



DIRECT ACTION



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RESIST

No-one will miss 1985. It was a bad year for workers almost everywhere, and in Britain particularly there was little to be proud of.

THE MINERS' STRIKE came to its ignominious end in March. The heroism of countless miners and their families was betrayed by the short-sighted self-interest of a labour movement whose leaders would sell their best

Vienna, which provoked the promise of yet more retaliation from the blood-stained Israeli government...

The list of 1985's low points needn't be prolonged. But it is worth glancing at the year ahead, with past events in mind, in order to try and find out what we're in for.

While many people on the

Hungary, for Ireland—it will more importantly be a year when the shape of a terrifying future for the working class becomes more definite and more inevitable. From now on the going gets tough, as North Sea Oil production begins to decline and asset-stripping of Great Britain Ltd really gets going.

WE'VE SEEN the decay of health, education and welfare provisions—but the Fowler review, coming into effect late in 1986 will make previous cuts seem trifling. **ONLY A DETERMINED AND SERIOUS RESISTANCE BY A UNITED WORKING CLASS** can save millions from a descent into poverty unseen here for generations.

WE'VE SEEN the remorseless crushing of the NUM and the setting up of a new bossen' union among the miners. Now, armed with anti-union legislation, revolutionary new technology

a labour movement whose
 leaders would sell their best
 friend for a knighthood, while
 the rank and file would settle
 for a lot less. The rhetoric
 about "going back with our
 heads held high" is now as
 faded as the promises not to
 forget those who sacrificed
 their jobs or their freedom...

PROVOCATION by the police,
 especially against black people
 became more open than ever, with
 riots sparked off by incidents
 including the shootings of a
 woman and a 5-year-old boy in
 their own homes...

THE DEVASTATING FAMINE in
 Africa continued its agonising
 toll. Band-aid became the fash-
 ionable cure for the man-made
 disease of starvation, but how
 many of those who bought a
 quiet conscience by donating
 gave any thought to the effect
 of their own lifestyles on the
 world's hunger? And what about
 the huge food surpluses, des-
 troyed daily and benefitting
 only the greedy farmers of the
 affluent countries?

IN SOUTH AFRICA violence in-
 tensified as state repression
 clashed with the people's anger
 but we have seen little sign of
 mass industrial mobilisation
 against apartheid—something
 indispensable to a genuine
 fight for freedom for black
 workers...

CANCER struck Ronnie Reagan,
 but left him fit enough to
 shake hands with Mikhail Gorba-
 chev in Geneva— before going
 home to set off a test of the
 so-called "defensive" weapon
 aptly named after a kids' sci-
 fi film. The world's peace is in
 good hands...

THE CRIMINAL INSANITY of tit-
 for-tat terrorism had almost
 the last word in 1985, with the
 Palestinian revenge squad
 attacks on airports in Rome and

While many people on the
 left will see 1986 as a year of
 anniversaries—for Spain, for



revolutionary new technology
 and, most effective of all, the
 easy tactic of divide-and-rule
 through buying off powerful
 minorities, the Tories will try
 a conclusive attack on organ-
 ized labour in this country.
**UNLESS THE RANK AND FILE CAN
 CARRY OUT VIGOROUS, UNITED
 RESISTANCE,** the benefits of a
 century's struggle and sacri-
 fice by workers will be lost,
 along with hopes for a decent
 future.

WE'VE SEEN the privatisation
 of British Telecom (the profit-
 able part of the Post Office
 1986 will be the year Thatcher's
 rich friends get to buy British
 Gas and the Water Authorities
 (vital services to every
 family) at knock-down prices.
 What's next for privatisation—
 hospitals? Prisons? The police?
**WORKERS MUST REFUSE TO ACCEPT
 THIS, AND MUST ACT ON THAT
 REFUSAL NOW!**

AND THE NOVELTY of 1986? We
 predict the Channel Tunnel as
 Mrs Thatcher's civil engineer-
 ing Falklands Factor. With less
 bloodshed and expense than a
 small war, it provides the per-
 fect excuse for the government
 and their lap-dogs in the press
 to enjoy an orgy of self-glor-
 ification. Less superficially, it
 will provide abundant (short-
 term) jobs in the South East,
 while robbing dockers and sea-
 farers of their remaining indus-
 trial power—and their jobs—
 mostly in the North (which will
 bleed to death as industry
 gravitates toward the Tunnel).
 It will also be an ideal chance
 (in view of the security prob-
 lems a tunnel poses) to in-
 crease the arms and the powers
 of the police.

**ANOTHER REASON WHY WE MUST
 MAKE 1986 THE YEAR OF RESISTANCE!**

BREAK THE SCALES

towards a rank and file movement

The end of the miners' strike saw the Left in Britain take up an interesting range of positions. While it's not necessary to go into the various "party lines" here, it is certainly relevant to comment on and try to challenge the major belief that industrial struggle has, for the time being, been laid to rest by the state.

A number of leftist groups have compared the miners' strike with the period of syndicalist growth at the beginning of the twentieth century. Predictably, all have come out against syndicalism in general and anarcho-syndicalism in particular. What is interesting is the alternatives offered.



THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE?

Considerable emphasis has been placed on the Broad Left as the only alternative to the increasing dominance on the Right Wing and the practice of forming "yellow" or company unions.

If we assume that many rank and file activists saw Broad Left and the Broad Left as the only alternative to the Right Wing and the TUC during the

decision to contest the recent elections for general secretary.

George Williamson, member of USDAW and BLOC analyses BLOC's disastrous defeat as follows: "Broad Left felt that, given the opportunity to put its policies to the activists and the membership, it would be possible to win support over the heads of the majority of officials..." but also notes that "many of the branches cast their vote on a tiny minority of the membership. For example Garfield Davies (right wing victor of the election) own branch, Ipswich General, which has 713 members, voted for him by three votes to two with Davies present and voting".

USDAW has a highly centralised union machinery, where full-time officials have a large influence, with a low level of membership activity in many branches, and BLOC's participation in union elections does nothing to change this situation.

The problems facing USDAW members are not going to go away. The need for activists to unite around the pressing

day to day issues is as strong now as it would have been if Bill Connors, the BLOC candidate had won.

The fundamental difference between anarcho-syndicalists and the majority of the left is our analysis of the problems facing the working class. While the left would argue that there exists a "crisis of leadership" they are inevitably led down a path of elections, compromise and participation in bureaucratic machinery. As a result they fail in the task of organising the rank and file.

While no-one can deny that we face a crisis, it is far deeper than a simple matter of changing leaders, whether in USDAW or the next general election. Our crisis is a crisis of organisation.

We must recognise that the present reformist nature of trade unions prevents them even maintaining today's living standards, let alone offering a challenge to the economic system. So it is impossible to build a revolutionary organisation by attempting to win the leadership of such a movement.

Instead, like Bakunin, we adopt two basic concepts: an absolute confidence in the creative capacity of the working class, and the necessity for a revolutionary organisation—an organisation that can win the political arguments within the working class.

REALITIES

The necessity of building a rank and file movement must be seen against the realities of the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Britain. We cannot hope to create overnight a rank and file organisation out of the membership and periph-



ery of the DAM/IWA. In any case such an organisation has to be built on sound foundations

Our first steps should be towards setting up an industrial network of militants, both establishing contacts with existing rank and file groups, and forming our own contacts in the workplace through sales of the paper.

If we are to work within a rank and file movement, establishing and building it, it has to be a principled participation. Past attempts by various

Willis and the TUC during the miners' strike, then the most important question is, why did they fail to deliver basic solidarity action during the year-long strike?

The BLOC is an organisation almost totally geared towards fighting union elections. Its weakness is its fundamental orientation towards "scaling the heights" of the labour movement rather than arguing the basic politics of working-class solidarity and rank-and-file activism.

LOST OPPORTUNITY

When the BLOC organised the lobby of the 1984 TUC conference, their organisers predicted a mass demonstration of 20,000. On the day, they achieved only 5,000, but more importantly, no delegations from any large factory or workplace were represented on the march. Any chance to turn their much-publicised "General Strike" into reality was lost due to their basic inability to complete the necessary work amongst rank and file activists and mount a successful campaign of industrial solidarity.

The actual usefulness of trying to unite rank and file activists around a policy of mobilisation for elections can be seen not only to fail to provide support during a large scale confrontation with the state, but in the day-to-day battles against employers and the union bureaucracy.

USDAW

To take as an example the recent Broad Left campaign in the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Trades (USDAW), the problems facing members of the pitifully low wages and the challenge of Sunday trading can be seen in contrast to the



Rank and file conference wrecked by marxists

On the 30th November 1985 a conference was held in Sheffield to discuss rank and file initiatives. The conference was called by a number of rank and file groups, the R&F Building Workers, R&F Miners, Scottish R&F Teachers and R&F Teachers 83. The conference was also attended by members of unemployed workers groups and members of political groups.

The conference was generally disrupted by marxist groups who appeared to have no idea of what rank and file organisation is or of independent workers organisation. The greatest bit of marxist interference was when the Workers Power group tried to use the conference to instruct the R&F Miners what to do, this was of course stopped by the R&F groups and anarcho-syndicalists present.

Very little constructive activity came from the conference, which was bogged down with debating abstract resolutions rather than the ways and means of achieving working class victories and building a wider R&F movement. Although the meeting of people with similar ideas of independent working class organisation can only be constructive in the long run.

The conference decided to organise another conference in 1986. This will only be worthwhile and constructive if the R&F groups emphasise the basic principles of R&F organisation and keep out those political groups whose only intention is to take over such groups and use them to build their own parties in order to tell the working class what to do.



themselves as little more than party fronts—groups unwilling to trust the workers in running their own movements or in forming a genuine democratic base for a real alternative to the present reformist union organisation.

At no time does this mean that as anarcho-syndicalists we hide our politics and attempt to give the impression that we do not consider the rank and file initiative an essential building block of anarcho-syndicalist unionism. We will need to argue the organisational limitations of rank and file movements and the need to go further and form an anarcho-syndicalist labour movement.

CHALLENGE THE TUC

The DAM pamphlet "What About the Unions?" quotes an engineering shop steward as saying "The unions are in for a slaughtering, and only from the remnants will an effective labour organisation be built". This view was popular during the miners' strike. Many activists expressed a dismay that the TUC had not suffered more during the strike. Although the TUC is at an all-time low in its standing within the labour movement, it is undoubtedly part and parcel of the state's machinery, and therefore, within the foreseeable future, because it is necessary to the state's existence, it will not collapse of its own accord.

What separates us from ultra-leftists groups is our belief in organisation. If the TUC is to be prevented from fulfilling its role as industrial saboteur, it has to be challenged by an organised and educated working class. This means a solid, organised rank and file movement.