

The Working Class and the Broad Democratic Alliance

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Any discussion of the road to socialism in Britain, of the role of the Communist Party and the broad democratic alliance must start from an awareness that all forms of oppression of the people in capitalist Britain have the objective purpose of keeping political power in the hands of the ruling class; to allow exploitation of the vast majority in the interests of private profit.

This is the *class* reality, the underlying and fundamental factor. With this in mind, the character, direction and leadership of the movements to overthrow capitalism can be looked at. The discussion requires understanding of the broad democratic alliance, the leading role of the working class, the nature and content of struggle and the distinctive part played by the Communist Party, rooted among the people and its struggles, constantly adding to them, giving leadership. This can help to ensure that while participating in mass democratic movements, the Communist Party does not become subordinate to them, as its *British Road to Socialism* is a programme for revolution. As Lenin put it (in *Letters on Tactics* April 1917):

"The transfer of State power from one class to another *class* is the first, the principal, the basic sign of *revolution*, both in the strictly scientific and the practical political meaning of the term."

So, we are interested in struggles, movements and our forms of work for that revolutionary and democratic aim.

This applies just as much to discussion of the implications of the updated edition of the *British Road to Socialism* for the style of work of the Party. There is a long tradition in Britain of mass democratic movements which in recent years include the peace movement, the many organisations for solidarity with national liberation, for rights for women and against racialism, for instance, which draw support from broad sections of the population.

The Trade Unions

The working class has forged many weapons. Among these the trade unions, as basic class organisations fighting to defend workers' conditions, conducting the daily class war, and to bring social change, are of the utmost importance. The high

degree of awareness of the political character of the struggles trade unions are concerned with, has long been expressed in their affiliation to, indeed their formation of, the Labour Party itself. The living link between the unions and the Labour Party demonstrates the living and continuing character of this political awareness.

The programme of our Party recognises that "the trade unions have their own particular and vital contribution to make, not only economic but political". Within these mass organisations of the working class, Communists campaign for policies that challenge those of the ruling class every day. There is the constant attention to struggle and to identifying the issues of the day around which workers can be mobilised for action. This is one of the principal areas where what the programme speaks of as the Communist Party's "special responsibility . . . for developing and leading mass struggle . . ." is exercised.

The prospects of "new forms of unity" between the Communist and Labour Parties is repeatedly treated in the programme and already today, therefore, the forging of such links in struggle on issues are important. The principal birthplace for these is in the workplaces and finds expression today in the trade union movement, where Communists and Labour Party members act together and are often already united in their campaigning. It is in the workplaces and in the trade union movement, at all levels, that the struggle between Right and Left is fought out the sharpest.

This is why our Party so correctly devotes considerable attention to our work in industry and to providing Communists in the trade union movement with the weapons of our organisation and fight for ideological clarity, not least through workplace branch organisation and the backup of industrial advisories.

The trade unions are the largest component of the *labour movement* through which "the main influence of the working class on society is expressed", according to the *British Road to Socialism*. It is the labour movement which comprises the most class conscious sections of the population, which give leadership in the struggle for advance.

Unless one keeps these matters in the forefront

of one's mind, any examination of our society and how we implement the fight for the *British Road to Socialism* misses the main points. The meaning of the leading role of the working class is lost. Debate on change and the role of the Communist Party in bringing about change otherwise becomes a discussion of blueprints, a contest of viewpoints in the abstract, in which Marxist understanding of class struggle and its particular forms in Britain find no place.

Working Class Approach

The *British Road to Socialism* is imbued with this class approach to the question of social change and properly examines the forms of struggle that are made available to us by the nature of our society, its development in the course of struggle and the vehicles for mass mobilisation that can be built. It correctly sees advance in terms of building the movement that can, in the course of the revolutionary process, end capitalist exploitation.

The concept of the revolutionary process is founded on a recognition of the might of our working class and democratic movements, and a revolutionary confidence in their ability to force through changes which encroach on the powers of the ruling class, weaken the state machine and make possible the winning of power by the working class without allowing the present rulers to impose civil war.

It is in this setting that the idea of the broad democratic alliance has its tremendous importance. But clarity on the *class character* and purpose of this alliance is imperative. The alliance includes the concept of bringing together *movements*, many of which are campaigning on issues of direct and immediate concern to working people, the exploited under capitalism; which are promoting the interests of the working class in many different areas.

But it is more than this. The alliance involves forces beyond the working class. These include the important strata of the liberal professions, doctors and lawyers, people in the top fields of science, culture and sport, the self-employed, the shopkeepers, small farmers and businessmen, the church, many in the state machine itself—the army and police. These sections of the population have to be won to the alliance if they are not to remain seeing their interests falsely as tied up with the ruling class, and thereby contributing to the maintenance of bourgeois rule.

That the alliance embraces various strata of society is obvious also when speaking of the peace, women's, anti-fascist movements, and so on. The alliance also gives leadership to the masses of people who are not members of any democratic movement. But its core is the organised labour movement, with its working class leadership role.

The broad democratic alliance is not only "workers plus others". It is also workers acting in different ways, bringing pressure to bear on capitalist rule from many different angles, from within different democratic movements, in association with other strata who are oppressed by the monopolies.

Within the Alliance

The differences in the component parts are contained in their, as yet, limited aims and the different *subjective* positions taken up by them; in the influence of various ruling class ideas (strongest of all that which says that emancipation can be limitlessly advanced within capitalism and without having to challenge it); in the different issues they take up; in the involvement of people from various strata in support of democratic demands.

Each of the movements today fights largely on its own. As yet, each sees its objectives as attainable on their own, without the need for joint struggle. Each does not recognise that its problems stem from the power of the monopolies and their state. To increase their individual effectiveness and unity requires winning understanding within them that they *do* have a shared concern with democratic rights.

It is here that we see a striking difference between the breadth of issues taken up by the basic organisations of the working class, the trade unions, on the one hand, and by the other movements or other strata, on the other. An examination of the agendas of most trade union conferences illustrates this. This is especially true of the unions covering the sections of the working class in the basic industries of the country.

Trade unions nowadays increasingly discuss policy on a host of questions that concern people well beyond their conditions at work. They deal with the rights of blacks, women, children and the aged; with pollution, general economic policy; foreign policy, peace, detente, disarmament, relations with the socialist countries, national liberation, democratic rights in Southern Africa, Iran, Chile, Argentina, Iraq and elsewhere; with town planning and public transport; public ownership, education and health and much more.

It is not, therefore, in any way accidental that many democratic movements (such as those for women's rights and against racialism) increasingly, correctly direct a lot of attention to winning trade union support for the causes they campaign on. Clearly this means there is a growing awareness among other progressive sections of the population that unions have political features which give them an interest in issues going well beyond the major ones for them of wages and conditions of work.

In view of some tendencies within the democratic movements, it is important to point out that the process of building the alliance can only be harmed

by arguing that the concerns of any one of these movements is more important than the issues on which the main component, the labour movement, is already waging struggle.

Damage is done by people who are correctly concerned about pollution, the treatment of women in the home, etc., when they attack others for concentrating on other aspects of oppression. Particularly is it damaging to attack the trade unions as they face the brunt of opposition from the ruling class in the wages battles. Such action can only help divide the working class and others in the democratic movements in their fight for advance in all areas.

Any suggestion that campaigning against pollution or for equal rights for women and blacks is somehow "more political" than the fight against incomes policy or for public ownership is totally untenable. Yet whiffs of this are strong in the contentions of the small number of Party members who have thought it useful to attack the trade union movement of late for fighting for the demands for which it was created.

Anti-capitalist

But to make the movements more effective in attaining their own aims, more is required than stating the differences. This "more" requires patient work to give them a direction that is anti-capitalist and eventually for basic social change on the road to socialism. This involves, in particular, strengthening the component parts of the alliance that possesses working class understanding, that will make the alliance the massive force it will be for ending capitalism.

Workers are oppressed in many ways by the ruling class and its ideas. As the possessors of labour power they are economically exploited. As consumers they are robbed again. They are condemned to the meanest physical environments, whatever their standard of living compared to the past. Whatever the level of democratic gains, under capitalism the denial to them of ownership and control of the means of production (and this applies equally in private industry as in the sector of the economy controlled by the capitalist state) denies economic power and means subordination to the profit motive.

The elitist ideas of the ruling class in general, not least about the property relations of the family, are preached from birth to death and greatly affect workers' ideas and relationships inside the working class family. This also remains largely true when women go out to work. Racialist ideas divide workers and produce sub-strata, antagonism and divisions. Ethnic minorities are subject to especially harsh treatment, suffering the worst discrimination in all walks of life. Once a worker ceases to be a

part of the production process he or she is kept on the most miserable subsistence level.

Despite the contradictory pressure from the objective demand by capitalism for an ever more highly trained and educated working class to man more complex machinery, the working class, generally speaking, and compared to the potential that exists today, is poorly trained and in large measure deprived of the benefits of world culture.

The control of the mass media by the ruling class denies objective information, especially on political matters and on the reality of life in the countries of working class power.

These are all matters on which the movements comprising the potential of the broad democratic alliance campaign. Any pressure from them to bring about justice on these issues means pressure objectively against capitalist oppression. This is in no way invalidated by them not at this stage seeing these to be issues concerned with class power.

It is precisely to overcome the present limits on their horizons that the special unifying contribution of the working class and of the labour movement in particular, is needed. To win these movements to see the capitalist system as the root cause of the problems of democracy that they are fighting to overcome, is the responsibility of all who see real advances being won through bringing them together in an alliance. Getting this ideological clarity is the critical step on the way to winning the alliance actively and consciously to fight for socialism.

Leading Role

The working class has the leading role to play in the alliance for a whole number of reasons. The understanding of this role derives, for Marxists, from understanding the objective position of this class in capitalist society.

Every moment of his working life a worker is exploited, whether he is conscious of this or not. As comrade Jack Woddis put it: "Hence the daily battles over wages, hours of work, piece-rates, productivity, holidays with pay, tea-breaks, and so on—the outcome of each such battle determining the share taken by the workers and taken by the employer" ¹. This struggle is *constant* because exploitation is constant, whatever the ebb and flow of the mass movement on these issues.

This gives to the working class movement a stability, a constance that is found in no other struggles under capitalism. Whereas, for instance, the peace movement will involve a larger or lesser number of people, and from all strata (and classes) of the population, according to the existence or not

¹ *New Theories of Revolution*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1972, a commentary on the views of Franz Fanon, Regis Debray and Herbert Marcuse.

of an immediate danger of war, this does not apply in any similar degree to the class struggle.

There is another fundamental factor which places on the working class its historical role of leadership. As Engels noted: the working class cannot "attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class—the bourgeoisie—without at the same time, once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinctions and class struggles".²

While it is now clear that all oppression is not removed as simply as might be suggested by the quotation, the basis for it is, as exploitation is removed.

Just as it is so important to win broad understanding of this, so it will be advanced and facilitated to the degree that the organisations of the labour movement, are won to campaign more not only on issues that affect workers directly as the exploited producers of wealth, but in all other spheres. This is one reason why it is of such great longstanding importance that labour movement organisations are taking up wider issues, such as equality for women, anti-fascism, peace and the rest. When these organisations take up the struggles, a whole new dimension is added to them. The democratic alliance of labour movement with pressure groups and mass democratic movements immensely strengthens the pressures for change. It is doubtful, for instance, if the question of decent pensions could have been as forcefully pressed by the organisations of the pensioners themselves, without the support of the labour movement. The same applies to women and the fight for equal pay and other questions.

Other Dimensions

But there are other dimensions to the importance of winning the organisations of the working class to take up the full breadth of democratic struggles.

The labour movement is itself transformed in the process. Its own political consciousness is developed as it comes to see itself as fighting on all issues affecting the working class, and on all issues affecting *other sections* of the population whose demands for democratic changes are objectively opposed to the interests and policies of the ruling class and its state. In this sense the working class *needs* the contribution of the broad democratic movements to broaden its own understanding about democratic control in all areas of life.

As Lenin said in *What is to be Done!*: "Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter what class is affected". So the

alliance is a concept of all the component parts making a contribution, broadening the outlook of all in the process. The leading role of the working class, expressed through the labour movement, its organised echelons, its most conscious sections, is in no way watered down by the fact that it needs the democratic movements (in which many of its members play a part) to help it see its role as being concerned with all democratic demands. Indeed, this is another recognition of this class' ability, by its intrinsic objective anti-capitalist nature, to give the leadership that will overcome sectional differences.

But clarity on the special historical role of the working class has to be fought for throughout the potential parts of the broad democratic alliance.

Obviously this process in the battle of ideas cannot be conducted in any sectarian fashion, by preaching or trying to impose attitudes from outside. The standard-bearers of these democratic and working class ideas can only be people who are involved in the movements themselves and genuinely campaigning for their objectives. The leading role of the Communist Party will be won by Communists fighting in this fashion, as the only Party which understands the paramount need for unity in the struggle.

The alliance will help overcome the disunited way struggle is today carried out, maximise its effect and greater sections of it will adopt an increasingly politically-conscious character.

Not just Reforms

The democratic movements today see their aims as exerting pressure (within capitalism) for advances which they do not see challenging a ruling class. Indeed, some, such as the self-employed, believe the working class is at least as much its enemy as the monopolies. Within the women's movement there are trends which wrongly identify the male as the enemy. Among many people striving for world peace, the role of the socialist countries is not understood. Nationalist chauvinist ideas weaken the fight for national liberation and against racialism, based as they are on ruling-class ideas of national superiority. The elitist ideas of the ruling class are a stumbling block among people wishing to see the best educational provision for their children.

All these incorrect ideas and many more are traceable back to an unawareness that the roots of the problems lie in class divisions on a national and world scale. These ideas are often seen by their holders (when they are aware of them) as being "non-class" ones. They are, in fact, non-working class views in the sense that they do not see issues in terms of which class interests are involved and therefore do not appreciate the leading role of the working class.

² Preface to English edition of *The Communist Manifesto* 1888.

This is not to underestimate the pressure for partial reforms that these movements can bring to bear already at this stage. But partial reforms are not the object of the alliance. The alliance is not to win reforms but to end capitalism, lock, stock and barrel.

The alliance in Britain can only be founded on a common recognition, within all the potential components, of their *common interest* in the struggle for democracy, and then in bringing an end to what is responsible for the ills: capitalism. This recognition of common interests has its most developed form in the class and political consciousness of the labour movement, and especially of the Communist Party. Winning understanding of the role of leadership depends, above all, on these sections. It, therefore, also follows that strengthening class consciousness and building the Communist Party is a contribution to building the alliance.

With the leading role seen in this way, it ceases to be, as it would appear from the writings of some comrades who have substituted a mechanical approach for a class one, a matter of "adding trade union muscle to the beautiful ideas that come from the 'new' movements". It places the role of the democratic movements in their context, showing their contribution. For the idea that they play a part in addition to being pressure groups in their own right, has also to be understood more in the labour movement itself. Their role is not just a fringe one, but is crucial to extending political consciousness in the alliance as a whole.

The Communist Party, in fighting for its programme, must more actively champion the idea of the broad democratic alliance within the labour movement and all the democratic movements. This can overcome the incorrect view that these movements are irrelevant to the working class (they are not part of the labour movement) and conversely dispel the nonsense that these movements are the possessors of all knowledge and play the leading role.

Ideology

But it is not only a matter of struggle on the different issues that arise. If mass action automatically gave rise to the alliance and to political consciousness then we should not today be in a situation where a Tory Government has just been elected and the Communist Party has a membership of little more than 20,000. Spontaneity is clearly not the answer.

The ideological battle must ceaselessly be conducted, to allow people to draw the correct conclusions from their struggle.

The alliance is strengthened by the extent to which there is a strengthening of those participants who recognise that the enemy is capitalism, that it is capitalism that breeds poverty and all the forms of

inequality, based on exploitation, race, sex or what have you.

The extent to which, on the one hand, members of the working class join the democratic movements, and on the other, the organisations of the working class itself (in the labour movement) champion the multitude of democratic demands, will affect the degree of conscious leadership given in the alliance.

This must apply particularly to Communist participation. Winning understanding that the fight for democracy is the cement of the alliance and that the leading role belongs to the working class is the part played by the Communist Party throughout the potential parts of the alliance. Seen this way we can improve the work of Communists in mass movements and deal in the course of activity with the arguments about whether members should "go it alone" or "become submerged" in the mass movements. The Party branches must organise so as to be able to play their part in welding the alliance. That means members both being immersed in the movements and carrying with them into those movements their class outlook and the understanding of the perspective put by the *British Road to Socialism*. It is in this way that the Party can win acknowledgement of its role as a Party of leadership through struggle, with its Marxist understanding.

Communists within the democratic movements cannot pander to wrong ideas if the movements are to become part of an alliance. Awareness of the existence of deep-rooted prejudices and inequality within the family, for instance, including the working class family, cannot be allowed to cloud one's understanding of the class roots of the problem of keeping women in a position of subjection, of being a cheap source of labour and weakened in the struggles for better facilities.

In passing, I might add that the lack of a correct class understanding in these matters sometimes seeks support in the continued existence of problems of inequality in countries where the working class does today hold power. Apart from the fact that the socialist countries have made the greatest strides in the direction of emancipation in all fields, to point to the class origin of problems is not the same as reducing the problem to one that is automatically overcome by ending capitalist relations of production. Old ideas have great tenacity and the struggle against ideological survivals of previous systems goes on for a long time.

Communist Party

The Party openly fights for understanding of this class approach to social change so that each component of the alliance can both increase its own campaigning power and come closer to others. Thus, *class understanding* strengthens the conscious leadership of the alliance. Clearly, the Party can

only give leadership in the creation of the alliance to the degree to which class consciousness permeates its own ranks.

The Party itself cannot maintain its Marxist class approach unless it constantly pays attention to this. In current circumstances it needs to devote much care to ensuring the involvement in branch, district and national Party work of those sections of the working class described by the *British Road to Socialism* as being "at the heart of the working class". These workers in the basic extractive, transport and manufacturing industries lead within the working class. They are distinguished above all other sections of the working class by their high degree of class consciousness.

They have demonstrated this time and time again. In this decade it was the dockers, supported by engineering and print workers, in the first instance, who spearheaded the fight against the Tory Industrial Relations Act. It was the miners who led the battle against the Tory policies to hold down wages and resist the fight for better conditions. It was road haulage and Ford workers who opened the breach in the most recent battles against incomes policy; a breakthrough which encouraged millions of others to fight.

Clearly it is of primary importance for the Communist Party to be organised among these leading sections of the working class and a concern for our Party at all levels.

At a time of great changes in the composition of the working class, and with the numerical (but not strategic) decline of the workforce in basic industries, attention to their involvement becomes all the more important. The class lessons they have learnt have to be taught again to the newer and less experienced sections of the working class. This applies equally within our own Party, whose membership reflects the changes.

The complex character of the alliance, its democratic content and need of working class leadership needs to be firmly grasped if what is sometimes called "ginger-group" activity is to be overcome in the movements Communists participate in. Ginger-group activity, in this context, is the simplest form of limiting activity to pressure for militant action on the narrowest of demands, and is little more than militant reformism.

There is no substitute for the Communist Party's own distinctive work, organised to win understanding on class reality and to fight the class war. Any examination of the Party's work related to our programme and the alliance is deficient unless it emphasises the need for our branches to be the forums in which the building of the alliance, starting in the localities and at the place of work, is at the centre of attention, leading to action on all democratic demands.

If Communists in their branch work lack *either* understanding of the fact that concern with democratic issues can unite the components of the alliance, *or* that working class leadership in the alliance is imperative, confusion about the politics of the alliance will remain. The first leads to a sectarian underestimation of the potential might and breadth of the alliance and the contributions from its different components. The second would deny the fight for democracy its class content.

Dangers of the Wrong Approach

Programmes for industries and local plans, to which the Party and its advisories are applying themselves, are weapons to assist in all this.

In our correct enthusiasm for plans and programmes for all areas of life, some comrades are falling into the trap of losing sight of the "class wood" for the trees. This is done, in my opinion, in several ways that are incorrect interpretations of the *British Road to Socialism*.

Some of these find expression in the article written by comrade Dave Cook in last December's issue of this journal. I should like to express sharp disagreement with him, principally because he treats the broad democratic alliance virtually as a reform movement, with only formal acknowledgement of the leading role of the working class.

In that article, the relations between the component parts of the alliance are mechanical and the leading role of the working class is not placed at the centre of attention, the development of which is the key to any advance to socialism. He writes of "the leading role" as stemming from the "power that the working class can exert. . . and its potential to overcome sectionalist and reformist attitudes . . ." only. While he is correct to write about the need for the working class to take "on board the struggles of *all oppressed people*", there is also the crucial need for working class leadership in all the *struggles* of the oppressed. The vast majority of the oppressed are members of the working class. The alliance is not only between workers and others, but between the more class-conscious labour movement and other democratic movements, to which the labour movement must give direction.

Even the programmes for different industries and localities can lose class content and everything becomes so fragmented that the capitalist state itself becomes lost and with it, its class content. It becomes supplanted by the administrative function of the state alone, and one sees this most evident in talk of the "local state", as something autonomous from the state. The confusion of the state with administration lies at the root of reformism and its ideas about the neutrality of the state in the class war.

In that article on the Party and the advance to socialism, missing are the capitalist state and the programme's central objective of ending capitalist exploitation. Missing is any conclusion for our work from the fact that the leading role of the working class stems from the character of exploitation. Without an eye on these when discussing how the Party should work, comrade Cook reduces the alliance to a list of pressure groups whose contribution is decided by their own image of reality. There is a wholesale exaggeration of what is new in the programme, amounting to a one-sidedness that would devoid the programme of its basic Marxist class approach. Such an interpretation of our programme would wrongly open it up to the charge of being reformist.

Yes, there is much that is new in the latest edition of the *British Road to Socialism*. But the theme running through it of maximising the potential opposition to capitalism and of drawing in all possible sections of the population and all democratic movements against the power of the monopolies, is not new. This has been the principal theme of all editions. The latest edition deepens our understanding of the process of revolution in Britain and of the relationship between the components of the alliance. This is a development in depth of the democratic strategy of all editions of the Party's programme.

Comrade Cook's interpretation of the "new", puts it in contradiction with the "old" and would give the impression that the 1978 edition of the *British Road to Socialism* was the founding document of a new party that was writing off its roots in the labour movement.

His underestimation of the work of the trade unions and, by clear implication, of the activities of Communists in industry, goes hand in hand with this. It cannot be accidental that the ten pages include nothing about Communist organisation in the workplaces, not a word about factory branches and their importance.

Selected and one-sided material is used to justify the assertion that there has been "a significant decline in the overall position of the Left". The facts that illustrate the contrary are omitted or not given their political significance. Among these can be mentioned the size of the Tribune Group of MPs in the last Parliament; the challenges to Right-wing policies from the Labour Party executive; the growing multitude of Left decisions taken by trade union conferences, the TUC and the Labour Party conference; the gains for Left-wing leadership within the trade union movement; the emergence of the movements against racialism and fascism, for women's rights; the progressive role of the students' movement, and much more.

Trade Union Struggles Today

One can only arrive at such a pessimistic assessment of the political balance of forces and the trends today in Britain if one does not see the *political* importance of the struggles of the labour movement and, especially, of the trade unions, over the past decade. That this is the underlying cause of what is, in my opinion, a wrong estimation of the situation is borne out by the article as a whole. There is displayed a lack of understanding of the dialectic of struggle.

Comrade Cook would grade issues according to his subjective assessment of their usefulness. Thus his article argues for all kind of issues to be taken up (correct, let it be said), but omitting the battles by the working class to improve its living standards, the daily class struggle throughout the land. Yet, in the conditions of state monopoly capitalism these mean an increasing struggle against the ruling class' economic policies as a whole. Because workers waging the class struggle are not always using "new forms of action, for new objectives—for the democratisation of all aspects of life", the importance of their battles is not appreciated by comrade Cook.

In his concern to win more people consciously to fight for social change, he loses any sense of the objective challenge that the workers' struggles here and today mean to capitalism. It misses the significance of the questioning of long-held class collaborationist ideas that goes on in the course of industrial struggles. It is in the course of the class struggle that the working class develops its organisation, and is combatting the ruling class drive for maximum profits. This is the key starting point. It is only in struggle around the issues the working class is already willing to do battle on, that the politically conscious sections, the Left and the Communist Party above all, can usefully conduct that propaganda for basic social change. The fact that this is not done with anything like sufficient degree does not detract from this.

In his interesting article, "The Workplace and the Communist Party" (*Marxism Today*, January 1979) comrade Ralph Simons points out: "Acceptance of right-wing theory breaks down in practice, because workers with strength of organisation will not accept a lowering of their standards for any length of time". He adds that the fight for socialism must be seen "as a concrete extension of the daily struggle" for a better life.

Struggle and Propaganda

Sometimes one hears in the Party the question: "How can one change or develop a struggle on an immediate issue, such as wages, into one for longer-term social change?" The very posing of this question reveals a lack of appreciation of the objective content of struggle against the boss (and,

increasingly, the bosses' state) and suggests that trade union struggle can replace the agitation and propaganda of a Communist Party. It can lead to the poverty-stricken argument against waging the battle on this or that major issue already felt by the people, because it is not consciously directed against capitalism, in favour of some other "more profitable" one.

When workers today back up with action a demand for something either their boss or the state refuses them, they are starting on a very rich path. They are insisting on something, as a group or class, doing something which goes quite counter to everything the mass media teaches them, and are therefore questioning the rights of the bosses. These things are of great *political* importance going well beyond the importance of the particular demand. When workers reach the stage of taking action, they can more easily identify the forces ranged on the side of the enemy, and any Communist with experience of the labour movement knows that in those circumstances of struggle, workers are more ready to listen to Left ideas.

These are major reasons why the Communist Party sees such tremendous importance in these struggles; why it is imperative that Communists are in positions of trust and standing in the movement, where they can conduct agitation and give leadership. This was underlined at the January Executive Committee meeting of our Party, when it fully discussed the programme of the alternative economic strategy and showed once again the link today between struggles in the trade union movement and the fight for social advance. This was why at its March meeting, the Executive discussed our work in industry and called for an intensification of our activity there and, in particular, for the building of more Party branches in the workplaces—a responsibility for the Party *as a whole*.

As Ralph Simons put it: "The workplace is the focal point of the whole working class strategy. It is the powerhouse from which all forces of the labour movement can be charged". The importance for Communists to be organised in such an area is paramount if there is to be progress made in extending political consciousness among the masses of workers.

Agitation

For Communists agitation is a matter of winning workers to engage in struggle for demands which objectively advance the cause of the working class. It is not a matter of adding new demands in the course of this or that struggle, but of seeing the objective anti-capitalist content of struggles. The Party points out this true content and strives, *through its own independent organisation* to win

conviction on this, recruiting the most advanced for membership of the Party. It is inside the Communist Party branches that the most advanced schools for socialism must exist, teaching the all-round nature of struggle and promoting an appreciation of capitalism's class nature, fighting against the ideas that militancy in the day-to-day battles is enough to change society.

But to sit in judgement on the labour movement (or any other progressive force) instead of giving the utmost support to it when it goes into battle against the class enemy, is to condemn oneself to the position of impotent onlooker. It is the opposite to what we mean when we speak of our Party being rooted among the people, sharing its concerns and identifying with its battles for a better life.

Political consciousness can only be won by the Communist Party taking all these factors into account, not by looking for easier ways. After all, if the working class, organised in its trade unions, can today take on the state and its incomes policy, and smash the 5 per cent, the lesson is not to move out of that area of successful struggle, but to build on success, making more radical demands for a better life.

As our Party programme states: "Only socialism can overcome the basic contradiction of capitalist society from which *every* aspect of the crisis flows".

The organised labour movement has been able to win a higher living standard for the British people, despite the dip taken as a result of the acceptance for a while of the class collaborationist ideas of the "social contract".

Its challenge to ruling class policies in the wages battles that broke the 5 per cent norm terrified bosses and Right-wing Labour alike. The shrillest anti-trade union campaign in years was mounted, involving the bulk of the mass media, to halt the rising level of mass expectation. The result was the "Concordat".

The Building of Conscious Challenge to Capitalism

At trade union conferences and at the TUC itself, these days, a host of broad political demands are advanced. Yet, despite all the battles and gains, the ruling class rules, striving to overcome the problems stemming from its crisis.

It is able to do so as there is nothing like sufficient conscious challenge to its power, its property and state machine. This consciousness, political consciousness, does not *arise* in the trade union movement, let alone in the single issue movements that campaign for this or that democratic demand. That is the contribution of the Communist Party and the real significance of the *British Road to Socialism*, as the strategy for advancing to socialism.

Political consciousness can be built by Com-

munists among trade unionists (or in any other movement) but this cannot transform the trade unions into the leadership in the fight for socialism. They are not created for that purpose, do not recruit for that objective and are not organised to exercise direct political power. But they are mighty organisations with the ability to mobilise masses of workers around the issues that promote social advance. It is the task of the Communist Party to give leadership here.

Yet some comrades are today treating the unions as if they were socialist parties to lead the revolutionary struggle. Then, because they find them wanting, criticise their actions for not being what they cannot be. This is the essence of comrade Pete Carter's contribution to this journal in January. He wrote: "There is little evidence that the struggles of 1968-74 had any lasting politicising effect"(!) If this is to say that these struggles were unrelated to the defeat of the Tories in the 1974 General Election (is that politics?) and to Labour's adoption of an Election Manifesto with a whole series of progressive political demands, then this is surely simply untrue, as comrade Ken Gill (*Marxism Today*, December 1978) had already pointed out.

While it is correct to point to the great weaknesses in the labour movement and to the betrayals of the Wilson/Callaghan Governments, it is wrong to see only this as characterising the 1970s. This was also the period of the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act and the enactment of legislation which promoted equality for women and encroached upon the employers' powers to sack at will. These are advances of a political character fully in line with the strategy of the *British Road to Socialism*. In striving to reverse these gains, the judges open up to scrutiny their own class role in society.

If he is questioning the effect of the struggles on political consciousness, then the question is meaningless. There can be no such automatic relationship. The real questions are—did Communists identify with these struggles by the workers? Did they involve themselves and argue the lessons that were there from the capitalist state machine's attacks on their living conditions and democratic rights to organise? The struggles of those years were important in themselves, politically, to defeat the Tory attacks and lead to advances even with Callaghan in office. The fact that the labour movement needed another few years, and the experience of the social contract, to realise that it had to depend on its own strength to defend its conditions, even under a Right-wing Labour Government, must be seen as immensely important politically.

One can argue about the degree of conscious awareness of what all these struggles involve.

The failure of the Communist Party to grow in these circumstances and the ability of Callaghan to

follow the social contract up with the "Concordat" indicate the strength of Right-wing ideology and lack of sufficient political consciousness within the working class. But one cannot question the existence of a massive objective challenge to the politics of Tory and Right-wing Labour alike that is evident from the mass struggles. Building the independent organisation of the Communist Party, especially in the workplaces, is imperative to change this situation.

First Pre-requisite

The new edition of the Party's programme, like its predecessors, is concerned with building political consciousness on a scale to decide favourably the outcome of the struggle between Left and Right for the leadership of the Labour Movement. Comrade Gill is correct to stress the importance of gains that have been made in this over the past decade.

Wherever else the Communist Party needs to strengthen its influence, it must do this within the class organisations of the working class. Socialism rests on the emancipation of the working class. This emancipation requires as a *first pre-requisite* the ending of economic bondage, the exploitation of its labour power, even though the fight for socialism is not only conducted on economic issues.

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