

for 48 years of illegality, would they have been willing to continue?"

We do, however, have to recognise that the revolution is not necessarily for today or tomorrow. We may wish that all the ultra left's assumptions about working class support for socialism and radical action were true, but they are not. And meanwhile, we have to face up to the far less attractive prospect of slogging away in a Labour Party in a non-socialist labour movement, within a conservative culture whilst at the same time constantly seeking ways and means of minimising and making short term the damaging effect of the **necessary** struggle to root socialism in the Labour Party and carry it to the working class.

Class conflict within a conservative society

Unlike the right wing revisionists, those of us who are traditional socialists and Marxian in approach see class conflict and most of its manifestations as having a potentially positive purpose in aiding the process of politicisation and so encouraging working class solidarity. However, unlike the crude and insurrectionary left, we do not encourage heightened conflict regardless. Nor do we encourage people to see trade union economism and industrial unrest as synonymous with a strategy for socialist transformation. We specifically reject that Trotskyist view which dictates that in periods of economic crisis, such as we are now experiencing, trade union economic demands automatically become revolutionary and must therefore be pressed forward at all times. We do not accept the supposition that a "new world reality" will necessarily revolutionise the movement and propel us along the road to socialism.

In a condition of economic crisis the impossibility of successful, overall, systematic and lasting reform does not mean that it is impossible to temporarily improve the lot of one section of the working class — at the expense of another. In fact, narrow sectionalised industrial militancy can sometimes do just that. In addition, though we may be loath to admit it, the disruptive nature of industrial conflict can easily encourage a general hostility which is detrimental to the labour movement. It may be an unpalatable fact, but it is no less a fact for all that.

This very point is made again by Hobsbaum when he argues that there is "a popular resentment of wage militancy" which is counter productive, especially as far as support for socialism and the Labour Party is concerned.

It is a problem which is, if anything, aggravated by the growth in the number of public sector employees whose industrial action often hurts the working class consumer. It is also made worse by the fact that a significant number of industrial disputes now have to be undertaken on a national basis against national federations of employers. Such strikes now tend to make life difficult for the rest of the working population, and in these circumstances, with the help of the media and strong political

opponents, such wage militancy is all too easily and successfully defined as destructive and against the "national" interest. The conflict then has a disuniting effect, encouraging hostility towards the labour movement and rendering it difficult for the left to win that political authority and respect so necessary to its success.

It must be stressed that this is **not** an argument against industrial action; it is merely an argument against the naive assumption that wage militancy is **always** to be seen as unproblematic or as politically beneficial, offering potential for socialist advance. It is also leading to an acknowledgement that there may be specific circumstances in which gains may be made as a direct result of a willingness to temporarily moderate the conflict. This would surely be the case where a socialist government, intent on socialist development, was actually in office. The simple truth is that the immediate economic prospects for **any** British government faced with an economic crisis, free collective bargaining and strong wage militancy can never be very promising. That being so, while parties and governments that extol the virtues of capitalism, the maldistribution of wealth and the free market mechanism must be countered by the unfettered strength of the trade union movement, socialist governments, with different values, should not. In that event there must be a quid pro quo. Otherwise, even with a socialist leadership, a credible socialist alternative economic strategy and the best will in the world, a Labour government could not succeed.

Once that is accepted the campaign for free collective bargaining **regardless of circumstance** becomes a nonsense. The debate shifts and centres on the terms of the socialist Social Contract. And if we accept that, then it becomes a nonsense to work for the return of a radical Labour government, and at the same time to demand free collective bargaining and the absolute right to encourage industrial conflict which could help to defeat such a government. The ultra left may well be able to take up the free collective bargaining demand and happily exploit it to discredit the Labour Party. But the democratic socialist left has need of a more credible, and indeed more creditable position, without which it can never hope to win the essential trust of the party membership, or gain authority within the movement and throughout the working class. Demanding a socialist Social Contract does not, of course, imply that it will be readily forthcoming, particularly when the demand is made of a non-socialist right wing leadership. Nevertheless, we would maintain that it is still a correct demand and offers a very reasonable alternative prospect to free collective bargaining and conflict on the one hand, and wage restraint in the interests of the owners of capital on the other.

Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions for those of us who are struggling for socialism **and** for reforms which are beneficial to working people. Earning political support and trust, and pursuing an approach which will help develop both the party and those extra-parliamentary forces necessary for the achievement and maintenance of socialism can

never be easy. However, it certainly cannot be achieved by making obviously **impossible** demands merely in order to take up a critical position when those demands are not met. As we suggested in "The Local Counter Attack", such demands must be exposed for what they are, "pious propaganda points, fashioned primarily as weapons of sectarian recruitment."

In our view the demands that we make of our Labour leaders cannot take the form of propaganda points **which are detached from both the general political tasks of the party and the realistic possibilities open to a socialist government**. We have a responsibility to suggest practicable policy and to argue for the support necessary for its success. Any demand that a Labour leadership pursue a correct programme must be accompanied by this essential element. Hence our support for a Socialist Social Contract.

However, as we have said, we are also concerned to develop and not weaken those extra-parliamentary forces so necessary for the ultimate achievement and maintenance of democratic socialism. In this respect we must acknowledge that free collective bargaining and industrial action which ideologically have nothing to do with socialism and which economically can push up inflation to a point where it actually damages the working class are, nonetheless, a means by which workers can be made more receptive to political ideas and become partially politicised. They are also the means by which the organised working class builds and renews itself, resists "corporatist" envelopment and retains its independence as a potential force for socialism.

There can be no question then of any long term agreements which could put the movement in jeopardy. We can **only** advocate short term moratoria on some clearly defined "quid pro quo" basis designed to advance the interests of the working class and shift us along the socialist road. This completely rules out the semi-permanent wages policy suggested by Denis Healey in "Socialist Commentary" (December 1977) and reaffirmed in "The Observer" (March 1980). He simply argues for a Tory style wage restraint where the government indicates the maximum increases in earning compatible with economic growth and stable prices within a market economy, and the unions and employers then negotiate within this total. Indeed, as the "Economist" (January 7th 1978) pointed out, such a policy had the support of Jim Prior (then Conservative employment spokesman) and the Confederation of British Industry.

It was also backed by most Parliamentary Labour Party leaders, including the then Transport Minister, William Rodgers who told a Leicester audience in January 1978:—

"the time has come now to stop thinking of incomes policy as a temporary expedient, and to begin to accept it as a necessary and obvious component of economic management and social planning."

We, on the other hand, are talking about a temporary but renegotiable socialist social contract, something altogether different from the wages policy envisaged by the social democrats. At times, when there is a need and popular and widespread support for some form of economic restraint, the call for a socialist "contract" can be a progressive and potentially popular move. In 1974 the ILP was critical of much of the left because of its determination to stick rigidly to a free collective bargaining which involved turning its back on the demand for a socialist contract and embracing a militant wages policy which, as we argued at the time, "was as narrow in its conception as the then Labour government's own policies."

In doing this the left put itself completely and **unnecessarily** out of line with the general attitude of the working class. It set its face against an almost inevitable, if temporary development on the wages front, and at the same time denied itself the possibility of mounting a campaign for any firm commitment from the Labour leadership to more far reaching radical policy. Instead it put itself at a disadvantage in the ideological battle, handed the political initiative to the right wing, and was effectively defeated.

Of course, the alternative is never likely to be as neat and tidy or as straightforward as the free collective battle; and we who sometimes advocate an alternative will no doubt be dubbed by the Trotskyist movement as 'centrists' who, say the Trotskyists, "continue to cloak the sins of opportunism with solemn references to the objective tendencies of development." The fact is, however, that there are some of us on the left who are quite simply not prepared to deny the problem, possibly the dilemma, of the socialist who wishes to transform society, who accepts the possibility of Parliamentary means allied to extra-parliamentary activity, and who nonetheless is anxious to see the development of sound, credible, Labour Party policies helping us, wherever possible, towards short term electoral success and the rout of the Tories.

We have absolutely no desire to underestimate the difficulties involved in achieving particular policy objectives or in developing policies capable of achieving those objectives, or in constructing the kind of support required for those policies to be adopted. Indeed the ILP's major defining characteristic is that it tries to come to terms with the **realities** of political opinion, power and influence within the Labour Party, within the broader labour movement, and among the working class. In broad terms, it seeks a political "modus vivendi" which will keep democratic socialists together, enabling them to grow and politically prosper and confirm the Labour Party as a vehicle for socialism. To do this it believes that the left have to undertake the ambitious task of developing credible policies that can expect to get more than a toe hold in the community; policies capable of implementation; policies that will promote the well-being of working people and, at the same time, sustain socialist ideas and propel us towards the transformation of our society. And to that extent we must see at least some of our demands as being 'transitional'.