

JOINT INTERNAL BULLETIN

June 1981

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June 1981

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for a General Bill to back out the ...

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EEC: No to the Bosses' Market!

From our very first public political statements (Socialist Press No 1, Feb 6, 1975) the Workers Socialist League has opposed the cross-class chauvinist anti-EEC campaigns mounted by the Labour and TUC 'left' and the Communist Party, which have drawn in a motley gang of supporters including Enoch Powell, leading Tories, big farmers and a gaggle of businessmen with Commonwealth interests.

At the same time we have consistently characterised the Common Market as a bloc of the European bourgeoisie against both the international working class and against rival (non-European) capitalist trading rivals. On the one hand the removal of internal tariff barriers within the EEC created a European home market that could sustain industries on a sufficient scale to compete with US and Japanese capitalism. But on the other the initial moves towards the formation of the EEC in the 1950s must be recognised as a part of American post-war political and economic strategy - designed to buttress the capitalist nations of Western Europe and consolidate them as a bloc counterposed to the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe. The contradictory outcome of this strategy for US imperialism is analogous to the contradictions embodied in the reconstruction of Japanese industry with US capital in the post-war period: the US has in each case found itself to a certain extent creating a rod for its own back in terms of today's intense rivalry for a slump-ridden world market.

For the British bankers and monopolies and British sections of the multinationals, entry into the EEC was an essential step towards the rationalisation of production on a continental scale. They wanted the free movement of capital and components to benefit to the full from differential wage rates and higher levels of exploitation in various parts of Europe. It was on this basis that they were prepared to carry the overhead taxation costs of sustaining the anarchy of the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy.

Now, having raised their horizons to a European rather than simply a British scale of operations, a new "Euro-chauvinism" has begun to replace the national chauvinism of capitalists feeling the brunt of competition from the USA, Japan, the far East and Eastern Europe. Pressures for protectionist measures now arise not simply from British employers and British labour bureaucrats, but from whole sections of European capitalists and bureaucrats across the continent.

In every aspect the EEC has operated to further the interests of the imperialists. Its costs - soaring prices, taxes and a quickened pace of rationalisation - have been carried largely by the working class. It is, as we have characterised it, purely and simply a Bosses' Market.

It is evident, therefore that revolutionaries did not and do not favour British entry into such a Bosses' Market. Yet substantial sections of the Labour bureaucracy (- remember Roy Jenkins and the 69 rebel Labour MPs?) committed to supporting the EEC in defiance of Labour conference decisions, it has been necessary to spell out exactly how and why the EEC acts against the interests of the working class. The ICL's material has been signally weak in this respect, since the main line of their propaganda has been to show that the EEC is effectively 'no change' for capitalism in Britain. This is manifestly inaccurate.

Having spelt out the dangers and anti-working class content of the Common Market, does it make sense then to workers if we simply stand back and refuse to take a stand against membership? We are not really neutral on whether or not the British imperialists cement a new economic alliance which will strengthen their hand against the working class at home and abroad.

We took the line of campaigning for a 'No' vote in the 1975 referendum, while explaining the reactionary line-up of forces mobilised to ensure that the hostility to the EEC was not manifested in the final vote. (It is a distortion to say that workers oppose the EEC simply from a chauvinist standpoint: the astronomic rise in the cost of living brought about by the CAP - and the CAP alone - was the major factor in determining the 8 million solidly working class votes cast against the EEC in the referendum. A cut in working class living standards on this scale is a class issue: the fact that it is caused by the bosses' affiliation to a "Foreign" institution does not make it any less a class issue.)

We pressed in 1975 for the perspective of a British withdrawal from the Common Market (by a Labour government) as part of a fight to break up the whole European capitalist alliance, overthrow the component capitalist governments, and establish a Socialist United States of Europe.

In 1975 we also pointed strongly to the significance of the issue in relation to the fight for the accountability of Labour leaders to conference decisions. Wilson had flouted repeated Labour conference decisions, and a specific 2-1 vote against the EEC at a Special Conference, in order to mount a full-scale government campaign for a "Yes" vote in the referendum. We called for the NEC to use the Party apparatus to combat the government campaign, and for action to remove Wilson and replace him with a leader prepared to follow Party conference policies.

Our position was also designed to challenge the right wing reformist line that it is possible to work for socialism through the institutions of the EEC and transform it piecemeal into some kind of Socialist Europe.

The fact is (as John McIlroy correctly pointed out in SO 34) that socialist policies in Britain (or any other member state) would be incompatible with the Treaty of Rome. It is equally true, as cde McIlroy declares, that:

"For a Labour government, taking socialist measures, to break with the EEC would increase the morale of the workers and constitute a confirmation of socialist intentions similar to withdrawal from NATO. Such a government would point out that far from deserting the European working classes it was freeing itself from the shackles of their capitalists as it moved against its own. It would argue for European workers to follow its example and would support them in so doing"

It is this kind of internationalist opposition to the EEC that we have fought for. It is necessary to link the issue to the fight for socialism.

It is no accident, for instance, that as the unions and the Labour Party rank and file have moved to the left, the calls for withdrawal from the Common Market have gathered renewed strength. Workers recognise that socialist policies are unachievable within the EEC straitjacket. It is up to us to go beyond this simple recognition, and spell out the necessity to link calls for a withdrawal from the EEC to a programme of concrete and active anti-capitalist policies in Britain, and strong opposition to cross-class chauvinist campaigns for import controls and economic isolation.

At the same time, as the process of capitalist rationalisation rushes ahead across Europe, the fight must be stepped up for practical cooperation and international solidarity between the British workers' movement and its sister organisations throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

An abstentionist position on the Common Market does nothing to assist this fight. Instead it simply artificially separates revolutionaries from sections of the labour movement who are far from

committed to the chauvinist politics of the leading professional "anti-marketeers" in the labour movement. Of course anti-EEC feeling (like opposition to nuclear missiles) can be exploited by the bureaucrats as a diversion - what potentially correct demand cannot? It is up to us as revolutionaries to put forward an independent class position, to mobilise workers in action against the capitalists and against the conservative bureaucrats. This is true also of the Common Market question.

We say: *NO to the Bosses' Market!

*NO to chauvinist import controls!

*NO to class collaboration in the "national interest".

*YES to the Socialist United States of Europe

*YES to workers' international solidarity

*YES to class action to defend jobs - through occupation, nationalisation, and work sharing on full pay.

JRL 24. 6. 81.

For a General Strike to Kick Out the Tories.

The ICL opposition to the demand "General Strike to Kick out the Tories" is coupled with the advocacy of a General Strike - to achieve limited, specific goals, such as repeal of anti-union laws or the defeat of a pay freeze.

So while arguing that a call to remove the government "limits" the outcome of a General Strike in advance, the ICL in effect impose a far more restricted perspective on the very campaign for a General Strike.

Yet experience even in recent years (France in May-June 1968; the confrontation over the Pentonville dockers in 1972; the Labour government's repeal of the Industrial Relations act, in the face of a national strike call by the AUEW) has shown that governments will - under certain conditions - make concessions on precisely such limited questions as wages or particular pieces of legislation in order to head off a General Strike and remain in office to regroup and wage further attacks.

These struggles have also confirmed that the trade union bureaucracy itself goes to great lengths to restrict the demands of the general strike movement to specific, limited demands on economic questions or on particular anti-union legislation. This was the case for instance during the miners' pay struggle of winter 1973-4. The solidity of the action and the growing mass solidarity of the workers' movement were the factors that forced Heath to seek a General Election to prepare the ground for a full-scale confrontation. The miners refused to call off their strike during the election campaign, and eventually concluded their deal with the newly-elected Wilson government. But throughout the action, it has now been confirmed, Gormley and the NUM leaders were shamelessly in collaboration with the Heath government, seeking at all costs a formula on pay which would have enabled the Tories to settle and remain in office. We can see a similar case in the steel strike of 1980. While union leaders in BL and other public sector pay reviews struggled to prevent any simultaneous strikes that might extend towards a general strike, and the TUC moved in to knife the General Strike call of the Welsh TUC, the ISTC leaders themselves battled to separate the issue of wages and jobs. They knew all too well that certain concessions could be secured on the pay issue - but to stem the slaughter of jobs meant to reverse the Tory strategy for the industry - effectively defeat the government.

Such conscious moves to limit workers' struggles to issues which can be tactically conceded by a capitalist government form the consistent tradition of the British (and every other) labour bureaucracy. The crucial weakness of the 1926 General Strike was precisely the determination of the TUC leaders to confine the struggle to economic demands; their refusal to put forward any call for the removal of the Baldwin government; and the failure of the Communist Party and left bureaucracy to offer any political alternative to the treachery of the General Council. The ICL point out in their pamphlet (p13) that the 1926 strike committees in County Durham "effectively took control of their area" - but leave out the fact that the limited demands and leadership of that strike led to its defeat.

In our view it is the obstruction of political development by the labour bureaucracy which is a primary obstacle to the development of mass struggle on a scale sufficient to bring down the Tories. We accept that in real terms a General Strike will arise not from some abstract and arbitrary decision by the whole working class, but from the extension of a particular struggle or wave of struggles (with their own specific and limited demands). But we consider it essential to raise - in the context of our struggle to spread and generalise such action - the need to bring down the

government which speaks and acts openly in the interests of the employers.

It is necessary also to raise propaganda for the kind of organisation needed by the working class to force not only the defeat of the Tory government, but also prepare for the necessary struggles against an incoming Labour government; to spell out the kind of socialist policies needed by the working class, and to draw from these a series of demands to be raised under a Labour government. It is necessary also in this context to counterpose the slogan of a workers' government, rooted in the movement of the masses, to a further repetition of the Wilson/Callaghan governments.

But unless we spell out a perspective for extra-parliamentary mass action by the working class to bring down the Tory government, begin to feel their independent strength as a class, and press home the fight for their demands, such socialist propaganda becomes simply empty rhetoric, or abstract prescriptions for action after the 1984 election.

Indeed it is appropriate to turn the question around. The ICL use the slogan "Boot Out the Tories". Do they not have an obligation to explain to the workers' movement just who is to do the booting, by what means, under what conditions, and exactly what we propose to replace the booted out capitalists? Surely the answer cannot be very different from the one embodied in the WSL's slogans.

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. This is now being advanced as a perspective by Peoples March leaders, Heffer-style lefts and wide layers of the labour bureaucracy. We must spell out that when we call for mass action to defeat the Tories we are not simply calling for another 100,000-strong one-off demonstration, for petitions or for protest stoppages, but for all-out General Strike action with the firm objective of sweeping this government from office.

If the Tories under such conditions were to call an election, they would do so not from a position of strength but of weakness. 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, redouble our efforts to develop the independent strength and organisation of the working class (councils of action, occupation committees, etc), seek means to drive the wedge between the forward-moving working class and its reluctant "leaders" in the unions and the Labour Party, build our own revolutionary forces, and seek to create the most favourable conditions to press home the struggle under whatever government emerged from the election.

We see no reason to be afraid of the possibility that a General Election may be called to defuse 'our' General Strike. We see rather a danger in failing to put forward an adequate political perspective in a potential General Strike situation; the government could once again be handed an extended lease of life by the union bureaucracy with us playing the role of the CP in 1926 - offering no serious political alternative to the limited demands of the reformists.

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THE GENERAL STRIKE

After a discussion on the joint NC about the general strike, I wrote a brief note outlining the differences as I saw them. BS did a reply for the liaison committee. These two notes are published here as appendices. This article summarises the argument and replies to BS's points.

Further reading: Workers' Action pamphlet, Why We Need a General Strike; Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike.

1. MARXISM AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

In the 19th century, the general strike was the slogan of anarchists and utopians, and the Marxists were sceptical. Engels wrote:

"In the Bakuninist [anarchist] programme, a general strike is the lever for unleashing social revolution. One fine morning, the workers in all the industries of a country, even of the whole world, stop work and, in four weeks at the maximum, oblige the ruling classes to surrender, or to attack the workers, thereby giving the latter the right to defend themselves and use this opportunity to tear down the whole of the old society... [But] it was recognised by all that a complete organisation of the working class and a full kitty were necessary. This indeed was the problem. On the one hand, the government, especially if encouraged by political abstentionism, will never allow the organisation or the funds of the workers to go so far; and on the other hand the political actions and abuses of the ruling classes will promote the emancipation of the workers long before the proletariat manages to achieve this ideal organisation and this vast reserve fund. And if it did have them, then it would not need to resort to the general strike to achieve its purpose"

(*'The Bakuninists At Work'*)

In the early 20th century, Rosa Luxemburg, basing herself on the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905 and also the Belgian general strikes for voting rights, argued that Engels' assessment was now out-of-date and one-sided. Engels was right as against the anarchists, she said; but the real development of the mass strike movements outstrips both the anarchists' conceptions and Engels' objections.

"In a word, the mass strike, as shown to us by the Russian Revolution, is not a crafty method discovered by subtle reasoning for the purpose of making the proletarian struggle more effective, but the method of motion of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution."

Consequently the task of Marxists was not "to put the mass strike on the calendar on an appointed day", but:

"To give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at its every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat which is already released and active, will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the social democrats [i.e. Marxists] are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness and that

they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it - that is the most important task of the directing body in a period of mass strikes".

('The Mass Strike')

Instead of the general strike being the product of an all-at-once working-class rejection of capitalism, it could be the means by which working-class consciousness developed from limited aims according to the laws and logic of the class struggle.

In the Transitional Programme, Trotsky writes:

"Sit-down strikes, the latest expression of this kind of initiative, go beyond the limits of 'normal' capitalist procedure. Independently of the demands of the strikers, the temporary seizure of factories deals a blow to the idol, capitalist property. Every sit-down strike poses in a practical manner the question of who is boss of the factory; the capitalist or the worker?"

And, in the same way, when any industrial action spreads beyond purely sectional limits, and begins to become class action (solidarity strikes, flying pickets, etc.), then, even if the initial demands are very limited, workers gain confidence of their strength and solidarity as a class against the capitalists.

In this way the development of a struggle starting from limited demands can lead towards revolutionary conclusions. We aim to maximise that development and to make it conscious through our fight for transitional demands.

The development from limited demands to revolutionary conclusions does not always take place bit-by-bit. A general strike is a tremendous qualitative leap in such development. Even starting from very limited demands (e.g. scrap a particular law), it rapidly raises the question of workers taking control of law and order, essential supplies and services, etc. It "poses in a practical manner the question of who is boss" of the society. It also poses an answer: the workers must take power and operate the means of production under collective control.

So we must be able to fight for the use of the general strike at relevant times as a weapon for immediate limited demands; and at the same time equip ourselves to fight for workers' victory in a general strike, once started.

That is why the I-CL has argued for raising the General Strike for specific demands (Smash the Industrial Relations Act in 1972, Stop the Cuts and Closures more recently), and not for 'Kick the Tories Out'.

2. 'GENERAL STRIKE TO KICK THE TORIES OUT'

The slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' links industrial militancy with politics in, apparently, a very clear, positive way. And it is popular with militants. But - I would argue - it is attractive partly because it is ambiguous. And Marxists need precision.

As a deliberate strategy proposed to the whole labour movement for dealing with the Tories, 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' has problems parallel to those Engels mentions. If the labour movement were conscious and well-organised enough to oust the Tories

through a general strike, then it would long previously have been strong enough to oust them by lesser means (obstruction, non-cooperation, etc.)

But BS proposes 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' rather differently. A General Strike, he argues, would most likely begin round "a very specific aim"; we should then intervene to "demand that the aim of the general strike is not merely to reverse a particular policy of the Tories but to kick them out". We do not envisage the TUC taking a deliberate decision to launch a general strike from a particular day to oust the Tories; rather, we base ourselves on an explosion of class solidarity round an immediate issue, and seek to direct that explosion towards kicking out the Tories.

This misses the nature of the general strike as a qualitative leap. Normally, even the most advanced industrial action mobilises only sections of the working class and comes to grip with only sectional issues. The labour movement relates to the general administration of society through parliamentary politics. And Trotskyists relate to the labour movement - by fighting to kick the Tories out and for demands on Labour, etc.

Once a general strike is underway, the working class has the immediate possibility of coming to grips with general politics directly. That does not mean that parliamentary politics fades away immediately. (E.g. in July 1972, when we were raising General Strike as an immediate agitational slogan, we also raised 'Kick the Tories out'). But relating to parliamentary politics becomes for us secondary compared to relating to the direct revolutionary possibilities of the general strike (workers' councils, workers' defence, etc.) The 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' slogan could only cut short those possibilities by directing the movement back towards relating to the general running of society only through parliamentary politics.

Either 'General Strike to Kick the Tories out' means: General Strike to replace Tories by Labour, i.e. general strike for a general election. In that case it is irresponsible trifling, a huge mobilisation for a comparatively minimal aim. Or it means: general strike to replace the Tories by a revolutionary government, i.e. general strike for revolution. But that is just the Bakuninist version.

3. GENERAL STRIKE FOR A GENERAL ELECTION?

But BS writes:

"I cannot understand why A asserts that the General Strike to kick out Tories demand here and now can only mean 'general strike for a general election'. If the Tories call a general election they haven't yet been kicked out; they're still in power, trying to be confirmed in power by an election".

Now the SLL used to raise 'General Strike to Kick the Tories out' explicitly as 'General Strike for a General Election':

"The general strike must not be lifted until the General Election when a Labour government pledged to socialist policies can be elected. "

(SLL 'Daily Political Letter', July 26, 1972)

I guess most workers who would support the slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' see it that way too. It makes some sense.

Short of revolution, the way to get the Tories out is to force an election. How to force an election? By making the government unable to govern. The only means of doing that open to rank and file workers is industrial action. So why not the maximum industrial action, i.e. general strike?

It's a profoundly reformist argument, because it sees the general strike purely as a pressure on parliamentary politics. It is also unrealistic. But it makes more sense than 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' as a slogan under which to continue a general strike once an election has been called.

Why is the General Strike being continued? To get more votes for Labour? General Strike to win the election? How? To get a more left-wing Labour government? How? Or because we do not accept parliamentary elections? Then why are we saying 'kick the Tories out' rather than 'kick the bosses out'? Or do we think that we can push Labour into organising a revolutionary uprising?

No: once an election is on, the way to kick the Tories out is to vote Labour. A 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' may make sense to workers as a way to force an election, but not as a way to win votes! The slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' would completely disarm us when trying to argue against use of an election call by the bourgeoisie to demobilise a general strike.

4. 'LIMITED DEMANDS'

"A's position is further illogical since it conceives of raising the general strike slogan for objectives which are surely more limited than forcing the elected government out of office - i.e. to reverse particular policies (e.g. to kill the bill). All the arguments against our position apply with greater force to his own".

No. The initial demands for a general strike will be limited; that's a fact that we have to relate to and can't change at will.

The government may take fright and grant the demands immediately. If it does, it makes no more sense to bemoan the fact that the general strike has not led further than it does routinely each evening to bemoan the fact that the workers have not taken power that day.

If the general strike does not "prove victorious immediately by the threat alone" (Engels), then it rapidly transcends its initial demands and poses the question of who rules: workers or bosses. We have to propose a strategy for victory, i.e. an appropriate chain of transitional demands. The problem with 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' is that it shies away from a strategy for victory. It evades the question of which class will rule, and looks instead at which party will govern. It directs the working class towards ducking the question of power.

Demands like 'Smash the Industrial Relations Act' or '35 hour week now' or 'Work-sharing without loss of pay' are limited but not limiting. 'Kick the Tories out' is not only limited but also (in a general strike) limiting.

5. 'MINDLESS MILITANCY'

"The alternative is just to say 'General Strike' without at this stage setting an objective. That A will surely agree is real mindless militancy".

Not quite. Obviously when we raise General Strike as an

immediate agitational call to action, we have to be precise about immediate demands. But in making propaganda (i.e. relatively full explanations to a relatively limited audience), I don't see why we can't explain the General Strike as a valuable weapon in the working class arsenal which can be appropriate in struggles arising out of limited demands but which has revolutionary potential. In the same way, we make propaganda, e.g. for occupations and flying pickets, without always specifying exactly what positive demands they may be linked to.

The I-CL has explained the General Strike in this way over the last 18 months, also raising it more agitationally at time. So far as I can understand, the French Trotskyists raised it in this way in 1935-6, for example. And Rosa Luxemburg argued for the German Social Democracy to raise the mass strike in this way, specifically opposing the idea that it should be tied precisely to just one possible issue - defence of the workers' right to vote.

"To fix beforehand the cause and the moment from and in which the mass strikes in Germany will break out is not in the power of social democracy, because it is not in its power to bring about historical situations by resolutions at party congresses".

('The Mass Strike')

6. "THE MILLION DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES"

"A's note seems to exclude anything between the demand for a revolutionary government on the one hand and an ordinary old peaceful general election on the other. But if a general strike did force a general election the situation would be one of the million different possibilities between these two extremes. It would be certainly unlike any general election ever seen before".

Yes, a general election following a general strike would be out of the ordinary. Even with my "mind-boggling lack of imagination" (BS again), I can think of a few possibilities.

* An election like France 1968 or Australia 1975 (after the Governor-General 'sacked' the elected Labour government), when the Right wins heavily by being a more convincing Party of Order than the workers' parties. The workers' parties lose because they seem to have nothing to offer but protests - no positive solutions, and/or no ability or will to fight for their solutions.

* An election where a 'centrist' bloc wins by presenting itself as the only force capable of 're-uniting the nation'. In Britain we might get a SDP/Liberal/Tory 'wet' bloc. Active strikers might well vote for such a bloc: don't workers often say that they strike not out of choice but because the harsh confrontation policies of the management leave them no option? We had this sort of development, in a small way, in February 1974, with the big Liberal and SNP vote, and a low Labour vote.

* An election like April 1975 in Portugal (after the defeat of Spínola's coup attempt on March 11) - with the workers' parties winning a majority but unable and unwilling to do anything with that majority to solve the social crisis.

* An election like 1919 in Germany when a conservative workers' party wins, with the votes of newly-aroused workers who identify that party with socialism, and uses its victory to organise counter-revolution.

Whatever the variant, revolutionaries could be active to good effect. We might even have some weight in determining which variant emerged. But in a general strike, achieving workers' power is an immediate possibility, and our task is to try to develop towards making it a reality.

All these variants are variants of what might happen after the general strike fails to achieve that immediate task.

The working class that ducks the immediate task (or allots it to its parliamentary misleaders) must expect a backlash from the bourgeoisie. The revolutionary organisation that ducks it proves itself unworthy. And for the revolutionaries to console themselves with the thought that the ensuing election will present millions of possibilities, is also unworthy.

7. "GENERAL STRIKE FOR A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT"

Some comrades in the I-CL have posed the question: doesn't our call for a Workers' Government change the terms of the argument, as compared to 1972-4? Can't we now pose GSKTO in terms of 'General Strike for a Workers' Government'?

This might be valid if the transformation of the Labour Party were much further advanced than in fact it is. But in reality a Labour Government elected now in the aftermath of a General Strike would be a conservative Labour Government. It would have Foot as Leader and Healey as Deputy. It would have policies firmly tied to capitalism.

It might prove unstable over the years, as the labour movement used its right to re-select MPs and re-elect the Leader and Deputy. But the Labour Party apparatus has enough 'dead weight' to act as an effective conservative force in the weeks and months following a general strike. It could even - with the assistance of the trade union bureaucracy - use that period to purge the militants and make sure the Labour Government was not destabilised later.

In any case, to opt for a minimal outcome from a General Strike (i.e. such a Labour Government), on the calculation that it would allow revolutionary possibilities later, is not a Trotskyist approach. And would we get even that minimal outcome? A general strike is not the way to get a general election. And the Tories could well win a general election forced on them by a general strike.

In the early 1970s, a favourite argument of Gerry Healy's was: 'The working class which has dealt with the Tory masters will know how to deal with the Labour servants'. Or:

"Once the working class has been mobilised in a general strike to force the Tories to resign, it will be able to deal with the traitors inside the Labour Party and the trade unions. It would have the strength to force socialist policies on a Labour government returned by direct class action.... With such policies forced on it by the strength of the working class, a Labour government could not be the same as previous Labour governments"

('Workers Press', 1972).

It sounds good, but it's pure bluster. The lesson of the 1970s is that the working class knew fairly well how to deal with the Tories, but was crippled by the fact that its best political slogan

was just 'kick the Tories out'. It did not know at all so well how to deal with the Labour leaders. And the Labour leaders then, by their inability to deal with capitalism's crisis, helped the Tories back into power.

It's easy to give a revolutionary gloss to 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' by saying, "A general election after a general strike could never be the same as an ordinary general election", "A Labour government brought to power by a general strike could never be the same as an ordinary Labour government". But these are consolations, not useful strategic information.

8. THE BEST WE CAN HOPE FOR?

In the joint NC discussion on the General Strike, KW argued that the fundamental error of the I-CL position was that we believed a revolutionary insurrection was possible in Britain in the near future. In reality, he said, no such outcome is possible. Therefore the best we can hope for from a general strike is the general election which is like no previous general election, the Labour government which is like no previous Labour government, etc - and we relate to that.

Other WSL comrades have said they disagree with KW. But I think KW's argument sharply expresses the logic of, for example, BS's presentation, or PL's contributions in the joint NC.

A general election like no previous general election, or a Labour government like no previous Labour government, is perhaps a desirable goal as compared to today's situation. But it is not a desirable goal during a general strike or for a general strike - unless that general strike actually has no revolutionary possibilities.

Given the strength of reformism and the weakness of the Trotskyists, we might indeed very likely be defeated in fighting for a revolutionary development of a general strike in Britain in the near future. But we can't set a limit in advance. We have to fight for victory - so that if we are defeated, it is not because of our own weakness and slowness, and so that we can rally and educate the best militants. If we do not fight for victory, we remove ourselves as a factor in the struggle striving for victory (by way, initially, of putting appropriate political perspectives), and we make ourselves into a force striving for something less than victory.

9. A NOTE ON HISTORY

The recent history of the general strike slogan in Britain begins in the early '70s, when the SLL raised it in the movement against the Industrial Relations Bill. As noted above, they raised it in the form, 'General Strike to kick the Tories out', explicitly meaning 'General Strike for a general election'.

IS (now SWP) picked up the General Strike slogan casually from time to time between 1970 and 1974 - sometimes, for example, blazoning it as the front-page headline without a word of text explaining how, or why, or what it meant. Occasionally they used 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' without any further explanation. In July 1972, when a mass strike movement developed against the jailing of 5 dockers, they dithered and failed to call for a general strike until the TUC did...

During the period in 1972 when the General Strike was really

on the agenda, the IMG stubbornly opposed the slogan, arguing for 'rounded political explanations' rather than 'calls to action'. With magnificent ineptness, they changed their line just as the General Strike went off the immediate agenda.

They proposed 'General Strike to kick the Tories out'. At first they justified it in typical logic-chopping terms: we are for smashing the state, the government is part of the state, therefore we are for smashing the government, and we are for using all means necessary, therefore 'General Strike and all means necessary to kick the Tories out'...

This rigmarole was rationalised, during 1973, with the theory that the Tory government was the only possible government for the bourgeoisie. The Tory government's policies were described as the various arms of an octopus - the answer was to slay the octopus. (But, of course, most of those 'Tory' policies could be, and were, in essentials continued by a Labour government....)

During winter 1973-4, the IMG's agitation for 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' became hysterical. When an election was called, the General Strike agitation was continued with the argument that General Strike action would help beat the Tories at the polls. The climax was reached when the election results were announced and Heath hesitated a couple of days before resigning. The IMG issued a broadsheet calling for a General Strike and for the Labour Party to ignore Heath and seize power unilaterally.

In line with the theory that the Tory government was the only possible government for the bourgeoisie, for several months in 1974 the IMG compared the new Labour government to the Allende government in Chile.

A big minority inside the IMG opposed the hysterical headline-every-issue use of 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' - and also proposed a different rationalisation of it. They proposed a parallel agitation for councils of action. The General Strike should then be proposed to kick the Tories out and replace them by a government based on those councils of action.

This was, in Trotsky's words, "to try to appease the hunger of today with the dinner of tomorrow". How can we call on workers to strike all-out to give power to councils which don't yet exist?

However, this IMG minority position is, as far as I can see, the only alternative coherent version of 'General Strike to kick the Tories out' to the SLL 'General Strike for a general election' version. The WSL's present position, it seems to me, is a sort of mixture between the SLL and IMG minority positions.

ALAN.

The joint NC discussion on the general strike seemed to suffer from WSL comrades misunderstanding our position - perhaps also us misunderstanding the WSL's position. So let's try to clarify.

WE AGREE that the general strike demand is on the agenda, to be raised in relation to specific struggles like the steel struggle in early 1980 or the recent miners' struggle.

WE AGREE in rejecting the use of the general strike as a cure-all (IMG 1973-4, SLL-WRP at various times); the paralysed refusal to raise the general strike short of 'perfect' conditions (various rightist tendencies); and unserious dabbling with the general strike slogan (IS-SWP).

WE AGREE in rejecting the old SLL slogan of 'general strike for a general election'; we agree that in a general strike revolutionaries would have to fight against moves to end the strike in favour of a general election (we also agree that, given our forces, we would quite likely be defeated in that fight); we agree that in a general strike revolutionaries would strive for the development of workers' councils and for the power of workers' councils.

WE AGREE that the slogan 'Kick the Tories Out' should be raised now, and during a general strike.

WE AGREE that the general strike is to be raised in relation to specific struggles, not as a general cure-all. We must therefore also agree - I should think - that specific immediate and transitional demands, relating to those specific struggles and their class-wide generalisation, must be raised in relation to the general strike.

WHERE WE DISAGREE then, is in the precise way the slogan 'Kick the Tories Out' and the specific immediate and transitional demands are related to the general strike slogan.

OUR VIEW is that 'Kick the Tories Out' should not be raised as the aim of the general strike. Why? Here and now it can only mean 'general strike for a general election'. To force a general election would be a great step forward NOW. But in a general strike it would NOT be. It is adventurist trifling to pose such a huge struggle for such a limited aim.

FURTHER; with the slogan 'General Strike to kick the Tories out', we could only oppose demobilisation of the general strike in favour of a general election on the following bases:

a) That we don't want a Labour government to replace the Tories, but a revolutionary government. But this is straight maximalism.

b) That the general strike should be continued for the sake of improving Labour's chances in the election. But, again, it is unserious to propose such a great struggle for such a relatively small purpose. Moreover, it is far from certain that strike action is a good vote-catching exercise.

THEREFORE we say: continue raising 'Kick the Tories Out'; raise the slogan of a workers' government in a directly agitational way as soon as that is possible; develop towards it through a chain of specific immediate and transitional demands.

(REPLY BY B.S.)

WE AGREE with paragraphs 1-7 to A's note.

We say that it is right to present 'kick the Tories out' as the aim of the General Strike at this stage in propaganda for it. That doesn't mean we would see it as the sole aim in any actual general strike or that other aims would not be added as the struggle developed. In any general strike likely to take place in the near future the aim in any case would be unlikely to be decided by our position but rather by the views of sections of the bureaucracy. It is most likely that they would establish a very specific aim related to a particular policy. In that case the demand that the aim of the strike is not merely to reverse a particular policy of the Tories but to kick them out is an extension of the aims rather than a limited aim as A. claims.

I cannot understand why A. asserts that the General Strike to Kick Out Tories demand here and now can only mean 'general strike for general election'. If the Tories call a general election they haven't yet been kicked out; they're still in power, trying to be confirmed in power by an election. Nobody would have the slightest problem understanding this. So the slogan in no way implies the need to demobilise the strike once an election is called. By calling an election the Tories would not be abdicating; they would be manoeuvring to maintain their power.

If a general strike did force the Tories into an election then obviously we could begin to raise new more advanced demands within the strike such as a concrete demand for a workers' government. Here we would have to combine the demands relating to the setting up and extension of power to councils of action etc. and demands relating to the Labour Party and parliament. It is impossible to foresee the exact scenario. We would, however, set no limit to it in advance.

A.'s note seems to exclude anything between the demand for a revolutionary government on the one hand and an ordinary old peaceful general election on the other. But if a general strike did force a general election the situation would be one of the million different possibilities between these extremes. It would be certainly unlike any general election ever seen before. If the election went ahead then there would be a massive struggle in the labour movement over whether labour movement candidates supported the strike or not. The whole question of constitutionality would be raised. The Labour party would almost certainly split, heaven knows how many ways. The workers organised in strike committees would support the candidature of those who supported the strike against Tories and constitutional Labour alike. But with a mind-boggling lack of imagination A's note dismisses all this as 'a relatively small purpose' and says that strike action is probably not a good vote-getting exercise.

A's position is further illogical since it conceives of raising the general strike slogan for objectives which are surely more limited than forcing the elected government out of office - i.e. to reverse particular policies (e.g. to kill the bill). All his arguments against our position apply with greater force to his own. The alternative is just to say 'General Strike' without at this stage setting an objective. That A will surely agree is real mindless militancy. That doesn't seem to be the comrade's position. But since he supports the call 'kick the Tories out' his position would seem to me to be summarised in the slogans 'General Strike to (achieve a specific objective) AND kick the Tories out'. This to me seems ridiculous. That is why we think it is important to link together at this stage the General Strike slogan with the question of government. We leave the positive governmental demands to depend on how the political possibilities develop. Hence, 'General Strike to kick the Tories out'.

BS.

THE COMMON MARKET AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR WITHDRAWAL.

The purpose of this article is to explain the reasons for the I-CL's (and its predecessors') opposition to the slogan of withdrawal from the Common Market. We believe that this slogan is incompatible with a consistently internationalist position, although we recognise that the WSL has always been determinedly against the chauvinism of the mainstream anti-EEC campaign sponsored by the Labour Lefts and the Communist Party.

The Common Market

The reasons for the creation of the EEC are fairly clear to see. Faced with U.S dominance in the capitalist world after World War II, the various capitalist classes in Western Europe were threatened with extinction if they did not rationalise their operations. It rapidly became apparent that the frontiers of the nation states thrown up by the bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries were too restrictive. If they were to have a hope of fighting the giant U.S corporations, then they must combine on a Europe-wide scale.

Given the central role that the state plays in financing and regulating a modern capitalist economy, more than just international mergers and the creation of a customs union was required. The development of supra-national state institutions was also needed.

So long as the various European capitalist states subsidised their own industries, sponsored parallel technological developments and operated with incompatible trade regulations then they would be easy meat for the American capitalist class. This was recognised clearly by the more perceptive bourgeois economists:

"While the Common Market is already a customs union, a plethora of barriers inherited from the past - separate capital markets, different standards, taxes, patents and an abiding nationalism - still inhibit the formation of a European industrial structure and a fully single market. The sooner these are harmonised, permitting European companies to operate freely throughout Europe, as American companies do in the United States, the quicker European companies will emerge that can compete with IBM, Westinghouse and Ford. Indeed if European companies do not take shape simultaneously with the emergence of the Common Market the customs union will simply be an irretrievable gift to the giant American companies which are already operating in Europe on a continental scale."

(C.Layton: 'European Advanced Technology' P.E.P 1969 p.50, quoted from Jones and Polan: 'The EEC: What it is and How to Fight it' p.12).

Thus we can see that the establishment of the Common Market was a response to the general needs of capitalist development. It was not a special attack on the working class or on the Soviet Union, as some have suggested. There is no reason to believe the Common Market, itself, has led to an intensification of the attacks on the working class or has shifted the balance of class forces in the bourgeoisie's favour. Indeed it should have made the task of uniting the working class on a Europe-wide basis easier.

Britain

During the 1950's, the British ruling class felt itself to be in a stronger position than its continental counterparts. The Empire and Commonwealth still provided a massive prop to the British economy, which had also benefitted from the sellers market that existed after the 2nd World War. British companies tended to be larger than their counterparts in France and Germany and thus better able to compete internationally, so the pressure to amalgamate was less severe and they rejected the chance to be in on the formation of the Common Market.

With the loss of the formal Empire and the rapid penetration by foreign competitors into the 'informal', semi-colonialist empire, it soon became apparent that the prospects for an 'independent' British capitalist economy were bleak. From 1962 onwards there were increasingly desperate attempts to get into the club.

Progress

Given the urgent need which the Common Market was intended to satisfy, progress towards a supra-national Euro-capitalism has been remarkably slow. Even during the period of capitalist boom, the various ruling classes competed vigorously with one another and specific national interests took precedence over general European ones. Today the international economic crisis is forcing the various capitalist classes back into isolation as they each attempt to save something for themselves.

The paralysis which grips the EEC is the result of the contradiction between the long term interests of the European bourgeoisies to unite their forces and their short term efforts to stave off disaster. (While no significant section of the ruling class is openly calling for withdrawal, the effective break-up of the EEC is implied by the protectionist demands of many capitalists.)

It is no part of the job of Marxists to try to intervene on either side of the bosses' dilemma. To do so is inevitably to sacrifice working class independence to one or other ruling class faction.

Whatever strategy the capitalist class, or sections of it, adopt, the result will be attacks on the working class. Our starting point has to be the defence of our class. The task of revolutionaries is to develop transitional demands which can enable the working class to resist the capitalists' attacks and launch a successful struggle for the real alternative: a United Socialist Europe.

The 'No' Campaign

It is sometimes argued that the slogan for withdrawal is correct in the form of 'No to the Bosses' Market; yes to a United Socialist Europe'. But, given that a United Socialist Europe is not an immediate possibility, the content of this slogan is simply 'Get Out' plus some piss and wind. It is similar to Tom Jackson arguing for 'an incomes policy as part of a socialist economic strategy' when he means 'wage cuts'.