

Conditions in which we struggle: UNEMPLOYMENT.

The bald figures - distorted by the Tory government's statistical tricks and by the more traditional means of concealing the extent of unemployment amongst women - may appear to vary widely, from the 'official'  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million on the dole to labour movement estimates of 5 million. But while the figures may be obscured, there is no concealing the reality that the Prime factor now shaping the lives of tens of millions of workers in Britain is relentless, unrelieved, grinding, dispiriting, demoralising mass unemployment on a scale few have directly experienced before, and it is still increasing.

The Tory and Labour leaders have played their cynical games with unemployed youth, devising ever more farcical 'job creation', 'opportunity' and 'training schemes' which at best deposit slightly better trained young people back on the dole queues a year later, and on average simply exploit unorganised, inexperienced and alienated school leavers at sweat shop rates of pay, or - worse still - to utilise them as a substitute for adult workers on full pay.

At the same time, as a result of the world economic crisis of the capitalist system, striking particularly sharply in Britain has resulted in whole sections of industry previously seen as the backbone of British capitalism being submerged almost totally, in Thatcher's ruthless drive for rationalisation and profitability. Steel production has been cut from 24m. tonnes 2 years ago, to 16m. tonnes a year. Current government proposals will cut it to 8m. tonnes. In the same period, the workforce is to be cut by almost 100 000 to little more than 50 000 still employed after a series of plant closures, and the probability of the closure of one of the remaining major plants. BL under Edwardes has seen the closure of major plants and the loss of 82 000 jobs in a period of three years. Engineering, textiles, chemicals, construction, oil refining, even retailing - every part of British industry with the slight exception of the capital intensive electronics sector - has suffered massive cutbacks and contributed to the pool of unemployment.

This comes on top of direct cuts brought about by government action - cuts in the public services: health; education; social services; housing etc. Tens of thousands of jobs have been slashed in school meals alone. The aftermath of the NHS pay dispute will bring a further series of attacks on the already hard-pressed staffing levels in the hospitals.

The scale of the shake out in productive industry is such that even the (unlikely) advent of a short term upturn, creating a rise in demand and in profitability would only offer the most marginal prospect of new jobs; basic industries are being destroyed and most closed plants will never re-open in a capitalist Britain. Any that do will never re-open their gates to more than a fraction of their former workforce. The new technology and industrial growth areas have substantial scope to expand while making no dent at all in unemployment.

The unemployed themselves have endured a particularly vicious series of attacks including the axing of earnings related benefit, the cut in benefit to below the level of inflation, the introduction of UB 671 and other measures designed to deter women in particular from claiming benefits, new complex social security procedures, and the brazen intimidation of the Oxford 'Operation Major' episode, going alongside the strengthening of the police and the forces of the state for use against the working class.

Caught between the hammer of the Tory offensive and the anvil - the TUC's refusal to offer any form of effective class action and combat the attacks - whole sections of the working class have begun



to lose sight and confidence in their vast potential strength. The trade union movement turns its back on the unemployed. The TGWU has recently redefined its 'rules' to debar the recruitment of the unemployed. This has brought a sapping growth of despair and fatalism within wide sections of the working class. For those still in a job, unemployment hangs over their heads as a daily threat. It hangs over every mass meeting vote; it hangs as an explicit or implicit penalty for challenging management on working conditions, wages or union rights. Against those prepared to fight redundancies, 'voluntary' redundancies, or 'natural wastage', employers have increasingly raised the threat of total closure or wholesale sacking, and the replacement of strikers. The ASLEF dispute - a dispute over jobs and conditions - saw this posed as a threat over a crucial nationalised industry. Strikers against redundancies at Leyland Vehicles were pressured into submission by similar pressures, argued by the employers, and more or less openly accepted at face value by frightened union leaders.

Indeed unemployment looms the larger as a threat precisely because it has appeared unchallengeable. Jobs have been massacred with virtually no resistance by the union leaders and no serious policies put forward to lead a fight.

1982 closed with a further damaging betrayal on the jobs front - the sell-out of the struggle to save Kinniel Colliery in Scotland. It is particularly damaging because the NUM had been the exception in the trade union movement in defending jobs. The threat of a national strike had completely halted previous closure threats. This time they deliberately avoided giving a lead from the top. Probably with the national ballot in mind, which because of their own tactical error, ended with an unrepresentative vote against opposing closures, they tried to promote a spontaneous move from the ranks. When this failed because of the absence of any official lead, Mick McGahy proposed to, and got the unanimous agreement from, the Scottish area executive that the closure be accepted, and even then only got it through by 7-12 votes at the conference.

The real strength of the miners against closures - obscured in the ballot by the pay issue - was shown by the strong vote of the Welsh miners against pit closures in the New Year. Unfortunately the possibility of spreading any strike action which may occur beyond Wales into other areas of the NUM will be rendered more difficult by the collapse in Scotland.

These betrayals underline the central role played by the existing trade union leadership - often 'left talking' elements of the leadership - in creating and sustaining the present levels of unemployment or more precisely their absolute inability to answer and analyse an employer who claims to be bankrupt or near bankrupt, and presents empirical 'evidence' of the necessity to cut back or rationalise their operations.

A further example of the failure to mount a serious fight on jobs is the Civil Service strike in Oxford and Birmingham for increased staffing levels to cope with the only real growth area of Thatcher's Britain - the DHSS benefit queue. The strike from the outset pointed the way to respond to the Tory offensive; but the struggle has had to be waged in the teeth of successive sell-out attempts by the CPSA's newly elected 'Broad Left' leadership. Twice mass meetings rejected proposals by their leaders to accept an offer of short term staff increases and return to work. On the 2nd Dec. a meeting of DHSS delegates held after the special pay conference of the CPSA voted for an all out national strike from Jan 17th. Then just before Christmas and after interventions by the TUC and the opposition spokesman, the union leadership voted to recommend a return to work on a slightly modified offer.



## THE GENERAL SITUATION OF THE WORKING CLASS.

The war on jobs has run hand in hand with a full-scale offensive on working conditions on the shop floor of industry. Most factories remaining open have in the main seen redundancies, linked to the speed-up of those still in work, the breaking of hard won working agreements and systematic attacks on the most militant shop stewards organisations. Running alongside this management drive has been the introduction of the Prior and Tebbit anti-union laws, each steps towards a full scale move to crack the strength of the trade union movement, and in Tebbit's provisions, dismantle the closed shop. Already dozens of resignations are taking place in the NUR - although it remains an open question whether a significant movement to leave the unions will develop. Tebbit's new Green Paper, including attacks on the political levy, looks at the next steps in politically and organisationally neutering the trade union movement, leaving shop floor workers defenceless in the face of renewed management moves.

The consistent retreat of union leaders' refusal to challenge the Tory government itself, has produced a series of substantial set-backs on wages and working class living standards. Indeed while the Thatcher government's baptism by fire began with the marathon steel workers' strike - and some concessions being won on wages in that dispute - the most recent pay battle in the NHS has lasted for longer, and concluded with a resounding set back for the NHS workforce, now tied by a vicious two-year deal which amounts to a further outright cut in their real wages. In each case the refusal of the TUC leadership to mobilise in an all-out confrontation with the government has been the decisive factor in limiting the impact of struggles which have won the overwhelming support of the rank and file. The NHS dispute also demonstrated to the horror of both Tory government and union bureaucrats the possibility of unprecedented supporting strike action from other sections of the working class, particularly the miners and engineering workers, at the very point where all were arguing that such action was of the thing of the distant past.

It took 8 months for Spenswick and Murray and co. to kill the NHS dispute; but their victory in finally doing so was a major victory for the Tory government to survive the current wage round and the possibilities of confrontation this winter. Although the 8 month action resulted in a development of trade union reorganisation in the NHS, particularly the shop stewards movement, the success of the government will contribute to the dissonance amongst rank and file workers. The possibility of the solidarity strikes and the High Court's retreat over Sean Geraghty, which could have formed a solid basis for mass action against Thatcher have been lost.

The NUPE leadership, which came out of the strike with a more militant reputation as a result of the national strike policy, in fact refused to implement it and blames the other unions.

The key was an effective fight for alternative leadership built around our policies for the NHS: all-out national strike; supporting strike action, which was achieved but not backed up and developed; open the books; nationalisation of the drug industry - now the policy of ASTMS but not pursued; the blacking of private beds and private medicine; occupation in the event of closures, with supporting strike action. The health workers for the Full Claim caucus played a significant role in this, meeting and organising and producing 8 editions of the bulletin.

The working class face the attack on every front. On housing huge cutbacks in local authority budgets, linked to the enforcement of Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' legislation, designed to deplete housing stocks, and boost the private sector, are in force. The fall in house building the rise in council rents and rates, the reduction in private house building all add to the rapidly growing homeless section of the working



class. Add to this the Tory cuts in health, welfare, education and the social services, care for the elderly and nursery provision for the very young, the picture can be seen.

In each case, facing the harshest side of all these problems, are the specially oppressed of society, women young and old, black people, young male workers and, increasingly, the elderly.

Women, denied jobs as they leave school, or thrown out of their jobs by cuts and closures, face a mounting pressure to retreat into the home, and to shoulder the increased burden of childcare, and the care of the sick and elderly as state facilities are closed down. Ignored or concealed in unemployment figures, ignored or denigrated by the official leaders of the labour movement, excluded from the ranks of the organised trade union movement, such women are offered no positive way forward and can rapidly become alienated from the labour movement as a whole.

For youth, too, nearly a million of whom are now covered by some cosmetic 'job creation' scheme, the danger remains that they are outside the organised labour movement and with no experience of its strength, see nothing in its leadership's pronouncements that can offer them a way forward.

Black people, fighting often naked discrimination in jobs and housing, suffer also indirectly from Tory attacks, since the acute social tensions building up as a result of the chronic decay and collapse of previously accepted social norms now fuels racist reaction among substantial sections of the working class, the brute expression of which is the violence of fascist streetfighters.

The elderly, having toiled their whole lives as part of the exploited working class, and expected to be rewarded with a measure of security and social care in retirement, now run up against a barrage of cuts and closures which face them with poverty, isolation, and in many cases force them unwillingly to become a burden to their children or relatives.

#### THE WAR DANGER.

The moves by both Thatcher and Reagan to step up the British, US and NATO stock piles of nuclear weapons, and to site US Cruise missiles in Britain has alerted millions of British workers and middle class people to the danger of nuclear annihilation. The mushrooming support for the CND movement - a movement in many ways bereft of any strategy offering more than a pious hope of halting the weapons build-up, but at least enabling people to declare their general sentiments - is an indication of the scale of this fear and horror in the population. Recent Gallup Polls commissioned by CND show an overall majority opposed to Cruise, Trident and even the existing Polaris weapons, with opposition predictably highest among women and youth.

But while CND has grown, like many similar peace campaigns elsewhere in Europe, it has deliberately refrained from developing as a political campaign - though its most resounding success has been in winning widespread support in the Labour and trade union movement. The feminist campaigns at Greenham Common takes this a step further with opposition to all politics and reliance on pacifist opposition of the individual, in this case women, to nuclear war.

In particular the CND leadership clearly opposes any move to link opposition to the imperialist arms drive to a more consistent and developed opposition to imperialism itself. Among thousands who demonstrate against nuclear weapons there are many who would also protest at use of plastic bullets by British troops in Ireland or against the use of cluster bombs by British planes in the Falklands war; but there



would be fewer who would develop beyond such humanitarian objections to recognise in British imperialism and the fight on a world scale for imperialist authority the main source of the violence and brutality to which they object.

The potential for a political struggle within the peace movement to raise such issues and to win the most militant forces to a consistent struggle against imperialism and its system of exploitation and oppression has yet to be assessed in practice: but the sheer scale of the forces involved must mean that a struggle flexibly and sensibly conducted could win substantial support.

Meanwhile alongside the nuclear build-up, Thatcher's government - massively boosted by the Falklands war and the barrage of jingoistic propaganda which accompanied it - has set out deliberately to stoke up nationalist sentiment which - unopposed or even rejected by the majority of the Labour and Trade union bureaucracy - has forced dangerous echoes in the working class.

Indeed the 'left' canacea of import controls and even the way in which whole sections of the Labour Left voice opposition to the Common market have merely assisted Thatcher's campaign of patriotic propaganda. The emergence of strong international pressures towards protectionism and the breakdown of existing trading blocs under the impact of the economic crisis means that an enlarged section of capitalist are prepared to throw in their lot with those seeking nationalist solutions to the British crisis.

And in the midst of this scenario of growing insularity and chauvinism, skillful media witchhunts of the Irish struggle and increasing racial tensions arising from chronic poverty and unemployment, drive further wedges into the working class.

#### ALIENATION AND RESENTMENT.

The sum total of these conditions in social and political terms is the build up - sometimes beneath the surface of society - of a very large pool of alienation and resentment, for the most part barely spoken or expressed, against the system which has so reduced whole sections of the class to desperation, and against the political - and often trade union - leaderships who are identified with that system. The alienation expresses itself in various forms all of which in one form or another mark a break from the 'traditional' structures of post-war capitalist society in Britain. On a political level there is the apparent growth of political abstentionism by sections of the working class, coupled with the alienation of sections of the middle class from the discredited policies of the Labour leaders - leading them all too often along the rightward path of support for the SDP/Liberal Alliance, with its lavishly promoted facade of 'new' policies and a 'breaking of the old mould of politics'. Thus we find a sharp drop in individual membership of the Labour Party, and the emergence of 'new' political forces which could at least potentially block the election of a majority Labour government.

On the shop floor, the combination of the management war of attrition, mass redundancies and the betrayals of the union leaders has brought a decline in the shop stewards movement which has in turn strengthened the grip of the union officials. Denied in this way, any avenue to take up their daily grievances with management, many union members have begun to despair of the union as a means of winning their demands, creating real dangers that Tabbitt's moves against the closed shop could be forced home in important sections of industry.



This situation must be met by us with a much more vigorous campaign on democracy in the unions, particularly the election accountability and recall of full time officials. The sheer scandal of appointed full time officials and officials elected for life and therefore accountable to no one should be raised at every opportunity in the course of our work in the unions. Many workers now feel they are paying the wages of people they don't elect and over whom they have no control whatsoever, who then go and work with the employer against them.

With workers' resentment thus denied organised, collective mass forms of expression, it is emerging in more anarchic, anti-social and destructive forms, such as violence in the home and on the streets - particularly violence against women and against racial minorities. The summer riots of 1981 prove now to have been an exceptional collective outburst of anger by whole working class communities, against a sea of troubles; in general, offered no lead as a class by leaders who have no wish to fight, the simmering frustration and resentment of workers is reduced to individual actions of revolt or despair, or individual efforts to break the circle and escape the daily grind on the estates and in the ghettos.

We must reject the view that there is any definable point at which the inarticulated, suppressed resentment of the working class will inevitably, spontaneously explode into mass, collective action. The Thatcher government has so far correctly calculated that the dead weight of unemployment, supplemented by the dead hand of the labour bureaucracy, could outbalance the bursts of anger and militancy that have erupted from the rank and file of the labour movement. That is why, although recently raising police pay and boosting police and army recruitment and equipment, the Tory government has not been seriously clearing the decks for an anticipated mass clamp-down. Far from becoming harder, they have found that the more factories are closed, the easier it is to close the rest.

While we must understand the alienation and resentment which has built up within the class, we must not stand back and think that this is going to burst into mass struggle of its own accord. We must seek ways of giving expression to this frustration and militancy of the class. Despite all the betrayals and victimisations and the effectiveness of the attacks on the unions, the workers themselves are not cowed or defeated. Behind the confusion the enormous power is still there. When they receive a lead which offers them the possibilities of struggle they respond. From behind the frustration the militancy emerges repeatedly in the big plants.

It is a situation which will not continue indefinitely. The workers movement will not stand still. The possibility of decisive defeats which would damage this situation is there. We must address ourselves to this situation, and to the extent that we can with small forces, offer a lead to the workers.

#### THE MEDIUM TERM

1983 will see the next General Election, in which it is already obvious that the Tories will run on an election platform based on a continuation of their stony-faced 'resolute approach', designed to win the confidence of the middle class and exploit the divisions brought about in the Labour vote by the defection of the SDP.

They will be 'putting the Great back in Britain' and dismantling the nationalised industries, with rich pickings for the lucky



future shareholders, combined with a possible package of further tax and other concessions to the prosperous middle classes while trading upon the implausibility of Labour's official proposals to confront the economic crisis, through the alternative economic strategy.

Tory leaders will exploit to the hilt the nonsensical proposal -s of Peter Shore's economic package - with its obvious dangers of creating a runaway collapse in the value of the pound, and bitter popular memories of the disastrous attempts of previous Labour governments to implement almost identical policies.

And they will lean upon the 'Falklands factor', their success in beating down the number of strikes, their willingness to take on and confront the 'monopoly power of the unions'.

It is not yet clear whether such tactics can enable the Tories to gain a further period of office under conditions of 5 million unemployed. But at present there is no sign of what ought already to have been a complete collapse of the government's electoral support. Thatcher manages to be at one and the same time the country's most popular and least popular politician.

It might be easier to assess the outcome of the next election were it not for the uncertain fortunes of the SDP/Liberal Alliance, whose period of growing success flew in the face of an increasing polarisation in class terms, and appeared to pose a serious danger in particular Tory seats. It is not a simple matter to estimate the precise impact on a General Election of the Alliance's quaint blend of traditional reformist policies - wage control and national plans - with the union-busting projects so dear to the hearts of the ex-Labour renegades, and the more radical tinge inherited from the Young Liberals. It is still conceivable that the SDP will - as many sections of the capitalist class, and particularly the capitalist press appear to have hoped - succeed in taking enough votes from Labour to prevent the election of a majority Labour government - particularly in the wake of the gerrymandering 'reform' of constituency boundaries. But it seems unlikely that the SDP itself will - as some of its founders dream - emerge as a party of government, except as insofar as it is able to strike a deal with the Tory or Labour leaders.

It is plainly with this at least partially in view that the ultra-right wing of Labour's NEC is so hell-bent upon carrying through a purge of the left at a time when all 'normal' electoral logic would have indicated they should leave a breathing space. And though Foot's speeches dwell repeatedly on nuclear disarmament, arch-anti-unilateralist Healey remains Deputy Leader and it is plain that the Labour manifesto will fall far short of a unilateralist commitment, just as it will avoid any other explicit pledge to serious left wing policies. Indeed the pressure to incorporate such policies has already slackened dramatically with the retreat of Benn and the Bennites - backed by the CP's fellow-travellers - in the aftermath of the Blackpool '82 conference. Pressure 'not to rock the boat' will likely subdue whole sections of the formerly fighting left at every level in the Labour Party between now and the next election, producing an equivalent slackening in the political struggle in CLPs and wards of the party. The impetus towards new recruitment from the working class and the mobilisation of the rank and file against the Labour leadership, already slowing down, will diminish still further and many of the forces increasingly willing to work with us over democracy issues and other questions in the period since 1979 will hold their distance from us organisationally, staking all upon securing the reelection of a Labour government, at the same time the resistance to the witch hunt has mobilised forces which are qualitatively strong in the fight and to which we must relate and whom we must organise.



Meanwhile on the far left the various organisations will continue their attempts to come to terms with the current situation in the labour movement, the harsh and difficult conditions in the unions on the one hand and the importance of working within the LP on the other; the IMG turning too late and too far towards existing sections of the Labour Party; the SWP with its despairing analysis of the possibilities of actual struggle turning its back on both the LP and on the fight in the unions, while proclaiming the need to 'build the party'.

Under such conditions only a firm and balanced approach to the situation - recognising the material and political forces that govern developments in the working class as a whole and the labour movements in particular - can enable us to pursue systematic work without losing our heads or missing opportunities.



## THE VACUUM OF SHOPFLOOR LEADERSHIP.

Since the point where the miners' strike and the resistance of the AUEW defeated the Heath government, and forced the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, the shop floor trade union movement in British industry has suffered a major weakening of its leadership.

The power of the shop stewards movement was singled out as a major target by the 1964-70 Labour government, whose 'In Place of Strife' legislation was swapped for a pledge that union leaders themselves would police the unions.

The institutionalised class collaboration of the Wilson/Benn 'participation' era and the social contract after 1974, did much to undermine the former level of independence of the shop stewards' movement both from the union bureaucracy and from management. The refusal of the Communist Party and clash with the Labour government led many Stalinist led or influenced shop stewards' committees into a prolonged period of acquiescence to government pay limits and the associated arguments on the need to preserve 'viability' and 'hold down inflation'. The confused talk of 'planning agreements' and the supposed common interests of workers and management expressed in the union representation on Benn's National Enterprise Board, served further to weaken the stewards' movement and lead to increased class collaboration at the very point where the war on jobs and living standards was being stepped up.

In addition to this the political implications of convenors and shop stewards who had for the most part worked all their lives under conditions of at least relative capitalist boom and relative full employment left them ill-prepared to lead their members under the rapidly changing conditions from the mid 1970s onwards. Labour's appointment of Edwardes, the spearhead of new hard line management in BL was naively welcomed not only by the extreme right wing but by virtually the whole body of BL convenors, led by the Stalinists. In few sectors of industry have shop stewards been sufficiently aware in advance of the kind of attack upon them being prepared by management. Instead the routinist forms of thinking, of activity and of organisation which are almost inevitable in 'boom' time lingered on with catastrophic results into the midst of Tory recession.

Nor has the response of many of the stewards and convenors who have woken up to the new dangers posed by the management offensive been adequate. Some, terrified to pose any serious challenge to the system, which they regard as fixed and 'normal' - and simply going through a temporary rough patch - have shifted markedly to the right, even become witchhunters of those who have proposed policies to oppose speed up, redundancies and closures. Others, despairing of any official support for struggles in their own plant, weighed down by repeated betrayals at local and national level and by the defeats suffered by the working class as a whole under the Tories have abandoned any struggle at all, accepting voluntary redundancy or simply allowing themselves to be made redundant.

An additional problem is that the opposition from the left is almost invariably hopelessly confused by the utopian politics of the 'Alternative Economic Strategy' - in particular its reverence for the future viability of a reformed British capitalism, its incessant demands for 'selective' nationalist import controls and its wide-eyed faith in the old chestnut of planning agreements, with the capitalists. In the sharp confrontations which have been posed, such policies offer no fighting perspective to the working class, but recreate all the confusion on which previous betrayals have been based.

These weaknesses have been exacerbated by a series of successful victimisations of prominent shop stewards, notably Derek Robinson and



Alan Thornett in BL and key militants in the NHS unions, and by the various techniques brought in by management and the right wing of the trade union bureaucracy to increase the leverage exerted on the membership by the Tory press and mass media - the introduction of postal ballots for trade union elections, where there is an election at all.

To prepare for class action to confront and defeat the ruling class offensive, we must find ways of reaching those sections of workers left leaderless and frustrated by these developments, the stewards left isolated, and the layers of workers who must come forward as the new stewards, the next leadership in the renewal of the shop stewards' movement.

To begin this we must, of course, start with our well established analysis of the developments that have led to the present situation. We must explain the impact of the betrayals, explain the politics of the previous leadership and of the bureaucracy, and point all the time to the necessity - and the possibility - of building an alternative leadership, an understanding of the Transitional Programme and a conception of fighting for an active, mobilised membership.

The recomposition or emergence for the first time of Broad Left groupings, very different from the now largely marginalised Stalinist front organisations of the last period is an indication that a layer of current activists is already seeking a new political way forward against the established right wing. Such movements are at present necessarily largely restricted to committed militants and political elements; but they are a symptom of the search for new answers which must be growing widely amongst particularly younger shop floor workers. We must encourage and intervene in such emerging Broad Lefts, fighting with in them for the maximum clarity on the political issues involved without posing to them impossible programmatic ultimatums. But at the same time we must recognise that such formations alone are not the answer to the crisis of shop floor leadership: almost inevitably the sights of the Broad Lefts are focussed on securing policy gains and electoral advances for the left over the right wing at various levels in the union. The key is the development of shop floor organisation and a fighting leadership ready and willing to mobilise class action.

We must approach the frustrated layers of militants with not only a critique of their existing leaders, but also on an openly revolutionary policy. We must find flexible means of agitation and propaganda to invite them not only to fight with us in reconstructing the stewards movement and reestablishing trade unionism as a fighting force, but to fight with us for the revolutionary transformation of society as a whole, which alone can answer the problems they and their families face day by day. To fall short of such a call is to risk confusing our politics with the politics which has allowed the present situation to take shape.

We must clearly define our politics as against the reformists in both the trade unions and the MP, in particular the left reformists and their political platform, the AES. With Benn leading a substantial segment of the PLP left into pre-election retreat, the dynamic campaigning quality which lent weight to the deputy leadership struggle, has been replaced by the aura of defeat and compromise. We should not of course underestimate the potential capacity of the Benn current to maintain a 'radical' face in comparison with the party's right wing - noting for example Benn's stand over Sinn Fein's invitation from the GLC, but we should not exaggerate the extent to which they are prepared to fight the NEC right wing between now and the next election.

In presenting ourselves to the already sceptical ranks of the trade union militants we gain nothing eventually by tying ourselves politically to the past of left Labourism. This does not mean of



course, that we should turn our backs on the Labour party struggle - far from it. Nor should we renounce the fight to draw worker elements into the party to pursue it. The fight against the right wing in the labour movement as a whole is both necessary in itself if we are not to renounce any prospect of winning and mobilising the trade unions; and a vital tool in educating workers on the need for a thorough-going alternative to the politics of social democracy.

We must firmly avoid giving the impression that our policies revolve purely and simply around the Labour Party and its existing personnel, if we are to convince the best sections of the working class that we are offering a real alternative political line for the working class.

The WSL has already firmly rejected the notion that our small numbers condemn us to a propaganda existence on the fringes of the labour movement. On the contrary, we set ourselves the task of creating a Trotskyist vanguard by precisely becoming a real force within the mass movement. We have the possibility of becoming the only Trotskyist group in Britain which refuses to counterpose work in the trade unions to our work with MP activists. We see in this period both as major indispensable areas of work.

The trade unions however, are the broadest and most important mass formations of the working class. It is there that raising of the key questions we face in the Trotskyist movement express themselves in their sharpest form: How do we fight for leadership and become a factor in the mass movement? How do we build a party rooted in the working class? How do we train and develop worker communists? How do we apply the Transitional Programme, to make it become a real factor in the struggles of the working class?

Lenin stressed that the trade union question can never be simply a tactic or an orientation at a given moment but must be a constant, fundamental part of the work of a Bolshevik party. His constant theme was the construction of vanguard parties fighting to break the working class from capitalism by striving to fight with the mass movement even under the most difficult conditions.

It is this which is crystallised in the system of the Transitional Programme. Demands which both spring from the everyday struggles of the class and at the same time raise its political consciousness towards the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Demands which embody the bitterest hostility of all forms of class compromise.

With this in mind as our basic position we should examine the adequacy of our practical application of this method over the last year. This would show that we are deficient in advancing transitional demands in some of the key struggles. In some cases we have made a conscious decision, such as in BL where we did not press beyond a certain point the adoption of the sliding scale of wages into the claim because we saw the main thing as getting a struggle off the ground. On the other hand we have not sufficiently propagandised the open the books demand in respect of the cuts and in defence of jobs in general, under conditions where it is an important demand in mobilising under conditions of cash limits in the public sector and bankruptcy in the private sector. We have not adequately raised the demand of work sharing on full pay in the defence of jobs in closure or redundancy situations.

At the same time we have not advanced such demands adequately in our press.

Over the next year in particular attention should be paid towards the advancing and propagandising of the transitional demands and the consistent use of the method of the transitional programme.

This means we must address the real conditions the real problems faced on a daily basis by workers and find means of presenting our policies for these problems in such a way as to establish a dialogue with them. Our revolutionary propaganda needs of course to be not simply



abstract phrases torn out of the TP, but a development on the demands and the method of that programme in the context of the crisis of, and the situation of the workers' movement in the 1980s. We need to develop material on the recent past of the workers' movement, the politics of its leadership and the techniques of its control over the rank and file. And we need to demonstrate to workers that we can offer serious day by day leadership and perspective for their struggles. We should use our existing Trade union footholds as basis for local and even national conferences etc. around the theme of 'Reconstruct the shop floor movement' and relevant political issues.

We need also to look closely at the emergence of women workers at the vanguard of the many recent class battles as a militant force thrown into struggles by their acute level of oppression - and less inhibited by the weight of routinism and conservatism. We have already allowed one golden opportunity for us, to reach out and begin to organise the most militant of these women trade unionists to slip through our grasp (in the campaign before and after the Spring '82 conference). We must now as an organisation discuss and consider exactly how best to develop our orientation towards women trade unionists, the specific demands they raise, and their special problems in confronting and defeating the full time union bureaucrats. In the turn to grasp and respond to the particular problems of mobilising and developing women in the unions, crucial lessons can be learned on how to tackle the broader mobilisation of male workers who remain shackled by conservative notions of the role of unions and the power of the officials.

None of this can offer a foolproof recipe for large-scale swift recruitment from the industrial working class. But we must grasp the fact that whatever forces we are able to accumulate through other arenas of political work - in the Labour Party, from the women's movement, among the unemployed - it is the strategic task of reconstructing a rank and file movement capable of mobilising mass action in the work places which offers the only hope of transforming possible paper victories on policy in the unions and LPs into practical class action. To focus exclusively upon trade union work per se, and upon developing trade unionists only to the level of trade union militancy would of course be a syndicalist deviation; but to retreat from the task of building revolutionary cadres rooted in the industrial working class and capable of mobilising mass action would be to retreat into an existence of propagandism and sectarianism increasingly remote from the real fight for proletarian revolution.

#### THE UNEMPLOYED : NO ORGANISATION, NO LEADERSHIP

Were the unemployed to be organised into a single union, it would be at least twice the size of the TGWU - and one of the biggest unions in the world. Yet in reality the number of unemployed organised in unions can at best be numbered in thousands and in many areas scarcely even in hundreds. That is the scale of the problem to be confronted in mobilising serious class-wide action against the Thatcher government.

Why don't the trade union leaders take action to organise this vast pool of potential recruits? Because they would pose political questions which the reformists cannot answer. There is no compromise possible for the unemployed. They are at the end of the road, the direct victims of the economic realities of capitalism and there is no reformist solution. They are completely compromised in front of the unemployed. They have negotiated closures and redundancy pay. In many instances the TUC has been in the forefront of job-cutting productivity deals. The same can be said of the LP leadership, whilst at the same time talking about the 'evils of unemployment'. Having helped create unemployment they then blackmail workers in struggle by saying that strike for wages will endanger jobs or will threaten the industry.

The latest example of the government using unemployment is the Youth



Training Scheme. This scheme is to replace the YOPs as cheap labour. They are even talking about whole factories entirely staffed by YTS labour. The TUC describe the scheme as "a good opportunity for youth" and urges the trade union movement to become involved in it.

Employed workers constantly feel the pressure of unemployment breaking down their working conditions. The high feeling in the trade union movement against unemployment has forced the TUC to reverse its original opposition to the unemployed march from Scotland to London; even the right LP NEC has had to support it. The WSL should make a major turn to the march in order, since it will be an official TUC march, to bring the fight to mobilise resistance to unemployment into the fight for new leadership. Struggles such as Lawrence Scott should be brought into the centre of it.

The TUC ignores the vast numbers of women workers, driven out of part and full-time jobs in industry and the public sector, remain excluded from of the trade unions, with their experience likewise often restricted to a handful of fleeting glimpses of a (male) full-time official negotiating the loss of their jobs or a sell out of their pay demands. On the estates and working class areas, hundreds of thousands of women denied jobs are thus also alienated from the trade union movement though during periods of struggle they, like other sections of the working class, can of course identify to a degree with those in the front line.

To build the kind of vast social and industrial movement that is necessary to overthrow the Tories and their system it is vital that the unemployed section of the working class is mobilised to fight for change.

Yet our level of coordinated WSL activity on this front has remained weak. Work among the unemployed, for their organisation in UWM, has been denied any central resources and largely "hived off" to a few individual comrades whose successful if restricted work has been largely ignored by the remainder of the WSL. Our press fails to convey and address the daily problems and reality faced by the unemployed - three times as many workers as took part in the NHS pay battle. And the result, as with the industrial working class, is little or no recruitment of unemployed workers (other than through our youth work).

Without the fight for a broader level of basic organisation of the unemployed, for activity designed to draw them into the life of the local and national labour movement, and develop them in political struggle, we can expect this problem to remain unresolved. The WSL must take urgent steps to provide the necessary central resources for the running of this work, ensuring that where we have an existing foothold in the trade union or labour movement it is utilised for the building of the widest possible campaign on the estates and around the dole offices for the recruitment of the unemployed to the UWM and into trade unions, fighting to defeat bureaucratic attempts to shunt the unemployed into

branches and to reach employed members of the general unions to enlist their support in this fight. The launch of Tebbit's new "training" initiative, together with existing job creation schemes raises once again the urgent need for Trades Councils or other local bodies to seek out these youth and recruit them to NUPE or other appropriate unions.

Such work conveniently - or perhaps unfortunately ! - overlaps with the almost equally neglected sphere of youth work, which will be dealt with elsewhere. But it is plain that unless efforts are made to mobilise adult workers in the struggle to unionise the youth on Tebbit's scheme, they will either not be recruited or fall rapid victims to the unions bureaucracy. While drawing out the revolutionary potential of the youth and attempting to develop them as a force capable of combating the manoeuvres and platitudes of the officials, we must formally establish the links between the struggle and those of adult workers who can both learn from the youth and offer them on occasion valuable advice and experience.

We should campaign for Trades Councils to form unemployment committees and set up centres for the unemployed. These should campaign for the right as part of the overall fight against unemployment.

In all our work amongst the unemployed we must put our own program in the forefront: Open the books; nationalisation under workers control; a workers' plan of production. We must show them that the only way out for them is a socialist planned economy.



# THE LABOUR PARTY

For the millions of unemployed, for the pressurised shop floor workers, for the tenants facing rate and rent increases and even cuts imposed by Labour Councils, for those in fear of nuclear holocaust sceptically watching the contradictory pronouncements of Labour Conference and Denis Healey, the Labour Party appears to be offering no more than another dose of the same old double talk and at best a relief from the relentless barrage of Tory attacks. Such workers may well vote Labour to win such relief a few may enter the Labour Party as active members in the hopes of building on policy gains and holding the leadership to the policies of the Conference; but more will in any event feel angry, even disgusted at the way Labour and TUC leaders appear completely remote from their problems and concerns.

Not least, many militant workers will be angry at the increasingly conciliatory attitude taken towards Foot and the Labour leadership by Tony Benn at a time when it is plain that the right wing are hell bent not only on a witch-hunt of militant - which might in itself leave many workers stone cold - but on a drive to crush any left wing policies at all in the run up to the next elections.

They have a right to feel angry. Benn is in effect dismantling the left wing coalition of diverse forces which brought him so close to winning the deputy leadership of the party. While a small segment of that coalition in the PLP has gone on despite Benn's reluctance to form an alternative Tribune grouping, the majority have toed Benn's line and moderated their attacks on the policies of the right wing. In return, Peter Shore has come out openly with a catastrophic plan for the economy under a reelected Labour government which echoes all the worst and most detested aspects of similar policies under Wilson and Callaghan. Benn's future attempts to secure election to Foot's shadow cabinet with its implied willingness to accept "collective responsibility" for the policies concocted by Shore and Co., indicate that he is now looking to a prolonged period of peaceful coexistence with the right wing at the very point where they pull out the knives against the left.

How far precisely Benn will go along this road - accompanied by the crypto-stalinists and others in the LCC, by the bulk of the Tribune group and by a sizable element in the CLPD and amongst constituency activists - remains to be seen. But it is plain that a serious fight for new leadership for accountability and for political opposition to the right wing in the Labour Party must now recognise Benn as a more or less explicit opponent, at least until after the next election. And this fact will not be lost on an increasingly cynical rank and file in the working class which always held its reservations on Benn's candidacy and will now be doubly sceptical of Labour politicians.

We have correctly and very capably related to a layer of the activists drawn forward in the last 4-5 years around the struggles for Party democracy and Benn's candidacy: we have engaged them, in a dialogue, attempted to give their struggles a firm organisational structure and political cutting edge. Our problem in the current period of development is that our stance has become too much reflecting the current stage of development of this layer, its preoccupations and debates, and insufficiently geared to criticising it from the standpoint of its detachment from the real problems and struggles of the working class as a whole, the very narrowness of its political horizons, the cloistered nature of its debates, its select audience it has been addressing.

The Labour left is by no means an unchanging or unambiguous section of the Labour movement. Its period of most healthy ferment and expansion came in the period 1978-79 class confrontations with the policies of the Callaghan government and the agreement of the catastrophic 1979 General Election. Under such conditions, the Labour left, under a refurbished and apparently radicalised Tony Benn, appeared to offer to Party members and trade union militants a means of expressing their anger, frustration and desire to change the leadership of the Labour and Trade Union movement. There was a period of influx of membership, an activation of many



previously defunct party bodies and a mobilisation of a new layer of activists at ward, Clp and other levels. The struggle of women for representation and expression of their demands through the Labour Party lent a further dimension to this ferment.

Certain real gains - in particular reselection of MPs - have been secured through such struggles and remain at present intact. But the beginnings of a reverse in the movement towards democratisation - reflected in the emergence of a centre/right and now of a far right majority on the NEC - has thrown profound doubt over the possibility of achieving the objectives of the rank and file left - the fight through the LP for left wing policies and for accountability.

The expansion of the left has been checked - and with its diminished influx of new forces has come a loss of momentum and increased pressures to toe the Foot line in the run up to the next election.

This means that many existing circles of activists face a period of arrested development or even retreat. And within its existing limitations the Labour left can find no way forward. Instead it must find itself increasingly pulled towards the position of the existing Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

So long as we operate simply on the terrain of the Labour Party work there is little we can do to persuade them of any other course. On the face of it, the fight for implementation of conference policies and the reelection of a Labour government require no organisation above and beyond the existing grouping of the left.

Yet we know that Labour democracy itself cannot be won with the Labour Party alone: it must be battled through the unions. And it is only insofar as we can turn outwards and involve Labour activists outward and involve them with the struggles and problems of the working class as a whole that we can hope to win the best of the fighting left to the politics of revolutionary marxism and a proper grasp of the context of the fight within the Labour Party.

In doing so we can in turn begin once again to transform the local organisations of the Labour Party and create conditions to bring in the necessary proletarian forces to combat the bureaucrats, careerists at local and national level.

Our approach to the Labour left in short needs not to be based upon acceptance of its existing (largely petty-bourgeois) class composition and narrowly focussed preoccupations, but upon the fight in practice to challenge its limitations and mobilise workers in the struggle against the leadership of the LP. Taking advantage at every step to advance and propagandise our programme.

The struggle for accountability and for fighting policies is a vital struggle in the developing crisis of social democracy. It enables us to go far further than before in exposing the inbuilt limitations of a party controlled lock, stock and barrel by a conservative trade union and parliamentary bureaucracy. It enables us to test out to the maximum and show the freedoms and openness pointed by the right wing of the Labour Party, and show the advances by the left are met by dictatorial policies, methods from the bureaucracy. But this should not blind us to the fact that detailed issues themselves - the ins and outs of the Labour Constitution or the insertion of particular policies into this or that manifesto - are of direct relevance to relatively few people. What most working class voters are interested in is whether a Labour government seriously offers an alternative to the Tories. The answer to such a question does and cannot be in the hand of Tony Benn or Michael Foot: it comes down to the level of organisation and mobilisation of the working class itself to press home its own demands and to remove those leaders who will not comply. Even the issues of Labour democracy must be solved primarily not in the Labour Party itself but in the fight for the democratisation of the trade union.

Obviously workers must be pressed to take up their demands in the Labour Party and we should be part and parcel of that fight. But at the same time we must equip workers with a systematic and ongoing critique of the politics not only of the right wing within the party



but also of the panaceas and the evasion of the left. We should share, reflect and build upon workers' anger at the remoteness of the left from life on the estates and in the factories. We should demand that the leaders of the left lead a fight against Peter Shore, recipe for disaster, and attach their refusal to do so.

And as the New Year brings more Labour Councils to the dilemmas of drawing up budgets to conform with Heseltine's spending straitjackets we must fight alongside those workers sick to the teeth of rate and rent rises who are waiting for some sign that a Labour Council Councillor is prepared to place his or her job on the line by mobilising a fullscale defiance of the Tory government. We can reinforce this by turning towards LP recruitment on the Council estates, recruiting unemployed men, women and youth to lend their voices to the struggle.

Our policy for Labour councils faces with the economic straitjacket of Heseltine's cashlimits must be to oppose any surrender to the Tories. Where necessary to oppose cuts and rate/rent increases, we should advocate the drawing up of budgets reflecting the needs of working people in the area, but which do not balance - and explain clearly the gap between Tory government policies and the necessary level of social provision for services. Conferences of the local Labour movement - trade unions, Labour Parties, tenants associations, etc. - should then be organised by Labour councillors as the basis for mobilising the working class to fight for such policies in defiance of council officers, government district auditors and any other steps taken to remove control from the Labour council. We should call for the cancellation of debit charges and call attention to the profit of the banks.

The turn must be to the working class electorate, the big estates, the unemployed, women in the home and the reservoir of potential support among the users of services as well as council employees in order to mobilise a mass base of support for a confrontation with the government.

Should we find that such conferences despite our struggle and campaign fail to take the necessary stand in a confrontation with the government - and opt instead for spending cuts, redundancies and rate/rent increases, then we should assess whether or not our supporters on the council concerned will resign any leading positions and refuse to implement policies to which they are fundamentally, and explicitly opposed.

The struggle for leadership on the level of local government has brought our supporters far closer to the real difficulties of creating a mass base for struggle against Tory cutbacks, and the twin pressures towards sectarian flagwaving on the one hand, and opportunist adaptation to reformist councillors and to the dictate of the Tory government on the other. Such experiences are important provided our movement can draw from them the new and concrete methods of struggle.

We need to take up strongly issues such as privatisation which is now a massive issue in local government as well as the NHS, Education and the Nationalised industries such as BL, BSC, British Telecom and British Rail.

It is in the context of a fight on these issues directly affecting the working class that we can best create conditions to mobilise workers against the Tories.

COMMITTEE EDITORIAL  
RECEIVED SECTION



Witch hunt of Militant and the Left. As long as the question remains an abstract one of well-known national figures apparently clearing out an underground bunch of clandestine trouble-makers, the working class will be easily swayed by the distortions of the press. If we are to relate the struggles of the Left in the Party to the problems of the working class and thus demonstrate why the purge of Militant is the thin end of the wedge for Labour's right wing, we can create the chance to fight the witch hunt.

The fight against the witch hunt must also be taken up in the unions where we have not sufficiently raised current struggles in the Labour Party. It is plain that if Duffy and the ultra right in the union leadership succeed in implementing the purge of the Labour Party they will be encouraged to attempt a similar attack on their own rank and file. The bedrock of Labour's right wing - the block vote of the unions - must be tackled. We should call for any reduction in the weight of the block vote. We must wage a continuous democracy struggle for accountability, new leadership and new fighting policies in the Trade Union movement.

There are many issues in this struggle in which the broader fighting unity developed in our work on the LP can pay dividends enabling us to reach wider layers of the existing and emerging left wing. We should avoid any temptation simply to erect political and organisational barriers that can prevent steps to deepen the dialogue with these forces and win them to revolutionary politics.

But if the price of our continued political intervention among such forces is a further dilution of our political line and submergence of our revolutionary organisation, that price both in terms of LP and trade union work will be too heavy. Our contribution as Marxists in the current phase of acute leadership crisis and political confusion in the Labour movement as those who fight to dispel illusions - where necessary in confrontation with the Labour bureaucracy - and promote political clarity and not as mere retailers of an anonymous "broad" publication sufficiently vacuous to escape the attention of the right wing witch hunters.

We should examine the work of the broad groups to assess success or otherwise in carrying the tactic out. How big in reality is our periphery in the MP? How many broad groups function? How many recruits has it produced for the WSL? How effective is it in hardening and deepening our intervention?

It appears at least in the short term that the complications of seeking to purge Militant will preoccupy the Labour NEC; but should they succeed in establishing that precedent, then it could be a short swift step to outlaw other left currents including SX. Under such conditions we must maintain no less than our current political profile, resolutely maintaining the debate on the levels of policies as well as democracy and the constitution and prepare for a new combination of "LP legal" and "illegal" work in the event of the paper being proscribed.

It would assist neither our work among the surviving "hard left" periphery in the LP who stick with us through the witch-hunt, nor the work to reach the militants in the unions and other arenas of struggle, were we to reduce ourselves to the exclusive production of a "legal" press which is not able to carry revolutionary propaganda and develop and argue a serious political critique of the currents of the Labour Left. Our relationship with the fighting left must be firmly based on defined common objectives and defined and argued political differences which we take up - with some sensitivity - in the course of our joint struggle against the right wing.

#### FOR A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

Assuming that Foot and his right wing successfully weather both the witch-hunting of the capitalist press and the storm of cynicism amongst Labour voters, it is conceivable that the defeat of Thatcher at the polls could result in an elected Labour government - whether in a majority or minority in Parliament. But is now firmly excluded that such a government be elected on a manifesto in any way reflecting the left victories in recent Party conferences: what is now in prospect is at best a repetition under changed conditions of the election of the Wilson governments or, quite possibly, a re-run of the period of minority Labour government under the 1977-79 Lib-Lab pact.



Such a government will in either case come under substantial pressure from the rank and file of the working class - while there is no doubt that its leadership will seek and implement a revised form of "social contract" and a package of policies designed to prop up the surviving elements of British capitalism at the expense of the working class.

While the most conscious worker militants will seek to utilise the recent gains in Party democracy to call their leaders to order, it is plain that with Labour back in government the full weight of the trade union bureaucracy will be mobilised to protect the Labour leadership against the rank and file: some heavy blows could be struck in reversing gains by prolonged and bitter struggles.

As under Wilson and Callaghan we would of course advocate electoral support for Foot against the Tories and the Liberal/Alliance - while sharply counterposing the needs of the working class to the parliamentary politics and right wing reformist policies of that leadership. We would seek concrete means to show the contradiction between the words and deeds of a Foot government on the one hand and the actions required of a workers' government determined to defend the working class.

This fight will need to begin from day one of the new government - and almost certainly before the emergence within the workers' movement of mass organisations of struggle - councils of action - as a challenge to the power and authority of the government. We would need to continue to seek a road to the "hard left", leftward moving and disillusioned workers in the Labour Party and broader workers' movement, spelling out and making concrete a programme of transitional, democratic and other demands and agitating for independent working class action to secure them. Part and parcel of this would be the fight to mobilise the rank and file and rebuild the shop floor movement, as well as organs of workers' control at factory level, the fight for councils of action at local level, raising demands at national level for a government that would implement anti-capitalist policies - nationalising occupied factories, banks, etc. and implementing a crash programme of useful public works to create millions of new jobs.

Effectively therefore we would still be calling upon workers to fight with us within and against their existing organisations for a revolutionary programme and perspective. We cannot say in advance how far such a struggle could go before it produced a further major split within the reformist organisations: we can be sure that no such split will take place until and unless serious mass forces are rallied to an alternative programme and policy and mobilised in opposition to the existing trade union and Labour leaders. The experience of such a struggle would enable us to win important and broader forces from the workers' movement as a whole to the banner of socialist revolution and create the possibility of mobilising whole sections of the working class.

It is in such conditions of mass struggle that the demands for the arming of the working class and its mobilisation against capitalist reaction, for the expropriation of the means of production and for the government to be made answerable to councils of actions can begin to acquire more than simply a propaganda value, and the building of a genuinely mass revolutionary

party to lead the struggle for power and the establishment of a workers' state - the dictatorship of the proletariat - can gather pace.

Our task at present remains that of developing, testing and strengthening our programme in the practical struggles that take place; to reach the broadest layers of working class men, women and youth now seeking away forward against the Tory offensive; and construct the cadre that must spearhead the fight for the mass revolutionary party of to-morrow.



## WORK AMONGST WOMEN

The most discussed topic in relation to work amongst women should not be whether or not we seek to build a broad organisation as a forum for political dialogue and development, but why it is that with such a "broad" organisation for the most part formally or even now potentially under our control we have so signally failed to build and recruit from the succession of major struggles and campaigns that have mobilised women in the last 18 months. Strikes and occupations at Lee Jeans, Rulecan, St Mary's Hospital, Raindas and the whole NHS pay battle involving hundreds of thousands of women have come and gone, generating scarcely a flicker of life or interest among the "broad" forces we have around us; the WX TU conference has equally come and gone with no serious attempt by WSL to build for it or follow up after it; the importance of having achieved national affiliation from NUPE has been lost and now appears irretrievable; we have seen a major upsurge of women's sections in the CLP increasingly pass over the head of a "broad" movement which began, with its roots in the LP - producing a disastrous WX Labour women's conference in November; having correctly taken the initiative for and battled through to achieve a 5000-strong demonstration on the right to work in June we offered no political leaflet or even slogans beyond "A women's right to work" and have since allowed the whole campaign to relapse into chaos and piecemeal local protests; the huge mobilisation of women on the Greenham Common protest equally found our women's organisation paralysed, with a feeble turn-out and no serious political contribution to make in combatting the pacifist illusions and confusion of the biggest women's demonstration in many years.

In other fields of campaign work - NAC, childcare, debates on pornography, etc., a mere handful of committed comrades have maintained a WSL presence despite being offered neither support nor guidance from the WSL or WX.

In short, while a substantial political ferment continues to mobilise women in militant struggles, searching debates and attempts to find ways of combatting the bureaucratic obstacles to their voices being heard in the unions and the CLP, our "broad campaign" has consistently been off beam in its application of organisational resources, lacking in political punch and almost completely unrelated to the task of winning the most committed women activists to our revolutionary programme.

This has been further complicated by the political evolution of RL from her previous uncontrolled positions while she was in the WSL to an overtly right-wing, radical feminist and anti-communist stance in the leading position of the WX.

Precisely how long she retains her hold on WX or her interest in the campaign can only be decided by the length of time it takes her to become politically isolated from the narrow group of women who have until now supported against us, but who hold back from her open switch to political with-hunting. Whatever the answer to this equation it is obvious that little if any of our politics can in the meantime be expressed through the medium of WX which remains in her control; we must either accept an indefinite pause in any agitational work amongst women or devise alternative means to continue that work pending the outcome of the in WX.

In view of the need to relate politically to sections of women fighting and seeking guidance within the trade union, the Labour Party and other basic campaigns we must find the necessary means - utilising and expanding the SX "Women in Struggle" pages, and under that heading printing or reprinting short agitational pamphlets, leaflets and other material as necessary. The large number of WSL women comrades not active in WX must be approached and involved in writing for SX and drawn into the work of the WSL women's commission which must at least in the short term plan series of public meetings on unemployment, CND and the cuts targeted at women in the workplace and on local estate, or other campaign work which does not depend on securing the good offices of RL.



Women's sections of the LP should be mobilised in active campaign work on the council estates, up with impending rate/rent increases, cuts and of course the level of unemployment, recruiting working class women and discussing outour socialist policies to confront the crisis.

But one vital lesson of the past 18 months is that such broader work - valuable as it is in general terms - can only produce political gains for us insofar as we ensure that our politics are clearly presented and firmly argued for among the women mobilised,

(Further discussions on work amongst women will take place under specific documents).

### YOUTH

As pointed out above, youth are one of the section of the population specially oppressed by capitalism and suffering particularly acutely in the present crisis. At stake for hundreds of thousands of working class youth is their whole future - whether it is to be one of unemployment, poverty and despair or one of struggle for a future.

The mobilisation of youth against racism in the late 1970s, against nuclear weapons and the explosion of youth revolt in the city riots of 1981 show their potential for rapid political development, given a fight which captures their imagination and energies. But the very volatility and political inexperience of youth can mean that without a leadership capable of

continuously driving forward and holding the attention and confidence of young people, the rapid emergence of campaigns can be swiftly followed by their decline: a youth leadership cannot be built through routinist, dilettante forms of work. It requires the full attention of a young and spirited leadership with sufficient resources at its disposal to maintain life and activity between larger "set-piece" events.

The diversity of issues which have galvanised layers of youth in the last 4-5 years - none of them monopolised or even effectively campaigned for by the Militant-led LPYS, which has stuck woodenly to its heavy-handed propaganda approach,

should warn us against any tendency simply to equate youth work and the building of the NLWYM with work in the xxxx.

It is true that in many issues we can - if we influence or control xxxx branches - utilise its machinery to support our work: but on other issues, for instance women's rights, anti-fascist struggles, gay rights or CND, the record and reputation of the xxxx and often the adult party is so unsavoury as to offer no advantage in our approach to young people. And in areas where we do not control an xxxx branch, particularly if M. has a stranglehold over the local group, we will be unable to use either the name or the forum of the xxxx if that is our only arena of work and could run the risk of demoralising youth contacts.

We should retain a flexible approach, and where no existing framework offers a means of reaching to new layers of youth, we should consider building class Fighter groups or work in groupings of black youth, YCND or other possible avenues to mobilise and organise amongst a periphery of winable youth.

We have learned from our intervention in the xxxx conferences in the last 2 years the enormous scope for the building of a left opposition to the M. But at the same time the disappointing response to our own youth paper and its conference indicates that few areas are doing very serious youth work - and there remains the danger that we seek to combat M. without having established a consistent alternative method of work. To mobilise the forces to defeat M we need to break out of the wooden, propagandist, inward-looking resolution-mongering YS branches built by M (and which differ little if at all from the adult movement in their agendas and meetings), establish lively campaigning YSS which mobilise for public activities - demos, lobbies, pickets - and develop special activities, films, videos, discos etc., as a means to reach out to fresh groups of youth.

The issues open to us for such campaigning work are almost unlimited: on so many fronts are youth under attack, so wide is the scope of issues which can grab their imagination, that a varied succession of events can, with



thought, be put together that will enable us to attract young workers, unemployed young people from the estates, and to make a specific approach to black youth, dealing with aspects of their particular oppression.

What must be grasped is that such work is essential if the vital youth cadres that will form the future leadership of our organisation are to be recruited and developed politically. With a large section of the adult workforce increasingly cynical and demoralised, the building of an active campaigning youth movement, fighting the bureaucracy in the LP, the unions and in every forum of the workers' movement can have a vital galvanising effect and assemble a strong basis for the recruitment of adult militants.

### WORK AMONGST BLACKS

The Black communities of Britain's towns and cities have suffered every form of oppression, discrimination, exploitation and violence - at the hands of the Tory government, the capitalist class, sections of the workers' movement and fascist and racist gangs and individuals thrown up by the social and economic decay of a degenerate imperialist nation.

The wretched record of the official Labour and trade union leadership on the struggle for basic rights of immigrants and Black British people has imbued within the Black community a profound and legitimate distrust of much of the Labour Movement. This does not mean however that they are not in many instances the most militant and tenacious trade unionists and dependable Labour voters: but it does mean that to win the confidence of the most committed Black people it is necessary to offer a perspective for a serious fight within the Labour movement against all remaining forms of discrimination.

A possible major step forward along these lines has been the formation of Black Trade Unionists Solidarity, a grouping launched initially in London to organise and mobilise Black workers. So far the grouping appears to have been most active in NALGO, but has already produced one campaign bulletin, and offers an important avenue for working with black militants across the Trade union movement. We should direct our black contacts towards this organisation and mobilise through trade union bodies to build support for it involving Black workers at workplaces where we are active.

In general what has been lacking in WSL work amongst Black people has been a willingness to work in Black communities, recognising it as a special field of work requiring adequate time and political preparation.

Among the issues to be taken up - over and above the massive and disproportionately high levels of unemployment amongst Black people, in particular Black youth, and above all Black women - is the ever present and apparently escalating issue of deportations under the Immigration Act.

The very existence of such racist legislation is a monument to the capitulation of the Labour leadership to nationalism and chauvinism; and it singles out in particular Black people for very special forms of summary arrest, detention and deportation. Yet the Labour movement remains to an alarming extent deaf and blind to these attacks, leaving the campaigns to be waged by local community groups. Black organisations and Community Relations Councils.

Only by getting involved in such struggles, and actively fighting to build wider support for them can we find ways to break down the barriers that separate Black workers from the mainstream of the Labour movement.

And it is vital that we do build such bridges: in our absence the most active sections of Black workers and youth make their experiences of the British workers' movement through contact with Labour bureaucrats on the one hand or the opportunists of the SWP/IMG/RCP on the other.

In the absence of any answers from the Labour movement, Black people are forging ahead with their own forms of organisation. A whole network of committees and groupings which had arisen from struggles on deportation cases appears to have drawn together in the period of the "Bradford 12" campaign - which resulted in the surprise ruling that "self-defence is no offence".

The impact of the Leeds decision will not be missed by the self-defence groups that have emerged among some of the more self-confident sections of black youth to combat the street violence of fascist gangs. We should fight



to turn this to workers' defence particularly around issues like the Brick Lane NF stall.

Nor should it be ignored by the workers' movement, which has lamentably failed to mobilise effectively against racist violence - or even in some instances to purge known racists and fascists from positions of leadership in the Labour movement itself.

The appalling lack of coverage in our press of the problems and struggles in the Black communities is a sure indicator of the fact that our comrades even insofar as they have links with Black people fail to connect this with the more general work of winning them to the WSL and extending their own experience to other comrades.

It is vital that 1983 see sustained efforts to raise the profile of our work amongst the Black communities to ensure sufficient resources are made available and that the pages of our press adequately reflect the importance of the issue and an increased amount of work being carried out.

### GAY RIGHTS

Our newspaper and the youth paper have both prominently taken up the issue of gay rights in the past year, and in a number of instances our comrades have led the struggle on the issue - for instance in the Socialist Teachers' Alliance.

But this should not give us grounds for complacency. Our organisation still has a long way to go before our own gay comrades and gay contacts can feel confident that their special oppression is understood or fought against in practice by the majority of our members. Indeed the very lack of a readily available series of demands summing up our approach to the question of gay liberation indicates how far we are from fully developing our programme in this respect.

While in the Labour Party the Issue can be taken up on a consistent propaganda level through the fight to build the LCGR and around such issues as the differential age of consent for gay sex which the NEC majority proposes to be included in any future Labour manifesto, the toughest fight is to oppose discrimination in the daily practice of workers at shop floor level in the workplace. To organise gay trade unionists, discuss their special problems, the forms taken by discrimination and possible avenues for trade union action to fight it should be seen as an issue as basic as the struggle for equal opportunity for women. Yet in few instances - least of all in industrial workplaces - have such struggles been taken up.

To prepare the basis for such work, we should arrange wherever possible to invite LCGR speakers to union branches, shop stewards and other meetings and campaign consistently against racist and sexist prejudices in our workplaces bulletins and propaganda. Possibly, more than any other oppressed minority gay people need to be persuaded that the Labour movement can offer them support, protection and a means to express themselves if they are to be won to the struggle for revolutionary leadership and the transformation of society in such a way as to destroy the material basis for the stereotypes upheld by bourgeois institutions and ideology.

### OUR PRESS AND ORGANISATION

The above points all suggest that substantial attention needs to be paid to both the form and content of our publication and to the mobilisation of our organisational resources to make best use of opportunities in the workers' movement.

The paper in particular needs to develop its political critique of the Labour Left and raise more clearly its propaganda for the transitional programme and for socialist revolution in articles aimed to be readable for the new layers of shop floor workers we must set out to attract. Articles should examine and explain the vacuum of leadership in the unions and offer our answers. Our articles should be more angled towards political conclusions proposed points of programmes or agitational objectives than simply reflecting existing struggles. And we must make special arrangements to ensure



an increased coverage of women's struggle and those of Black people and gays.

We should also make efforts to involve the necessary comrades to ensure regular articles on Labour history, the main historical and theoretical issues of the revolutionary movement, and on current cultural issues - sadly neglected since the weekly was launched.

Internally, educational work amongst our own comrades should focus on the preparation for a Summer School dealing with the major international issues that confront our movement. But in addition we should hold special educational classes aimed at preparing our comrades for work with specially oppressed sections of the working class - black people, women and gays. Area-based cadre schools should also be held to discuss in some detail the structure and functioning of our branches and area committees, with a view to stepping up a drive for recruitment and maximising the impact of our turn to the rebuilding of the shop stewards' movement.

The problems of theoretical development which have characterised our movement in the past 18 months must be combatted by the actual production of the theoretical magazine which we have agreed to produce. We should establish a functioning editorial board and appoint a full time comrade to ensure its regular production. We need developed articles on the economic crisis, on basic Marxism, the peace movement. We need to begin the theoretical and necessary debate on Imperialism - decided by resolution at the Special Conference. The leadership needs to encourage and organise theoretical work in the organisation.

We need to tighten up the general organisational structure of the WSL along the lines agreed at the fusion. Area Committees must meet and direct the work. Branches must meet regularly. They must deal adequately with organisational questions such as finances. Branches must discuss and organise the work of branch members, in campaigns, in the Trade Unions and in broad groupings. at the same time there needs to be more material direction to local work in particular trade union commissions should meet regularly (some do of course). They should direct the work in particular unions and industry.

We need more WSL/SO pamphlets: imports controls, school meals, defending the NHS and the attack on the shop stewards movement are obvious examples.

JRL JAN. 6th 1983

### Notes

There has not been time to develop sections on :  
Student work

Solidarity work - Ireland, Turkey, SA, Palestine etc.

I propose to produce such sections over the next week or so.

The international work of the WSL will be dealt with in a separate statement.

In rereading this document a more developed section on privatisation is also necessary.

COMMITTEE EDITED IN  
TEXT AND VOICE