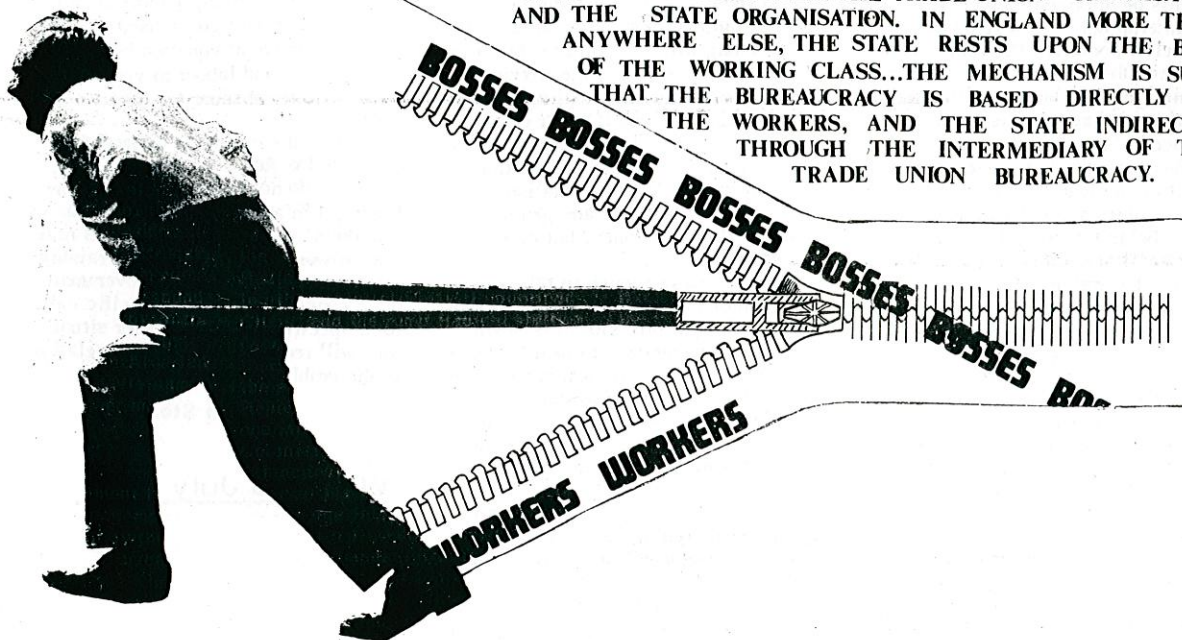


# TRADE UNIONS AND THE STATE

## *HOW THE LEADERSHIP OF THE TRADE UNIONS KEEP THE BOSSES IN POWER*

by  
**PAUL ADAMS**

FROM THE EXAMPLE OF ENGLAND, ONE SEES VERY CLEARLY HOW ABSURD IT IS TO COUNTERPOSE... THE TRADE UNION ORGANISATION AND THE STATE ORGANISATION. IN ENGLAND MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE, THE STATE RESTS UPON THE BACK OF THE WORKING CLASS... THE MECHANISM IS SUCH THAT THE BUREAUCRACY IS BASED DIRECTLY ON THE WORKERS, AND THE STATE INDIRECTLY, THROUGH THE INTERMEDIARY OF THE TRADE UNION BUREAUCRACY.



**LAST JUNE AN UNEXPECTED** judgment by the Court of Appeal ruled that the T&GWU was not responsible for the actions of its members when those actions were unofficial.

With this one ruling the whole of the British capitalist class's

strategy for controlling the working class was thrown into the melting pot.

By the following month, thanks to the Tories' friends in the Law Lords, this judgment was reversed, and the T&G was responsible. But what had happened in the meantime? A massive strike wave which could have reached general strike proportions, got underway — dockers struck, printers struck, miners and drivers struck ... the very power of the ruling class looked as if it might be challenged.

The moment the Tories were not able to operate their chosen policy, all that they stand for was in imminent danger of being overthrown. Far from those five days in July being "the real face of British Toryism" they were the exception that proves the rule.

What then is the rule? How does the ruling class maintain its dominance over the working class in Britain? It clearly is not usually by a show of force — organised strike-breaking, troops shooting workers, jailing of trade unionists, etc. Not that the capitalists would be averse to doing this if they thought that they were really threatened.

But the fact is that they are very rarely really threatened — and that in itself is a measure of the degree of control they exercise over the working class.

How do they manage it?

Generally the capitalists attempt to set a framework either by law (compulsory) or by agreement (voluntary) within which the point of confrontation is between the trade union bureaucracy and the rank and file, and not between capitalism and the trade unions as a whole. The main drive is always to get the union bureaucrats to police the unions for capitalism.

It was this that led Trotsky to write: "From the example of England, one sees very clearly

how absurd it is to counterpose ... the trade union organisation and the state organisation. In England more than anywhere else, the state rests upon the back of the working class ... The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers, and the state indirectly, through the intermediary of the trade union bureaucracy".

But how does it come about that the bosses' state is able to rule in part through the trade union bureaucracy, through those whose verbal commitment is precisely that they are "against the bosses"?

From about the middle of the nineteenth century Britain's profits in particular the super-profits of imperialist exploitation were used to create a "labour aristocracy". As Lenin pointed out, a part of these super-profits were distributed so as to buy off a top layer of the working class (the skilled craft workers).

Imperialism had laid the material basis of a certain differentiation within the working class, such that the top layer became thoroughly 'bourgeoisified'.

The ideology of this top layer was reformism, or social-chauvinism — socialism in words, chauvinism or nationalism in deeds. This was most vividly expressed in 1914 when, after a decade of opposition to the coming imperialist war, all the European social democratic parties capitulated and urged workers to 'fight for the fatherland'. But it is in fact also an everyday phenomenon in peacetime too, where 'national interest' rather than class interest dominates the attitudes of the reformists' and international capitalist competition supercedes socialist internationalism.

In Britain today the chief representatives of this layer are the trade union and Labour Party leaders and paid officials, as well as certain white collar and specially privileged sections of the working class.

## TRADE UNION INDEPENDENCE

Just in case some of those who become trade union leaders still

see themselves as trying to express the real interests of the working class, all the pressures and privileges of "high station" are brought to bear to soften them up: winning and dining by big business and its parliamentary lush-boys, meeting the boss "in person" and, perhaps most of all, the whole tendency to look on negotiation as essentially a form of compromise.

These pressures hold absolute sway where a union is undemocratic. The members pay the piper, but they don't call the tune. They can only do so if they can elect, pressurise and, if need be, recall their "leaders". Trade union democracy is not just a way of ensuring maximum freedom for the rank and file, it is also a way of ensuring minimum freedom for the officials.

"The primary slogan for this struggle is: Complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state. This means a struggle to turn the trade unions into the organs of the broad exploited masses and not the organs of a labour aristocracy." (Trotsky, *Trade Unions in the epoch of Imperialist Decay*.) Only complete trade union democracy can ensure this.

So the slogan "Hands off the Unions" must be coupled with the

slogan "For Trade union Democracy": regular elections not appointment, the right to recall officials, stewards' participation in negotiation; lay committees; decisions to be put to mass meetings or delegate meetings, etc.

## DEFEATISM

Our view, the Trotskyist view, is that the trade union bureaucracy is a distinct social layer which represents its own — not the working class's — interests. And its own interests lie in leading workers against individual capitalists to some extent, while chaining them to the capitalist class as a whole. The difference between right and left is that in the main the left do the first better than the right, while both do the second to the same extent.



Consider: did the state's troops smash the Triple Alliance of 1921? No, the railmen's leader, Jimmy Thomas, did it. Did the state's troops smash the General Strike in 1926? No. Although they acted as strike breakers and although leading communists were jailed, the strike was actually smashed by the TUC General Council. Did the High Court forbid communists to hold office in trade unions? No. The T.G.W.U. did.

Did the rank and file agree to stop striking during the war? No. The TUC did. Did shop floor workers agree to co-operate with Labour's Prices and Incomes Policy? No. But the TUC did.

The examples are too numerous to list. But can anyone name just one piece of class collaboration that the rank and file wanted but that the TUC campaigned against?

How then is this tiny minority so powerful? Do they just spread their reformist, social-chauvinist class collaborationist ideas and convince everybody? No. They do spread these ideas, but the chief way that they maintain their own dominance, and through that the bourgeoisie's physical and ideological dominance, is by actually structuring the working class's activity and experience according to their ideas.

Thus, for instance, the trade union bureaucracy counters the development of the working class's self-confidence not so much by arguing defeatism, but by leading the class to defeat. After 1926 millions of workers gave up the belief that they could win, because, thanks to the TUC, they hadn't won.

For the trade union bureaucrat life is a series of self-fulfilling prophecies: I say the rank and file can't handle their own affairs, therefore I take the crucial decisions myself, therefore the rank and file are powerless, therefore they don't attend branch meetings, therefore I can assume they don't want to take decisions, all of which proves I was right saying that they can't handle their own affairs....

After the 2nd World War, trade unionists found that the boom conditions enabled them to bargain locally again after the straight-



jacket of war-time National Agreements. (As is usual when the ruling class wishes to discipline the workers, National agreements were the rule.)

Now workers zoomed ahead by negotiating nearer rank and file level. Disputes were generally short, with the bosses conceding quickly — in 1950 around 1,300 strikes lost the employers only 1 million working days — and could well be over before District Office ever knew about them.

There began a process of growth in trade unionism and in the power of the shop stewards.. Today there are 11 million trade unionists and 175,000 shop stewards.

By 1960 however, the situation had changed.. The more far-sighted members of the capitalist class understood that the rate of growth was beginning to decline, both absolutely and relative to other major industrial countries. They realised that the rate of profit could only be maintained and increased if exploitation was increased.

After the 1960 Fawley agreement the employers felt that they had found the instrument whereby their control of production could be increased, while workers could be got to think — at least at first — that they were getting a better deal. **the name of the game: productivity dealing.**

And the 'prod deal' also involved an ideological attack on the working class, because its basic message was: **your higher wages are determined by our higher profit** It was therefore to be the new form of widespread class collaboration between the mass of workers and

the bosses.

When Labour came to power in 1964 it used every Party Political medicine-show to extol the productivity deal as the ideal patent tonic for all the 'nation's ills'. The whole of the trade union leadership (with the single exception of DATA) rushed to recommend it.

But Labour also realised that the main defect of the 'prod deal' from the bosses' point of view was that the final fixing of the rate could only be done on the shop floor itself, and therefore even more decision making was taking place at that level than previously. While the prod deal was not only an idea that undermined workers' class consciousness but also worsened their working conditions, their implementation resulted in the balance between the rank and file and the union bureaucracy being shifted in favour of the rank and file. As Harold Wilson said to the stormy cheers of City bankers in a speech at the Guildhall on 10th November 1969, "We face the problem of an assertion of the power of the factory floor, a problem... which is growing throughout Europe, a problem to which no country has so far found an answer."

Under the combined pressure of this "assertion" and the worsening prospects for British capitalists, Labour leaders tried to add to class collaboration on the shop floor (the prod deal from 1960 onwards), voluntary class collaboration on the national level (George Brown's National Plan, Prices and Incomes Policy, P.I.B. etc from 1964); and then to add onto that compulsory class collaboration on the national level (Castle's "In Place of Strife"

of 1969).

Thereby the Labour Party hoped, with the unions, to act as brokers — with the bosses' state on one side and the working class on the other.

In fact, to the working class there is little difference between such "voluntary" and "compulsory" restraints, as these differences apply essentially to the union bureaucracy. **They can voluntarily or compulsorily accept to compel us; but for us it is compulsion one way or the other.**

So why did the trade union leaders balk at compulsory national agreements and control? Because a more cunning game was to be played — one that conformed to the bureaucrats' split personality.

While the Labour Party, knuckling under to big business, threatened statutory powers and the law, the trade union bureaucrats under the guise of opposition to "In Place of Strife", actually sought to eliminate from the policy only the open intervention of the state in the form of the law. What appeared then to be a fight for the working class was in fact chiefly a fight by the bureaucracy to retain its mask of "independence" while actually knuckling under to the general line of the policy "voluntarily."

The election of the Tories solved this stalemate for the ruling class. The Tories could act without either being inhibited by any need to "look left", or being pressurised by the working class.

When Robert "Securicor" Carr introduced the Industrial Relations Act as a Bill into Parliament, therefore, the trade union leaders offered no resistance other than a Sunday afternoon march. It had been cheap enough to resist Labour, where there was no danger of things getting out of hand because "we mustn't rock the boat for Labour".

This was the perfect combination of pretended revolt and actual capitulation.

Now, rather than do anything that would mobilise, organise or invigorate the working class, the (mis)leaders who at least haggled with Labour caved in to the Tories!

Just in case the "left" had a twinge of doubt on this score, the fantastic victory of the miners who smashed any attempt to impose a "voluntary" incomes policy (the ill-fated 7½% norm) served as ample warning. The "left" leaders took the warning, understanding that any wave of militancy they encouraged by leading a fight against the Act would drown them as well as Carr.

They realised in any case that Securicor was right when he said that the Act would strengthen the trade unions — the union machine, that is — and that it would redress the balance between the rank and file and the union bureaucracy in favour of the latter.

The Industrial Relations Act is the perfect combination of the two principle ways the bosses' state has used to chain the unions to itself: on the one hand it puts all the rights to take the initiative in the hands of the union leaders (enforcing national contracts; disciplining dissidents etc), and second, it puts all the responsibility for the initiatives taken by the rank and file into the same hands. That way it gives these 'trusties' both the motive and the alibi they need to police the rank and file.

## INCOMES POLICY

But the working class is pretty tough. It takes more than one chain to even slow it down. And so a

second chain has now been ~~sh~~ led on — that of the Incomes ~~P~~ From April to July the TUC was having talks with the CBI, with TUC (rather than the CBI) making inviting noises to the Government to join in.

After the jailing of the five dockers the TUC felt it had to ~~r~~ carefully; but at the Brighton TU conference Feather gave a clear indication to the Tories and the C that "tripartite talks" would be welcome.

Like a whore who describes all her customers as rapists, the TUC initiated the talks, immobilised the working class as much as it could and then, having made sure that Heath had got what he wanted ~~any~~ way, said that they were ~~against~~ the deal and would only comply if forced.

Thus the union leaders played their usual game of trying to ~~shack~~le the working class to the ~~inter~~ests of the capitalists' state. The more capitalism finds itself in difficulty the more this role is accentuated.

But the more capitalism is squeezed the more it squeezes the working class and the more that working class needs to rely on its own activity and refuse to be subordinated to the interests of the state.

This can only be done if the working class fights the government with the slogan **Hands off the Unions**, and fights the leaders with the slogan **For trade union Democracy**.

- \* NO Industrial Relations Act
- \* NO Prices and Incomes Policy
- \* NO wage Freeze
- \* NO legally binding agreements!



# THE MINORITY MOVEMENT

## REVOLUTIONARY TRADE-UNIONISM

### 1924 -32

The Minority Movement was the first and last effort of the Communist Party to develop a nationally co-ordinated mass rank and file movement on the basis of revolutionary politics. At its height it had the active support on a quarter of the organised trade unionists in Britain.

## EARLY STRUGGLES

THE MINORITY MOVEMENT WAS founded in August 1924 after almost two years of considerable preparations by the revolutionary militants of the Communist Party. It marked a new rise in labour militancy, and in the organised influence of revolutionary socialism amongst the militants.

Despite having taken a principled revolutionary stand in the struggles of the engineers in 1922, the Communist Party had found the ground cut from beneath its feet by reverses which it had been powerless to prevent.

The actual conditions of struggle inside the trade unions became increasingly difficult. The defeats of 1921/2 (\*see W.F.9), where the employers had taken on the working class section by section and won, had created massive demoralisation and lengthened the idle queues to 2½ millions.

Under the pressure of these defeats, the Party leadership adapted to the prevalent moods in the working class and tended to dismiss the possibility of creating a real working class base in the next round of struggles.

This too-pessimistic approach

was reflected in the speech of J.T. Murphy, a Central Committee member of the C.P., at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International: "In England we have had a powerful Shop Stewards movement. But it can and only does exist given objective conditions. These necessary conditions at the moment in England do not exist. ... You cannot build factory organisations in empty and depleted workshops, while you have a great reservoir of unemployed workers."

By early 1924, the Communist Party had become so infected with defeatism on the industrial front, that the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) intervened directly. The work of the British section of RILU was severely criticised for its sectarianism at a time when the class was beginning to recover from the demoralisation of the defeats of 1921/22.

The Executive of the RILU pinpointed the defects of the Communist Party's approach when it stated - "...the work of the British Bureau does not keep pace with the requirements and possibilities of the present labour movement of Great Britain." In short, the Communist Party was idle in the face of new and sharp developments in the class struggle. The transformation of the old purely propagandist groups which had united under the name of the Communist Party in 1920 and '21, into a real Communist Party actively involved in the everyday struggles of the working class, had still to take place.

Consequently the Executive of RILU fought fiercely for a rapid re-organisation of the industrial work of the Communist Party. The main emphasis of the fight was placed on the urgent necessity of constructing revolutionary minor-

ity groups in all sections of industry - and with these groups, a strong national leadership.

William Gallacher, a former leading Clydeside shop steward, was set the task of convening a national conference to forge these minority movements into a unified body of a national character.

## NEW WAVE

The success of these new departures was of prime importance to the struggle against the right wing inside the TUC whose treachery had paved the way for the massive defeats of 1921/22. The new wave of class struggles afforded tremendous opportunities to the revolutionary wing inside the unions. With the correct tactics, the Communist Party would be able to win around it those dedicated fighters and working class militants who had not rallied to it previously; laying broad foundations for a struggle to replace the bureaucracy of the trade union movement with an organised rank and file revolutionary leadership.

This crucial tactical turn towards the mass of militants inside the unions was not, however, met with unqualified enthusiasm in the leadership of the Communist Party. William Allan, a leading CP member, described the reception given to the new policy: "...at the beginning of the National Minority Movement, considerable time was expended to fight down the belief that there was no room for a movement dealing with immediate and 'narrow' economic issues, that it was a reformist conception, and that such an organisation would stand in front of and hide the face of the Party from the workers. Sneering descriptions of the NMM were given in the Party as being

an attempt to dress a red man in a pink cloak". This sort of attitude caused the delays in calling a national conference to launch the movement.

## MINERS

More through the efforts of Party rank and filers and trade union militants than anything else, a national conference formed a national Miners Minority Movement in January 1924, after a series of district conferences in all the coalfields. The conference decisions reflected the growing determination of the working class to join battle once more with the employers. It resolved that district committees were to be set up in South Wales, Durham, Lancs, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Nottingham and Scotland.

real wages to be equivalent to the real wage in 1914.

The biggest achievement of the Miners' section, however, occurred soon after the establishment of the movement when Frank Hodges, the right wing Secretary of the Miners' Federation, resigned to take a post in the Labour Government and was replaced by the left wing A.J. Cook, who was elected secretary by a majority of 15,000. This development was also intimately connected with the recovery of the miners from the defeat of 'Black Friday'.

## METAL WORKERS

Elsewhere, however, the progress of the movement was somewhat slower. Proposals for broad agitation in the engineering union were uttered but largely not im-

ately a Metal Workers Minority Movement. Despite this early success, the pace of development was still slow. Conferences were planned for other districts but did not take place.

These temporary difficulties did not deter the CP, which sought to draw out the lessons of the workers' struggles to date. The Sixth Party Congress of May 1924 assessed the situation thus: "The bankruptcy of the bureaucracy has brought into existence fighting groups of workers in all parts of the country, all battling for a fighting policy for the Trade Union movement. These groups are gradually being co-ordinated into what has become known as 'The Minority Movement' - the new and encouraging sign of the spirit that will one day overcome all obstacles in the path of working class



The General Strike showed both the organised strength and the political weakness of the young Communist Party

On 16th. February 1924 the Miners' Minority Movement launched a newspaper *The Mineworker* whose campaigning focal point was the call for the transformation of the Miners Federation into a national industrial union, the United Mineworkers Union, affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions. Other demands included the Six-hour day and for

lemented. Only at the end of May had sufficient preparations been made to organise local conferences, of which one took place in Manchester and one in Edinburgh.

The support for the Conferences enabled the C.P.'s Central Industrial Committee to launch immed-

emancipation. ... The Communist Party has on all occasions assisted in the development of this movement, and will continue to do so, but at the same time warns those active workers who participate in it, that only a revolutionary Communist struggle can serve to ach-

ieve the object they have in view."

## NATIONALLY ORGANISED

By August 1924, the stage was set for the first national conference of the Minority Movement, which was held in London. The gathering was attended by 270 delegates, representing almost 200,000 workers, and united the individual rank and file movements, formulated a programme of Action and arranged for the election of an executive committee and a general secretary.

The conference was particularly timely in that the Labour government of MacDonald had had 8 months of government and wide sections of the working class were moving into conflict with it. Also, it was a genuine attempt on the part of the C.P. to break from the sterile propagandist sectarianism that had plagued so much of its earlier industrial work, creating the opportunity for its transformation from a tiny propaganda group into potentially a mass party with deep roots in the working class.

The struggle to build strong national unofficial movements around immediate demands was a step towards this mass revolutionary party, as well as an organiser of the immediate working class struggle.

The lessons of Black Friday and the collapse of the Triple Alliance of railmen, miners and transport workers, had bitten deep in the minds of the militants, who felt the need of a movement which could provide an instrument of combat against the right wing inside the trade union leadership.

### RANK & FILE

Hence, the first Conference focussed much of its attention on the battle for rank and file control over the union leaderships, in general, and the TUC General Council in particular.

The Minority Movement's Programme of Action mirrored this concern by calling for the setting up of workshop and factory committees, for representation of these committees on the Trades Councils, for industrial unionism, and for the immediate affiliation of the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement to the TUC. These demands were des-

igned to assert the strength of the rank and file in the unions and to make the union leaderships directly responsible to the rank and file.

The inaugural conference also called for a strengthening of the General Council of the TUC, "to mobilise and concentrate all the forces of the working class movement for the purpose of opposing a united class front to the united class enemy."

This may appear to have been in formal contradiction to the stress which the Conference laid on fighting the right wing. Far from it! The delegates were fully aware of the urgency of a parallel growth of rank and file control over the General Council. This was implicit in the statement that

"The reactionaries desire a General Council which will check and dissipate all advances by the workers. We of the Minority Movement desire a General Council which will bring into being a bold and audacious General Staff of the trade union movement. ... We can guard against the General Council becoming a machine of the capitalists .. by, in the first place and fundamentally, developing a revolutionary class consciousness among the trade union membership and, in the second place, by so altering the constitution of the General Council as to ensure that those elected thereon have the closest contact with the workers".

On these firm foundations, the Movement experienced initial successes. Trade Union activity was on the upswing, there was a partial economic recovery from the slump of 1921 to 1923 and unemployment fell slightly, all providing an impetus to the class struggle, with key sections moving into action to recoup the losses they had suffered at the hands of the employers in the past period.

Railmen, engineers, shipyard workers and dockers all filed new wage claims. Into this fray stepped the Minority Movement.

### SUCCESSES

Substantial successes were gained and new affiliations were secured. March 1926 saw some 957,000 trade unionists organised in the Minority Movement. It was especially powerful in the coal industry, shortly to be the scene of major class conflict. By August 1925 Minority Movement branches had been formed in the mining areas and 16 miners' Lodges had



Miners' leader A.J. Cook

affiliated.

Similar developments took place in the engineering industry. In fact, there were 153 engineering delegates at the next Minority Movement Conference. Further support was derived from substantial membership of the Movement among the East London tailoring and furniture trade workers, who were largely Jewish refugees from Tsarist oppression.

Given this basis, the Movement was able to exercise considerable influence on the course of the class struggle. Under its pressure, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain leadership began to investigate the possibilities of a new industrial Alliance between the members of the old Triple Alliance

### T.U.C.

The Movement also achieved a partial success when the TUC Congress of 1925 accepted a resolution empowering the General Council to organise support for stoppages. However, the resolution — framed by the 'left' union leader, Hicks — was so vaguely worded as to be meaningless. Understandably the Minority Movement was dissatisfied with it and stepped up its campaign to urge the TUC leaders to prepare for the coming fight.

Right through to the General Strike, the Minority Movement commanded increasing support, forcing union leaders leftwards and succeeding in having parts of the Programme of Action adopted as union policy. The strength of the Minority Movement was demonstrated by the fact that in July 1925, the TUC was forced to ally itself to the miners and make the Tory government retreat on 'Red Friday'.

## PARALYSIS

Yet, at this crucial point, when the Communist Party was clothing the fight for a revolutionary working class leadership in real flesh and blood, the tactics of the Minority Movement began to change.

This change owed its origin to the first manifestations of the growing tendency of the incipient Stalinist regime in Russia to put the programme of world revolution in second place, subordinating it to a reliance on "progressive forces" whose task was to 'neutralise' the hostility of imperialism to the young workers' state in Russia.

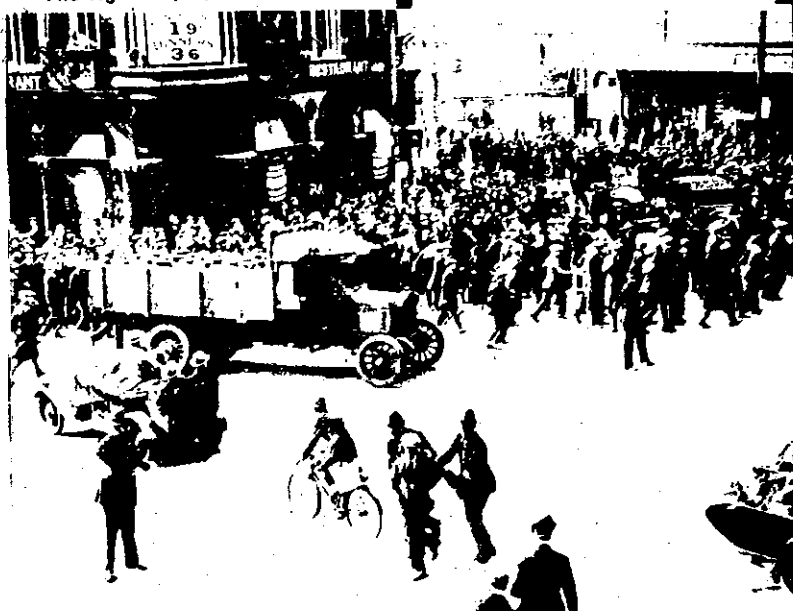
In Britain, this change found its expression in the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, which would supposedly offset the vicious anti-Soviet outlook of the British capitalist class. All the bold warriors, Purcell, Hicks, Swales et al who were to be instrumental in betraying the General Strike, were to be found under the canopy of the Anglo-Russian Committee, exploiting a cheap and empty 'left' (pro-Soviet) image in foreign policy to cover a rightist and bureaucratic trade union policy at home, where it meant something in practice. And it was to this wing of the trade union bureaucracy that the Minority Movement was tied.

In return for the dubious friendship of bureaucrats towards the USSR, the C.P. and Minority Movement began to sacrifice their political independence. The depth of the change is best signified by reference to two statements from leaders of the Communist Party:

1924: "It would be a suicidal policy ... for the C.P. and M.M. to place too much reliance on what we have called the official left wing." (J.R. Campbell in Communist Review).

1925: "The left trade union leaders occupy at present the position not only of the workers in

the immediate crisis, but also of the spokesmen of the working class elements in the C.P. ... an alternative political leadership" (Palme-Dutt in 'Inprecorr').  
The fight to prepare the rank



Below: workers, trying to stop a scab truck, are attacked by police

and file in the local areas was muted and limited by the exigencies of the alliance, and the activity of the M.M. was directed towards presenting the 'lefts' as a leadership that could smash the capitalist offensive. On the eve of the General Strike, then, the revolutionary movement was effectively paralysed and the independence of the revolutionary workers' Party heavily compromised.

### 1926

This was the tragedy of 1926, and everything the Movement did prior to the strike, during the strike and after it was coloured by this policy. The Councils of Action, built up in the previous period and designed to co-ordinate the rank and file against the bureaucracy, were turned over to this policy, being transformed into ginger-groups instead of embryonic organs of working class power.

The C.P. and M.M. failed to play an independent revolutionary role in the strike, despite the courageous efforts of party members in some districts. Possessed of the idea that it was not on the cards to challenge the domination of the TUC leadership, it raised the preposterous slogan "All Power to the TUC". That is, to

the uncontrolled bureaucracy that was blatantly selling out the strike.

### LEFT COVER

Even the betrayal did not shake the Party leaders off this course. Only a few weeks after the end of the General Strike, the Central Committee sought to head off great criticism in the ranks with the warning that "There will be a reaction within our Party

against working with left wing leaders. We must fight down this natural feeling and get better contact with these leaders and more mass pressure on them." In other words, not only dig your own grave but pay for the use of the shovel!

Throughout the period of continuing ferment after the end of the strike the bureaucrats benefited enormously from the restraint of the C.P. and M.M. and the left cover they provided. When they had ridden out the storm, they then broke up — in late 1927 — the Anglo-Russian Committee, and launched a ferocious witch-hunt against the Minority Movement.

The refusal to learn from the bankrupt policy of pressurising the sham Lefts marked the beginning of the end for the Minority Movement (and the Communist



Party) as a revolutionary force.

This policy was taken to extraordinary lengths by the Communist Party leaders so that when the TUC General Council instructed trades councils to disaffiliate from the Minority Movement at the end of 1927 . . . the C.P. advised them to obey! The policy, together with the demoralisation and defeat which descended on the working class, led to a sharp decline in the Minority Movement.

## ULTRA-LEFT DECLINE

The sharp turn left of the world Communist movement was to kill the Minority Movement stone dead. Having subordinated to the Union bureaucrats in a period when the working class could have pushed them aside, the C.P. after mid-1929 suddenly appeared to go mad. Not only the bureaucrats were now declared bankrupt — but the Trade Unions too!

Already weakened by its incapacity to assimilate the lessons of 1926, the Minority Movement indulged in the idiotic antics of the Stalinist ultra-left Third Period, attempting to set up 'pure' revolutionary breakaway unions (e.g. the United Mineworkers of Scotland), and describing everything outside these bodies as 'social-fascist' — thus writing off the majority of the class who were concentrated in the reformist unions.

This period was adequately summed up by Brian Pearce in his 1959 article "Some Past Rank and File Movements": "Characteristic of the 1929/31 period was a growing disparity between slogans and achievements. During the Bradford woollen strike of 1930, for instance, the Minority Movement shouted to bewildered workers about "The Struggle for Power" — but proved incapable of setting up a single independent mill committee. The shouting to workers to come to be led, with a general strike as 'the next step' grew louder and shriller..."

Amidst this 'growing disparity between slogans and achievements', the Minority Movement



*Communist Party leaders Pollitt and Hannington*  
was allowed to die slowly up to 1932, when it was finally buried.

When after about 1934/5 the Communist Party emerged from the ultra-left binge of the Third Period its trade union policy rapidly became one of blatant subordination to the Union machines and bureaucrats, its prime goal the capture of Union office and positions. Rank and file direct action to smash bureaucratic control of the unions was forgotten in favour of gaining positions within the bureaucracy.

## CONCLUSION

The Minority Movement in the early stages of its development was the model revolutionary opposition movement in the unions. Led by communists, but having no formal connection with the Party, it was able to win hundreds of thousands to its revolutionary policies of struggle against both the ruling class and its bureaucratic mainstays in the trade union movement. This broad front of militants

could — given the leadership of a powerful communist party, capable of ruthless self-criticism — have created the basis for the mass revolutionary workers' party. The very growth of the movement pointed to the fact that key sections of workers were breaking from the road of reformism. But when they looked for leadership it was not forthcoming.

### TODAY

Today's tasks bear close similarity to those of 1925. A nationally organised mass rank and file movement is a vital necessity at a time when the TUC leaders, 'left' and 'right', are in headlong retreat before the Tories.

In building such a movement we must learn from the Minority Movement.

There are tremendous possibilities for such a movement today. However, militants must be clear on one thing: that pressure politics alone are useless. This is the lesson which we must learn from the Minority Movement. Any pressure we put on today's union leaders must be backed up by the most detailed preparations to remove them and replace them by a militant leadership and socialist policies. Without this, pressure politics can only play into the hands of the bureaucracy.

That is why the policy of the Communist Party is so dangerous, subordinating the real, militant left in the unions to the phoney 'left' in the leadership. The policy of manoeuvring with the lefts shows only the road to defeat. If the current generation of militants is to be successful, it must learn this above all.

Our attitude to 'our leaders' must be firmly based on the central conception of the Minority Movement in its early days: that we ally with those leaders only as long as they identify themselves with the militants and actively fight the right wing. Or as T.A. Jackson, an early Communist Party leader put it: we may take them by the hand in order (if they retreat) to take them by the throat. Only this way can we carve out the path of victory over the enemy class once and for all.