

UNEMPLOYMENT:



**A 35 HOUR WEEK
NOW!**

BY PAT HICKEY

20p

PAT HICKEY is a senior shop steward in the T.G.W.U. at British Leyland's Rover, Solihull plant and a member of Birmingham Trades Council. He is a regular contributor to, and long standing supporter of, the weekly paper Socialist Challenge.

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Introduction

Today, in Britain, the working class is being deprived of the most fundamental right of all - the right to work. As unemployment heads for the 3 million mark, and with no sign of it stopping there, poverty and hardship is the only future that the Tories offer the working class.

Unemployment does not only effect those without jobs. For those in work it is the weapon which the bosses are using to hold down wages, attack trade union rights and worsen working conditions. So far, the TUC has concentrated on asking Thatcher to change course - an approach that has made as much impact on the Tories as an attack by a dead sheep. The TUC has also spent some effort in attempting to get the CBI to join it in approaches to the Government, and in order to win their support has put forward proposals for import controls and incomes policy.

The policy of Len Murray et al is based on getting a re-run of the policies of the last Labour government which were based on attacks on working class living standards and which led to the return of the Tories at the last election.

We reject these policies. The answer to Thatcher does not lie in putting forward Toryism in carpet slippers as an alternative to Toryism with its boots on. It lies in policies which are based on making the bosses pay for the crisis of their system. We say that the answer lies in building a national campaign for the 35 hour week without loss of pay and by mobilising the massive strength of the 13 million trade unionists in Britain to prepare to kick the Tories out.

After 2 years of the Tories we say that the working class in Britain cannot afford to wait 3 more years to deal with them through the ballot box. In every area of life the Tories are attacking the working class: cuts in social services, massive rent and rate increases, falling living standards, victimisation of shop stewards, speed-up at work, cuts in unemployment benefit, attacks on picketing and on strikers families. The Tories and the employers are determined that the working class will pay the price for the crisis of their bankrupt economic system. The mass of people must suffer to preserve the wealth and privilege of the few - and if this means attacking the old, the sick, the poor, then the capitalist class are quite prepared to do so.

They must be stopped. The miners showed what can be done. The Government backed off from the miners because they feared that a confrontation with them would involve the rest of the working class. Throughout the country, the atmosphere on the shop floor in other industries was electric. At British Leyland's Rover plant the attitude of the shop floor was "I hope the miners take them on then we'll have a chance to get revenge on those bastards." And this was in a plant which has suffered big defeats. Despite local defeats on redundancies, speed-up, defence of agreements and so on the working class in Britain remains the most strongly organised working class in the world (13,489,000 trade union members at the end of 1979). That strength must be used to smash the Tories and the employers.

NATIONAL RESPONSE NEEDED.

The Tory Government is acting as the High Command of British employers. It is co-ordinating the attack by the capitalist class and preparing for a showdown with workers' organisations. The increased spending on the police and the army, the anti-union laws, the encouragement of massive unemployment are all designed to strengthen the state and weaken the working class.

The depth of the crisis has forced the working class to try to come to grips with the new problems and with new solutions. Since the Second World War localised factory based organisations were enough to win wage rises, improve working conditions and so on. But now we face problems of an entirely different kind. For workers throughout the country it is increasingly clear that the problems that they face cannot be solved at the level of the factory or even the combine. Almost every struggle comes up against the employers' arguments about viability, the need to be competitive and the threat of complete closure. As a result shop floor organisation has been thrown into crisis. The basic problems facing the working class cannot be solved simply by plant based action. We need a national political perspective. The employers have theirs through the Tory Government. But where is ours?

The need for a national fight-back is clear. This is most evident on the question of unemployment which is the single biggest problem facing the working class. How many jobs would the miners have saved if they had dealt with problem pit by pit? Probably as many as British Leyland saved through dealing with Edwardes plant by plant. In other words NONE.

There are many in the movement who look at the lack of a fight-back at the moment and say that the workers are defeated and that we can expect nothing much to happen. We say this attitude is defeatist. The labour movement is not smashed up, and at present the lack of a fight-back is due to the leadership of the labour movement who refuse to mobilise the full strength of the working class against the Government. This refusal gives the green light to the Government to deepen its attacks.



Prior and Howe - part of Thatcher's team
orchestrating attacks on the working class.

Unemployment is the most striking evidence of the bankruptcy of the capitalist system. Britain needs schools, hospitals, houses, nurseries, roads and transport. We need a better Health Service, more social services, more provision for the elderly. And as unemployment grows so social need grows. The cost of the present level of unemployment (almost 3 million at the time of writing) is £500 per year for every employed person through loss of goods and services. It costs the Exchequer £8.9 billion in loss of revenue and social security pay outs. Every additional 100,000 unemployed costs £300 million plus.

But to have on the one side idle plant and machinery, jobless workers, and on the other, massive unrest and growing social need is a crime against humanity which must be stopped.

Unemployment threatens all the social gains made by the working class in the past 20 years. It hits women, black and young workers particularly hard. The Tories welcome the fact that women are being driven out of employment and forced back into the home and into dependence on men. The attack on the economic independence of women is an attack on the whole working class. For tens of thousands of young people it destroys the possibility of independence from the family.

The existence of an army of unemployed is also a direct threat to the living standards and conditions of the employed. The employers use mass unemployment to weaken the organisation of employed workers. Throughout the country, particularly in engineering, employers have used unemployment to hold down wages to about half the rate of inflation. Unless the labour movement shows the unemployed a way out of the crisis unemployed workers will be open to use by the employers as scab labour to defeat strikes. In the recent Ansell's strike in Birmingham the employers threatened to recruit people from the dole to replace the striking workers. It didn't work this time. But if the situation continues it might well work in the future.

Unemployment is like a cancer at the heart of the labour movement. Writing more than 40 years ago Trotsky said that "...under the menace of its own disintegration the working class cannot permit the transformation of an increasing section of the workers into chronically unemployed paupers living off the slops of a crumbling society. The right to employment is the only serious right left to the worker in a society based upon exploitation." We must take up the fight for the right to work.

A serious fight for the right to work must be waged at a national level. It must be organised by the labour movement leadership and be directed against the Tories. And it must set itself clear objectives that can win the support of the working class. We have the strength; we have the organisation; have we got the leadership?

A CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP.

Every major union in Britain has adopted policies in favour of the 35 hour week at national conferences. But now, when unemployment is soaring, none of the trade union leaders raise this demand. Despite the wide range of attacks on the working class none of the leaders - except Arthur Scargill - have called for the kicking

out of the Tories. Instead they appeal to the Tories to change their policies and speak about the '...danger of social unrest.' In our view social unrest is not a danger. It is a necessity. The strategy of the trade union leaders is to direct working class anger into protest actions and to use these protests to pressure the Tories into a change of policy. Thus the Liverpool and Glasgow demonstrations and the 'Peoples March' are 'against' unemployment but not for anything in particular. To direct the anger of the working class towards clear goals would be to risk unleashing the 'social unrest' that the well fed gentlemen of the TUC are so concerned about and while 'social unrest' is avoided the Tories will continue their attacks on the working class and its organisations. They have 3 more years to do it in and the timid policies of our leaders will leave them plenty of room. The Tories are well aware of the 'danger of social unrest'. This is why the only growth area of public expenditure is the police, the army and the security services. They are getting ready for a showdown.



LEN MURRAY

'The strategy of the trade union leaders is to direct working class anger into protest actions and to use these to pressure the Tories into a change of policy.'

But they are not ready yet. That is why they backed off from the miners - this time. They know that the potential strength of the working class in Britain is unstoppable. In Britain the working class is a larger proportion of the population and is more highly organised than in any other country in the world. As long ago as 1920 Prime Minister Lloyd George stated "Four fifths of this country is industrial and commercial, hardly one fifth is agricultural. It is one of the things I have constantly in mind when I think of the dangers of the future here. In France the population is agricultural and you have a solid body of opinion which does not move rapidly... This is not the case here. This country is more top-heavy than any in the world and if it begins to rock, the crash here, for that reason, will be greater than in any land." This is even more true today. And as they take their well paid seats at Government QUANGOS the labour leaders tremble at the thought.

UNITY WITH THE BOSSES ?

Instead of demands for a 35 hour week without loss of pay and a programme of public works, which would take all 3 million unemployed workers off the dole they go for import controls. This demand is right in line with their refusal to take on the Tories. Instead of a struggle against the employers they want an alliance with them. At a special T.G.W.U. conference Moss Evans opened the proceedings by saying "We take the view that the CBI ought to end its silence and represent the interests of its members properly... If they do not respond, and it becomes necessary for an initiative to come from the unions, for us to forge direct links with the employers' associations against the Government, then we will do it."

This is real fighting talk. Instead of using the strength of the working class against its enemies we will link up with the enemy against the bosses government.

IMPORT CONTROLS - WHO BENEFITS ?

The core of the trade union leaders policy is the call for import controls. They say that they are for 'selective' import controls - but a TUC publication on imports covers every single area from cars to textiles, engineering to chemicals, earth movers to cigarette lighters. Selective or not import controls are no way forward for the working class.

On the face of it they seem a viable option. If there are fewer foreign goods on the market more British goods will be sold. But it won't work. The crisis is not just a British one. It is world-wide. In America, Europe and Japan unemployment is rising and industrial production is being cut back.

"According to figures released yesterday by the European Commission, unemployment throughout the Community leaped by 27 per cent last year. The UK (66 per cent), Denmark (56 per cent), the Netherlands (49 per cent), Ireland (38 per cent), and West Germany (29 per cent) were all above average. Italy's 6 per cent growth was much the smallest."

Quoted in the Financial Times, January 22nd 1981.

"In the OECD industrial countries, unemployment now stands at 17.5 million; seven years ago, it was 10.2 million. At a very rough guess, there are about 300 million unemployed people in the world; perhaps as many again are underemployed."

Quoted in the Economist, January 3rd-9th 1981. The OECD includes Britain, Japan, United States, West Germany, France, Australia, Canada, Italy, Norway, Spain, Holland, Austria & Switzerland.

To take just one example, the car industry. In the boom years of the 60s and early 70s the car market was growing at 12-13% a year. Predictions for the 80s put growth at 2-3%, and this is optimistic. Meanwhile all the major car manufacturers are increasing productive capacity. They are all seeking to increase productivity, cut their work forces and grab a larger share of the market. The story is the same in other industries. Every employer wants to grab the market at the expense of other employers. The crisis of capitalism creates an ever more intense competitive struggle. And in this struggle the armies are the working class. The employers will fight to the last drop of our blood. If we let them.

Import controls line British workers up with British bosses against the workers of Europe, America and Japan. And if we take this stand we must also help our bosses become more competitive by accepting redundancies, speed-ups and wage cuts.

In a shrinking world market other countries will not stand by and let British companies corner markets through trade restriction. They would inevitably retaliate. Import controls would not work for any length of time. They do nothing to increase employment; they only export unemployment, which other countries would export right back. The last time there was widespread use of import controls, in 1931, unemployment soared. The world-wide recession at that time was what determined the number of jobs and not import controls. Only policies which put the working class first could have saved the working class from the miseries of the dole queues. Import controls helped British employers but were a disaster for British workers.

Lining up with the employers in this way is a road to disaster. The uselessness of the approach can be seen in the proposals of the T.G.W.U. to give cheaper loans to workers who buy British Leyland cars. All this would do is put Ford, Vauxhall or Talbot workers out of a job. And unemployed workers, even with cheaper loans, don't buy cars.

The dangers can be seen when Moss Evans and Terry Duffy go hand-in-hand with Michael Edwardes to ask for import controls. And this within weeks of Edwardes sacking Derek Robinson, and while he is still planning to axe thousands of jobs.

Finally import controls would cut living standards of workers in Britain. Recently Scottish fishermen blockaded ports to prevent cheap foreign fish being landed. But who buys the fish? Working class people. Excluding cheaper goods in favour of dearer British goods means a direct tax on British workers in favour of 'our' employers. The T.G.W.U. has called for a campaign to develop national awareness to buy British. For the trade union leaders the most important thing is to be British, and this over-rides the differences between workers and employers. The line is that 'we' must stand together against the foreigners. It is not a very big step from this to demanding 'British jobs for British workers'. 'Unity' with employers is gained at the expense of the unity of the working class.

The search for unity with the employers does not stop at import controls. The labour right, in the TUC and the Labour Party, are already putting forward plans for Incomes Policy - ie. holding down working class living standards to help British bosses. Unity with employers is an expensive business, with the workers paying the bill and the employers getting the gravy.

A 35 HOUR WEEK WITH NO LOSS OF PAY.

The starting point for a fight against unemployment must be that the working class is not responsible for the crisis. We have no common cause with 'our' employers. The crisis is a crisis of their economic system. We need to ensure that they pay the price not us.



Occupations like the one at Gardners - above - are essential in fighting plant closures and redundancies.

If their system cannot employ all those who are able and willing to work then the response of the working class must be the demand to share the work without loss of pay. In the fight against plant closures and redundancies the use of occupations and demands for employment to be maintained is ABC. But to deal with the problem effectively we need a national campaign for work sharing without loss of pay. Today this must be concentrated on the demand for a 35 hour week now.

A 35 hour week would take over 1 million people off the dole at a stroke. If it were combined with a programme of public works to build houses, hospitals, roads etc. and improve social services all 3 million unemployed would disappear. Although most unions have support for a 35 hour week as part of their policy none of the major unions have fought for this. The CSEU, after national strikes, got a reduction of 1 hour from 1982 provided it led to no reduction in productivity and under the condition that the hours would not be renegotiated until 1984. Apart from this the unions have left it to local bargaining.

SPENDING ON ARMS COMPARED WITH SOCIAL SERVICES

<i>Annual expenditure £ million</i>		<i>£ million</i>	
Defence budget 1980-81	10,785	Hospital and community health services	8,389
of which		Child benefits	2,970
Pay & pensions for armed forces	3,017	Medical research	40
Defence research & development	1,479	Services for disabled	76
Upkeep of Polaris submarines	165	Welfare foods	33
Fighting vehicles	101		
<i>Cost of individual items £m</i>		<i>£m</i>	
One nuclear hunter-killer submarine	140	56 advanced passenger trains	140
One guided missile destroyer	85	3 hospitals each with 1,000 beds	76
One Tornado aircraft	10	833 houses	10
	£		£
One Milan anti-tank missile	7,000	One kidney machine	6,000
One 155mm illuminating ammunition shell	450	Schoolbooks for 100 children for one year	423

Table taken from 'LABOUR RESEARCH' Volume 69 Number 7 July 1980

'Jobs Not Bombs' -A programme of public works to build houses, hospitals, roads etc. would dramatically reduce the number of unemployed and could be funded through a massive reduction in arms expenditure.

Local bargaining will not achieve what we need. Every previous major reduction in hours has been fought for MAINLY through national campaigns aimed at securing legislation. Instead of import controls and pleading with the Tories to change course, the TUC should be waging a national campaign for 35 hours and the Labour Party left, like Benn and Heffer, should commit themselves to implementing the 35 hour week BY LAW when a Labour government is returned.

THE EMPLOYERS' RESPONSE.

Of course such a campaign would bring the trade union movement into direct conflict with the Tories and the employers. Sharing out the available work means that the employers would pay for the crisis instead of the working class. And that is precisely what we need.

A national campaign for the 35 hour week would unite the employed and the unemployed in a common struggle. We believe that it would unleash the pent up anger and frustration of the working class which has found its way forward blocked at the level of the plant. It would increase the strength of the class at every level.

Such a campaign would not be successful with a Tory Government. They would have to be cleared out. But consider the prospect for a Labour victory if the leadership has adopted such a policy. How different it would be from 1979, when Callaghan appealed for working class votes with his miserable policy of wage restraint and attacks on pickets.

The biggest single cause of the Tory victory then was the Labour government's refusal to confront the employers and defend the working class. In the Labour Party the fight against the right-wing has begun. If the Labour left are serious about defending the working class and defeating the Healey-Hattersley clique then they must identify themselves with policies which workers can clearly see as in their interest. The 35 hour week should be at the top of the list.

Of course the employers will fight back. There would be a massive economic crisis as employers allowed plant and machinery to lie idle rather than produce without profit. But then they are doing this anyway. And the plant and machinery that they own is merely the surplus from decades of labour by the working class. In

response to such action by the employers we demand nationalisation without compensation. If the employers cannot run the plants we will take them over and run them to satisfy social need.

Socialist Challenge rejects the view that the working class is unable or unwilling to struggle. The readiness to respond to the miners and the massive support for the Liverpool and Glasgow unemployment marches demonstrates this. The lack of struggle at a local level is due to a lack of a viable perspective. And the main reason for this lack of perspective is the labour leaders, who will do anything except fight the Tories now. Trotting people out for the occasional demonstration is not enough. The demonstrations must be part of a campaign to deal with the problem of unemployment.



For too many of the labour leaders socialism is a subject for speeches, and fighting the Tories must wait until 1984. We say that socialism is the only way in which the crisis will be solved in the interest of the working class and the fight for it should begin now.

Socialist Challenge gives full support to every demonstration called by the Labour Party and the unions. But we also fight within the unions and the Labour Party to build left wings which seek to replace the right wing leaders who prevent the working class using its full strength against the Tories.

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