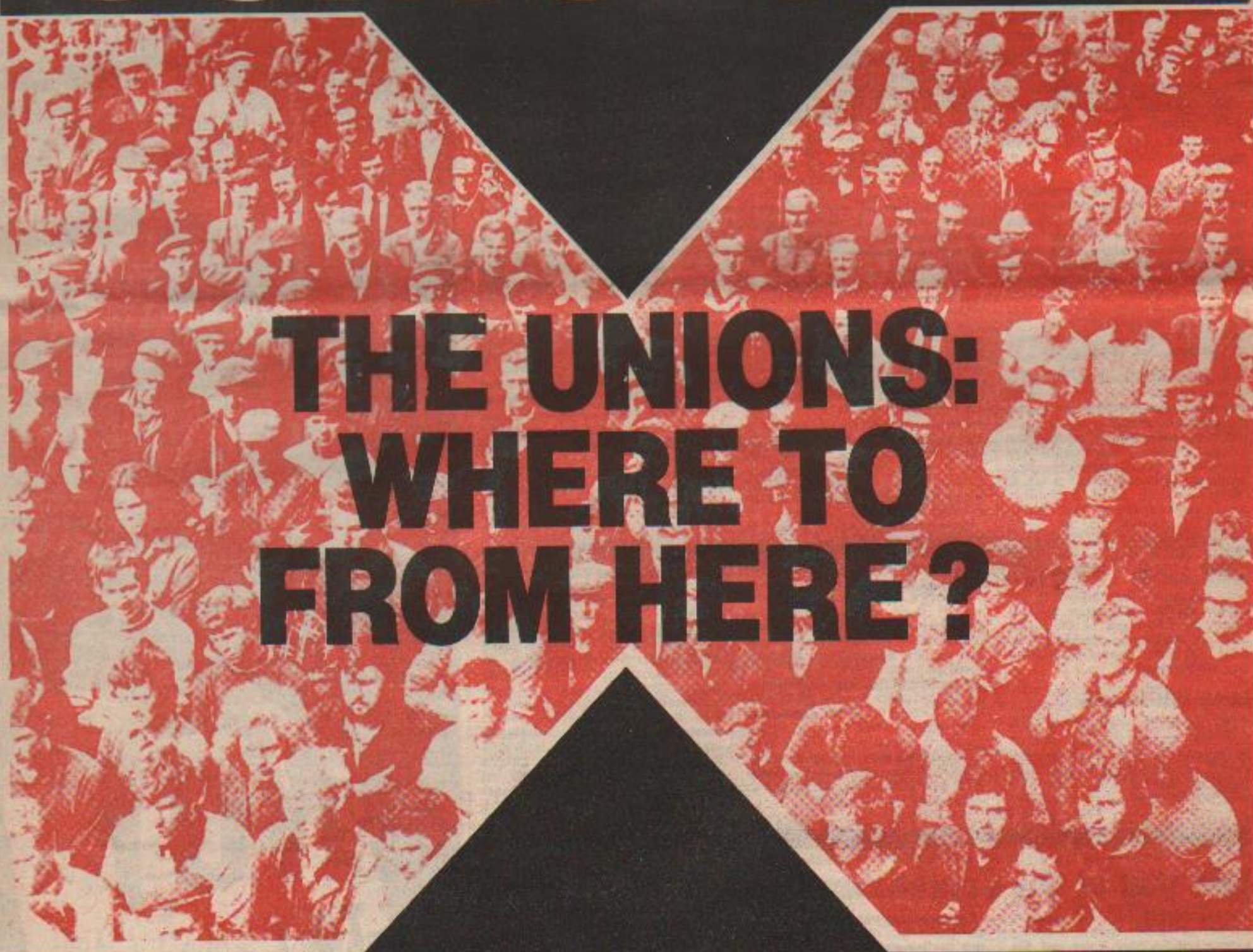


**Socialist Challenge**

# **Trade Union Conference**



**THE UNIONS:  
WHERE TO  
FROM HERE?**

**Saturday, 1 July, 10.30am  
Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham**

(creche provided)

**FOUR YEARS** of Labour Government have put to the test the strategies of all those claiming to represent the interests of the working class. Labour has managed to implement the very policies which had led Heath's Tory administration to defeat at the hands of the unions.

Callaghan and company have borrowed shamelessly from the Tories and Liberals their talk of the need to defend the 'national' interest against the claims of individual groups.

As ever, this amounts to nothing but defending the bosses' general interests against those of the workers. They have clubbed together with the Liberals in the Lib-Lab pact to show how sincere they are in

carrying out the wishes of the ruling class.

Under Labour's Social Contract, the working class has been forced to pay for a crisis not of our making. Real wages have fallen by 12.5 per cent. Social services have been cut by £3.5 billion. Dole queues have grown longer than at any time since the '30s.

Fascist organisations like the National Front have won recruits as some workers have turned to their racist 'solutions'. The Government has helped create conditions in which the fascists can thrive; and its racist immigration controls lend credibility to fascist — and now also Tory — claims that blacks are somehow to blame for the crisis.

## 'We need a new Minority Movement today'

**THE LABOUR** Government has got away with things the Tories only dreamed of because it has won important political battles.

When the firefighters went on strike to defend their living standards, Callaghan and Co claimed that the issue was the future of the Labour Government. If the firefighters were allowed to break ten per cent, other workers would follow.

The Liberals would withdraw their support. The Government would fall. The Tories would return.

In order to deal with such arguments, an alternative to the Social Contract is required. It is useless to argue a 'special case' as did the Fire Brigades Union leaders. This merely isolates those workers engaged in struggle.

The Government simply replies: 'If we stick together with the Social Contract we all make sacrifices today. But they will be small compared to the gains for everyone tomorrow. So don't rock the boat, don't struggle, Jim'll fix it....'

Such arguments have a real attraction to workers not involved in struggle, when they stand to make no gains from the struggles in progress.

Unfortunately, even those like the Leyland toolroom workers who took action in the face of massive opposition from their own union leaders as well as the Government, failed to confront these arguments head on. They tried to avoid the question of the Social Contract by taking their stand on another 'special case' — that skilled workers should maintain their differentials.

But this made it very difficult to win support for their strike action, because within the framework of the Social Contract their interests appeared to run quite counter to those of semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

### LEAP FROGGING

The toolmakers' response was not a new one. It was the way workers struggled in the 1960s. When the press used to complain about so-called 'leap frogging', this is what they were referring to: one group of workers

going into struggle for parity followed by another to maintain differentials.

That was all very well in the '60s. Wages kept ahead of prices. There was 'full employment'. The social services were expanding. Women gained increased rights, such as the 1967 Abortion Act, and despite low pay were encouraged to seek employment. At such a time, the idea of looking after the little things and letting the big things look after themselves appeared quite credible.

With the present massive attacks on living standards, and on issues such as racism and restrictions of women's rights, we can no longer rely on the methods of the last decade. These 'big questions' are ignored at our peril. The Grunwick strikers found that even a fight for trade union recognition has involved a head-on confrontation with the State.

The crisis is not of the workers' making. Why should we take responsibility for it through wage restraint? We must campaign to break the Social Contract.

### BREAK PACT

The Liberals did not join the Lib-Lab pact to defend the interests of the workers. They did so to prop up the Government's anti-working class policies. The pact must be broken.

A united fightback can only emerge if we take a clear stand on such issues. But it is not enough to fight against the Government's policies. We must also put forward alternative policies — socialist policies, which can provide lasting gains for the working class from its struggles.

Everyone knows that a strike for higher wages is very difficult to win. But it can be done. The British Oxygen workers won 26 per cent. But with inflation running in double figures this will soon be eroded. Workers have to run to stand still. Demands like automatic cost of living increases can provide lasting gains and represent part of a socialist alternative to Labour's Social Contract.

In the face of the racist onslaught of the Tories and the fascists, the Labour leaders engage in debate about how many blacks should be kept out of Britain. But black people are no more responsible for the crisis than are white workers. We must insist on the repeal of all immigration laws and an end to all controls.

Reactionary attacks on women's rights must be met with a real commitment to policies for free abortion on demand, adequate nursery facilities, paid maternity leave and so on. Such demands are summed up in the Working Women's Charter.

The example of the Charter holds out other lessons. It has become policy in a number of unions. The white-collar section of the Engineering Union, TASS, for example, was quick to endorse the Charter but it has never launched any real fight around its demands. Part and parcel of any campaign for socialist policies in the unions must be a fight for a leadership prepared to support and further mass action to win them.

Rank and file militants have shown their enthusiasm for uniting and discussing the policies for launching the fightback. When called to take action by their leaderships they have responded — like the 80,000-strong demonstration against the cuts in November 1976. When there appeared to be viable forums for discussing policies and organising around them, they have been quick to rally around them. Three thousand delegates attended the Assembly on Unemployment in March 1976. 1200 attended the February 1977 conference of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. A similar number attended the 'Leyland TUC' in March last year.

### OPPOSITIONS

Steps towards building organised oppositions to the right wing have advanced in a number of unions. The Broad Left in the Civil Service Union adopted at its last conference fighting policies and an open democratic structure. All tendencies are free to operate inside it and put forward their own positions. Minority positions are represented on its leading bodies and in its journal. On this basis, it successfully led the fight against right-wing assaults on union democracy at the recent CPSA rules revision conference.

The Socialist Teachers Alliance in the National Union of Teachers is a small but important development. It seeks to involve left-wing teachers in a democratic opposition and fights for united action with other left tendencies in the union. Smaller class struggle tendencies have been set up in the National Union of Public Employees and in the Confederation of Health Service Employees.

All over the country, support committees for the Grunwick strike organised effective solidarity by grouping local activists to fight for support in the local labour movement.

Such steps need development and extension into other areas and unions. The objective must be the creation of a class struggle left wing in the labour movement as a whole.

Faced with a similar situation to that of today, socialist activists in the 1920s formed the Minority Movement. This movement was able to act as an organising centre for struggle as well as waging a fight against the right-wing leadership.

We need our Minority Movement today. Not a carbon copy of something that existed 50 years ago. But a movement, organised and democratic, prepared to fight for socialist policies and a leadership prepared to carry them out.

## See you at the Conference!

**SOCIALIST CHALLENGE** is calling a trade union conference. We have approached Socialist Voice and Big Flame newspapers to jointly sponsor the conference on the basis of broad agreement with the perspective outlined in this broadsheet.

The conference is not designed to establish a new body in opposition to other organisations of the left. It will provide a forum where militants can exchange experiences. Discussion will centre on how to fight for a united democratic organisation to struggle against the class collaborationist right wing for policies in the interests of workers and for a union leadership prepared to carry these out.

Particular emphasis will be placed on drawing out lessons from the Grunwick and firefighters' strikes as to how militants can support and fight for socialist policies in the context of such struggles.

We will be discussing campaigns for socialist policies to: defend living standards against racism, for women's rights, and for democracy in the unions.

And we will be discussing the general lessons that can be drawn from developments in particular industries and unions for the fight for a class struggle left-wing in the labour movement as a whole.



# Trade Union Leaders

## The backbone of Labour's policies

THE TRADE UNION leaders have been the backbone of support for Government policies — from the Social Contract to immigration controls. Not only have former 'lefts' like Jones, Scanlon and Daly failed to oppose the Government's attacks; they have actively assisted them.

Other leaders, like NUPE's Alan Fisher — who opposed the cuts — divided the struggle of public sector workers from those in private industry by supporting the Social Contract. The fight against the cuts was fragmented by the failure to organise nationally

after the massive day of action on 17 November 1976.

Leaders of unions in the private sector used a similar 'divide and rule' policy. Instead of fighting the Social Contract, they took their stand on defence of differentials, thereby dividing low-paid and better-paid workers.

### DIVISION

Divisions on sex lines are sharpened by the demand for 'women out first' in the event of redundancies, while the TUC's failure to campaign for a £50 minimum wage has hit particularly hard at low-paid women workers.

Failure to take up policies to fight for the right to work threatens to divide the employed from the unemployed. And

the support of many union leaders for immigration controls and the racist 'voucher' system deepens divisions along racial lines.

The trade union leaders have imposed the Government's policies on the rank and file through blatant assaults on trade union democracy. Before last September's Trade Union Congress, Hugh Scanlon and his cronies in the Engineering Union leadership refused to recall the AUEW's National Committee to vote on the 12 month rule.

When it came to Congress, Scanlon ignored the position previously taken by his National Committee in support of free collective bargaining and — in spite of the opposition of the AUEW delegation meeting — cast the union's vote in favour of the rule.

Jack Jones announced in advance that if Congress adopted the rule, the Transport and General Workers Union would loyally carry out the will of the majority: the majority of the TUC that is, not of the TGWU!

The TUC leadership, however, did not consider themselves similarly constrained. Despite Congress's rejection of the 10 per cent limit, they refused to support the firefighters and

the call for a campaign against the 'guidelines'. And they failed to act on the Congress decisions on the Grunwick dispute.

The prize for the most blatant manoeuvres of the year must be reserved for the right-wing majority on the miners' union executive. First, they tried to overturn NUM conference decisions on the wage claim and incentive scheme through a national ballot. Then, when they lost the ballot, they overturned the decisions anyway!

### AUTONOMY

In other unions, the leaderships have attempted to make permanent inroads into union democracy through rule changes. In the National Union of Teachers, an assault on the autonomy of local branches has outlawed unofficial strike action. In AUEW (TASS) — the Engineering Union's white-collar section — delegates to conference are no longer to be elected by branches but by divisions.

In the AUEW, officials will now be elected by postal ballot. And attempts to democratise unions like APEX and the Electricians' Union, which are already short on democratic pro-



ALAN FISHER: divides the public sector from workers in private industry.

cedures, have been fought tooth and nail by the bureaucracy.

To safeguard harmonious participation in British Leyland's job-cutting Edwardes plan, Transport and General Workers Union officials have initiated a full scale witchhunt against elected Cowley assembly plant convenor Bob Fryer and deputy convenor Alan Thornett.

## The Communist Party

### The Broad Left

UNDER HEATH and even Wilson, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions was associated with all the most important trade union battles.

Against In Place of Strife, the Industrial Relations Bill, and incomes policy; for the freeing of the Pentonville Five, and, belatedly, in the struggle to free the Shrewsbury building workers.

In the last few years, however, the Liaison Committee and Broad Left formations have utterly failed to organise any resistance to the Labour Government's attacks.

The Assembly on Unemployment in spring 1976 passed a resolution calling for the setting up of local committees — nothing was done. The Liaison Committee conference in 1977 also called for local LCDTUs — again nothing happened. After calling a Day of Action on 20 April last year, the Leyland 'TUC' failed to mobilise even Leyland

workers themselves. In fact, Leyland convenor and prominent CP member Derek Robinson actively fought against strike action on the day.

The policies put forward by these conferences were in general simple repetitions of the 'Alternative Economic Policy' of the Tribune group of Labour MPs: inflation of the economy, import controls, and the like. A fight around these demands would effectively tie workers to an alternative bosses' 'solution' to the crisis, rather than mobilising workers in a fight for socialist policies against the employers and the Government. The CP leadership, as usual, provided no opportunity for amendments to their proposed motions and declarations.

Behind these tightly stage-managed conferences and their adoption of weak-kneed resolutions lies the CP's notion of 'left unity'. For them, this means an alliance with the 'left' trade union and labour leaders. But the activity of these 'lefts' has been so spineless that in order to gain an alliance with them it is necessary to sacrifice the interests of the working class.

## The Socialist Workers Party

### Rank and File

THE CONFERENCES and activities of the Socialist Workers Party-inspired Rank and File groupings have been fuelled by the loss of prestige of the Liaison Committee.

In sharp contrast to the LCDTU, Rank and File has stood for a real fightback against the Labour Government's attacks.

The Right to Work conference in November 1976 attracted some 750 labour movement delegates. The Rank and File Coordinating Committee conference last November was rather smaller, with just over 500 delegates.

But Rank and File with its 'We are the left' stance, has been unable to make any real headway from the crisis in the Liaison Committee. Both Rank and File and the Right to Work Campaign have consistently claimed to be far more powerful than they actually are; in reality, neither represent more than a small minority of even those who have been previously mobilised by the Liaison Committee.

What is required is a real struggle to unite with militants who have traditionally supported the LCDTU — not fraudulent claims and posturing. Instead their claims have been increasingly absurd. When the Rank and File conference called a one-day strike in support of the firefighters, Socialist Worker declared: 'We are the rank and file'; that nothing could be further from the truth was demonstrated when nobody at all heeded the strike call.

The increasing isolation brought upon Rank and File by such claims and the consequent 'join us or be damned' ultimatums has made the SWP think again. The 'front' image of the Rank and File groupings must be 'weakened'

they have declared. This is certainly a step in the right direction. But to provide a vehicle for a genuine broad unity in action, their 'front' character would have to be buried rather than weakened and their structures democratised to permit open debate on the policies that are required.

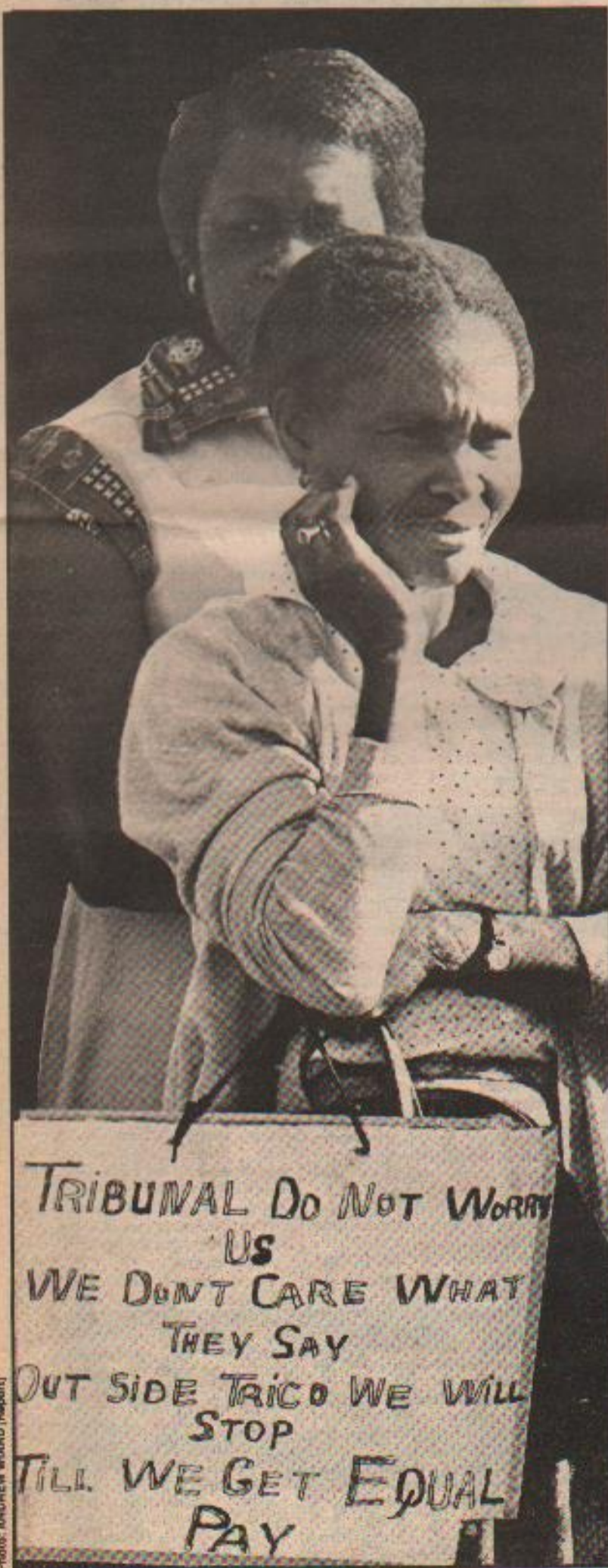
Rank and File has never developed a clear set of policies by which the working class could make lasting gains from its struggles. It has limited itself to calls for more militancy. Such calls are woefully inadequate.

It is not the working class's lack of militancy which has been the main problem. It has been the lack of clear alternative policies to those of the trade union and labour leaders. To believe, as one delegate argued at last November's Rank and File conference, that 'if you look after the little things, the big things will look after themselves'; that all is well if militancy is maintained in day-to-day struggles in the workplace — is to live in cloud cuckoo land.

Other groups, such as the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement backed by the Workers Socialist League, share with Socialist Challenge a commitment to clear socialist policies.

The CDLM, unfortunately, does not understand the need to fight for these policies through unity in action with supporters of the Liaison Committee and Rank and File. What is needed is not yet another tendency to counterpose itself to these bodies, but one committed to fighting within them for their unification on a democratic basis.

Only on these conditions will its fightback policies in the trade unions make a real contribution to building a class struggle left wing rather than a sectarian excuse for not doing so.



TRIBUNAL DO NOT WORRY  
US  
WE DONT CARE WHAT  
THEY SAY  
OUT SIDE TRICO WE WILL  
STOP  
TILL WE GET EQUAL  
PAY

# Why we're coming...

## Pat Hickey



## Denny Fitzpatrick



## Dick Hall



Since the collapse of the British Leyland Motor Corporation, and its full-scale backdoor nationalisation under the banner of British Leyland, the company's union leaderships have had their own versions of the Social Contract. This Social Contract has involved the unions in participation in one form or another, explains PAT HICKEY.

Welcomed by the Communist Party as a major extension of democracy, participation has meant the unions carrying out management decisions, improving productivity, punishing strikers, accepting redundancies.

In the interests of a 'strong Leyland' the union leaderships have accepted an incomes policy more stringent than the one being enforced nationally. Its greatest success to date was the Michael Edwards meeting last month when union representatives and management voted together to get rid of 20-30,000 jobs.

To continue on this course the union leaderships have had to stifle the activity of their membership. When the tool-makers struck against the incomes policy the unions

bosses concentrated on attacking the strikers.

When Leyland management refused to recognise Alan Thornett as deputy senior steward, the unions responded by laying charges against Thornett and eight other stewards. Wage negotiations have been handed over to a joint negotiating committee, not accountable to the shop floor. The combine committee has done nothing to help the Speke workers except issue a statement.

Plant leaderships have become the front line for the union bureaucracy. If this process continues the unions in Leyland will be mere tools of management.

The left must begin to organise now to challenge this situation; to fight for an end to participation, against the Edwards plan, in defence of living standards.

This can be done by building a class struggle opposition in Leyland which unites on a national level all those tendencies and forces who are opposed to the policies of the present leadership.

The Socialist Challenge trade union conference will provide those of us in Leyland with an opportunity to learn from the experience of militants in other unions and sectors about how to begin to build a strong class struggle opposition.

Denny Fitzpatrick is a member of the Executive Committee of the Socialist Teachers Alliance and a teacher at Paddington School in London. Five London schools — including her own — are presently facing closure or amalgamation. They are fighting back.

By 1978, the Labour Government will have cut £1,000 million from the education budget. Local authorities, with no alternative to these Tory policies have been implementing cuts piecemeal — squeezing and saving in every possible area.

The trade union leaders have done little to stop this. The closure of teacher training colleges, reduction in allowances, cuts in supply and part-time teaching staff and increases in the price of school meals have followed.

Now, to make real savings, the authorities are having to make cuts that really hurt. So with 20,000 registered unemployed teachers (and more besides) union members are being compulsorily transferred from one school to another, redeployment, sackings and redundancies... and now closure of schools.

The Government and authorities have the nerve to argue that it's not a question of curbacks. There are declining numbers of children entering schools — they tell us that school closures are a necessary rationalisation for such 'falling rolls'.

In Westminster three newly-built comprehensive schools face the threat of closure and 'rationalisation'. To answer this threat we have produced an alternative plan. Our plan is based on keeping all schools open and safeguarding all jobs.

Unlike the authority's, it is not limited to three schools, but covers the whole of the area. We are fighting for community-based schools with a class size of 25. With less children, our plan provides for more space and more equipment all round.

Our campaign in West-

minster involves the students, parents and local trade unionists. We have formed democratic and representative inter-union committees in the schools; an inter-school action committee; and an action committee to involve the parents.

Through the Trades Council, we have called a public meeting to broaden the base of the campaign and we organised a lobby of the London Regional Labour Party Conference. Our next step will be to turn the support we've got into some real action — a lobby of the Inner London Education Authority is planned.

Westminster NUT has taken the lead in the campaign. But the NUT nationally has no policy to defend education. The Executive has limited action against the Government's cuts to local protests. Instead of mounting a campaign against the Government's attacks it has supported the Social Contract and disciplined members who wanted to take effective action. Teachers' salaries have declined about 30 per cent. A fight against school closures, against cuts in wages, jobs and services involves a fight against the right-wing union leadership.

The Socialist Teachers Alliance is pledged to uniting the left in the NUT around policies for a fightback. In recent elections in London, STA candidates came within 200 votes (out of over 4,000) of defeating the right-wing, pro-Executive candidates. The STA is a democratic tendency with open debate in its journal, Socialist Teacher, and all currents represented on its leading bodies.

But the left in the NUT is still divided. An important task before us is to unify the left on a democratic basis, in particular for the STA to unite with the SWP-inspired Rank and File.

I shall be going to the Socialist Challenge Trade Union Conference not to find all the answers but to discuss how to build a broad based and united opposition in the unions — one that can begin to fight nationally for the sort of policies and actions we're campaigning around in Westminster.

by DICK HALL, NUM MEMBER, and supporter of The Collier, Worksop Main Colliery, N. Derbyshire.

WHO WOULD have suspected there was open collaboration between our so-called moderate officials in the National Union of Mineworkers, the Coal Board, and this Tory...er, sorry...Labour Government linking the introduction of productivity deals and our annual wage claim?

The same Labour Government which came to power on the backs of the miners, and incidentally the same Government which had the key election promise of a return to free collective bargaining.

Somehow this turned into the most rigidly enforced voluntary pay restraint. This kind of betrayal...bloody hell, wrong word again...co-operation must require certain sacrifices from the participants, which bear close scrutiny.

Even Joe Gornley and his right-wing majority on the NUM executive (usually 14 to 11) had to make sacrifices.

They were, for example, obliged to overturn the democratic wishes of the majority of the union membership. It was the leadership, remember, who insisted on having a ballot on the productivity scheme — even after conference had rejected these proposals.

The leadership was also forced to overturn the decision of the annual conference (that's the jamboree we all thought was our supreme body) on our wage claim.

They didn't of course, have their own standard of living cut, but then we can't really expect them to shoulder all the sacrifices.

There has been a dramatic change since the heady days of '72 and '74. Even in apparent success the seeds of defeat can be sown. Half of what you gain by militant action is lost around the negotiating table, someone once said — a fact well understood by Lord Wilberforce, who headed the inquiry after the '72 strike.

His report contained two dangerous clauses. Clause 48 moved the date of negotiating our annual claim from November to March, which meant we lost four months and considerably weakened our bargaining strength.

Clause 53 was just as serious. It said that there should be a productivity scheme, which 'should be agreed nationally and could be based on increases in productivity nationally or by individual pits, or by a combination of the two...'. Now, we are reaping the harvest.

More deaths, accidents and disease are on the cards with the introduction of incentive schemes designed to break the unity of the union.

The NUM left has also been shown to be wanting. Faced with the undemocratic manoeuvres of the right-wing, first Kent last October and then Arthur Scargill's Yorkshire Area in December looked to the courts rather than the power of the rank and file.

The Government has achieved something which the Tories only dreamt of — weakening the unity of the miners. We have lost our strength by pinning our hopes on our non-recallable officials.

What we have failed to realise is that militant action by itself is not sufficient in the face of an enormous crisis and the Government's attacks. The Socialist Challenge Trade Union Conference will provide an important forum for militants to discuss our political response.

## ...why don't you?

If you are interested in attending the Socialist Challenge Trade Union Conference, just fill in this form and send it to SC Trade Union Conference, PO Box 50, London N1.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

TRADE UNION.....

Labour movement positions held.....