

THE STATE OF THE UNIONS

The working class had to fight hard to establish trade unions. Workers built them in the teeth of violent opposition from their bosses, who used any means—beating up by hired thugs or the police, deportation, sackings and lock-outs—to try to crush all attempts by the workers to organize themselves to fight for better pay and conditions.

But gradually, in one firm after another, the workers won. After a trail had been blazed by industrial workers, many white collar workers also unionized. Although quite a few of the smaller firms (like the comic printers, D.C. Thompson, in Scotland, or the notorious Grunwicks') continue to hold out, the majority of the working population (about 12 million people) are now members of the unions that make up the TUC.

But the ruling class has a way of trying to turn every gain made by working people to its own benefit, and it has been doing that with the trade unions for some years now. They have tried to make the unions into an arm of their class dictatorship over the working class, tying them to the state through the trade union bureaucrats and the Labour Government, firstly through the "social contract," then through the various "pay guidelines."

They tried to hold back the struggles of workers and working people for better wages under the Tories by attempting to control the unions using the Industrial Relations Act, but this move failed miserably. The Act was clearly recognized as a measure to weaken the working class' ability to organize through the unions for its demands, and was simply made inoperable by the resistance of hundreds of thousands of workers. The Industrial Relations Act had already been smashed when the new Labour government scrapped it in 1974; it wasn't doing the working class any favours, just claiming the working class's victory as its own, parliamentary one.

Like the Tories, Labour is a party which serves the bosses, but it serves them in a different way, and this has been shown by its behaviour since the present government took office. It has achieved, to a large extent, the results the Tories wanted, but failed to get, by using different means. Instead of trying to shackle the unions with another "In Place of Strife" (Labour's forerunner to the Industrial Relations Act, prepared by Barbara Castle) they, together with most of the trade union leadership, have brought in the "social contract" and then the various "pay guidelines." Because they controlled the union machinery, the trade union leaders claimed to be acting for their members, in co-operation with the government, and some even claimed to be acting for the working class, but workers and working people have suffered a fall in their real wages under Labour, and received nothing from it which they had not already won by their own efforts.

LABOUR'S DECEPTIVE NATURE

How is it that Labour has largely got away with this?

The Labour Party was set up by the TUC as a political arm, and the leaderships of the two have been very close ever since. The Labour Party claimed to represent the working class, and to stand for socialism, which it said could be won by electing Labour to office.

This was naturally attractive to millions of workers, especially since for most of this century there has either been no revolutionary alternative to Labour, or only a weak one....

But while Labour promised a lot to the working class, and drew members and support from it, it was never a working class party, in the sense of being a party which upheld the highest interests of the working class.

The class interests it represented were always those of the capitalist class.

After all, the emergency measures used to defeat the 1926 General Strike had been prepared by the first Labour government in 1924, and the leopard has not changed his spots since then.

Labour has lost support as it has demonstrated its true nature in practice, particularly while it held office. This was especially true in 1966-70, when it had a large parliamentary majority, and nonetheless Britain was no more a socialist country when Labour eventually lost power in 1970 than it had been at the beginning of that government.

In February 1974, Labour's share of the vote fell to its lowest level since the '30s. This was due to the growing dissatisfaction of its traditional supporters. Nevertheless, some sections of the working class still have illusions about the Labour Party, though most who vote Labour no longer expect much from it; they only vote that way because they still think the alternatives are even worse.

The people who have stayed loyal to Labour are the great majority of trade union bureaucrats and officials, and it is these social democrats who have accepted Labour's pay restraint (really pay cuts, since prices have gone up faster than wages) and tried to make their members do so. Many are Labour Party members; others who are not have also helped Labour impose its policies.

Some trade union officials who are members of the revisionist "Communist" Party of Great Britain have attacked the "Social Contract" etc. in words, but in practice they have been against any effective working class action which might threaten the survival or re-election of the Labour Government, and have encouraged illusions about Labour.

Others, who pretend to be further left than the "CPGB have also assisted Labour; for example, Reg Birch, who calls himself a Marxist-Leninist and who is a member of the General Council of the TUC, worked hard to get strikers at Heathrow Airport, the Daily Express, and Ford's Dagenham to go back to work with their demands unmet. Employers, including the Daily Express bosses, have expressed their deep gratitude to him.

Because of the social-democratic and revisionist hold on the trade unions, they have been changed from organisations through which workers and working people fought for better wages and conditions into bodies used for the control and suppression of their struggles (this is why for years most strikes have been unofficial).

DANGER OF FASCISM

By linking themselves closely with the Labour Government and its policies, the social-democratic and revisionist trade union leadership is actively taking part in the building of a fascist-type corporate state, with capitalists and their government (a government which supposedly stands above classes) working hand in glove against the working class.

The power of Labour over many working class organisations, and its continuing ability to deceive some working people despite its reactionary character, make it a more dangerous enemy than the Tories, and make the revisionists and Trotskyists who hide its true nature all the worse.

Part of the trend towards a corporate state is the various "worker participation" schemes, who are supported by the Labour "lefts"

These schemes involve a few trade union hacks being given places on boards of directors, etc. Of course, they will generally be people who are already well-in with management already, and even when they are not, "participation" along with a few cocktails and a little golf, will encourage them to see things from the bosses' point of view. This will soon lead to unions deciding who must be sacked, what wage levels should be "in the company's interest", etc.

What we have said so far might all seem dispiriting. If the unions are in such a state, why bother with them?

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Two main tasks need to be undertaken.

Firstly, most important, a Marxist-Leninist party of the working class has to be built.

Secondly, rank and file trade union members need to fight for class struggle trade unions.

The importance of the Party cannot be overstressed. A Marxist-Leninist Party will represent the highest interests of the working class. Such a party stands for its general class interests, not for any particular interests; it will oppose all moves by the social democrats and their allies to make the working class accept its exploitation by the capitalist class, and will fight for the working class' political and organisational independence.

The Marxist-Leninist Party will resolutely fight both the ruling class and its agents within the organisations of the working class and working people, particularly the revisionists and social democrats; while supporting the struggle for strong, democratic class struggle unions, it will point out the need to go beyond bargaining for better terms within the present system; it will point out the need to overthrow the system by armed socialist revolution and establish the rule of the working class - the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Marxist-Leninist Party will work to win to its ranks the finest and most politically advanced sections of the working people who in all the struggles in which they participate will try to be resolute class fighters, to provide sound leadership through example and persuasion, and who will not sell out to the bosses. They will work hard and patiently to help the working people raise their political and ideological level to a Communist consciousness, to



Members of the Mansfield Hosiery Strike Committee. The bosses succeeded in defeating all the workers there by dividing them on racial lines. It is vital to combat racism in the unions.

the realisation of their fundamental interests and destiny. The Marxist-Leninists of today, and the Party of the future, will play a key role in the building of class struggle unions.

The fight for class struggle unions will be a hard and complicated one, with different problems arising within each union and each union branch. Certain guidelines can be set out however.

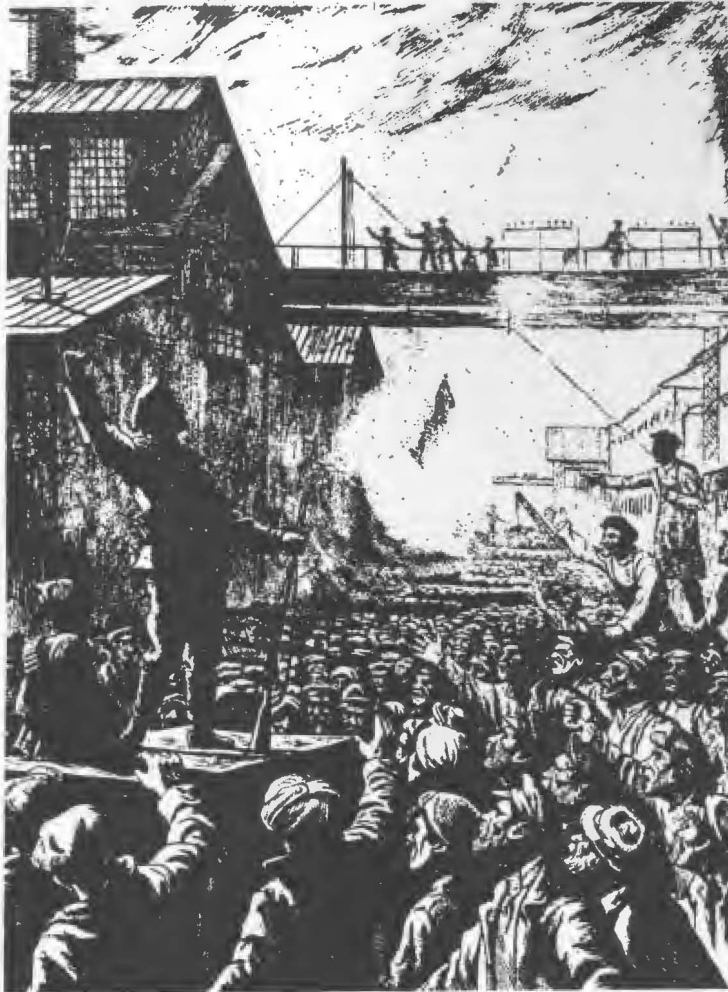
Union branches must be made as democratic as possible, and participation encouraged. Trade union hacks often use their knowledge of constitutions and union procedure to monopolise and control discussion, and write motions in a language all of their own. These are favourite methods of the revisionists and social democrats. They also bore people until enough of them have gone away for them to push through their own proposals with the votes of their loyal band of supporters who stay for the purpose. Marxist-Leninists and militant workers should try to get union meetings held during work hours if possible. Rank-and-file militants should work to make sure meetings take place fairly often but not too often; that they are short, effectively chaired, not boring, and deal with real issues. If Marxist-Leninists and militants are playing a leading role, it is all the easier to do these things.

• Unity is important for victory in any working-class struggle. Marxist-Leninists and militant workers must always fight to unite the great majority of their fellow workers by persuasion and argument, and isolate the bosses' agents and allies and diehard reactionaries.

Only with solid unity can struggles against an employer be won. Unity itself does not come without struggle, and conflict with the social-democrats, revisionists, trotskyites and fascists in the unions will take place often.

One of the favourite tricks of the social-democrats and revisionists is to put forward their own ideas as those of the working class. When they are challenged, or counter-proposals are put forward, they accuse their opponents of being splitters.

Marxist-Leninists and militants mustn't be intimidated by this sort of thing. It is right not to unite with those who would lead workers into more "social contracts", into dead-ends and class collaboration. The class struggle alternatives should be put as openly and firmly as possible, so that the union members involved will see clearly the differences between our stand



Russian workers in the days before the Revolution, organizing to seize power, as the British working class will.

and that of such people.

As the two lines are tested in practice, and the Marxist-Leninists and militants continue to argue their views, these will win more support, and higher levels of struggle against the bosses can be waged, with the union members more and more closely united around the class struggle line.

The first stages of this struggle are difficult, because firms will always look for an excuse to fire militant workers, and a union branch run by social democrats will often, as experience has shown, fail to defend the victimised worker - indeed, there are quite a few cases where the social democrats actively helped management pick out militants and fire them. However, when sufficient support has been built up for the class struggle line and its supporters, they will be able to work more openly and easily.

• Racism must be fought with

determination because it breaks up the unity of black and white working people against their real enemies. Today especially, this is full time work.

• When tackling the social democrats, revisionists and Trotskyites in the unions, it is important to concentrate on fighting the political line and ideology they push, and to identify and isolate the small handful of misleaders putting forward their rubbish, who are generally misguided but honest. This even goes for the fascists too - most of the young people they recruit are confused and have not seen any revolutionary alternative (not surprisingly) in the fake "left".

Trotskyites might throw up their hands in horror at this statement, but anyone who has worked in a place where there is a strong National Front presence knows this is true. These people should be fought in the process of hitting at the capi-

talist class.

• The capitalist enemy should be treated as the main enemy facing the working class organisations externally, and the social democrats and revisionists as the main enemy within these organisations.

Generally, all unions need to be made more democratic; all shop stewards or union reps should be made accountable to union meetings; annual conferences should be able to throw out any top union official by a majority vote of no confidence. All officials should have to stand for re-election at least every four or five years, and no-one should be elected for life.

Postal voting should be resisted, because it enables the press to interfere more easily in union campaigns to push the bosses' men. Officers should be elected by accountable branch delegates, mandated by their members through a general meeting after the manifestos of the various candidates have been circulated and discussion has taken place. Winning these things will make it easier for the members to control the union and elect a leadership which is ready to fight for their demands. This will make it possible to wage more effective, co-ordinated and organised struggles.

• Concrete demands must be put forward in each union, each firm and each union branch, taking into account and summing up the demands and wishes of the workers there. Sometimes, mistaken demands are put forward, and then better alternatives should be argued for in their stead. For example, some workers who are short of money want more overtime to make up their wages, and favour keeping the firm they work for understaffed to enable them to get it. It should be pointed out that this only means having less free time to spend with family and friends, and keeping others unemployed. What they really want in the short term is higher wages, and these should be fought for.

• Marxist-Leninists and militant workers should fight union rules and TUC rulings which limit the ability of trades councils to do their political work or which call for support for the Labour Party. They should oppose the use of union political funds to back Labour, and call for them to be used instead for anti-racist work, for campaigning against pay restraint, against the trend towards fascism, etc.

While these struggles are important, ultimately the only real salvation for the working class and working people is socialism. For Marxist-Leninists and revolutionaries all shorter-term goals must be subordinate to this.

Czechoslovakia: Ten years on.....

10 years ago, Soviet social imperialist forces invaded Czechoslovakia. This has been followed up by expansion and interference around the world by the Soviet Union, while Brezhnev has spoken about peace and "detente."

The Communist Workers' Movement and Revolutionary Communist League of Britain are organizing a demonstration on 20th August, marking the anniversary and condemning Soviet social imperialist aggression today. More details in our next issue.

