it means 'open a struggle to overthrow capitalism'. The problem is that these two meanings pose sharply different perspectives for a general strike. The ambiguous slogan disarms revolutionaries in that clash of perspectives.

Despite the popularity of slogans like 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' (and its equivalent in other countries), in the whole rich international experience of general strikes there is not one example (to my knowledge) of a general strike aimed at replacing a government. In the actual struggle workers realise that the general strike is not a tool for replacing one parliamentary government by another. The general strike may frighten the bosses into quickly granting the workers' immediate demands; if not, it becomes a fight for state power.

The bulk of the working class is not likely to realise this, or even to see workers' power as a real possibility, until the general strike is underway. But for Marxists,

"An ideologist is worthy of the name only when he marches ahead of the spontaneous movement, points out the road, and when he is able ahead of all others to solve all the theoretical, political, tactical and organisational questions which the 'material elements' of the movement spontaneously encounter" (Lenin).
But "We do not mean to be afraid of the possibility that a general election may be called to defuse 'our' general strike... We do not call for a general election; but we would not oppose one if it were called. We would press for the class action to continue during the election".

In a general strike, the argument would not be about opposing or not opposing a General Election. It would be about escalating or not escalating the general strike. But if the working class accepts the arbitration of an election, then inevitably the general strike slackens and ebbs. And a general strike must either escalate or die. If it ebbs the workers lose the initiative.

Conversely, if the general strike escalates, then the general election cannot take place. Who would then print the ballot papers, set up and man the polling stations, count the votes, collate the results....? Would the workers' strike committees passively allow scabs to do these jobs? Or would they meekly organise elections for the bourgeois state, instead of organising their own elections for workers' councils?

Our slogan would be 'escalate the general strike', not 'oppose the general election'. But escalating the general strike would mean no general election. To stoutly declare 'we are not afraid' of a general election is to mislead the working class (and ourselves). To "press for the class action to continue during the election" (i.e. to press for the working class to continue - and step up - paralysing the functions of the bourgeois state while the bourgeois state carries out one of its functions on a large scale !) is a nonsense.

Moreover, how, on what basis, would JL argue from the slogan General Strike to kick the Tories out for the continuation of the general strike?

From our perspective on the general strike, the basis for arguing for continuation (and escalation) is clear. We call on the workers to stay out until they have solid victories actually in their grasp - not to demobilise for the sake of the slippery promise of a general election and the even more slippery promise of concessions from a future Labour government. It's the same as the argument against arbitration in a sectional strike.

But if the chief aim is kicking the Tories out, then every worker will conclude that once an election has been called the main thing is to get out the vote for Labour. There is no way that continuing the strike can improve the result of the election.

Or are we to tell workers that the elections are a snare and a trap, and that the only way to deal with the Tories is for the workers to take power into their own hands? In that case we should have been making clear right from the start that more than a change of parliamentary government was at stake, instead of focusing on an ambiguous demand like 'kick the Tories out'.

And what about the initial demands of the general strike? By making our slogan General Strike to kick out the Tories we tell the workers that these immediate demands are secondary compared to changing the government. And thus we will - contrary to our intentions - help the reformist misleaders when they tell the workers to wait for those immediate demands to be dealt with by the future Labour government.
mentary t're of to everyoners id.ears clarifying their struggle, left-wing workers struggle, to a further repetition of the Wilson/Callaghan govt."

No. Whatever we say in the small print of our press, most workers will interpret General Strike to kick the Tories Out in line with their own existing ideas, i.e. as a general strike to force a general election. And to force a general election could not be the first stage in an escalating development of the general strike - it would be the end of the development.

Suppose we tried to make it clearer by re-phrasing the slogan in a positive form: General Strike for a Workers' Government. Then the question would be: what Wokers' Government? Do we mean General Strike for a Labour Government? General strike for a Labour government on which we would place various demands? General strike for revolution, the old anarchist slogan? Or General Strike for as good a government as you can get ...?

10. Aren't you now arguing for throwing out the whole Workers' Government slogan as ambiguous?

No. The Workers' Government is not a thing or a set formula, but a line of struggle. Our agitation for a Workers' Government is not a matter of speculating about whether this or that Labour government might be a workers' government, but a programme of mobilisation against the reformist misleaders in a whole variety of possible future developments. But 'General Strike for a line of struggle in the labour movement' makes no sense.

In the debates in the CI, Fadék explained:

"The German, Norwegian and Czechoslovakian workers will more readily declare against coalition with the bourgeoisie, preferring a coalition of labour parties which would guarantee the 8 hour day and an extra crust of bread, etc. A Workers' Government usually arises in this manner either through preliminary struggles or on the basis of a parliamentary combination, and it would be folly to turn aside the opportunities of such a situation in stubborn doctrinaire fashion... (we should) lead the masses into the fight on the basis of their own illusions for the realisation of the programme of a Workers' Government"

The Workers' Government slogan is not ambiguous, but a definite line of struggle, the exact results of which cannot be predicted. Certainly many workers will interpret the Workers' Government in a reformist sense, as a more left-wing Labour government or a 'Labour government with socialist policies'. But we fight to mobilise them for an aim that they don't see clearly yet, and clarify their ideas in the course of the struggle - rather than trying to get everyone's ideas straight before the struggle starts.

To try to calculate exact limits on how far revolutionaries can go in transforming the Labour Party before there is a split, or how far a Parliamentary Labour government could go in taking measures against capitalism - or to couple every use of the Workers' Government slogan with pedantic refutations of reformist illusions - would be to miss the point of the attempt to 'lead the masses into the fight on the basis of their own illusions'.
"Comrades, if there were still a party, we would ask
comrade Zinoviev to sign an ukase (decrees) ordering
Scheidemann and company (the German reformist leaders)
to disappear from the face of the earth. Since this is
impossible, we must fight them. The only question is
when we will be able to destroy them.

"It is possible that these people are so tightly bound
to the bourgeoisie that they cannot break away from them,
so that we will have to destroy them together with the
bourgeoisie. But it is also possible that there will come
a time when, the coalition with the bourgeoisie having
become impossible for them, they will be forced to enter
into a coalition with us.

"In this coalition they will attempt to betray us. We will
be able to conquer them only after their actions within the
colalition will have discredited them totally...

"He who does not take into account all these possibilities,
who is ever repeating, he loves me, he loves me not, will
betray me wholly or only partly, shall I be afraid or
shall I not be afraid, reminds me of the girls of whom
Heine says that they have nothing else but their virtue."

(Radek).

But equally it would be folly for us to forget the limitations of our
Workers' Government slogan. It aims to mobilise workers, within the labour
movement and within the labour movement's present situation of relating to the
general running of society through parliamentary politics, in a way that opens
up revolutionary possibilities.

In a general strike the whole framework of our current Workers' Govern-
ment slogan will become outdated. The issue will be posed starkly: will the
workers reach for power, or will they leave the political struggle to their
reformist misleaders? And it will be resolved one way or the other within a
matter of weeks. The struggle within the Labour Party and the trade unions
to transform the labour movement and replace the reformist misleaders will
still be central - but it will take a different, more direct form, through the
fight for the Labour Parties and Trades Councils to set up Workers' Councils,
and to take power.

In the CI debates, the Bolshevik leaders stressed again and again that
the Workers' Government was one possible path for developing the revolutionary
struggle - and that failure to take account of the other, more direct possi-
bilities, could make the Workers' Government slogan disorientating.

"Woe to us if we ever allow the suggestion to creep up
in our propaganda that the Workers' Government is a
necessary step, to be achieved peacefully, as a period
of semi-organic construction which may take the place
of civil war, etc..." (Zinoviev).

Normally we say to workers: let's fight together to put in a Labour
government, and to impose our demands on it. Thus we "seek means to drive
the wedge between the forward-moving working class and its reluctant 'leaders'"
(JL). But this perspective would be outdated in a General Strike.

11. Why?

Because a Labour government as the outcome of a general strike would be
a defeat for its immediate revolutionary possibilities.
for a Labour government?

No: not until workers’ councils had developed to the point where a government of workers’ councils could be directly and immediately proposed. But we would argue for developing the general strike until workers’ victory. And the call for escalation of a general strike inevitably makes the question of a Labour government secondary: as explained above, escalation of the general strike rules out a general election, and vice versa.

13. But why do you see a Labour government as a defeat? A Labour government brought to power by a general strike would be different from a Labour government brought in by a normal, peaceful election.

A Labour government brought to power by a general strike would be just as anti working class as any other Labour government.

It is possible to fight to change the Labour Party. But that fight is much more likely to lead to a split than to a thorough transformation of the Labour Party. Besides, a general strike can, within a few days or weeks open the prospect of direct workers’ power; it certainly cannot within a few weeks transform the apparatus of the Labour Party.

A Labour government resulting from a general strike could be unstable. A general strike, however inadequate the revolutionaries’ tactics in it, creates a ferment in society. The new Labour government would either undertake brutal repression of the revolutionary forces (including measures which the Labour leaders would personally prefer to avoid, but would be forced into by the alarm-stricken bourgeoisie); or it would drift along making ineffectual concessions and soon get thrown out by the bourgeoisie; or (most probably) it would have some combination of these courses.

The ferment and instability would allow revolutionaries to be active to good effect - maybe even to open up a new revolutionary situation. But that is no justification for missing - for not even aiming for - the first revolutionary opening created by the general strike.

14. "If the Tories under such conditions (a general strike) were to call an election, they would do so not from a position of strength but of weakness" (JL)

They sure would. It is unlikely that any government would call an election just at the beginning of a general strike, before it was really underway. As a bourgeois government calling a general election in the midst of a fully-developed general strike is certainly in trouble!

The Tories would call an election to cure their weakness - to save capitalism and, with luck, to save the Tory government too.

If they successfully called the election, they would certainly save capitalism. (for the time being) They would have a good chance of saving the Tory government, too. Backward workers roused and inspired by the strike, and then disillusioned by the failure of the advanced workers to reach for power, could well rally to a programme of restoring order and national unity - like in France in 1968.

The Tories might lose the election. But there is nothing the general strike can do to make them more likely to lose it.

JL points out that “governments will make concessions on limited questions in order to head off a general strike and remain in office to regroup and wage further attacks”. A more correct way of putting this would be:
If a general strike develops, the ruling class may well concede almost any partial demand in order to avoid revolution. They will certainly concede a change of government. Obviously a particular capitalist government would rather make concessions itself than hand over. But in case of necessity it will bow to the general class interest of the capitalists. And it will do so with the consolation that an election will give it a reasonable chance of keeping power anyway.

Thus 'general strike to kick the Tories out' actually means: general strike with the perspective that total victory is an uncertain chance of replacing the Tories with a Labour government which may or may not make some concessions to the workers.

There's a strange slip of the pen in JL's article. "Boot out the Tories" ... exactly what do we propose to replace the booted-out capitalists?"

Booting out the Tories, by a general strike or any other way is not at all the same as booting out the capitalists! And in a general strike where booting out the capitalists is posed as an immediate task, the illusion that ousting the Tories means ousting the capitalists is more dangerous than ever.

Obviously it's a slip of the pen. But surely the slip of the pen testifies to a lack of focus, also shown by the fact that the possible outcomes of the general strike are discussed exclusively in terms of governments: "an incoming Labour Government", "whatever government emerged from the election". And JL concludes by seeing the worst danger in a general strike at "an extended leash of life for the government" - not for capitalism, but for the government.

The same in the pamphlet, 'Bring down the Tories this winter'. After introducing the slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out', the author says this about the perspectives:

"A working class that had the experience of defeating the open government of the class enemy would be immeasurably strengthened in the struggle against the traitors in its own ranks - typified by the right wing Callaghan/Healey leadership in the Labour Party.

"A Labour government returned under such conditions would be a government of acute crisis..."

And the author goes on to say that opportunities would be opened to expose the Labour Lefts and to build a revolutionary party. No word anywhere about any possible revolutionary outcome from the general strike - all the revolutionary possibilities discussed are those that might arise at the next stage after the General strike had resulted in a Labour government.

Surely this is a reflection of the line of thought baldly expressed by KW at the Joint NC: he argued that the I-CL line is wrong because a General Strike in the near future in Britain could not have revolutionary possibilities. And indeed logically KW's is the only consistent argument for 'General Strike to Kick the Tories Out'.

15. But we must pose 'Kick the Tories out' as the essential first step in the fight for socialism. "We must combat the reformist delusion that the Tories can simply be pressured into a change of line, or that reforms can be won for the working class without mass action to defeat this government".

In a general strike we would call for 'Kick the Tories out' and link it to a fight to transform the labour movement (for Labour Parties and Trades Councils to set up workers' councils, etc) But we would not pose 'Kick the
The General Strike Is Not a Game of Hide-and-Seek

In the same article (February 28), Thorez laments: "The Socialist Party has not accepted our proposals for wide-scale action, including the strike, against the decree-laws, which are being ever more enforced."

Including the strike? What strike? Since the abolition of the decree-laws is involved here, what Thorez apparently has in view are not partial economic strikes but a general strike, that is to say, a political strike. He does not utter the words "general strike" in order not to make it obvious that he is repeating our long-standing proposal. To what humiliating subterfuges must these poor people resort in order to mask their vacillations and contradictions?

This procedure has become, it seems, a method. In the open letter of March 12, the Central Committee of the Communist Party proposed to the Socialist Party to inaugurate a decisive campaign against the two-year term of military service, "through all methods available, including the strike." Once again the same mysterious formula! The Central Committee evidently has the strike in mind as an instrument of political struggle, that is to say, as a revolutionary weapon. But why then does it fear to utter aloud the words "general strike" and simply speak of "a strike"? With whom is the Central Committee playing hide-and-seek? Is it with the proletariat, or not?

The Preparation for the General Strike

But aside from these unbecoming maneuvers to maintain "prestige," there remains the fact that the Central Committee of the Communist Party proposes the general strike for the struggle against the Bonapartist legislation of Doumergue-Hullin. With this we are in full accord. But we demand that the leaders of working-class organizations themselves understand and explain to the masses the meaning of the general strike under the present conditions, as well as how it must be prepared.

Even an ordinary economic strike requires as a rule a militant organization, specifically, pickets. Under the present aggravated conditions of the class struggle, faced with the fascist provocation and terror, a real organization of pickets is the essential prerequisite for all important economic struggles. Let us imagine, however, that some trade union leader would assert, "Pickets are not necessary, that would be a provocation—self-defense will be sufficient for the strikers!" Isn't it obvious that the workers would abominably advise such a "leader" to go to a hospital, if not directly to an insane asylum? The fact is that pickets are precisely the most important organ of the strikers' self-defense!

Let us view more closely the line of reasoning relating to the general strike. We have in mind not an ordinary demonstration, nor a symbolic strike of an hour's or even twenty-four hour's duration but a war maneuver with the aim of forcing the enemy to submit. It is not difficult to understand what a terrific aggravation of the class struggle the general strike would imply under the present conditions! The fascist gauleiters would sprout on all sides like mushrooms after a rain and they would attempt with all their might to introduce confusion, provocation, and demoralization among the ranks of the strikers. How else can we guard the general strike against needless sacrifices and even against complete annihilation if not by means of military and strictly disciplined workers' detachments? The general strike is the generalization of the partial strike. The workers' militia is the generalization of the picket squads. Only windbags and pathetic braggarts can play with the idea of the general strike under the present conditions, and refuse at the same time to carry on the stubborn work for the creation of the workers' militia!

A General Strike in a "Nonrevolutionary Situation"

But the wretched members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party do not stop with this.

The general strike, as every Marxist knows, is one of the most revolutionary methods of struggle. The general strike is impossible except at a time when the class struggle rises above particular and craft demands, and extends over all occupations and district divisions, and wipes away the lines between the trade unions and the parties, between legality and illegality, and mobilizes the majority of the proletariat in an active opposition to the bourgeoisie and the state. Nothing can be on a higher plane than the general strike, except the armed insurrection. The entire history of the working class movement proves that every general strike, whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has
Part Two: A Program for the Front Line Leader

Employ the workers most closely associated to the present

Our educational program derives its major emphasis since the growth of

Strength and succinctness

In this program, it is essential that the entire body of

Instruction and communication training here described is the natural
growth of the position. The worker who has read this

Hereafter, the program of training is delineated: the major emphasis of

A number of factors, including the setting of the program, the

impact of the workers on the business is now considered as a

Furthermore, the training program is delineated: the major emphasis on

The worker's position and the state of mind of the program

...
country and outline the general course of the immediate struggle. By means of agitation and probing of the masses, the party must bring into its concepts the necessary corrections and exactitude, particularly in everything relating to the rhythm of the movement and the dates for major actions.

The situation in the country has been described above; it bears a prerevolutionary character along with the nonrevolutionary character of the leadership of the proletariat. And since the policy of the proletariat is the principal factor in the development of a revolutionary situation, the nonrevolutionary character of the proletarian leadership checks the transformation of the prerevolutionary situation and by this very thing contributes toward transforming it into a counterrevolutionary situation.

In objective reality there are, of course, no sharp boundaries between the different stages of the political process. One stage interpenetrates with another and as a result of this situation reveals various contradictions. These contradictions certainly make diagnosis and prognosis more difficult, but they do not at all make it impossible.

The forces of the French proletariat remain not only unexhausted, but are indeed still intact. Fascism as a political factor among the petty-bourgeois masses is relatively feeble as yet (much more powerful, nevertheless, than it seems to the parliamentarians). These two very important political facts allow us to say with firm conviction: nothing has been lost as yet, the possibility for transforming the prerevolutionary situation into a revolutionary situation is still entirely open.

But in a capitalist country such as this there can be no revolutionary struggles without the general strike: if working men and women remain in the factories during the decisive days, who then will do the fighting? Thus, the general strike is on the agenda.

But the question of the moment for the general strike is the question of knowing whether the masses are prepared to struggle and whether the workers' organizations are ready to lead them to battle.

Do the Masses Want to Struggle?

Is it true, however, that the only thing lacking is revolutionary leadership? Does not there exist a great force of conservatism within the masses themselves, within the proletariat? Such voices are raised from different sides. And there is nothing astonishing about it! When a revolutionary crisis approaches, many leaders, fearful of the responsibilities, hide themselves behind the pseudo-conservatism of the masses. History has taught us how a few weeks, even a few days prior to the October insurrection, such distinguished Bolsheviks as Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Rykov (it is needless to mention such people as Lozovsky, Manuilsky, etc.) asserted that the masses were worn out and did not want to fight. And yet as revolutionists, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Rykov lower in stature far above the likes of Cachin, Thorez, and Monmasson.

Whoever declares that the proletariat does not want to wage or is incapable of waging a revolutionary struggle, himself spreads calumny by ascribing his own feebleness and his own cowardice to the toiling masses. Up to the present moment there has been not a single case either in Paris or in the provinces where the masses remained deaf to a call from above.

The greatest case in point is the general strike of February 12, 1934. Despite the complete division of the leadership, the lack of any serious preparation, the tenacious efforts of the leaders of the CGT to reduce the movement to a minimum—since they could not evade it altogether—the general strike achieved the greatest success possible under the given conditions. It is clear that the masses want to struggle. Every class-conscious worker must say to himself that the pressure from below must have been extremely powerful if Jouhaux himself was stirred for a moment from his immobility. True, involved here was not a general strike in the proper meaning of the term, but only a twenty-hour demonstration. But this restriction was not put by the masses; it was dictated from above.

The demonstration of February 10 of this year on the Place de la République confirms the very same conclusion. The only thing the leading centers did to prepare for it was to issue banal pronouncements. The only slogan the masses heard was "Hush! Hush!" And nevertheless the number of demonstrators surpassed all expectations. In the provinces things have been during the past year in exactly the same state, and so they remain. It is impossible to adduce a single serious fact that would prove that the leaders wanted to struggle and the masses refused to follow them. Always and everywhere just the reverse relationship is to be observed. It preserves its full force even today. The rank and file want to fight, the leaders apply the brake. It is here that the chief danger lies; and it may end in a catastrophe.
The Rank and File and the Upper Crust Within the Party

The same relationship is to be found not only between the parties (or the trade unions) and the proletariat but also within each of the parties. Thus Frossard has not the slightest support among the rank and file in the SFIO; the only ones who support him are the deputies and the mayors who want everything to remain as it was in the past. On the other hand, Marceau Pivert—thanks to his stand, which is becoming more and more clear and resolute—has become one of the most popular figures with the rank and file. We recognize this all the more readily since we have never renounced in the past, as we shall not in the future, speaking out openly when we are not in agreement with Pivert.

Taken as a political symptom, this fact by its importance far transcends the question of the personalities of Frossard and Pivert: it indicates the general tendency of development. The rank and file of the Socialist Party, like that of the Communist Party, is more to the left, more revolutionary, more audacious than the upper crust: this is precisely why it is ready to place confidence only in the left-wing leaders. Still more: it is pushing the sincere Socialist always further to the left. Why does the rank and file itself become radicalized? Because it finds itself in direct contact with the masses of the population, with their misery, their revolt, and their hatred. This is an infallible symptom. We can rely on it.

"Immediate Demands" and the Radicalization of the Masses

The leaders of the Communist Party can, indeed, cite the fact that the masses failed to respond to their appeals. But this fact does not invalidate but rather confirms our analysis. The working masses understand what the "leaders" do not understand, that is to say, that under the conditions of a very great social crisis, a partial economic struggle alone, which requires enormous efforts and enormous sacrifices, can not achieve any serious results. Worse yet, it can weaken and exhaust the proletariat. The workers are ready to participate in fighting demonstrations and even in a general strike, but not in petty exhausting strikes without any perspective. Despite the appeals, manifestos and articles in L'Humanité, the Communist agitators hardly appear at all before the masses to preach strikes in the name of "partial immediate demands." They sense that the bureaucratic plans of their leaders do not correspond at all either to the objective situation or the mood of the masses. Without great perspectives, the masses cannot and will not begin to struggle. The policy of l'Humanité is the policy of an artificial and false pseudo-"realism." The failure of the CGTU in calling partial strikes is the indirect but very actual confirmation of the profundity of the crisis and of the moral tension in the workers' districts.

One should not think, however, that the radicalization of the masses will proceed by itself, automatically. The working class waits for initiative on the part of its organizations. When it arrives at the conclusion that its expectations have been false—and this moment is, perhaps, not so very distant—the process of radicalization will break off and be transformed into manifestations of discouragement, apathy, and isolated explosions of despair. At the periphery of the proletariat, anarchist tendencies impinge upon fascist tendencies. The wine will turn to vinegar.

The shifts in the political mood of the masses demand the greatest possible attention. To probe this living dialectic at every stage—that is the task of agitation. So far, the united front criminally continues to lag behind the development of the social crisis and the mood of the masses. It is still possible to make up for lost time. But we must not lose any more time. Today history is to be reckoned not in terms of years, but in months and weeks.

The Program of the General Strike

To determine to what degree the masses are ripe for the general strike and at the same time to strengthen the militant mood of the masses, it is necessary to place before them a program of revolutionary action. Partial slogans such as the abolition of the Bonapartist decree-laws and of the two-year term of military service will find, of course, an important place in such a program. But these two episodic slogans are entirely inadequate.

Above all tasks and partial demands of our epoch there stands the question of power. Since February 6, 1934, the question of power has been openly posed as a question of armed force. The municipal and parliamentary elections can be of importance insofar as the evaluation of forces is concerned—but nothing more. The question will be settled by the open conflict between the two camps. Governments of the type of Doumergue-Flandin,
The General Strike and the GFT

The General Strike is a powerful tool in the repertoire of the trade union. It is not a weapon to be used lightly, but when it is necessary, it can be a decisive factor in winning a struggle for workers' rights and improving working conditions. The General Strike is a coordinated, mass action of workers who strike together, refusing to work in a particular industry or sector. This action puts pressure on employers and the government, forcing them to negotiate and make changes.

The General Strike has been used by trade unions around the world to achieve significant gains for workers. It is a form of collective action that can be used to demand better wages, safer working conditions, and more democratic workplace practices. The strike is a powerful way to send a clear message to employers and policymakers that workers are united in their demand for change.

In order to be successful, a General Strike requires careful planning and coordination. Trade unions must work together to ensure that the strike is well-organized and that all members are aware of the goals and objectives. It is important to have a clear strategy and to be prepared for possible outcomes, including negotiations with employers and the possibility of a compromise.

The General Strike is not always successful, and there are risks involved. Employers may try to force workers back to work through threats or violence, and it is important for workers to be prepared for these challenges. However, when used effectively, the General Strike can be a powerful tool in the fight for workers' rights.
TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF SOLIDARNOSC.

The eighteen months from August 1980 through to December 13th 1981, were dominated by the events in Poland, and by the role played by Solidarnosc. The reason was simply that for the first time, the working class, in a Stalinist State, were taking on the bureaucracy, avoiding the bloodshed of the 1936 and 1970 experiences and seemed to be winning. Anti-Communist and anti-working class forces were jubilant at the strength of the Polish workers, claiming the struggle as their own, and ignoring the fact that the 21 demands of Solidarnosc, were demands that they would never accept in total or in part. The jubilation of these right wing forces declined as the Polish economic crisis deepened during 1981, and concern over the repayment of Polish debts to Western banks became more worrying.

In the Trotskyist movement, the Solidarnosc phenomenon was greeted with apprehension. Two very confused groups (the international Spartacist tendency and the Workers' Party) abandoned the Polish working class to line up with the hard line Stalinists, arguing that because of the role of the Catholic Church and the fact that point 3 of the 21 demands state "To respect freedom of expression and publication as upheld by the Constitution of People's Poland and to take no measures against independent publications, as well as to grant access to the mass media to representatives of all religions," therefore, for them Solidarnosc was reactionary. Their position on this, must exclude them, not only from the Trotskyist movement, but also from all those tendencies, whose origins are based in the Left Opposition.

As far as the rest of the Trotskyist movement was concerned, there was a general air of uncertainty. Some comrades admitted that the road Solidarnosc was travelling was better than the outright confrontation and 'associated bloodshed that the trotskists would have probably gone for. But apart from that and general statements about the need for a revolutionary party, there was a general feeling that we, of all people, ought to have the most to say, but didn't know what. The Trotskyist movement was bemused. Of course it isn't the first time that revolutionaries have been caught napping by mass upsurges of the working class, nor the first time that they have been totally confused by them. The Bolsheviks and Lenin were caught unaware by 1905 and 1917, and in 1905 they were very sceptical about Soviets. The difference is that the revolutionaries, then, were in close proximity to the working class upsurge, and able to evaluate it at first hand and learn from it. Lenin's analysis in 1917, while developed outside Russia, was based on the 1905 "dress rehearsal", and more importantly was in agreement with the grass roots of the Bolsheviks. The Trotskyist movement however, has not had this advantage, when attempting to analyse what was happening in Poland. With the exception of Edmund Baluka, no Trotskyist has any organic links with the Polish working class, and Baluka, himself, was in exile for nearly ten years, before the eruption of Solidarnosc. The result has been that all branches of the Trotskyist movement have been unprepared to come to terms with Solidarnosc, its contradictions, its possibilities, and to actually formulate a programme for the left in Solidarnosc. The result of this has been primarily, an acceptance of Solidarnosc as a trade union, which is how the Reformists and the bourgeois press have portrayed it, and to see the struggle in terms of a trade union fighting for its rights.

This is not a correct assessment for a whole number of reasons, which make the Solidarnosc experience, a novel development for the working class. It is the aim of this document to explain the distinct features of Solidarnosc, and to assess what our programme should have been, so that in the future we are more prepared.

THE NATURE OF POLAND.

The Trotskyist movement has predominantly characterised the countries behind the "Iron Curtain", with the exception of the USSR, as defomed workers' states. Other left tendencies, with the exception of the Stalinists, consider these states to be state capitalist. By the term defomed workers' state, the trotskists attempt to explain the setting up of a political and economic system, on the lines of the USSR, which is characterised as a degenerated workers' state, but without ever having been a genuine workers' state, that is with state power in the hands of the workers, after having had a proletarian revolution. The characterising feature in class terms, of both the degenerated and deformed workers' states, is the existence of a privileged bureaucracy, sitting above the working class, and dominating political and economic life. Its ability to rule is based on international relation-
ship of class forces rather than national class relationship. The bureaucracy maintained its existence on the backs of the workers, by counterposing to them the threat of capitalist restoration and the need to fight against that threat.

The importance of the nature of Poland's class rule in relation to Solidarnosc is two fold: firstly, who was the struggle directed against, and for any honest Stalinist, this ought to have far reaching implications; secondly, what does that struggle show about the consciousness of the Polish working class?

The 21 demands of the Gdansk agreement spell out the essential points of the struggle, primarily it was against the bureaucratic domination of the workers lives. The establishment of the independent self-governing trade union Solidarnosc, broke one of the established methods of keeping the Polish workers down through control of the trade union structure. The right to strike was also guaranteed by point 2.

Points 3 and 5 broke the bureaucracy's dominance of the media and allowed other groups to put their views across and specifically the M.K.S. (Central Strike Committee) demands to go through the media.

Point 6 calls for the opening of the books and point 9 calls for the guaranteeing of the sliding scale of wages, both fundamental demands, breaking the monopoly of knowledge that the bureaucracy had about the economy and also at a stroke, destroying the ability to force real wages down, through inflation.

Point 10 calls for the internal market to be satisfied before exporting products, so that only the surplus is exported. For an economy massively in debt to Finance Capital, this is a blow not so much at the bureaucracy, as at Finance Capital itself.

The majority of the rest of the demands are very important social ones. The creche and nursery facilities, and more housing, but the above demand point the finger at the focus of the struggle. In a sense, the demands for creche and nursery facilities, are secondary, in that given a healthy working state, they would be provided as a matter of course, the problem is not the lack of nurseries but the bureaucracy.

The attack on the bureaucracy was greeted with jubilation by the Capitalists of the West. Ever since 1917, Capitalism has been denied all of the world as its market. The division of Europe, at Yalta, was a necessary expedient, and ever since Capitalism has been attempting to gain access to those potential markets.

The prospect of the working class throwing off its bureaucratic rulers, was therefore one to which the capitalists looked forward to, believing that it would lead to a restoration of capitalism in Poland. But point 10 of the 21 demands also points the struggle against that same Capitalism which was so jubilant, and during the eighteen months, the finance capitalists were to become increasingly concerned about the prospect of the Polish debt not being repaid and the possibility of a major default on those debts (20 billion dollars in July '80 and 27 billion by June '81). This reached its climax with the imposition of military rule on December 13th 1981. The capitalist press was not altogether horrified by the clamp down, preferring a stabilised dictatorship which pays its debts at the expense of the workers, to a country divided by a power struggle, in which debt repayments are the least of either sides worries.

There was also the point that the hidden hopes of the capitalists, that the Polish workers would overthrow the bureaucracy and reestablish capitalism, obviously became the blatant pipedream that it always was. Instead of a yearning for capitalism, it became more and more apparent that the leadership of Solidarnosc had no intention of fighting to reestablish capitalism, (in fact they were extremely reluctant to press for the release of Leszek Moczulski and four other leaders of the right wing Confederation of Independent Poland - who were arrested at the same time as the KOR activists in August 1980, but were not released as part of the Gdansk agreement). The problem that many workers saw, was that it was the working class who nominally control the factories, the docks, the mines, etc., but that they didn't actually run them.

This was one of the motivating forces of the Polish working class, for their nominal control to be turned into actual control of the means of production, not a restoration of capitalism. Denis MacShane, in his book "Solidarnosc", quotes a number of cases where local factory branches of Solidarnosc were involved in reforming workers self management of the plant, and quoted one member of Solidarnosc pointing out, "After all, we are the co owners of this plant under our system". MacShane also points out that Solidarnosc, in order to get factories working, would often bypass the official bureaucracy, and
I have tried to give a clear idea of the background to the emergence of Solidarnosc. The Western media, which has consistently describedSolidarnosc as a trade union, a description which reformist socialists have agreed to, have nothing to do with them.

Both the nationalism and the role of the church are inconvenient for the Solidarnosc leadership. In all cases, the Catholic Church is seen as a foreign force in Ireland, which is understandable in view of the movement's desire to make the Catholic Church a symbol of the Irish struggle. The Church is not seen as a genuine creation of the Irish people, but rather as a colonial force, which is why Solidarnosc is regarded as an organisation that is not a class, but rather a movement that has been established by the Catholic Church in Ireland. It is important to note, however, that the Church has been a source of resistance and has played a crucial role in the history of the Irish struggle.

In fact, there are great similarities between both struggles. The Polish nationalisation struggle, for example, was a struggle for power and control. In Ireland, the Church has traditionally been seen as a symbol of power and control, and its influence has been seen as a barrier to the development of a genuine national consciousness. In Poland, the Church has been a source of resistance and has played a crucial role in the history of the Polish struggle.

As for the role of the wells, the comparisons with Northern Ireland are instructive. In both cases, the Church was a source of resistance and was seen as a barrier to the development of a genuine national consciousness. In Northern Ireland, the Church has traditionally been seen as a symbol of power and control, and its influence has been seen as a barrier to the development of a genuine national consciousness. In Poland, the Church has been a source of resistance and has played a crucial role in the history of the Polish struggle.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Polish workers' class is not a single national group, but rather a group that has been shaped by the social and economic conditions of its time. It is also clear that the Polish workers' class is not a class in the traditional sense, but rather a group that has been shaped by the social and economic conditions of its time.
Solidarność was much more than just a trade union. It was concerned with the running of Poland, by the workers. The actual running of factories, and ending of bureaucratic abuse and privilege, of bettering social conditions, of ending harassment. As such the only other unions with which it can be honestly compared are the anarcho-syndicalist C.N.T. in Spain up to 1939, or the socialist I.W.W. at the height of its influence. But yet it was not similar to these either.

Trotskyists have tended to expect the working class when in a period of upsurge to throw up workers' council, that is committees with delegates from striking plants and factories and generally any working class organisation involved. Because they are unofficial the delegates are not elected for a fixed term but re-elected for as long as the workers they represent have trust in them, and also these committees include anyone who is useful to that committee. This is essentially the model of the early Soviets in Russia, and Workers' Councils thrown up during the revolutionary wave after the first world war.

But the experience of 1956 in Poland when workers' councils were set up and then later absorbed into the bureaucracy, meant that the working class in Poland would not organise on exactly the same lines. The result of previous struggles 1956, '68, '70, '76, meant that the working class would organise on different grounds and thereby attempt to avoid the defeats of the past. Solidarność was predominantly still a system of workers' councils, but it had also adopted features from other methods of organising, notably membership from trade unions.

Solidarność arose out of strike committees and the Interfactory committees (M.K.O.) which was copied at regional level all over Poland. As such it organised all sections of workers, not by industry or profession but by regions like workers' councils. As such its concerns are with the overall running of society not the sectional interests of one group of workers. The distribution of materials the organisation of public transport etc were all seen as being within the scope of Solidarność's concern, nothing was irrelevant.

Because of this, Solidarność was constantly in a dual power situation with the Stalinist bureaucracy. If Solidarność wanted one thing and the bureaucracy another than Solidarność, because the workers supported Solidarność, would win. But such a situation cannot last indefinitely. It was surprising that it lasted as long as it did. A revolutionary upsurge of the working class will not last indefinitely, and when it ebbs then if the revolution has not been carried through, the counter-revolution will then crush the working class.

But Solidarność was not just a workers' council, it had a trade union element to it. Notably in how it was understood, by the leadership, both left and right. Walesa wanted Solidarność to be a loyal opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy. Not an alternative state mechanism. He is quoted as saying (Socialist Organiser '84) "I would like Solidarity to be a trade union movement. But life introduces corrections. If suddenly the problem of political prisoners appears or food queues get longer and longer and people are dissatisfied I can't stay in an enterprise, limit myself to the enterprise and forget about these problems." Obviously the fact that the struggle was a struggle of life and death for the Stalinist bureaucracy, was for Walesa nothing more than an interference. Throughout its eighteen months existence Solidarność changed, as is to be expected of any living organism. The inherent contradiction in it of the two component parts, the trade union and the workers' council became more and more into conflict. The longer the moderate leadership retained control, the more bureaucraticised and formal became Solidarność, and as such the trade union elements started to predominate. About this was the decline of the role of the floating helpers, the intellectuals, students, teachers etc who had no fixed place in Solidarność but were helping it. As Solidarność stabilised, so the role of the freelance activists declined, and bureaucracy started to set-in.

This formalisation of Solidarność and the prevalence of its trade union nature was of course directly related to the decline in the revolutionary militancy of the working class. That is to say that there were fewer strikes but rather that the expectations of the workers were becoming limited. The
At that point, the decision not to act from the leadership of Solidarnosc and the failure of the rank and file to respond to the events without the leadership must have been a welcome sign for the Stalinist bureaucracy. The working class upsurge had seriously ebbed. Three weeks later the militia was used against Solidarnosc as a whole.

Was there another road?

The answer must be yes, the question is what was it. For Trotskyists the struggle between the working class and the bureaucracy is a struggle for life and death. There is no halfway road. It is necessary to oust the Stalinists from power and yet could this have been done without a Soviet invasion, even if the Polish Stalinists had been unable to carry through a counter-revolution? It is impossible to say for certain. Solidarnosc under Walesa's leadership however did fail this test, that is - now certain, unfortunately. It is also true to say that even if the Stalinist bureaucracy had been ousted, and there was not an invasion Poland as a workers state would not have survived its own bureaucratic distortions, when the example it set led to similar revolutions in other developed countries. But that problem, the problem of the degeneration of an isolated workers state was not one that the Polish workers even reached.

As has been shown above there were two tendencies inside Solidarnosc not clearly defined as political positions but intertwined. The tendency towards becoming a trade union. Walesa clearly advocated the latter tendency. The problem was that there was no wing pushing consciously for Solidarnosc to develop into a national network of workers councils, bypassing the Stalinist bureaucracy totally and taking over gradually the running of the country, completely. Where steps were made along this road, for example Solidarnosc taking over the role of ordering basic materials from other Solidarnosc branches as so as to keep factories running, this was done because of the necessity created by the bureaucracies inefficiency.

There had been a Trotskyist leadership (i.e. one that had an understanding of the deformed nature of the deformed workers state) which pressed for the continuing running of the countries means of production, but systematically removing the Stalinist bureaucracy from any ability to affect that running and placing that power in the hands of Solidarnosc. Then Solidarnosc could well have arrived at a position where a formal revolution only ratified the actual balance of class forces, i.e. all power in the hands of Solidarnosc. To have done this would of course have meant in the process, having gained control of the army - a task which ought not to have been difficult, it consisting mainly of conscripts serving a two year stint. It would also have meant disarming the militia.

Would this have led to the Russian tanks going in - I think yes. But then everyone in the west expected the Russian tanks to go in at some stage, and one is reminded that Lenin and Trotsky were very impressed when the October revolution outlived the Paris commune. They too thought that the counter-revolution would crush them physically. But although the possibility of the Solidarnosc experience ending in a Stalinist counter-revolution would have remained very high. An invasion into a country where the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is the firm class rule of the workers, is a living vital force, is unlike any other invasion. The heroic resistance of the young soviet state against the white armies and the heroic resistance of the Paris Commune, demonstrate clearly that the working class will not relinquish statepower quietly once they have taken it. In Poland the counterrevolution did not even require outside help to crush the workers.
The Solidarnosc experiment is dead. It is the intention of this document to help to explain why it died, by explaining simply what it was and the forces it was up against. But although the experiment is dead the cause of that experiment is anything but dead. The inherent conflict between the working class of Eastern Europe and the stalinist bureaucracy remains, and memory of those eighteen months will remain, conclusions will be drawn from the experiment. Not least that the Polish workers were isolated.

Of the 5-12 thousand still detained, imprisonment will not be just an isolation from the rest of the community but also an enforced association with other leading activists of Solidarnosc. The result will be the possible development of a cadre inside the prisons who will be released over the next few years, released into a situation where the problems that led to Solidarnosc still remain. It is inconceivable that there will not be another uprising. When there is, the experience of Solidarnosc, the failures, the stalinist clampdown, and the need for the working class to take power from the bureaucracy to avoid a repeat will be in the minds of the present persecuted activists of Solidarnosc.

Evington.
Dec.81/Jan.82.
It is resolved that:

The Polish Solidarity Campaign be affiliated to and that if be fully and formally supported.

P.S.C. has secured the sponsorship and support of Labour MP's and prominent trade unionists. It has produced an informative Newsletter containing otherwise inaccessible material of developments in Poland as well as detailing responses in the British Labour Movement both constructive and destructive to the aims and ambitions of the Polish working class. It has established relations with Solidarnosc, who report its work to Poles through the Unions publications in Poland. It has provided speakers for trade union conferences and meetings of unions, Labour movement parties and bodies.

In short it is the only specifically Polish Solidarity Campaign that is worthy of the name. No other organisation could even pretend to have done a fraction of the work P.S.C. has done on behalf of the Polish working class. Given the military take-over in Poland in the last few days the development of that work becomes an inescapable duty for all socialists.

The aims of P.S.C. democratically adopted at its General Meeting of all members are both a broad non-sectarian but also a principled basis for work in the Labour movement.

i) To support and defend the struggle of all working class and democratic rights in Poland.

ii) To gain recognition in Britain for Polish working class and democratic organisations and for the withdrawal of support for state employer run puppet organisations.

iii) To encourage and assist all forms of conduct between working class and democratic organisations in Britain and Poland.

The prominent involvement, of Poles living in Britain, in P.S.C. in London must be developed elsewhere, Poles have, like all peoples of Eastern Europe, a hundred good reasons for their "anti-communism". Socialists will need to show tact and sensitivity to this if fruitful collaboration in supporting "Solidarity" is to be realised. Unhappily that sensitivity was not shown at last Sunday's demonstration at the Polish Embassy. The singing of the "International" and the slogan of "Defend Workers Poland" were to the Poles the legitimizing hymn of the Kremlin and the Polish Communist Party and did not mean to the Poles what they did to the British socialists at the Embassy protest.

Both the East European Solidarity Campaign and the Marxist journal of Soviet studies "Critique" do valuable related, if not entirely congruent work in this area. Neither sees itself as campaigning specifically on Poland as P.S.C. does. However, productive campaigning on Poland cannot be sustained without serious study of and critical attention to development in East European society. Thus systematic discussion of the contents of Labour Focus and Critique should be organised as part of Solidarity work for Solidarnosc.
This resolution was presented to the National Committee on Saturday December 19th one week after the military take over in Poland. The authors hoped that by moving this resolution the quite shameful inactivity displayed towards solidarity with the Polish working class could be ended and real solidarity work begun.

That hope was in vain. Instead of considering the resolution and its proposals seriously and objectively it was claimed without any explanation that the resolution was "the smuggling in of alien ideas under the guise of solidarity work". Even more astonishing was a complaint from Tony Richardson who wanted to know "Why has this resolution suddenly been foisted upon us?" Surely the question that Tony should have been asking himself was a very different one. Namely why for more than a year has the leadership including himself done absolutely nothing in support of Polish Solidarity and why even at this late hour as Polish workers are shot down and beaten to death the leadership still resist the commitment to do real solidarity work?

Instead of supporting the P.S.C. whose record of work is outlined in the resolution, the National Committee (with three votes against and three abstentions) decided to support an as yet non-existent "Labour Movement Solidarity Campaign". Who will support such a rival to the P.S.C.? Perhaps other small left wing groups who share with the W.S.L. the unenviable distinction of also having done absolutely nothing on behalf of Polish Solidarity over the past year. Certainly not the Polish people who live in Britain. F.S.C. had to put in a great deal of work in regular public meetings and fund raising socials before the respect and trust of the Polish community in London was secured.

Certainly not the trade union movement whose leaders were fighting with each other to be allowed onto F.S.C.'s platform in Hyde Park last Sunday. Those like Roy Grantham of APES who didn't get to speak could be seen instead trudging round the sodden park collecting bucket in hand. But the price that F.S.C. insisted upon from the trade union leaders was that they spoke not as individuals but publicly committed their unions to the cause of Solidarnosc and provided practical assistance. So the GMW gave money to help cover costs of Sunday's demonstration, the EEPTU provided stewards and loud speaker equipment and Terry Duffy called upon all AUEW branches to support the demonstration, while in Birmingham that same union has offered the local branch of F.S.C. its facilities free for a public meeting in January.

This formal endorsement of the Polish Solidarity Campaign by the Labour leaders creates excellent conditions for taking the cause of the Polish working class into the broad ranks of the British working class. Unhappily while the N.C. maintain their position the membership are trapped in a position of acute embarrassment. What do they do in their trade union and Labour Party branches, their G.M.C.'s and Trade Councils when faced with motions to affiliate to and support F.S.C.? Do they oppose and call for

continued....
the N.C.'s "Labour Movement Solidarity Campaign" instead? And what do they say when they are asked what is this Labour Movement Solidarity Campaign? What work has it done, who sponsors and supports it?

There is not the slightest doubt that under those conditions the N.C.'s proposal will appear as a wrecking manoeuvre to prevent real solidarity work from taking place. W.S.L. members who try to implement in practice the N.C.'s proposal in labour movement meetings will find themselves supported from an unexpected and repulsive quarter. The Stalinists. For they too will be desperately looking for a way out. For a way of supporting the butchers of the Polish working class without openly saying so. The N.C.'s proposal to reject support for P.S.C. which does exist and give it instead to a campaign that doesn't will be eagerly seized upon by all the enemies of the Polish working class.

At the same N.C. during a different but related discussion many protests were made about the stagnant internal life of the organisation. The question of Polish solidarity would we feel be a good one for the membership to show that there is still life left in the branches. And by rejecting the N.C.'s sectarian fantasy of a labour movement solidarity campaign and supporting instead the principled programme of P.S.C. the membership may yet salvage what little honour the revolutionary left still retains in the eyes of the heroic, struggling and undefeated Polish W.C.

IAN MACALMAN
JO QUICLEY

22.12.81