

One year of the miners' strike

FIGHTING TO WIN

Jack Conrad

THE MINERS' STRIKE is the longest mass strike in British history. And it has been as heroic as it has been long.

The miners have suffered seven deaths, countless injuries, and around 9,000 arrests. They have faced the newly organised national police force which has launched cavalry charges and snatch squads against their picket lines. Their union has had its funds legally robbed by courts which have also banned mass picketing. Even worse, because of sectionalism most in the important Notts coalfield refused to join the strike and now the Notts Area NUM has taken fateful steps towards forming a neo-Spencer *Solidarnosc* type union.

But while the miners have been blooded they have not been cowed. They have fought back with hit squads, they have built barricades, they have defied the law, and they have raised huge amounts of money to sustain the strike. In this they have received sterling help from the mining communities as a whole, especially the women. What is more, tens of thousands of militants in the Miners' Support Committees have rallied to their aid, as have workers across the world, especially those in France and the Soviet Union.

Tragically, this solidarity has not been matched by the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade union movement. Not only have we seen Ramsay MacKinnock and Judas Willis denounce miners' fully justified violence but despite TUC and Labour Party resolutions calling for action in support of the miners the best that has been delivered has been tokenism; at worst downright scabbing.

Seeing that the trade union leaderships have no stomach to fight, Thatcher has been determined to press the offensive in order to smash the NUM as an effective union. Unfortunately, talk from the compromising majority on the NUM National Executive Committee about an 'honourable settlement', that is, an

honourable surrender, has only encouraged the Tories in demanding a humiliating surrender as a prelude to their general offensive against the living standards, rights, and organisations of the rest of the working class.

True, many organisations and leaders of the working class have sought a victory for the miners. But against the full power of an aggressive and confident state the only way this can be achieved is the mobilisation of the workers in a strike wave of general strike proportions. This is something that many have refused to confront, preferring to keep talk about 'industrial solidarity' as vague as possible. Some, like Tony Benn, have even lightheadedly said that the "miners cannot lose".

Of course, the fact is that the miners can lose. To suggest this can't happen is to desert reality and no playing with figures can change that. This does not mean that the miners have already lost, as the "new realists" of the Socialist Workers Party claim, far from it. While well over 100,000 miners are on strike victory can still be won — snatched from the jaws of defeat. But the key question is how to win.

It's no good just repeating the slogan for a general strike like *News Line* does every day: we all know this is what is needed, the real question is how are we to get it. Some have suggested half way house measures like a TUC-called 24 hour strike, or a recall TUC. But these calls are in reality utter diversions from the necessity of confronting the task of organising a general strike and offer not the slightest possibility of producing what is needed at the end of the day.

The key to victory lies amongst the militant rank and file, not the fat cat trade union leaders and their petty bourgeois alter egos in the SWP, *Militant*, *Socialist Action*, and *Socialist Organiser*, their Mineworkers' Defence Committee and BLOC. That is why we have from the very earliest stages of the miners' strike called for an organisation of the militant rank and file modelled on the National Minority Movement of the

1920s.

Central to this perspective are the militants in the NUM itself. They have shed their hero worship attitude towards Scargill. Yes, they respect his intransigence, but they know he has got no winning strategy. However a brilliant tactician Scargill is he is a prisoner, indeed part, of the trade union bureaucracy. The fact that he is tied by a thousand strings of ideology, social position, and tradition to the Kinnocks, the Willises, and the Basnetts means that he cannot demand and really fight for a general strike because to do so would mean to break with the TUC, the Labour Party, and reformism. This is something Scargill shows no signs of being prepared to do.

Because of this, if the miners are to achieve total victory — and what else is acceptable after one year on strike? — then they must organise independently of their leadership. They must have the courage to form a Miners' Militant Minority.

No doubt many of the established full time leaders of the NUM will oppose such a move; some will fight tooth and nail to prevent the rank and file organising themselves. They will have to be overcome like all tailists of the official structure. A Miners' Militant Minority must be established wherever the opposition to it comes from.

A Miners' Militant Minority should fight around the following immediate broad programme:

- For a strike wave of general strike proportions in support of the miners, around particular sectional demands, and against the anti-trade union laws.
- For the transformation of the Miners' Support Committees into Council of Action type bodies so that the struggle at a local level can be coordinated. This means they should consist of elected and recallable delegates.
- For the linking of Militant Minorities across industries and for the linking of local Support Committees into a National Council of Action.
- For the formation of Workers' Defence Corps.

● For a democratisation of the NUM in particular and all trade unions in general. All officials to be elected and recallable and to receive no more than the average pay of the rank and file membership.

Militant miners must take this programme to other workers, especially those on the rails, in the docks, and in the metropolitan counties. They must also fight to win direct support from Miners' Support Committees in order to provide vital financial and logistical help. Already militant miners finding their officials blocking moves to picket power stations around London have taken matters into their own hands and with the full backing of Miners' Support Committees, most notably the one in Camden (which provides £600 per week for the pickets), have organised picketing themselves.

This must now go much further. If a Miners' Militant Minority was established it would receive the immediate support from a host of Support Committees. With a concerted propaganda offensive and patient explanation they could win the vast majority to back them. Part and parcel of this will be the political defeat of the gloom and doom mongers who at present paralyse many Support Committees and the winning of new layers in the workplaces to them.

Militant miners must grasp this nettle. If they wait for others to lead, victory will never be won. Those who have taken tentative steps, those who have organised themselves in scab areas like Notts, those who refuse to accept their leadership's compliance with court orders banning picketing, must organise themselves as a Miners' Militant Minority. As soon as this is done they must turn outwards and rally the working class, above all the millions who are yearning for a fighting lead and itching to teach the Iron Lady a lesson she and her Tories will never forget.

While the strength of *The Leninist* is small we will place our paper at the disposal of those making any moves towards a Miners' Militant Minority.

Prepare for a general strike

This was a personal appeal issued by Jack Collins, Secretary Kent Area NUM, to the Mineworkers' Defence Committee Conference on February 9, and distributed in leaflet form by supporters of *The Leninist*.

Comrades and friends,

First let me wish you every success with your conference and in any future solidarity actions you may organise in support of the miners.

The miners' strike is obviously the key battle facing the working class movement. On the outcome of this struggle depends not only the future of the National Union of Mineworkers, but possibly the very future of both legal and official trade unionism and other forms of democratic and progressive organisation in Britain.

The most recent underhanded manoeuvre is the attempt of the NCB to string out the process of

negotiations in the vain hope that the core of the striking miners will crack. They have clearly underestimated the resolve and fighting spirit of the striking miners and their families.

In contrast, the leadership of the TUC have clearly failed to respond in kind to the attacks of the Tories on the miners and the wider working class movement. The miners' strike has exposed the Willises, the Basnetts and the Chapples of the movement as spineless fat cats with no guts to fight. The miners have never had any reluctance to call over the heads of such official 'leaders' of the movement if these people fail to live up to their responsibilities as class fighters.

Food and money remain an important — indeed vital — component part of solidarity with the NUM and on behalf of miners everywhere I express my heartfelt thanks for this sterling work

without which we could not have physically survived these past 11 months. However, the whole question of industrial solidarity is becoming more and more important. There is a crying need for a cross industry movement of those committed to *total physical support* for the miners. This total physical support movement should be committed to a class struggle programme and if necessary be organised independently of the official structures in much the same way as the National Minority Movement of the 1920s. Given this perspective the Miners' Support Committees could begin a process of transforming themselves along the lines of Council of Action-type bodies.

Although I have on frequent occasions called for preparations for a General Strike to back the miners, we have to understand that the situation today is

potentially very different to the 1926 debacle. Today we see the possibility for social change. The miners point the way forward not only to the rest of the working class movement in the short term but also to the struggle for a society where human need and not profit is the motive of our economy. But that relies above all on us seizing the opportunities that the struggle is presenting us with.

- PREPARE FOR A GENERAL STRIKE AGAINST PIT CLOSURES AND AGAINST THE TORIES' ANTI-TRADE UNION LAWS.
- FORGE A FIGHTING MINORITY MOVEMENT OF ALL THOSE COMMITTED TO TOTAL PHYSICAL SUPPORT FOR THE MINERS.
- TRANSFORM THE MINERS' SUPPORT COMMITTEES ALONG THE LINES OF COUNCILS OF ACTION.



THE LENINIST

London Communists Rebel

AROUND 400 Communist Party members from London District met on February 10 in open defiance of instructions from the rump London District Committee which warned that "attendance by Party members at this 'aggregate' will be viewed very seriously by the District Committee". The fact that so many were prepared to take the risk shows the extent and depth of the anti-Euro rebellion which has exploded in London. It also shows that old beliefs in the sanctity of "democratic centralism" have been overcome by the more important considerations of communist principles.

In other words, faced with a leadership which is committed to anti-Sovietism, which considers the miners' strike a case for charity not class solidarity, and which is keeping control of the Party by closing the London District Congress, liquidating the East Anglia District, and virtually decimating the Sussex District, Party members have come to accept that it is their duty to rebel.

But although the call for the February 10 meeting promised "frank, open, and principled discussion" the unfortunate fact was that in three hours plus only 20 carefully selected speakers were heard. Because of this the conference was turned into a rally which of course lacked "frank, open, and principled discussion" and was presented with only one view. As a result while there was plenty of indignant rhetoric against the Euro/McLennan bureaucratic centralist regime there was no clear strategy presented, no resolutions and amendments debated, no alternatives considered.

True, comrade John Rees from Tower Hamlets slipped through the net causing some embarrassment with his statement that the present leadership owed their origins to the 1930s and were in fact "Euro Stalinists". But comrades known to have different views to the organisers, or even suspected of having different views, were prevented from speaking by careful stage management by comrade John Bowden.

So while the chairs of the London District's print, transport, and local government advisories were all given the status of being platform speakers, the Ireland advisory (which also called the conference) was not given this right, no doubt because its chairman comrade Eric Ross has openly expressed criticisms of the *Morning Star* and pointed out some potential dangers in its political direction. Such a bureaucratic attitude not only sniffs of the Euro/McLennan leadership and its methods but weakens the opposition and bodes ill for the future.

What is desperately needed is "frank, open, and principled discussion" inside the opposition. This is the key to beating the Euros, linking the inner-Party struggle with the class struggle, and beginning the fight for a Communist Party based on the Marxist-Leninist principles on which our Party was founded.

The Editor

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Irish Advisory

I attended the February 3 Bloody Sunday demonstration, held this year in Leicester. Many people at this year's protest were surprised and pleased to hear this message read out from our Communist Party's London District Irish Advisory Committee:

"At this time when the miners' strike is nearly eleven months old it is opportune for us to reflect on the origins of the police tactics of violence against women, men, and children protecting their livelihood, jobs, and future. Thirteen years ago in Derry, fourteen Irish civil rights demonstrators were murdered by the same oppressive lackeys of the British imperialist ruling class which is still terrorising Irish and British workers alike.

"The Irish Advisory Committee of the London District of the Communist Party of Great Britain sends comradely greetings to today's rally to mark the thirteenth anniversary of Bloody Sunday, and pledges its support for the struggle of the Irish people against imperialism. At the same time as the miners are confronting the undisguised violence of the British police — and we must not forget that the tactics which are used today against the miners were developed in Ireland — the Irish people are subjected to indiscriminate murder, harassment, strip searches, and plastic bullets and prevented from solving the crisis imposed on them by British imperialism.

DOWN WITH
IMPERIALISM.

LONG LIVE THE
STRUGGLE FOR IRISH
FREEDOM AND SELF-
DETERMINATION.

LONG LIVE INTERNA-
TIONAL SOLIDARITY."

In previous years the Bloody Sunday demonstrations have been shamefully ignored by the Communist Party. Hopefully the solidarity message to this year's protest augurs well for a more responsible and principled attitude to the tasks of Irish solidarity.

Yours fraternally
RM Smiley.
London

Press Release

We have received from various sources in Istanbul the information that the national television news broadcast was interrupted in parts of the city on 31st January 1985 at 20:33 by the singing of "The Internationale". The broadcast by TKP-İşçinin Sesi (Communist Party of Turkey — Workers' Voice) began with an explanation of the meaning and the content of "The Internationale". It proceeded to denounce the continuing torture of revolutionaries and called on the people to struggle against Evren and his regime, to overthrow this brutal regime. The broadcast concluded with the singing of "The Internationale" and normal television news resumed.

The sections of the "pirate" broadcast which could be recorded, has just been received today.

In those areas where the

"pirate" broadcast was received, people welcomed it with enthusiasm. In some districts, neighbours asked each other how it happened. Crowds gathered and rumours spread all over the city that the television studios had been raided by workers and revolutionaries. When questioned about the incident, authorities in the TRT (Turkish Radio-Television) Istanbul news service replied that the information had been received and the affected areas were being identified. Various newspapers sent reporters to areas where the broadcast was received. In a short time, the Istanbul Martial Law Command banned any news relating to the TKP-İşçinin Sesi "pirate" broadcast. A total news blackout was imposed.

Nevertheless, the news spread by word of mouth and filtered out to other countries. The Turkish Section of the BBC World Service reported the news that on 31st January 1985 the TKP-İşçinin Sesi interrupted the television broadcast in Istanbul with the song "The Internationale". However, the BBC declined to give the source of the news. The same news was reported by the Dutch Radio Turkish Service on Saturday at 18:30.

The news blackout imposed by the Istanbul Martial Law Command is just another example of the ongoing anti-democratic oppression and censorship of the press in Turkey. It also provides striking evidence of the lengths to which the present regime goes to conceal the real situation in the country. The aim of these anti-democratic measures is to prevent the working class from making its voice heard. When the workers break through these barriers and raise their voices, even the news of it is banned. Opposition to these bans and the ongoing repression is the duty of everyone who adheres to democracy.

İşçinin Sesi

London, February 4 1985

Nothing to Hide

I request that my positions and recommendations be printed in *The Leninist* for broader discussion — don't give me a bloody pseudonym, I have nothing to hide from the Executive Committee, or any other revisionist clique of bureaucrats. I couldn't care less whether I am expelled from the CPGB and will probably be anyway.

I have expressed my differences with *The Leninist's* paper format and strategy which I reiterate below.

1. The strategy of *The Leninist* should have been to fight for a split in the CPGB (probably it would have been useful to have a temporary alliance with the Costelloites) while building a faction around *The Leninist* as the sole basis of a new revolutionary organisation.

2. The Chater/Costello group will eventually split and form a more Labour movement orientated party with the Soviet franchise. It seems obvious that this new party will be to the right of the New Communist Party and the *Militant* and this will degenerate and disintegrate or

die off and age as with the Euro party.

3. Talk about fighting liquidationism is outdated now. The CPGB liquidated itself as a revolutionary party of the working class back in the 50s, since then it has degenerated into an insignificant section of the labour movement bureaucracy which acts as a right wing reactionary brake on militancy where it has got strength in addition to acting for British imperialism with regard to Ireland.

4. *The Leninist's* politics are generally correct in theoretical terms but revolutionary theory is academic without revolutionary action amongst workers and oppressed people in struggle.

5. What is needed if *The Leninist* is serious about forming a revolutionary party in Britain is to prepare the formation of a Leninist party nationally with a less academic and more agitational paper to forge it. A theoretical journal will be necessary as an addition but not as the organ which is the present situation.

Yours fraternally
Tony Lewis
Leicester

Jack Conrad replies

Tony Lewis, like us, wants a genuine Communist Party which can meet the challenge of class war and the battle for state power. But his points 1-5 outlining his positions and criticisms show that he is suffering from misapprehension, youthful enthusiasm, and a casual attitude towards revolutionary theory. We can show this and reiterate our views by directly answering Tony Lewis point by point.

1. The decision to split is decided by a number of factors: the tempo of the class struggle, the ideological consciousness of the working class, and the strength and influence of the revolutionaries. It is a question that can never be answered in the abstract, only in the concrete. At the present moment of time the forces around *The Leninist* are very weak; certainly the working class has no need of an isolated small sect. As to an alliance with the pro-*Morning Star* grouping: we have for some time been calling for a pro-Party alliance, a call for which we directed to comrade Tony Chater himself (see *The Leninist* no 5). All who have read *The Leninist* will agree that we have stated time and time again that what the working class needs is a revolutionary party, but to suggest that *The Leninist* is the "sole basis" for this is to kill the project before it's started. *The Leninist* will certainly be the leading element in a reformed Communist Party but the rest will be decided by history.

2. Yes, we agree that it is possible that the pro-*Morning Star* grouping might be forced into a split. But as to what political complexion it finally takes: that is another matter. Because of their centrism

Paul Whetton is the secretary of the Notts rank and file striking miners

No compromise

they have every possibility of quickly degenerating into Labourites, but on the other hand given the increasing tempo of the class struggle they could shift to the left.

3. The CPGB retreated from being a revolutionary party in the 1930s not "back in the 50s" as comrade Lewis argues. It is not an "insignificant section of the labour movement bureaucracy" but still a component of the world communist movement and still the most important working class organisation in Britain for communists. Its leadership is of course thoroughly opportunist, not least over the question of Ireland.

4. We agree that the task of digging deep roots in the working class is essential, but what comes first is theoretical clarity.

5. Because we are "serious about forming a revolutionary party in Britain" we make the matter of theory central. We must win the vanguard of the working class, and this is done primarily through ideological struggle. Our paper, far from being "academic", provides the most advanced and scientific theory. As a result we have already secured important contacts from the best elements in the class. These elements do not consider Marxist-Leninist theory "academic", certainly our positions on the necessity of a strike wave of general strike proportions, a new National Minority type movement, Workers' Defence Corps, Councils of Action, and above all the need for a genuine Communist party have been enthusiastically greeted by advanced workers, especially advanced miners. An "agitational paper" is the major weapon in linking the vanguard organised in the Communist Party to the broad masses. But to pose this as the key task today is farcical simply because the vanguard has yet to be won to Leninism.

Note: Letters have been shortened due to lack of space. For political security we have changed names and addresses, and certain details.

An Urgent Appeal

Last month we received £350 towards our immediate costs and our outstanding debt. This must be increased to at least £600 this month. Unless we achieve this target we will be forced to suspend publication for the month of April. Rush donations small or large but preferably large to BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.

The Leninist: What should be the demands of the strike now — should it still be for a victory or an honourable compromise?

Paul Whetton: I think it's very simple. We are not out on strike for any of the side issues like wages, hours, and all the rest of it. That was submitted as a separate entity before the strike began. We are out purely and simply on the issue of pit closures. I do not accept that there can be any compromise or middle ground. We object to pit closures.

The Leninist: Since the last time we spoke a great deal has happened. What is your present assessment of the strike: is it on the defensive?

Paul Whetton: It may well appear that we are on the defensive, but after 11 months and the great deal of privation among the mining communities, it is not surprising that a lot of the mining communities have felt terribly let down. Let down by the TUC, let down by the Labour Party — the leadership of these organisations I mean; the role played by rank and file members all over the country as trade unionists, Labour Party activists and so on has been 'spot on'. But the leadership have failed in any way to deliver the promises that they made. To actually come across with the goods has been left to the activists at rank and file level.

The Leninist: Many groups and individuals on the British left have played about with the slogan of a general strike and some, notably *Militant*, have set a 24 hour limit on it in advance. Could you clarify your attitude to the general strike question?

Paul Whetton: I believe that the rest of the trade union movement have been frightened to some extent by what it sees as a really serious confrontation with this government. The leadership are absolutely running scared of a real ding-dong battle with the government. They have been trying to play it down. We at the same time have been trying to build up that head of steam and it seems to me that we have no recourse but to appeal to the rest of the trade union movement for a general strike.

My attitude to a 24 hour general strike is that what it would mean to the ruling class in this country is another royal wedding and that's virtually all! So I would myself argue, and this is a purely personal view, that while we have to work hard to raise the political consciousness of the rank and file of this country so they understand we are under all out attack, it is not a miners' fight, it is an attack against the basic right to belong to a trade union and to organise freely. That applies to every man, woman, and child in this country: they are all under attack. Therefore we have no option but to call for a general strike and, I would say, for an open ended general strike and *not* a 24 hour general strike.

The Leninist: Could you tell us something about the recent moves in Ollerton to establish an NUM rank and file forum.

Paul Whetton: We had very little to do with that meeting. What happened was that we were asked to provide a venue for that meeting. Nottinghamshire strikers are in a minority, but they are, if it's not a contradiction in terms, a *major* minority. But of course, other areas like Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Lancashire have got problems and we were asked to host a meeting that would be attended by minority areas plus delegates from some of the other areas like Yorkshire, Kent, South Wales. That was a coming



Paul Whetton

together of rank and file trade unionists from all over the country and they were talking about raising the dispute and trying to build up that head of steam that seems to have run out with various ideas from different areas of course; different areas have got different problems. Some people want to go for power stations, others are insisting that we go for the pits, some are insisting on a general strike and there are many different strategies being put forward. It was a good thing insofar as it allowed rank and file miners to come together and speak together who have never really come together before.

The Leninist: Why was the need felt for such a rank and file gathering?

Paul Whetton: Well, the people that organised it were really in a minority area and that's Leicestershire — the Dirty Thirty, and people like that. If we in Nottinghamshire think we've got problems then obviously they've got much bigger problems. We felt it was necessary at that stage to talk about the dispute and particularly what happened when the dispute was won. They would be going back to work, even in a victory situation, in a minority and there are bound to be tremendous problems.

The Leninist: Firstly could you give us your assessment of the role of the Labour Party leadership in this dispute and secondly, in the light of this role, do you think that the Labour Party can ever be changed?

Paul Whetton: If you talk about the leadership I don't think anybody would disagree with the fact that the leadership of the Labour Party have been absolutely abysmal throughout this dispute. It seems to me that the only thing that they are after is power at any price and they are playing a populist game. Of course there have been people within the Labour Party like Skinner and Benn who have come out fairly and squarely and stood behind the miners.

The Leninist: So despite all you would still see it as possible to change the Labour Party.

Paul Whetton: Yes, but how effective that change is going to be I don't know. But I *do* know that what this dispute has done is politicise hell of a lot of people; and we've gone into areas where for years the Labour Party has lain dormant and because of the need to galvanise support for the dispute it has awakened in many local parties a realisation of what they actually can achieve if they stretch themselves. I would imagine that there is a hell of a lot of rank and file activity taking place that is going to come to fruition in

a very short time when those sort of people who are being thrown up as leaders and activists at grassroots level are going to start to take over and say to the old guard, like they did when they went into Kerensky and stopped the clock, you know, 'your time's up!'

I think there will be a great deal of upsurge of activity among the rank and file Labour Party members.

The Leninist: It is interesting that you mention Kerensky. For us when we look at the strike, rather than a transformed Labour Party, it cries out for a revolutionary Communist Party along the lines of the Russian Bolsheviks. Do you think that that perspective is needed in Britain or do you regard it as a utopia?

Paul Whetton: Socialism to me is inevitable. Socialism will not be achieved overnight: the first thing we have to do is destroy capitalism and it seems to me that the deeper capitalism gets into crisis the worse things get for it. The more they screw the working class of this country the more they will encounter resistance. I think there is a possibility of a real socialist Britain. I do not see it being achieved by, you know, grabbing the rifle off the wall and dashing out into the street, but I do see it being achieved by rank and file political awareness and people saying 'well, we can actually change the system, we can play an active role', and rank and file members becoming involved in industrial disputes, political argument, political debate; and I think that that will be the first stage of a long and hard road towards a socialist Britain.

The Leninist: The killing of the South Wales taxi driver David Wilkie brought howls of condemnation from every corner, including many in the British 'revolutionary' left. What was your attitude to this incident?

Paul Whetton: I think it is inevitable in the way that the state is behaving that violence will erupt and it will continue to erupt. They cannot expect the working class to stand by and see all they have worked for for the last hundred years just simply taken away from them.

The Leninist: We have received quite vociferous protests from some in *Socialist Organiser* who actually claim that we have falsified the last interview with you to make it seem as though you were against *Solidarnosc*. Could you clarify your attitude to *Solidarnosc*?

Paul Whetton: I think that I ought to reiterate my stance right from the first time that *Solidarnosc* appeared, and that is that *anything that the church has got its dirty little paws in I suspect straight away*. I've no doubt that there was a great deal of honest genuine basic trade union feeling in the birth of *Solidarnosc*, people felt there was a need to stand up and be counted. But I think that what has happened to *Solidarnosc* and the personification of *Solidarnosc* in Lech Walesa is something that has shown it up to be not quite everything it was made out to be in the first place. I mean, Walesa receiving the peace prize and the Pope blessing it; and then saying that Maggie Thatcher was a wonderful woman really opens it up to some criticism.

I've no doubt that there are a great number of genuine socialist trade unionist participants within *Solidarnosc*, but at the same time I've got serious reservations and I have done ever since it first appeared about the role of *Solidarnosc*.

Which Way Forward?

This is the second half of our interview with Jack Collins, Secretary of Kent Area NUM. As well as looking at the pressing questions of the strike we look at the crisis in the CPGB.

The Leninist: Some have sought to distance themselves from the justified violence of the miners; for us the acid test on this question was the killing of Wilkie the South Wales taxi driver. What's your position?

Jack Collins: Wilkie worked for a scab outfit; I've no sympathy for scabs. If you scab you ought to expect someone to react. Life is a beautiful thing, it's a gift... it's all we have, so I value life. But if you're prepared to line up with those trying to force miners back to work, with those prepared to starve kids, then you must expect the workers to react. You see, the scab driver is like the scab miner, like the scab protector policemen, like the bosses' courts, like the government. If it hadn't been for the class responding to our appeals, they would have succeeded in committing infanticide in order to force the miners back. A scab who wants to go scabbing must take the consequences; it's a fact of the class struggle.

The Leninist: Peter Walker talks of no power cuts in 1985. The Tories seem to be brimming with confidence: can the miners win?

Jack Collins: First let me say that there will be no power cuts if they aren't relying on coal, they're bringing in heavy fuel oil — the cost of which is crippling. Ted Heath has openly stated that opinion abroad is concerned about the damaging effect of the miners' strike. So it's obvious that the strike is having a major impact on the pound. Billions are being spent by the government fighting the strike, so in that sense, while we might not see power cuts, we've already won a victory.

What you've got in Kent according to the NCB is 130 back to work. Well, we know they're counting those who've gone in and come back out again. Yes, they've got the bath attendants, winding engine men, carpenters, fitters, etc.; all important people when the mine is working, but not so important when it isn't. I would say the cost of taking them to work is huge, half a million in wages alone, let alone the cost of police, transport, etc. We're going to win because those who produce the coal aren't going back to conditions that existed before the strike. Nobody expected the strike to have lasted so long; not us, not the Tories, but we're going to win.

The Leninist: But do you think you can win by simply "sitting it out"?

Jack Collins: I think it's important that other sections come into fight with us. I'd say to other workers: how much longer do we have to fight alone, how much longer do we have to wait for you? Saying you support the miners is all very well, but you should be out with the miners — I say that with all the force I can muster. The government doesn't want to fight the class war on too many fronts; the workers should strike with the miners, those in the metropolitan counties for example should come out with us now, not wait until they're sacked.

The jackboots are being put on. Some are saying we'll send the miners money, a bit of food, a few secondhand clothes, and that's our contribution to the struggle. But that's not enough. I would rather have no money, no food; if I had to choose between money and food or workers on strike I'd choose workers on strike.

The Leninist: Given recent developments in the strike, where now should rank and file militants place their trust? Should they simply rely on their elected officials or should they look to developing their own strength through such rank and file

gatherings as that in Ollerton recently which was attended by a delegate from Kent?

Jack Collins: In relation to the Ollerton meeting, we must be quite clear and honest, it was not a decision of the Kent Area to send anybody. Of course, we know many of the people in that area and we have contacts there, so there was no objection to anyone going, but nobody went as an official representative.

The leadership of the union have been in my opinion very correct and very strong. I don't think the time is ready, or if indeed it will ever be ready, for the miners to go against the leadership of Scargill. I think that the way to make sure that the present talks are a success is for miners at every level whether they be leaders or rank and file members, to set themselves the task of getting more miners on strike.

The Leninist: Could you say something about the international support that has been given to the miners?

Jack Collins: We've had international support from our immediate continental neighbours, as well as Australia and America. But probably the largest amount of support we've had has come from the Soviet Union, who have refused to send coal in and with the exception of a couple of ships on the high seas have sent no oil in; they've also sent money and other forms of aid.

The Leninist: What about Poland and Solidarnosc?

Jack Collins: While we congratulate the socialist lands for their help we must be critical of Poland. We condemn the actions of Poland and I believe that the international workers' and trade union movement should immediately kick Poland out of organisations in which the working class are involved because of their attitude. As to Solidarnosc, I completely opposed it; it was a reactionary movement.

The Leninist: Why haven't you re-registered for membership of the Communist Party?

Jack Collins: It's a personal domestic matter, fairly personal. But I've also been critical of Party attitudes on many questions, especially in the international sphere. I've certainly had doubts since I heard the General Secretary say that we're not a vanguard party. The last correct stand they made was over Hungary; since then they've lined up with reaction. Take Afghanistan; now, I'm on the Executive Committee of the Chile Solidarity Campaign (I wish there was no need for such a movement), I could see a situation where we could have had to have a similar body for Afghanistan. I'm pleased to say we haven't had to.

The Leninist: What about the role of the Communist Party in the current miners' struggle; are you critical of it?

Jack Collins: I differentiate between the Party and Party comrades. Many, many communists have given us tremendous support — we of course expect them to do this — but it's obvious from all the wrangling that has been going on in the Party that it's not given the lead that it ought. The wranglings are almost designed to get people away from the miners' dispute. I know that Party leaders have gone on to platforms to speak on behalf of the miners; we can all stand on platforms to speak on behalf of the miners; we can all stand on platforms and talk but it's

the organisation of the working class to back the miners that's the way to judge people.

The Leninist: You have stated in *The Leninist* that the organisation which you are nearest to is the New Communist Party. But they, unlike you, refuse to criticise the socialist countries as a matter of principle.

Jack Collins: I can understand many communists looking to the socialist lands to seek reassurance. If it wasn't for them we wouldn't be able to talk like this here today. The tremendous sacrifices of the Soviet people won't be forgotten as far as I'm concerned. Yes, my attitude towards the Soviet Union is coloured; yes, they make mistakes, but we must draw inspiration from the fact that they exist. When things are going badly in Britain where should we look for inspiration? West Germany? No, of course not. I look towards the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the other socialist lands. It is they who provide those in struggle with physical and moral support. So I can understand those like the NCP who don't want to criticise the socialist lands, why NCP members don't think critically. What would decide my attitude towards the NCP probably would be if the socialist lands recognised it; if they did I would line up with them.

The Leninist: What do you think of our paper?

Jack Collins: From a journalistic point of view it's put together well... I think many of your attitudes are correct, but then we come back to the question of where does the Party go from here, where is the Party? Is the Party now finished? Will someone come in and rebuild it? I think you won't build anything within the Party; it is too far gone.

The Leninist: We think that through open ideological struggle, winning workers to the Communist Party open-eyed, a Leninist wing can be built. For us this method of Lenin and the Bolsheviks can reforge the CPGB.

Jack Collins: But we shouldn't be in the situation where groupings have to exist. There's *Straight Left*, *The Leninist*, and a number of others. We can see in the Party the politics of the British left as a whole, in miniature. What's taking place in the Party is what's taking place in the movement. We should all be working towards a socialist society: people in the Party, the Labour Party, the WRP, but we aren't. The organisation which for years many of us looked to for inspiration and guidance is split like the working class and it's had a disastrous effect on the miners' struggle.

The Leninist: Do you have any sympathy with the London 22 — those suspended by the Euro/McLennan EC of the Communist Party following its closing of the London District Congress?

Jack Collins: Yes, they are the class fighters, of course I'm in sympathy with them. However, I've been very critical of the *Morning Star*; I've told Chater that on a number of occasions. I'm especially critical of its lack of positive coverage of the Soviet Union. I'm appalled that the events in London and the North West could happen. It seems to me that some are indulging in this sort of fight because they've got nothing to contribute to the big fight.

The Leninist: We think that the Special Congress in May will be a very important turning point for the CPGB.

Jack Collins: I think the old CP is completely destroyed; it is not an effective weapon anymore. Those who've been expelled are in danger of being isolated; some will want to join them if they set up another organisation, others won't. I think the EC of the CP has done a successful job in destroying the communist movement

in Britain. They'll go down in history as the people who destroyed the communist movement. It'll have to be built again, but it won't be rebuilt by these people.

The Leninist: The chances of a split in the Communist Party are now very real. For us, the Eurocommunists are nothing to do with communism and one way or another they should be ditched. The Chater/Costello headed oppositionist forces, however, organise some of the most potentially healthy elements of our class. If there is a split and a new party composed of these forces is set up, what would be your attitude to it?

Jack Collins: Well I think that many people in the Party have been — I don't know if the word is 'contaminated' but have been 'affected' by the developments over the last 20 years in the Party. It seems very, very doubtful that we have got sufficient honourable communists to form an effective organisation. I think that the Eurocommunists have put back the development of a Communist Party in Britain many, many years. I think that they have proved that they are ineffective as a party in the miners' strike, although many leading communists have given us tremendous support and we thank them for that.

The Leninist: So it has to be built from scratch?

Jack Collins: That doesn't mean to say that we disregard all the leading real communists that we've got in the party. I don't want to mention names but the sort of people I think of are people like Tom Durkin and people like that. It would be unthinkable to establish an organisation without such leading people. Those people would have to be brought in. But the present Communist Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain as it now exists is, in my opinion, washed up.

The Leninist: So how do we build a Communist Party?

Jack Collins: I don't know the answer to that. An appeal to the movement to set up a new organisation; would that be any good? I doubt it.

My assessment of a party is — how do they react to the socialist lands? If we're going to get a party that can find nothing better to do than to lambast the Soviet Union then that party is doomed to failure in my opinion because they too will take a Eurocommunist line eventually. I don't really know the answer to your question. The point of view I've got now and the view I had even before I joined the Communist Party in 1958 remains the same. Some people would say — 'that's wrong, you never change'. Some people have said to me that I speak the same language as when the First International was set up; well of course I do! The problems are still the same. The problems are not different. They may be dressed up in different clothing but the class struggle is the same; the class enemy is the same. And so, the language we use is the same and the teachings, the philosophy of class struggle remains constant, will always remain constant.

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The barbarity of British imperialism in Ireland. The Armagh women speak out.

Strip searching is torture

Ian Mahoney &
Geraldine Duffy

STRIP SEARCHING IS A particularly degrading form of torture that republican women in Armagh jail in Northern Ireland are subjected to on a daily basis. The very term 'search' is in fact misleading. The vagina and anus are not examined despite the Northern Ireland's office throw-away assertion that "it's really very easy to conceal things in bodily orifices." The object of strip searching is to intimidate and shatter the personal dignity of the prisoners of British imperialism. As Linda Quigley who spent 18 months in Armagh said in a speech in Camden in November 1984: "They strip you naked and they stare at you. That's what their search is."

Women have always played a heroic role in the resistance struggle to Britain's bloody rule in Northern Ireland and have frequently set the standards for principled resistance for their male comrades. For example, the women's organisation of Cumann na mBan was the first republican organisation to come out and repudiate the sell-out settlement of 1921. In the current phase of the war, women if anything have become more prominent than at any other time even if simply due to the fact that necessity is forcing on them a more militant and independent role. The working class women of the nationalist communities suffer not only as members of an oppressed nation and class, but also through their roles as wives and mothers. For the republican communities of Derry or Belfast family life

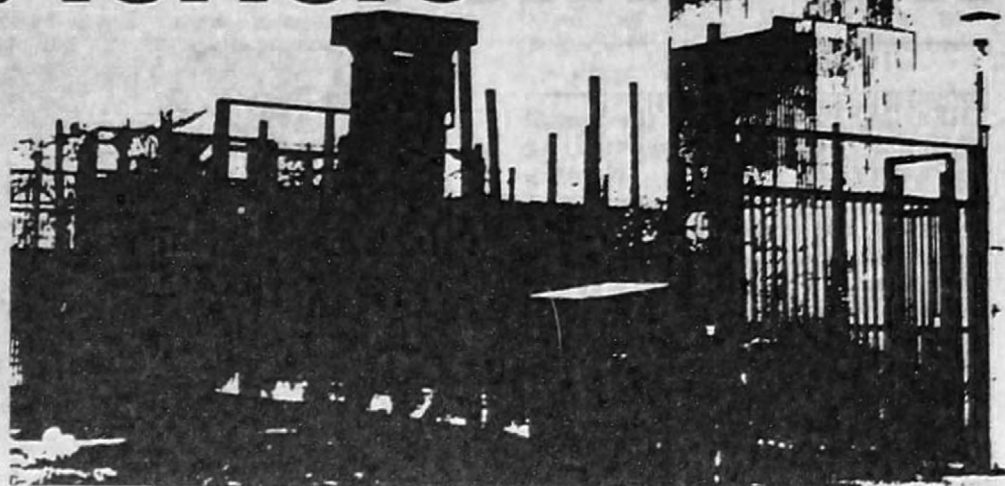
is under siege. Homes are broken into in the dead of night by the army of an occupying foreign power and fathers, daughters, and sons are brutally dragged off to jail, frequently on the flimsiest of 'evidence'. The fragility and explosiveness of social life in the occupied six counties of Ireland puts horrendous strains on women who are frequently the lynchpins of the family unit.

Notwithstanding this, the pressures of attempting to live a 'normal' family life in an occupied country have not led to women becoming a conservative force. On the contrary:

"Women have played an increasingly important role. In my own experience there have always been women who have been involved directly in the IRA Commands at all levels and who have been involved in all aspects of IRA activity" (Interview with a member of the IRA's General Headquarters staff in *Iris* April 1981.)

When captured, Republican women face torture and degradation that is specific to their sex and strip searching is one of the most ugly examples of this. In the same speech as quoted above, Linda Quigley gave a harrowing picture of the life of women republican prisoners and of the harassment of strip searching:

"All of your clothing has to be removed, every item, and that includes sanitary protection — towels and tampons. In some cases women are actually left to stand and bleed. While you are naked there is what's called by the British government 'a brief visual examination' of your body...



You're standing there naked. You may have a period at the time. You have people staring at you. These people are strangers that are openly hostile to you. Comments are made about your body... they run their hand down your calf the way you would do with a horse... they touch the palms of your hands. God knows why. They actually touch you while you're naked.

"A young woman from Anderstown, Marie Wright, was taken down to reception. Marie had a period and refused to remove her pants and stated that she was wearing a sanitary towel because she was bleeding and she wasn't taking them off. Marie's pants and sanitary towel were forcibly removed. When Marie was returned to the wing she was what could only be described as semi-hysterical. It took us, Marie's friends — people who were sympathetic to Marie — it took us ten minutes to get out of her what had actually happened, she was so upset.

"Because of the publicity surrounding the issues of strip searches in Armagh jail... they introduced this policy of what they call 'random searching'. A lot of people seem to confuse random with occasional. Random strip searching in Armagh Jail means that occasionally we will not be strip searched. You do not know when that is going to be... It doesn't matter a damn at the end of the day — you might as well have been through it."

One republican woman was strip searched during pregnancy and again shortly after giving birth. She had her breast and sanitary protection forcibly removed and was humiliatingly left standing, leaking milk and bleeding. Her baby, born in June 1984, is body searched.

The nature and scale of the campaign of strip searching which was introduced into Armagh in November 1982, exposes the authorities' claims that the practice has anything to do with security in the prison. In the 24 months from November 1982 to October 1984, an average of 24 women have been strip searched 1,899 times and of course it must be remembered that the people supervising these 'searches' — the screws — are drawn almost exclusively from the pro-imperialist loyalist population and are thus actively hostile to the women and their cause. Strip searching is torture.

The women of Armagh maintain a strict military discipline in the face of this intimidation. Their lines of communication are protected by their officers using Gaelic, which most prison officers do not understand, to shout their orders through the cell walls. Using this method of coordination, a dirty protest was organised in 1980. Thirty Armagh women caked

their cell walls with their excrement and menstrual blood to symbolise their refusal to acquiesce to the British government's attempt to criminalise the Irish national liberation struggle.

However, the definition of Irish freedom fighters as 'terrorists' is one that is accepted by many opportunists in our own Communist Party. For instance, the prominent Euro, Bea 'the Brit' Campbell definitely seems to prefer the representatives of British imperialism to those who are incarcerated for struggling against it. In an article on strip searching in the radical 'what's on, where' journal, *City Limits* of January 4-10 1985, she looks for some 'alliances' against the practice of strip searching amongst some pretty dubious 'new social forces':

"Womens' interests have never featured much among the Loyalists, and although the Loyalists have no women in prison at the moment, they have had in the past — and they, too, are opposing the sexual harassment of women prisoners and intensifying their political focus on prison life."

She then goes on to quote from the Loyalist scum, Andy Tyrie of the Ulster Defence Association (!), who apparently "can understand the women being very upset about it."

'Comrade' Campbell insults the honour of the heroic Armagh by consulting the neo-fascist UDA over this form of torture inflicted by the ilk of Tyrie and which even Campbell is forced to admit is directed exclusively against nationalist women. If the opposition in the Communist Party is serious about fighting the Eurocommunists, it must denounce this and other instances of the Euro's pro-imperialism over Ireland and fight to make the cause of Irish liberation its own. *Morning Star* Readers Groups around the country should circumvent the wall of silence the Party leadership has thrown around the issue of Ireland and concretely link the struggle for Irish national liberation to the struggle to reforge a genuine vanguard Communist Party. Don't push the example of Greenham Common at miners' wives; give them the example of the Armagh women and their inspiring fight against the sharp end of British imperialism! It is time to break the bipartisan consensus that has ruled in the Communist Party over the issue of the Irish national liberation struggle. Leave the Euros to cuddle up to their new found 'allies', the semifascist shock troops of 'justice' British-style, the UDA; it is high time that the opposition took sides in the Irish war with the heroic Irish people.

VICTORY TO THE ARMAGH WOMEN!
POLITICAL STATUS FOR ALL
REPUBLICAN PRISONERS!
TROOPS OUT NOW!

For more information about the struggle of the Armagh women contact STOP THE STRIP SEARCHES CAMPAIGN, London Armagh Women's Group, 52-54 Featherstone Street, London EC1.

Eleanor the Fenian

Marx's daughter Eleanor provides us today with a model of proletarian internationalism and the duties of a socialist of an oppressor country to the oppressed nation.

All of Marx's daughters took up the cause of Ireland but it was Eleanor or 'Tussy' who really made the cause her own, considering herself a militant of the struggle by the age of 13. The thirteen year old Tussy revised the anthem 'God Save the Queen' to 'God Save our Flag of Green' and was signing herself Eleanor F.S. (Fenian Sister). Even in the strongly pro-Fenian Marx household, Eleanor was, according to Marx himself, "one of their head centres".

All of this was not just liberal sentimentality; rather it was living implementation of Marx's famous dictum that "Any nation which oppresses another forges its own chains", of the need for the English proletariat to break from the politics of the bourgeoisie over Ireland in order to settle accounts with them as a class for itself. At the massive Hyde Park demonstration against the Irish Coercion Bill in 1887, Eleanor spoke along these lines. The *Daily Telegraph* of the day was evidently quite charmed despite itself:

"... considerable interest was actually taken in the speech delivered with excellent fluency and clear intonation by Mrs Marx Aveling (Eleanor Marx) who wore beneath her brown cape a dress of green plush with a broad trimmed

hat to match. The lady has a rather winning and pretty way of putting forth revolutionary and socialist ideas as though they were the gentlest thoughts on earth. Her speech was chiefly confined to impressing on her socialist friends the necessity for helping Ireland as in so doing they would be helping their own poor selves and the cause to which they were attached. She was enthusiastically applauded for a speech delivered with perfect self-possession." (Our emphasis.)

Perhaps it would not be too brutal of us to suggest that Mrs Marx Aveling was "enthusiastically applauded" not for her competent delivery or her twee dress sense, but because 1887 saw the English proletariat wake to the cause of Ireland. As Eleanor wrote:

"Everywhere large meetings are being held and for the first time the English working class is supporting Ireland."

It is left to the Leninists of the Communist Party to recapture the proud heritage of Eleanor Marx on Ireland; to struggle for a free, united and socialist Ireland:

"Let Ireland be free, but let it be an Ireland of free workers; it matters little to the men and women of Ireland if they are exploited by nationalist or Orangeman; the agricultural labourer sees his enemy in the landlord, as the industrial worker in his capitalist." (Eleanor Marx).

The Executive Committee's Draft Resolution

There's a Party crisis —

it's official

David Sherriff

THE DRAFT resolution for the Special National Congress presented to February's EC meeting solemnly declares that "there have been serious internal differences within the Party... which amount to a Party crisis." This crisis is apparently the result of five central factors:

- "Deep rooted differences going back over a long period on the strategy for socialist revolution in Britain... Most marked in relation to the latest edition of the British Road.

- "Longstanding disagreements over our attitude to the socialist countries.

- "Sharp differences of analysis of more recent political developments... particularly the question of 'Thatcherism' and the crisis of the labour movement.

- "A dramatic growth in factional activity.

- "The breach between the Party and the *Morning Star*, and the use of the paper as a means of bringing together an 'opposition block'."

The arguments around these subjects are old and well known and in essence the draft resolution simply repeats them. On 'Thatcherism' it paints the present government as being of a distinctly new type. Of course for us the fact that it has broken with the consensus politics of the 1950s and 1960s, that it is out to attack the "postwar gains of the British working class" as well as its drawing on "genuine popular discontents" has nothing to do with Thatcher being a semi-fascist but the demands placed on the Tories by a capitalism which is facing the prospect of a new general crisis.

For us the inevitable consequence of the slide towards general crisis is not only an attack on the rights, conditions, and pay of the working class, but the growing impotence of reformism. In the midst of economic decay, mass unemployment, and an anti-Soviet war drive reformism cannot defend the interests of the working class let alone advance them. As a result, one of the consequences of a crisis of capitalism is a crisis of reformism.

But for the Euros with their dream that reformism will bring socialism and that the Labour Party will be the vehicle to bring to reality this dream, the crisis of reformism becomes "the



Martin Jacques plays Santa Claus — but the working class doesn't need token Euro charity mongering.

crisis of the labour movement." The Euros regard it as their sacred duty to rescue the labour movement (read reformism) in general, and the Labour Party in particular, from the consequences of the crisis of capitalism. The result is Canute-like.

Against the sharp move to the left of the militant minority and its consequences in pulling certain prominent Labourites in their wake, the Euros seek to create a neo-consensus politics based around anti-'Thatcherism'. The Euros are convinced that the likes of Benn, Livingstone, and Scargill will alienate the vital anti-'Thatcherite' Tories as well as the SDPs and Liberals. As a result they demand that socialism and the struggle for it must be put into cold storage and subordinated to building "the broadest movement against Thatcherism".

Because the Euros elevate 'Thatcherism' to the level of something akin to fascism, they advocate that the working class pursue a strategy of class collaboration in the manner of the 1930s Popular Fronts. This strategy was, we believe, mistaken then; it is certainly mistaken now. For a strategy of class collaboration carries with it the seeds of social chauvinism and, what is more, ties the working class to alien social forces, all the while removing its hegemonic revolutionary role by putting off the struggle for socialism to some never-never land.

The draft resolution criticises social democracy because it has "traditionally opposed the labour movement entering into alliances with other sections and movements." What is meant by this is of

course the past reluctance of the Labourite leaders to enter into coalition deals with the Liberals, and 'progressive' anti-Chamberlain Tories, and their present reluctance to enter into similar coalitions with Liberals, anti-'Thatcherite' Tories, and now the SDP.

The draft correctly states that in the 1930s communists "had to fight for the Popular Front strategy". But what it 'forgets' is, first, that the reluctance of the Labourites to follow this line emanated from the 'betrayal' of MacDonald and the resulting hatred for coalitionism amongst Labour's rank and file. More damningly it also 'forgets' that from the time of Marx and Engels working class revolutionaries have fought tooth and nail for working class political independence, a tradition and central political tenet the CPGB maintained from its foundation until 1935. Time and time again in the 1920s and early 1930s the CPGB warned the masses against the dangers of Labour coalitions and wheeler-dealing with the Liberal Party. This line was only broken in 1935.

The Euros attempt to portray their anti-'Thatcherite' alliance as being not a matter of "electoral agreements" but of "the forces that can be won for action... some cases involving sections of the capitalist class". This strategy of winning "sections of the capitalist class" is classic Menshevism. For what is proposed, openly and unashamedly, is a reformist alliance. We Leninists have no objection to alliances per se; what we oppose is the working class being entrapped in alliances with non-revolutionary forces. Lenin's strategy

in Russia was to forge a revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry aimed not at reforming the Tsarist regime, nor democratising it, but at smashing it. Of course, in Britain the working class is not in a small minority but a clear majority: around 70% of the population. What is more, no other section of the population can play a consistent revolutionary role; thus the proletariat in Britain has little need for class alliances. What it does need though is to win working class unity, not around reformism but around revolutionism, not under the leadership of the bourgeois party of the working class, the Labour Party, but under the revolutionary leadership of a reformed Leninist vanguard party.

Part and parcel of class collaboration, as we have already stated, is social chauvinism. Once the working class looks upon itself as being primarily British, French, Japanese etc., once it is won to the idea that its interests lie with the interests and success of its 'own' capitalist nation, it becomes divided and a victim of capitalist jingoism.

This was the case in World War I when worker fought worker for the sake of their capitalist nations' imperialist plunder. In a similar way today the Euros urge workers to line up with their 'own' bosses to stop Japanese imports 'flooding in' and 'deindustrialising Britain'. This chauvinist response is enshrined in the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES) which we are meant to believe will save capitalist Britain from the consequences of the world capitalist crisis. This is an impossibility, but in this AES lies the prospect of worker fighting worker yet again; it also carries with it, by implication, anti-Sovietism and winning workers to imperialism's anti-Soviet war drive.

This is the objective source of the Euros' "criticisms" of the socialist countries. The draft resolution defends the leadership's attacks on the Soviet Union, its praise for *Solidarnosc*, and its call for the Red Army to withdraw from Afghanistan, on the basis that it is "constructive" and indeed it is a "duty and service to the common cause". This is a lie. Leninists regard it as their duty to criticise mistakes. We will voice our differences without fear or favour. But the Euros have long ago abandoned proletarian internationalism; they owe their loyalty to Great Britain, not the world's working class. Their criticism takes real or imagined mistakes by the socialist countries and uses them in the service of imperialism and anti-Sovietism. The proof of their objective pro-imperialism is the contrast between their attitude towards Ireland, a country under the direct colonial boot of British imperialism, and Afghanistan.

When it comes to Ireland they refuse to call for British troops to leave Ireland, contenting themselves with the pious substitute of a withdrawal to barracks and the demand that British imperialism must carry out a 'progressive colonial policy' by enacting a so-called Bill of Rights. Now while we have important criticisms of the Soviet role in the killing of Hafizullah Amin and 97 other leaders of the Party in Afghanistan, we know that to call for a Soviet pullout with a counterrevolutionary war still raging is to call for a victory for counter-revolution. And this is what objectively the Euros do.

With such class collaborationist, anti-Soviet, social patriotic politics, no wonder the CPGB rank and file have rebelled. No wonder so many have refused to bow before bureaucratic centralism and the threat of expulsion.

The EC's draft resolution is nothing but a shabby justification for the Euros' wrecking of the CPGB laced with a thinly veiled threat that Party members who do not "support candidates" at June's PPS AGM "committed" to the EC's line will be expelled. Whatever the outcome of May's Special Congress, genuine communists know they have the duty not to accept Eurocommunist anti-communism. They know that the rebellion must be taken to a higher plane.

No excuse for scabbing

The latest Straight Leftist Communist "samizdat" comes under the title *Forward to the 39th Congress*. It maintains that the 39th Congress "is not a result of the general class struggle, which has scarcely shaken us out of our routine for years, but as a result of the crisis threatening to destroy the Party." It is certainly true that during the miners' strike the EC, the *Morning Star*, and the Straight Leftists have acted as cheerleaders, a conservative break, they have hardly stirred from their complacent ideological slumbers. But it is wrong to divorce the present fierce class struggle from the Party crisis. For the miners'

strike points to the desperate need for a genuine revolutionary vanguard Party, a need which only the tendency around *The Leninist* fully recognises and which only the tendency around *The Leninist* is fighting to create.

The Straight Leftists have been as conservative in the inner-Party crisis as they have during the miners' strike. Fearing expulsions by the Euro/McLennan leadership they have called for a 'heads down, keep out of trouble' strategy. This has led them to, first, walk out of the London District Congress side by side with the Euros and McLennan, and subsequent to this, when the majority of the

opposition has refused to recognise the suspensions and expulsions meted out by the EC, they have again joined the Euros in walk outs from branches, borough committees, and industrial advisories.

So while preaching unity of the entire opposition, saying that a new anti-Euro leadership must "draw on all strands of opinion in the opposition", they cowardly scab on the majority of the opposition. And when it comes to those members they suspect of sympathising with *The Leninist*, scabbing becomes murderous to the extent of working actively hand in glove with the Euros to expel Party members and bar prospective members. In the YCL they even successfully proposed that support for *The Leninist* be a disciplinary offence: a move the Euros eagerly agreed to.

With such a track record, how can we take Straight Leftist protestations about the need for unity seriously?

Spanish steps



Dimitroff: for Carrillo the founding father of Eurocommunism

Santiago Carrillo 'Eurocommunism' and the State Lawrence & Wishart 1977 pp. 172 £2.75.

THE FRAGMENTATION that has hit the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) in recent years is a direct result of gross opportunism. As *The Leninist* has made clear before, the roots of such opportunism lie deep in the history of the world communist movement. Santiago Carrillo's book, written on the eve of Franco's transition to bourgeois democracy though it is, has surprising unconscious warnings for us in a Party which the Euros are trying to take over lock, stock, and barrel.

Comrade Carrillo and the PCE wish to pose as revolutionary whilst directing their message at the respectable middle strata of Spain. Thus, "while the proletariat continues to be the main revolutionary class, it is no longer the only one; other strata, other social categories are placing themselves objectively within the socialist perspective..." (p.44). Indeed, not only those managing industry or staffing the upper levels of the state machine are appealed to by the PCE; the police "should exist to defend society from anti-social elements, to control traffic, to protect the population," whilst in that other branch of the capitalist state's repressive machinery, the army, socialist forces can "win the professional military men... and make certain that the majority of them will loyally support the new State power." (p.74) And this was written a bare three years after the Chilean fascist coup.

Comrade Carrillo's basic premiss is that the Spanish state, or any other bourgeois state in the West, can be penetrated, democratised, and utilised for progressive purposes. Of course this cannot be done by violence; though revolutionary violence can be excused by the PCE in backward Russia during the 1917 Revolution, since that was only "A phase of revolutionary violence... indispensable in order to break the resistance of the capitalist system." (p. 137) Now that initial resistance has been broken, presumably we don't have to worry our heads unduly about nasty things like violent revolutions, just quiet ones. The nature of the PCE's quiet revolution is quite evident: a sickening social pacifism compounded by a cringing desire to transform society "without breaking the rules of democracy..." (p. 149).

The PCE has totally divorced itself from Leninism. For comrade Carrillo, "Lenin's theses of 1917 and 1918... are not applicable today..." (pp.9-10). We are told that "Lenin was no more than half right..." since political diversity nowadays "entails the possibility of the dictatorship of the proletariat not being necessary." (p. 154). The nature of the state is not understood in Leninist terms at all by the PCE; it puts great store on "the transformation of the State apparatus..." (p. 13). Even leaving aside our obvious objection to transforming (i.e. reforming) the bourgeois state, the PCE ignores glaring reality: "the State is becoming less and less a State for all and more and more a State for the few" (p. 25). When in class society before socialism has a state been a state for all? Never. Comrade Carrillo's lie serves only to misdirect the energies of Spain's working class towards "penetrating the State apparatus and of winning important sections of it." (p. 26). Spanish Eurocommunism sees the key to this illusory democratic transformation of the capitalist state in turning the "ideological apparatuses around" (p. 27). It sees the bourgeoisie as benignly, democratically allowing a direct challenge to bourgeois rule just because the PCE might have managed to sow "the seed of Marxist and progressive ideas" (p. 35) amongst the cadres of the state's ideological apparatus. What makes this position even more incredible is that it was formulated with Spain still under the fascist regime which was installed precisely because a former revolutionary situation threatened bourgeois rule. This is more than ignorance of one's own history; it is a deliberate attempt to destroy any vestige of Leninism and the true revolutionary heritage of Spain's working class.

The PCE, as you might expect, did not conjure Eurocommunism out of the blue. Comrade Carrillo rightly traces its origins back beyond comrade Togliatti, beyond our Party's *British Road to Socialism* (edition one), to comrades Thorez and Dimitroff. The opportunism of the world communist movement in the 1930s was expressed in the popular front idea of alignment of communist parties with 'anti-fascist' sections of the bourgeoisie. This class collaboration is understandably welcomed by comrade Carrillo, who sees in it the beginnings of today's Eurocommunist class collaboration "in the interests of society" (p.54).

Viewing established socialism with a more than jaundiced eye, the PCE is frantic to ingratiate itself with the middle strata by distancing itself from the Soviet Union, which is termed "a State which is evidently not a bourgeois state, but neither is it as yet the proletariat organised as the ruling class, or a genuine workers' democracy." (p. 157). Not for the PCE the dictatorship of the proletariat, since the "term dictatorship has in itself become hateful in the course of the present century..." (p. 141); and the liberal disgust with real revolution then turns to chide us about "the evils of totalitarianism" like any Harvard professor.

This book helps us understand why 'communist' is a misnomer in the title of the PCE. Similarly, the Eurocommunists in the CPGB have no claim to the proud description of communist; Eurocommunism in the PCE, the CPGB, as elsewhere, does not want revolution. Instead it desires a complete break with the established socialism of the socialist lands, and consequently Marxism-Leninism itself, in favour of weaseling its way into the state apparatus and thus forming itself into the staff officers of the bourgeois state.

Here is a clear indication of the present danger. Our duty is to heed the recent history of the world communist

movement, including the foulness generated by the PCE, and ensure that Eurocommunism is removed from our Party one way or another.

Peter Butler

Amazing ignorance



Is this *Straight Left* seller in the CP or Labour Party?

Socialist Organiser, *The Labour Left and the break up of the Communist Party*, *Forum* No 1 February 1985 pp.24 50p.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER is one of a score of Trotskyite entryists in the Labour Party. Like other Trotskyites in the Labour Party they have constituted themselves the extreme left of social democracy, preferring this to the impotence of the sectarian wilderness.

In common with other entryists, *SO* wants to channel the energy of the miners' strike into shifting Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party to the left believing that the Labour Party can be transformed into a vehicle for socialist change. And while putting forward militant slogans, it like the others always prefaces them with thoroughly reformist preconditions. Thus, while recognising the necessity of a general strike if the miners are to achieve total victory, *SO* demands that this can only happen after a token TUC-run 24 hour strike, and now a recall TUC.

What distinguishes *SO* from other entryists is not its Labourphilia, its pseudo revolutionism, its anti-communism, and its hatred of the socialist countries, but the depth to which *SO* has taken these features of Trotskyism. So while posing as Marxist, *SO* declares that for workers, bourgeois democracy is preferable to the "totalitarianism" of the socialist countries. Indeed, these people brand the socialist countries as "Stalinist states" or even "anti-working class police states" which workers are supposed to have no interest in defending.

The first edition of their *Forum* illustrates fully their love of the Labour Party and their anti-communism. While the longest article consists of a broadly correct critique of the CPGB's programme the *British Road to Socialism*, written in 1977, from *Socialist Organiser's* predecessor *Workers' Action*, the major thrust of the twenty-four incondite pages is the danger that a possible break-up of the Communist Party presents to the left wing of their precious Labour Party.

According to *Forum*, the "likely consequence of the break-up of the CP will be the entry into the

Labour Party of a sizable number of activists"; they "will strengthen the Kinnock centre and the soft left." Because of this prospect *SO* has published *Forum* in order that those on the "Labour Party left" can "arm ourselves politically against the *British Road* view of parliament-worship". (pp.4,5.)

This view not only presupposes the liquidation of the Communist Party but assumes that the *British Road* has near universal support from Party members, the only exception being "the small group around the monthly paper *The Leninist*" (p5). While it is of course true that *The Leninist* tendency is small, a relatively large section of the rank and file in the opposition, particularly because of their defence of the Soviet Union, reject either openly or by implication the positions of the *British Road*, i.e. the positions of reformism. (These forces adhere to centrism in one form or another.) This certainly cannot be said of the Labour Party left to which *SO* owe their loyalty. They are committed to reformism by tradition, by ideology, by their defence of British imperialism, and above all their vain illusory hopes in the next Labour government and thus Neil 'scab' Kinnock.

Far from revolutionary Marxists wanting to protect the Labour Party left from a mass influx of disaffected CP oppositionists we seek to protect the CP oppositionists from the poison of Labourism which has *SO* so tightly in its tender and corrupting embrace. Of course we don't give a damn if the Euros go off into the Labour Party and join up with the ex-Young Liberal Peter Hain and the Labour Coordinating Committee; in fact we'll encourage them in that direction. Then *SO* might even discover that they have more in common with the Euros than they at present think.

Both the Euros and *SO* loath the socialist countries and prefer the sham of bourgeois democracy. Both consider the Labour Party as the "mass party of the working class", not the bourgeois workers' party that it is, and both look to it as the key to socialist transformation. What is more, both the Euros and *SO* loved the counterrevolutionary *Solidarnosc*, a fact which *SO* refuses to tell its readers, claiming either maliciously or through stupidity that the Euros opposed *Solidarnosc*.

We must say "stupidity" because *SO* and its *Forum* are amazingly ignorant, or so it seems, when it comes to politics in the CPGB in particular and by definition the Labour Party itself in general. For in the editorial article it is claimed that among the groups in the *Labour Party* ex-CPGB members might join is *Straight Left* (p.4)! Showing that this is no silly slip, *Forum* devotes six of its pages to a detailed analysis of *Straight Left* b Stan Crooke under the title of the "Anatomy of the Labour Left", which ends with the conclusion that *Straight Left's* "forces could be seriously increased if a large number of CPers bitter against Eurocommunism and seeking a 'hard' alternative to it enter the Labour Party" (p.19).

Don't these people ever read, don't they ever even look at TV? If they did, certainly if they'd ever read *The Leninist* they wouldn't have made such an enormous gaffe. *Straight Left* might seem to the uninitiated to be a Labourite paper, but, blockheads of *SO*, it is in reality a highly organised and well known faction in the CPGB. To believe that *Straight Left* is a broad labour movement paper is like expecting readers of *Forum* to believe that *Socialist Organiser* is a "Labour Party paper" and not the publication of the "revolutionary democratic centralist WSL" (i.e. the entryist Trotskyite Workers' Socialist League). But then this is exactly what is claimed on page twenty-two.

Jack Conrad

Organising for action?

John Miller

HOW MANY times have we heard militants say 'the miners are fighting for us all'? Yes, the miners certainly have been fighting; seven have been killed, thousands fined or imprisoned. And yes, the struggle they have waged with such determination and courage has indeed been 'for us all' — a strategic struggle in the interests of the whole working class and others oppressed by capitalism, and not merely some sectional wages strike. But how have these others been fighting for the miners?

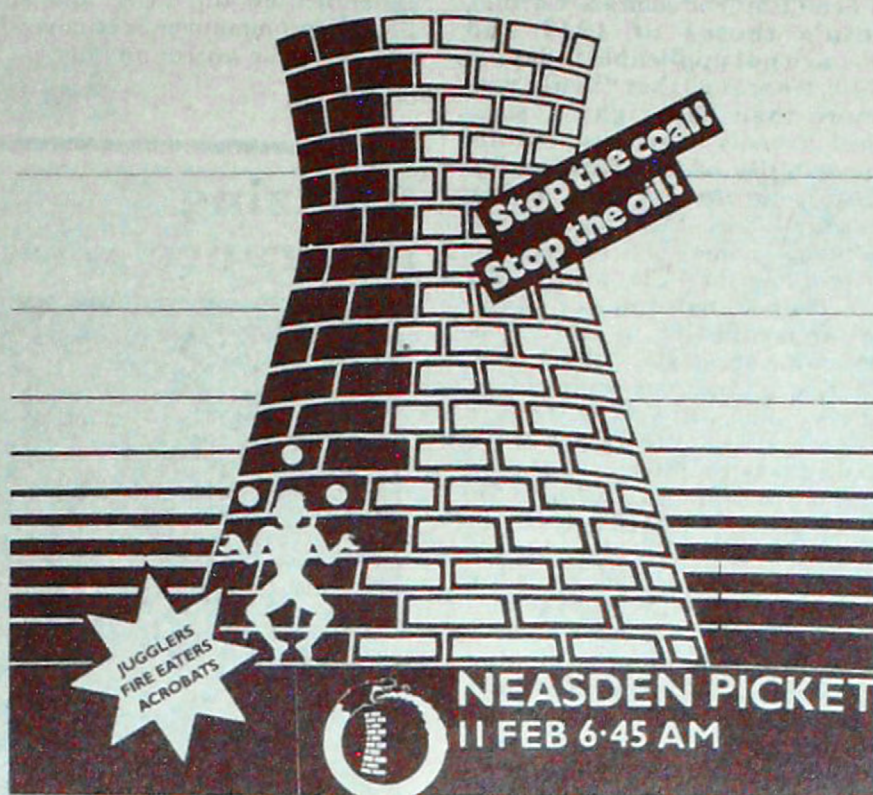
Undoubtedly the millions of pounds worth of food and money raised by the miners' support movement and the trade unions nationally and internationally have helped sustain the strikers and their families. But the fight for finance, though essential, is only the most basic level of solidarity; it alone has not and will not help the miners break through to victory. Neither will merely staging mass pickets outside striking pits, as those abysmal downturn defeatists, the SWP stupidly declare.

For never has it been so crystal clear that unless widespread industrial action of general strike proportions by other sections of the working class in defence of the miners, in defence of their unions against the anti-union laws, and for better benefits and wages starts very soon not only the miners but the whole working class will go down to a bitter defeat. Increasingly, militant miners are coming to see that need. How then is such action to be won?

Although it was quite correct to campaign for the TUC to organise industrial action in support of the miners before its '84 Congress, to have simply continued to appeal to those cosy fat cat bureaucrats for real action after Congress was more and more absurd. We remind those who now campaign for a recall of the TUC that it has not even enforced its own policy (and never intended to) on the blacking of all coal and oil, so what do they honestly expect from such misleaders as Willis, Duffy, Basnett (and Todd and Knapp) if their aim were to be achieved? More paper resolutions, promises and no action.

If the TUC refuses to act, and it should have been blindingly obvious to all militants (even the SWP) that they were not going to organise industrial action unless put under the most intense pressure from below, then they must be bypassed. From the very start of the strike the working class movement cried out for an organisation of rank and file militants, cutting across sectionalism and including militant miners. If that perspective, which we put forward last May, had been firmly grasped and campaigned for by the left from the start of the strike, today we could be seeing a vigorous minority movement in action, a mass movement of the minority of workers prepared to take industrial action for the miners and for their own demands, an organisation composed of rank and file miners, railworkers, powerworkers, carworkers, public service workers, etc., building up a tremendous head of pressure on the official movement, and at the same time linking together and campaigning politically in the workplaces for the 'total physical support' necessary for victory. And it is such an organisation that is needed even more today.

Unfortunately, such action that has been organised by unofficial bodies that exist, like the Mineworkers' Defence Committee, the Liaison Committee, BLOC, or the WRP's All Trade Union Alliance (none of them bearing any resemblance whatsoever to a Minority Movement type organisation) has been utterly inadequate.



Can jugglers, fire eaters, acrobats and one day token pickets bring victory?

Liaison Committee

The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LDCTU), initially formed in 1966 to rally opposition to incomes policy, became the leadership of the fight against the anti-union laws emanating from both Labour and Tory governments in the late 60s and early 70s.

In 1970, after the 'consultative document' on the proposed Industrial Relations Bill was published in October, the TUC predictably responded by merely calling a protest rally for Jan 12 1971. The Liaison Committee, itself led by Communist Party industrial militants, almost immediately called for "mass industrial action" — a strike on Dec 8 1970. And although, as the LDCTU themselves point out "... the call was made by an unofficial body and (with) the reservations, even hostility, of most union leaderships..." it became a massive display of industrial strength with 3/4 million workers striking and demonstrations everywhere including 20,000 in Liverpool and 30,000 in London. (see LDCTU pamphlet: *Action defeats the Bill*.)

The Liaison Committee had also called for similar action to be taken on January 12, and because of its militant campaign managed to push the TUC into supporting meetings in works "where necessary". On the day, an estimated 5 million workers took part in such meetings the workers often marched out of the factories and did not return. Following that, on Feb 21 1971 the biggest demonstration of industrial workers ever seen this century marched through London.

Thus the struggle against the Industrial Relations Act was initiated by an unofficial movement of shop stewards which organised rank and file workers, putting pressure on the TUC and bypassing the labour bureaucrats when they were forced to.

The final demise of the Act is a well known story. The LDCTU's active record then, though certainly not flawless, contrasts completely with its role during the present miners' strike, for it has been noticeable more by its absence. Apart from a tiny contingent lobbying the 1984 TUC Congress, this place shadow (or even ghost?) of an organisation has organised just one conference — on January 17, over 9 months after the strike started.

The declaration of the 200 strong conference confined itself to a call for the implementation of TUC policy and support for pickets and demonstrations, plus some general criticisms of no-strike agreements: those unions preparing to accept cash for ballots.

And that was about it! The anaemic declaration, to which no amendments were allowed, contained only one proposal for action — a demonstration on a Sunday!

The sad truth is that the Liaison Committee has over the past ten years degenerated, becoming increasingly bureaucratically run — allowing no democracy to develop. Though it retains some influence among the middle layers of the trade unions (branch secretaries, convenors, etc.) its influence among the rank and file has declined dramatically to the point of nonexistence.

But while the cat's away (or perhaps asleep) the mice will play, and so they did.

Miners' Defence

The Mineworkers' Defence Committee (MDC) was formed at the 1984 Labour Party Conference by an amalgam of Labour Briefing/Bennite and other left factions of the Labour Party. After remaining more or less dormant (no doubt waiting for the TUC to deliver the goods) for a month or so, it gradually started to dawn on this self-appointed committee that there was a need for the co-ordination of basic solidarity work.

After a month's hurried preparation, the MDC held its 'conference' on Dec 2 1984 which, largely due to the bureaucratic manoeuvring of *Socialist Action* and the SWP (who had been co-opted onto the MDC after its formation by the Briefing-Chartist group) became a glorified rally and talking shop. To all militants, miner and non-miner, concerned with transforming the MDC into an organisation capable of mobilising for action, the Dec 2 event proved to be a great disappointment.

For a further two months the factional manoeuvring for the upper hand on the MDC between the right-moving SWP/*Socialist Action* bloc and the left-posing *Chartist/Socialist Organiser* group continued within the labyrinthine corridors of County Hall.

Then in January emerged the weekly bulletin of the MDC, the *Black Dragon* (as every worker knows, the dragon is an ancient symbol of solidarity!). As simply an up to date source of information on picketing, benefits, etc. the beast was of some use. As an agitator and co-ordinator of the campaign for the general strike so clearly needed, it completely failed in giving a consistent lead. In Nos. 2 & 3 we read editorials expressing official NUM policy; in No 4 the editorial consisted of the *Chartist's* position calling for an indefinite general strike in defence of the NUM and the GLC

commencing on March 6 and for the recall of the TUC; whilst Nos 5 & 6 contained not a mention of such demands!

Reading further in the bizarre saga of the *Black Dragon*, we meet the offspring of the 'Pit Dragon', an ensemble of alternative, left, or radical musicians, jugglers, and fire-eaters (let the bourgeoisie tremble) for a miners' victory, whose task is to entertain the picket lines. Saves them talking so much politics we suppose.

The final chapter on this ungainly creature consists of the promised second 'conference' of Feb 9. Whereas the Dec 2 rally did attract large numbers of miners and women from the pit areas, February drew much fewer even though it was held in Sheffield rather than London. And again, much time was spent listening to various big name speakers leaving no time for the delegates to discuss the strategy and the politics of the support movement or even the resolutions. Another opportunity to launch an effective campaign was thus tragically lost. But this half rally — half conference contained not just elements of tragedy but also of pure farce.

The organisers had bureaucratically and unilaterally decided, in their wish to ingratiate themselves with left union leaders and Labour names, to expand the MDC to include an array of representatives from each national union/broad left, regional Labour Parties and Labour Council groups, an "unlimited" number of NUM reps and only one rep from each of 16 regions, so that, for example the whole of north London or Scotland has only one member on the MDC! Thus thousands of those actively involved in support group work are represented by a handful of individuals. Instead of a nationally organised miners' support movement based on elected recallable delegates from area and particularly workplace organisations the MDC has spawned a cumbersome bureaucratic monster quite unrepresentative of the movement it purports to lead. The final touch of absurdity was provided by the method of election of the area reps. This took the form of the delegates being directed to an allotted segment of the Octagon Theatre's seating blocks: "all those from the Southern (!) region to go to the fourth section on the left". In the ensuing confusion a number of unrecallable and uncontactable 'representatives' were 'elected' with the barest minimum of discussion. Such a shambles would have been screamingly funny if there were not such a serious issue at stake.

The MDC has thus become a bureaucratic appendix. Now, with the ascendancy of the rightist elements like the tailist *Socialist Action* trotskyites and SWP defeatists it is quite useless for organising action.

The need now

"There is a crying need for a cross industry movement of those committed to total physical support for the miners. This total physical support movement should be committed to a class struggle programme, and if necessary be organised independently of the official structures in much the same way as the National Minority Movement of the 1920s. Given this perspective the Miners' Support Committees could begin a process of transforming themselves along the lines of Council of Action type bodies." (Jack Collins, February 1985, see front page.)

Given the paralysis of the official trade union leadership, which is likely to continue in the foreseeable future a Minority Movement type organisation is indeed a burning necessity both for a miners' victory and beyond. It is now a matter of the most extreme urgency.

On International Women's Day 1985 our thoughts and hopes must go out to the fighting women in the mining communities. For one year they have sustained the momentous miners' strike and provided a magnificent example for all working class women. Their struggle has forced many women to reject the separatist and pacifist approaches. The role of women during the miners' strike, their determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with men, their willingness to meet violence with violence, undermines many feminist assumptions.

But how are women to win real freedom? How are we to achieve more than formal equality? These questions still need answering.



Women Take Sides

Geraldine Duffy

“They talk about statistics, about the price of coal, the cost of our community is dying on the dole. In fighting for our future we’ve found ways to organise, Where women’s liberation failed to move, this strike has mobilised.”

(First verse of a song written for pit women, quoted in the *Morning Star*, January 8 1985.)

THE MESSAGE in this verse sparked the latest round in the debate over the women’s question within the Communist Party. In general terms the Party is deeply riven and this expresses itself in a particularly vivid way over the

question of women. It was comrade Barbara McDermot who quoted the song in a pointed article in the *Star* arguing that women mobilised by the miners’ strike owed nothing to the women’s liberation movement.

The barb was caught by the feminists in the Party whose response to comrade McDermot was very much a defensive one. The replies to her article in *Communist Focus* (the Euro’s factional paper for conducting inner Party struggle), demonstrate that the role of women in the miners’ strike is indeed a ticklish theme for the feminists. The best counter argument that this trend have come up with is that the pit women’s movement would have been impossible without the increased confidence given to all women by the women’s liberation movement (WLM)

of the 1970’s:

“The growth of a women’s movement in the coalfields... would have been inconceivable without the changes brought about in women’s confidence and in the circumstances of women by the women’s liberation movement.” (Comrade Tricia Davis, *Focus*, January 17 1985.)

This is the sort of distortion that has been used by feminists since their emergence. At the beginning of the century bourgeois women began to struggle to enter the professions and the obstructions put in their path gave rise to “feminism” — the attempt of bourgeois women to stand together and pit their common strength against the enemy, against men.” (A. Kollontai, *The Social Basis of the Woman Question*.)

As these women began to enter the labour market they made vain boasts about being the ‘vanguard of the women’s movement’. Yet they ignored the fact that in every country their working class ‘sisters’ had preceded them, they had flooded the factories and workshops before the bourgeois women’s movement was even born. It was only due to the fact that women workers had been recognised that bourgeois women were able to trail in on their poorer sisters’ skirts.

In a similar vein the present day feminists claim that the WLM of the ’70s was the vanguard that led the way for their more ‘backward’ sisters who have only just caught up. So let us briefly look at the role of the WLM. One of the major contributions the WLM claims to have made is a change in

society's 'attitude' towards women. However, these changes predate the WLM by at least a generation. The expansion of British capitalism during World War II and during the boom that followed brought millions of women into work because it needed the additional labour that they could provide. For this reason the capitalist class conveniently dropped their Victorian values about women's role. Employers supported increased education and job opportunities for women and liberal legislation was passed on women's issues. All this meant that middle class women escaped their traditional callings and prepared for professional careers. But they emerged into a society where they discovered that society may have been liberalised but this was not liberation — thus the WLM was born.

So given that feminism was not responsible for the change in capitalism's attitude to women, what about the argument that the legislation against sex discrimination and for equal pay was a contribution of the WLM that cannot be denied? Apart from the fact that this legislation is ineffective it is yet another myth that the WLM was responsible for this legislation. These two Acts were introduced in reality because of militant working class women strikers and because of direct pressure from the EEC.

Indeed it is difficult to point to one fact in the history of the struggle of working class women to improve their material conditions to which the feminist movement has contributed significantly. The argument used by the Euro feminists in the Party is not new but apply it to working women in struggle, from the women who sparked the Russian Revolution to the Armagh women struggling against imperialism in the present, and it requires a considerable degree of self deception to believe that the motivation for these women was or is to be found in the increased confidence they gained from bourgeois feminism. Indeed with regard to the miners' strike, when the Euro feminists interviewed a miner's wife in *Focus* they asked if feminism had influenced the miners' wives — "no" was the stark reply.

In reality the feminists found themselves on the sidelines in the strike and to inflate their importance they have tried to claim a subjective role in the consciousness of the pit women. The feminists are well aware of their isolation from working class women involved in the miners' strike; for this reason they have put all their energies into gearing these women towards feminism using the vehicle of the Greenham Common protest and its form of organisation. This view has been instinctively rejected by the pit women who have not only supported their men and the violence used by pickets but have also refused to be separatist.

Peaceful Women?

"The women who were demonstrating [at Greenham] were bringing to our notice the moods they share privately: a capacity to nurse and nourish, to care, tolerate, improve and preserve and demonstrate a set of values contrary to the machismo of men now insanely conquering outer space in phallic warships and pre-occupied with phallic missiles." (Leo Abse (Labour Party MP), *Hansard*, December 17 1982.)

The idea peddled by the Greenham protest is that women are naturally peaceful and men naturally aggressive. In itself this is a dangerous notion but what is much more dangerous is when others peddle the same politics under the name of 'communism' and who seek to direct the struggle of working women in this direction. These women emphasise women's stereotyped role as life-givers,

adorning the fences of Greenham with baby clothes, children's toys, and family photos. But in reality there is no natural connection between gender and violence; the classic modern day example of this fact presents itself in the form of our Prime Minister — one of the most vicious leaders this country has seen in a long while.

Feminist organisations have a history of pacifism, but when war breaks out everyone has to take sides and class forces tend to polarise; when it comes to this choice feminists have a bad record. The fact that these women's movements have been dominated by bourgeois ideas has led them to take the side of that class from 1914 to Ireland today.

So why does pacifism have such an appeal to these self same women? Most bourgeois women spend their time looking after their families and this isolation means they are largely excluded from political life. Given that war is the continuation of politics by other means then such women tend to be isolated from it. This has a considerable effect on their perception of war; to them it seems irrational — they have produced life and the fact that that life is taken away from them seems a cruel consequence of conflicts which are beyond their control.

Working class women have to take a different attitude. Workers never have the luxury of abstaining from any conflict, they are forced to take sides. In a strike they can either fight the bosses or they can scab; the miners' strike has been a vivid example of this choice. Where working women have become involved in politics as in the miners' strike they have necessarily become involved in violence.

So while there is no natural connection between violence and gender there is a connection between pacifism and feminism. Both movements are led by middle class individualists who reject working class politics and working class violence. Trapped between the picket line violence and the violence of the police they express the view of an 'innocent bystander'. The most tragic feature of all this is that such views have taken root in the Party. Thus comrades Bea Campbell and Janie Glen condemned the violence used by the Warrington pickets in the NGA dispute and, throwing caution to the wind, comrade Glen also condemned miners' violence as 'male'. For example, in a recent article in *Focus* Glen poses the "question of the difference in the amount of violence at Greenham and on the miners' picket lines"; the answer she comes up with is unfortunately predictable:

"Men... when faced with provocative and emotional situations are often only able to release their emotions through violence; whereas women have developed other and more constructive ways of expressing and dealing with emotionally charged situations." (*Focus*, February 7 1985.) Because of their class orientation Glen and Campbell do not understand what many a miner's wife has learnt — these conflicts are not between groups of males but between the ruling class and the working class. Comrades that fail to appreciate this, who attack the violence of the unarmed working class against the armed state, objectively take the side of the ruling class; they have nothing to do with working class struggle.

This is why the feminists in the Party have been trying to divert the orientation of the pit women towards Greenham style tactics. Again they are playing into the hands of the ruling class by urging passive resistance as opposed to militancy. Against this the pit women have largely rejected this method of organisation even though many of them believe Greenham to be a good thing. There is a simple explanation for this: women against pit closures know that the state will not have any qualms about using violence on them, women or no. Greenham is just an irritation to the bourgeois state; the miners' wives represent much, much more and it is for this reason that

"The police are just as violent with the women and children as they are with the men." (Mari Collins, leading Kent activist, interviewed in *The Leninist* No 17.)

For working class women who want genuine peace a war with the forces of law and order in Britain is unavoidable — pit women have already experienced this. To deny this lesson and instead to promote Greenham-type activity is a crime against the working class. Greenham not only glorifies a view of women which derives from the inferior position of women in bourgeois society, it also presents a view of 'peace' as the status quo in a society whose nature can never mean true peace for the working class. Working class women also care about their children, but they cannot afford peace at any price which is why their place is not with bourgeois women but alongside men in fighting capitalist oppression.

Class Lines

"Where, then, is that general 'woman question'? Where is that unity of tasks and aspirations about which the feminists have so much to say? A sober glance at reality shows that such unity does not and cannot exist..."

"The women's world is divided, just as is the world of men, into two camps; the interests and aspirations of one group of women bring it close to the bourgeois class, while the other group has close connections with the proletariat... Thus although both camps follow the general slogan of the 'liberation of women', their aims and interests are different." (A. Kollontai, *The Social Basis of the Woman Question*.)

In a society based on class contradictions there is no place for a women's movement indiscriminately embracing all women. As we have already demonstrated bourgeois women and working women instinctively represent the interests of their class, and this gives a bias to their aims and actions.

The feminists always oppose themselves to men and demand their rights from men. For them contemporary society is divided into two categories — men and women. But for working class women their class brethren are not their enemies because that which unites them is much stronger than that which divides them. They are united by their common lack of rights, their common needs and their common exploitation.

That women, like men, respond along class rather than sex lines has been shown again and again by history. The Paris Commune was a good example of where both sides were not averse to violence for the victory of their class. Working women played a valiant role in this struggle and were courageous to the last. When the Commune fell one woman replied to the accusation of having killed two soldiers, "May God punish me for not having killed more" (S. Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p.330). Over this struggle there was no common ground between the bourgeois and working women. After the fall of the Commune it was the bourgeois women whose vengeance was most vicious towards their working class 'sisters':

"Elegant and joyous women, as in a pleasure trip, betook themselves to the corpses, and, to enjoy the sight of the valorous dead, raised the end of their sunshades raised the last coverings." (P. Lissagray, *History of the Paris Commune*, p.419.)

But what about modern times? What have the bourgeois women of 1871 to do with the feminists of 1985? Isn't feminism now part of the working class movement? Certainly feminism has had an effect on the workers' movement — it has made it even less

effective in defending women and workers. 'Socialist feminism' has become a vehicle for anti-working class ideas on both organisation and politics. Feminism stresses the need for individual expression and is totally dismissive of the traditional discipline of the working class. It demanded the left become more 'open' and 'broad'. In other words they wanted working class organisations opened up to them.

Thus although feminists may orientate themselves towards the working class and call themselves 'socialists' their aim is not the liberation of the working class but their own liberation — the liberation which will give them equality with bourgeois men to exploit the working class. If bourgeois or petty bourgeois women cannot win equality from their male counterparts they will try to use the power of the working class to win their aims. Once these aims have been won they will unite with their class and turn their backs on their working class 'sisters':

This orientation is clear to see; for example, the feminists argue for equal rights but they want male workers to pay for these instead of the capitalist class. This was the logic of Anna Coote and Bea Campbell in their book *Sweet Freedom*. The argument runs something like this: if women want more wages they have to capture them from more highly paid male workers; if they want less domestic work let the husband do it; if they need more family allowances men's wages should be taxed to provide it. Obviously working women need all these things but who should pay for them — working class men or the bosses?

For working class women these sort of equal rights with men would mean only an equal share in inequality. But for the bourgeois women it would indeed open doors to new and unprecedented rights and privileges.

The ideology of feminism, its preoccupation with individual attitudes, is an indication of its class nature. This was clearly demonstrated by Euro-feminist Tricia Davis who, in *Marxism Today*, argued that Tory ideology had ironically embraced many of the demands and characteristics of feminism and she claims, "There are Tory women, however, with careers, including political careers, who are unlikely to welcome a simplistic call for women to return to the home." (*Marxism Today*, October 1983.) This is a good thing, comrade Davis would have us believe, because it makes it difficult for the Tories to launch a major offensive against feminism. Good for whom? Is the call for women to return to the home really directed towards Tory lady lawyers or is it directed to the mass of working class women? The fact is that Davis is not even thinking of working class women, she is thinking of how the left can be used to ensure middle class women retain and enhance the gains they have made.

The increased influence of the feminists on the left has meant that divisions within the working class have deepened. The demand by the feminists for autonomous organisations has let labour leaders off the hook — lip service is paid to women's interests while the existence of these autonomous women's groups allows the trade union bureaucracy to avoid the task of getting male workers to fight for women's rights and thus strengthen the working class as a whole.

An additional problem is that those that oppose the feminists often react in the opposite extreme. For example, in the Party although the centrists have opposed the Euro feminists they have failed to pose any alternative to the politics of this trend thus reflecting a lack of seriousness to the whole vital area. *Straight Left* is the worst offender in this respect, this was displayed for all to see by comrade Susan Michie (a member of that faction), when she tried to answer an argument on women in the *Star* from a position to the left of her: she ended up calling herself a feminist. Apart from

proving yet again that *Straight Left's* political poverty increasingly ends them up with strange bedfellows it also reflects a general lack of respect for the question among the opposition in the Party. Another example of this was the 38th Congress of the CPGB when the opposition did not bother to put any alternative resolutions on women.

This unserious attitude to the question, usually born of distrust of feminism, often results in the failure to see the need for special work among women. This is a characteristic of both *Militant* and the Socialist Workers' Party as well as some Party members. To counteract this dangerous narrow mindedness considerable educational work among male comrades is necessary or they may well continue to "regard agitation and propaganda among women and the task of rousing and revolutionising them as of secondary importance, as the job of just women communists... In the final analysis, it is an underestimation of women and their accomplishments." (V I Lenin, *Emancipation of Women*, p114.)

Such underestimation is not to be tolerated because if women are not mobilised to fight for revolution then the working class will have to fight with one hand tied behind it. The women's question in the Party must be wrested from the feminists whose preaching of cross class ideology can only serve to weaken the working class and thus the fight for working class women to achieve their liberty. Feminism has no progressive role to play within the workers' movement; it is an obstacle in our path which must be overcome.

Socialism — The Key

"Hail the women! Hail the International! The women were the first to come out on the streets of Petrograd on their Women's Day. The women in Moscow in many cases determined the need of the military; they went to the barracks, and convinced the soldiers to come over to the side of the Revolution. Hail the women!" (*Pravda* editorial after the February revolution)

The Russian revolution was begun by women. On International Women's Day in 1917 women textile workers went on strike in Petrograd for bread, against the war and against the autocracy. The women appealed to other workers to support them and this strike proved to be the start of the revolution. This one fact is an argument in itself for anti-feminism. The Bolsheviks had put much energy into countering the feminists into polarising working class and bourgeois women and into strengthening the ties between working class men and women. The result was the leading role of women working in the revolution, a revolution which was, needless to say, not supported by the bourgeois feminists of the time.

After the revolution for the first time in history women won full equality, a fact that sent shock waves throughout the entire bourgeois world and that has never been equalled by any capitalist country to the present day. However, even then all the equality legislation that the Bolsheviks passed did not mean that Soviet women were actually equal — it made them formally equal as distinct from real social equality. Lenin was well aware that actual equality took a long time to build, "the more thoroughly we clear the ground of the lumber of the old bourgeois laws and institutions, the more we realise that we have only cleared the ground to build on but are not yet building." (V.I. Lenin, *The Emancipation of Women*.)

While Lenin realised the necessity for strengthening the ground beneath the revolution's feet step by step he must have believed that by the time the revolution was 68 years old it would have far advanced the basics

introduced by the Bolsheviks. The truth is that although women's equality has vastly improved since just after the revolution it is still only formal because some of the crucial elements required for women's liberation have been reneged on since the revolution. The major area of failure is the role of women in the home in the Soviet Union. Again the Bolsheviks had realised the central importance of this area, "even when women have full rights, they still remain down-trodden because all the house-work is left to them." (V.I. Lenin, *The Emancipation of Women*.)

For this reason the Bolsheviks were fully committed to the socialisation of domestic labour. In a nutshell this concept means that all the house-keeping functions of a family such as washing, cleaning, cooking and child-care are provided by services of the socialist society. This does not mean, as the individualism of the feminists has often led them to proclaim, that every aspect of peoples lives is institutionalised but rather that families and especially women are freed from the drudgery that occupies so much of their time and consequently enables them to lead much more fulfilling lives. For a start this means that such social services have to be of a very high standard. Nurseries have to be locally situated places where children look forward to going because they have more fun than if they were shut up at home. Parents must be able to relax knowing that their children are being well cared for and happy and for that matter mothers and fathers should be able to share in this community care for their own and other peoples children.

Similarly with laundry, cleaning and cooking. If the services provided were not high quality then women would tend to opt for the drudgery of doing it themselves. Again feminists come out with remarks like "24 hr institution food — ugh!". They would be correct if canteen level was all that society aspired to but we have a lesson to learn from the bourgeoisie here. When people talk of communal eating the immediate parallel that is drawn is the one of social dinners or workplace canteens and their plastic food but surely the Ritz is also an institution which caters on a mass scale? The working class, having struggled hard for their liberation, must aspire to the highest common denominator, not the lowest. If the necessary resources are provided, and those preparing the food trained and in contact with their consumers and if everyone in the community can regularly take turns at work then the drudgery of cooking day in day out can be removed. The strikers' canteens of the miners' strike show in a small way the social and community atmosphere that comes through such organisation.

Of course, organising our lives in this way does not mean that people cannot cook for themselves for pleasure but it does mean that daily necessity no longer rules our lives. The same applies to washing and cleaning — the bourgeoisie has always sent its washing to private laundries and had their houses cleaned for them — working class women must have these facilities but the difference is that like eating and childcare facilities these will be provided within their communities.

The Soviet Union does make some of these provisions but they are largely very inadequate. This would not be such a failing if the Soviet Party was making a genuine attempt to come to terms with these problems, unfortunately our Soviet comrades no longer even pay lip service to the socialisation of domestic labour. Face to face with this fact many feminists argue that socialism is therefore not the answer to women's liberation and the central question is one of women's power. This assertion is born of a lack of understanding of the nature of socialism.

First it is naive to believe that a socialist revolution will bring instant equality — it marks only the conditions in which equality can be worked for.

Secondly, it fails to appreciate that the Soviet leaders should be motivated first and foremost as communists rather than as 'men'. It is not in the interests of a socialist society, if it wishes to advance, to oppress women. If these leaders fail in their duties towards women it is not because they are influenced by 'male' ideas but bourgeois ones. To pose the question in terms of 'male' attitudes is similar to saying that it is in the interests of a white worker to oppress a black worker. Such ideas are not only untrue especially in the long term but they foster divisions which are the seeds of counterrevolution.

On the other hand it is almost as bad to ignore the faults of the Soviet leadership and to accept the line that 'women have equality in the Soviet Union'. This is the type of head in the sand attitude typical of centrists in the Party but it sows distrust amongst workers as well as a despondency that socialism can go no further than the still formal and therefore inadequate level in the socialist countries. For those communists who want to see genuine women's equality in the Soviet Union and who recognise that socialism in that country must advance beyond the current formal stage it is their solemn proletarian internationalist duty to criticise and pose tasks.

In truth this is the only position for those who want to see communism — the society where women will achieve full and genuine equality. It will be under communism that each receives on the basis of need rather than work done and thus the final blocks to women's equality (those of child bearing and comparative lack of strength) will be overcome. Those that fail to take this position fail to see socialism as living, in effect they do not accept the possibility of a communist society where "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". They hold the key but will not open the door.

Women under Capitalism

"Studies have shown that for married women who go out to work the family and the home are still the main interests, and are regarded by themselves... as the prime responsibility... Employers accept this attitude as socially right: it should not be changed. The economic value of the mother's work in the home cannot be calculated but the social value is unquestionable." (CBI: *Employing Women: the Employer's view* September 1967.)

Women in the Soviet Union may not have total equality with their male counterparts, but the crucial difference between socialist society and capitalist is that socialist society, however formal and undeveloped, provides the basis for winning that equality by advancing towards communism. The bleating of the feminist flock that 'I'm not going to wait for socialism for equality' is thus as utopian as it is reactionary; capitalism is physically unable to liberate women.

Under capitalism, labour power as a commodity is quite unique: it is the only commodity which has the potential to create more value than it itself possesses. It is from this living labour that the capitalist extracts his surplus value, the source of his profit. This labour power and its ability to produce surplus value for the capitalist must itself be serviced by the expenditure of labour power to maintain its efficiency. Just as a machine must be regularly oiled and cleaned to maintain it in working order, so too must a worker be fed, clothed and generally 'serviced' to ensure that he is available and fit for work the next day.

This domestic work — cooking, cleaning, laundering etc — is privatised, individual toil that lies outside the sphere of social production. No surplus value can be realised by its socialisation, therefore capitalism is neither interested or capable of

removing it from the sphere of the individual (female):

"The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and this must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave its fulfilment to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and propagation." (Karl Marx *Capital* Volume 1, p537.)

As early as the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Marx and Engels polemicised against the idea that these ideas meant that communists were the enemy of the family *per se* — the 'shock/horror' tactic used by the bourgeoisie to discredit Marxism. Familial relations of one sort or another are inevitable. What Marxists attack is the economic function of the family — its role as an economic unit in class society, concerned specifically under capitalism with the *gratis* maintenance of the exploitability of the working class's labour power. It is this economic content of the family unit and the domestic slavery it entails that produce the stultification and oppression that characterise personal relations in modern bourgeois families. It is capitalism, not socialism, that destroys family life.

Fitting in with their domestic role, women also perform another important function for capitalism. Given their marginal position to the general process of social production, women are ideal candidates to form an important part of a fluctuating reserve army of labour. Such a reservoir of exploitable labour can be sucked into the production process in times of boom or war and expelled from the ranks of the employed when accumulation stagnates. Women's specific form of oppression dictates firstly that when employed they are systematically regulated and ghettoised into a narrow range of second-rate 'peripheral' jobs and secondly as 'natural' wives and mothers they are easier to throw out of work and back into the home.

Around 60% of all women are in paid employment of one sort or another and they thus constitute about 40% of the British workforce. On average however, women earn just 65% of men's wages and they make up some 60% of Britain's four million low paid workers. This is unsurprising when you examine the patterns of women's employment. In 1983 some 200,000 more part-time jobs came onto the market, while the same period saw over 150,000 women's full-time jobs disappear. In the words of the house journal of the British bourgeoisie, "part time women workers in Britain are not just cheerful but cheap." (*The Economist*, 29 September 1984.) The same issue of this publication went on to estimate that in the service sector up to 70% of women part-timers were earning less than the £34 a week national insurance threshold.

With the onset of the crisis, capitalism sets to work squeezing women out of the workforce — women are currently losing their jobs at twice the rate of men. The reactionary apologists of the bourgeois order are wheeled out to justify and excuse the state's attacks on the rights and position of working women. There wasn't a dry eye in the house at the 1979 Tory party conference when Patrick Jenkin, evidently a little choked up himself, spoke of:

"The family... (which) has been the foundation for virtually every free society known to history. It possesses strength and resilience, not least in adversity."

Working class families under the Tories of course have come in for quite a lot of "adversity". Cuts in social services and educational provisions have meant that working class women have had intolerable burdens placed on them as they attempt to look after the unemployed, the elderly or the disabled who have literally been thrown out onto the streets by the Tory cuts.

The Tory Family Policy Group was set up in 1982 to give justification and direction to these attempts to remove

women from the labour force and to take on unpaid responsibility for services which the Tories intend to axe. While it has organised in its orbit some of the type of 'loopies' of the Tory establishment who look and sound less believable than their 'Spitting Image' doubles, its central policy recommendations have on the whole made sound economic sense for the bourgeoisie. On its 'ga-ga' fringe there is Ferdinand 'Ferdy' Mount, author of *The Subversive Family*. While Mount's views do not necessarily represent the mainstream of the ruling class's thinking, his basic rabidly anti-woman stance is fairly typical. For example, Mount evidently does not consider it a fact that women have been oppressed throughout the history of class society. Instead apparently, it's simply that men have had rather a bad press:

"... at times in the Middle Ages we are deafened by complaints of henpecked husbands and women asserting their right to choose husbands or lovers."

While the Family Policy Group does not quite want to take us back to the good old days before the sexually promiscuous 'swinging' Middle Ages of Mount's colourful imagination, it certainly is intent on removing the fragile and extremely limited gains that women have made in the post war period.

The reactionary ideas of John Bowdley are resuscitated to give credence to the hysteria about the 'latch-key kids' of working mothers; women are encouraged to rediscover their natural 'caring' role of looking after those who have become useless to capital, the old, the sick or the unemployed; and as a safety net should all of this prove too much for working class women to stand up to, we must according to the Family Policy Group, have "more emphasis and encouragement to community-based services like day or short-term care". For "community-based" read 'on the cheap' or for "short-term" read 'inadequate'.

Abortion and contraception rights are under ideological and financial attack and every ploy is used to justify walling women up in the home until they are needed again by capitalism. 'What's best for baby' now entails mother staying at home and the sickly sweet propaganda of the bourgeoisie is in stark contrast to its denial of basic rights to working class women and their children. In the economic boom, working mothers had to make do with bottle feeding their infants, whatever the dangers. Now though, in recession, the ruling class gushes, "The best milk yet discovered is mother's own." (*The Guardian*, 11 February 1976.)

Similarly, thirty years ago Maggie Thatcher was all for women following her example and attempting to combine "marriage and career" and she pooh-pooed the notion that it had detrimental effects at home: "... the idea that the family suffers is, I believe, quite mistaken." In the cold light of 1982 however, she was altogether more cautious: "Material goods can never be a substitute for loving care."

It is not the way Mark Thatcher as the 'latch-key kid' of the working mum has turned out that has changed the Iron Lady's mind on this matter (although that *would* be understandable...). No, it is the fact that today we are in the depth of economic recession and as a political representative of the bourgeoisie, Thatcher's job is now to encourage or force women back into the home rather than entice them out.

For an even more graphic exposition of the same basic idea, let us turn to Sir Keith Joseph, a man always in the vanguard of Tory reaction. The Mad Monk was spelling it out in no uncertain terms way back in the mid-seventies:

"Parents are being divested of their duty to provide for their family economically, or their responsibility for education, health... saving for old age, for housing... But the only lasting help

we can give the poor is to help themselves. To do the opposite is to create more dependence... throwing an unfair burden on society." (*The Times* 21 October 1974.)

The feminists, with their reformist and reactionary mumbo-jumbo, are totally incapable of resisting the attacks of the state on working women. Tricia Davis for example (*Marxism Today* October 1983), ponders on the idiosyncracies of modern day "society" which has an interesting parallel with the Keith Joseph quote above:

"It is a society in which there can be no simple return to full employment..."

"In such a society an alternative economic strategy which constructs our working day, year and life around this concept of caring is the only one which makes sense..."

A component part of this 'caring' package is, apparently:

"... equal domestic responsibility for men and equal contact with both parents for children."

Thus, instead of proposing a militant campaign for a working class woman's right to work regardless of whether capitalist "society" can afford to employ them or not, comrade Davis smugly accepts the prospect of mass unemployment — one has to be realistic after all. Her Alternative Economic Strategy is consequently based on 'caring' — by which she appears to understand that men take equal responsibility for the daily drudge of domestic work, instead of removing it from the sphere of the individual altogether.

As the 'caring' sex, the feminists are unable to challenge the bourgeoisie's attempt to throw the responsibility for looking after the old, disabled or the young unemployed onto the already over-burdened backs of working class women; all they can do is give this policy a radical gloss by demanding that working class women and men are burdened equally and *both* roll up their sleeves and plunge their hands into the soapy dish-water.

In the same way, erstwhile radical Germaine Greer now wails the praises of the Indian extended family-type model and holds up the prison house kinship unit as a model for 'the West'. The 'YB A Wife' badges and the militant rhetoric of the '60s have been discarded for the politics of 'caring' and the idealisation of women's crafts. But before the click-clack of knitting needles begins to dull our senses, let us turn to our alternative.

How to Fight

"Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number —
Shake your chains to earth
like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on
you —
Ye are many — they are few."
(Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Contrary to the image of women as an easy touch for bosses working class women have been consistently involved in militant struggle over the last couple of decades, their action ranging over everything from strikes to fights over hospital and school closures. However, these women have largely remained isolated, unable to communicate their experiences to other women workers, and thus organise on a large scale.

The crying need is therefore for a working class women's movement that could link up the best militant working class women nationally across union, industry and community boundaries. Such an organisation would give enormous strength to working women in struggle; it would be the scourge of bosses wanting to use women as a source of cheap unorganised labour and of union leaders who fail to back their women members in struggle.

The failure of the unions to defend their women workers is in fact a major reason for the necessity of a working class women's movement. The record of unions on women's disputes is

appalling. The classic example is that of Grunwicks in 1977 when mainly Asian women struck for union recognition. The APEX leaders in effect supported the boss and the police by trying to limit the numbers of pickets on the gate and by refusing to organise the blacking of Grunwicks by other unions. Their betrayal led to the workers' defeat. This is one obvious example but in general there can be no doubt that unions do not work effectively for their women members. Proof of this lies in the fact that many unions with overwhelming female membership are led by male trade union officials. Union meetings are usually inaccessible to women being held after work in pubs and without creches etc. One of the first campaigns for a working class women's movement must be for union meetings to be held in the bosses' time.

But why are the union officials so universally bad at defending women's interests? It isn't just 'sexism' or prejudice that points them in this direction but the fact that most trade union leaders accept the same view as the bosses towards women and their primary role in the home. Much rhetoric is spouted by the TUC on women's rights by the reality is plain to see. One of the most radical suggestions to come out of this body is that men should help with housework. But such tokenism does not challenge the privatisation of domestic work, it costs the bosses nothing and in effect it is yet another call for the working class to spread their inequality and domestic drudgery rather than fight it. A working class women's movement would place a firecracker under the cosy relationship between bosses and union officials on the question of women.

Another major reason for a working class women's movement is the fact that it would go beyond those women in work to women in the home. Many women are isolated at home either because of unemployment or because they have young children and only newspapers and TV connect them with the outside world. This makes them particularly susceptible to anti-working class propaganda because it surrounds them — not talking to others in similar situations cuts them off from the struggles that makes them ready to fight back. Also, even for women who have been in struggle, when the particular fight is over there is enormous pressure for them to return to the kitchen sink. A working class women's movement can give these women the lead they need by ensuring they are not isolated and by involving them in wider struggle.

However, the existence of a working class women's movement does not mean that women will become isolated from their male fellow workers but rather that women will be stronger to fight *with* their class brethren and kill much bourgeois prejudice amongst male workers at the same time. This orientation necessarily means a struggle against the feminists who would seek to divide female workers from male workers because, as we have seen, they view sex to be the antagonistic divide in society rather than class. Many Euro-feminists in the Party have expressed 'disgust' at the concept of a working class women's movement and have called it 'sectarian'. It is sectarian to them because it denies them — petty bourgeois women — the ability to unite with working class women in order to use their muscle to gain their quest for parity with their male counterparts. If a working class women's movement is to work for working class women and thus the class in general there can be no unity with the feminist ideology of bourgeois or petty bourgeois women. For working class women the fight for liberation does not stop at achieving formal legal equality or ending the use of sexist language. The struggle to be truly free from the drudgery of domestic work and to be free to take an equal place in society alongside men is the struggle to fundamentally change that society, it is the struggle to overthrow the system that profits from our oppression — capitalism. However,

spontaneous militant leadership is not enough to ensure that such a movement is not dissipated and for this reason it is necessary for genuine communists to give leadership to maintain a consistent class outlook and thus ensure that the perspective of a working class women's movement is given a cutting edge and not blown off course.

A Sign of Things to Come

"... before the strike I didn't know the meaning of left and right. I know I'm definitely bloody left now! I wasn't politically minded, you see? They'll find out which way I am now..."

"We don't watch 'Crossroads' now, we watch 'World in Action', 'Panorama' you name it. We've forgotten all about 'Coronation Street' now." (Margaret Densham, Kent pit women activist, interviewed in *The Leninist*, No 17)

The pit women are obviously a beacon for the future of a working class women's movement. The miners' strike has seen the political organisation of working class women on an unprecedented scale in British history. These women workers and housewives have united in the common struggle to save their communities and in doing so they have shocked both the bosses, who expected them to drive their menfolk back to work, and even their class brothers who didn't expect their support to take on such a militant and political face.

But one strike does not a movement make and therefore communists need to be working hard to consolidate these positive developments and to give a lead to the spontaneous militancy these women have thrown up. The Euros in the Party have attempted to give a lead in that they have tried to impose the 'go floppy' tactics and ideology of Greenham on the miners' wives and to set them against the violence used by the miners to fight back. It is up to genuine communists to counter this course which can only lead to failure for the pit women and cause divisions within the working class. We need to adopt the slogan 'agitation and propaganda through action', in other words we must lead by example and show working class women through experience that every action directed against the exploitation of capital, every step towards reforging a Communist Party, is a blow struck against women's oppression.

The miners' wives learnt to organise themselves and the lack of communist leadership has made the lessons that more painful. Kay Sutcliffe of the Kent Women Against Pit Closures expressed this in an interview in February's edition of *The Leninist*:

"I feel sorry that we didn't contact the wives of the British Leyland workers when they had their industrial dispute, and also the dockers. I think we missed our chance there; we should have gone straight in."

It is this sort of perspective that needs to be initiated. The building of a working class women's movement cannot be put off to some distant date. It is not only necessary now but we would be failing our class if we did not try to nurture the seed that the pit women have planted. By making links with other women in struggle and the wives of male workers in struggle, and by organising national coordination of the existing women against pit closure groups towards this aim, the beginnings of such a movement can be made.

It is in this way that working class women will start to shatter one by one the chains that are forged for them under capitalism. The awakening of the women will be the harbinger of the society of the future, communism, which will see not simply the full equality of women, but the emancipation of all humanity.