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**CENTRISM  
IN  
CRISIS**

The  
**'MILITANT'**  
and the  
**GENERAL STRIKE**

*by*  
**CHRIS KNIGHT**

**A CHARTIST PUBLICATION**

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THIS PAMPHLET does not attempt to provide a full-scale critique of the political positions of the Militant group. It deals only with that tendency's position on the General Strike and the question of power, as a touch-stone whereby its overall position can be judged.

We single out this tendency not because it is the worst of the groups considering themselves "revolutionary" in the labour movement today. It is far from that. On the contrary we single out the Militant because it happens to be our closest—and therefore in a sense most immediate—opponent within the working class movement and in particular the Labour Party.

Our conclusion is that the Militant tendency is not marxist but centrist. That is, while its members are generally sincere in believing in the class struggle and the necessity for revolution, they split and vacillate when faced with the question of power. The better elements in this "split" turn out to have a position virtually indistinguishable from our own.

In our view it would require a full-scale "dual-power" crisis in Britain to bring out the real contradictions within the Militant group. But even the earliest beginnings of such a crisis implicit in the events of the past year have already begun showing their effect. In February and March 1973 the trade union movement seemed to be heading towards a possible General Strike. In the event, the movement was successfully if only temporarily de-railed by the Tory Government with the aid of the TUC. But not before powerful shock-waves had travelled through almost all sections of society. One effect was to be seen in the pages of the Militant. If centrism be vacillation on the question of power, then the March issues of this paper provide us with a classic example. It is to an analysis of these issues that this pamphlet is devoted first of all.

Before we can appreciate the Militant's evident shock at having to deal even with the possibility of a confrontation with the Government in this period, it is necessary to understand what its own perspectives had been. Two months earlier, it had published an article by Ted Grant—the group's main "theoretician"—entitled "British Perspectives". It took up almost the whole of No 6 of the journal Militant International Review.

"The Tories", ran the introduction to this document, "are not surprisingly fighting shy of confrontation today." This theory was based on the following considerations (quoted from p. 6 of the main article by Grant):

"With the change of course of the Tories (the Rents Bill is a legacy of their former policy of confrontation), the basic weakness of British capitalism is laid bare. Their turn away from confrontation is dictated by a weighing-up of the relationship of forces on a class basis, the possibility at this stage of concessions, and the long-term organic weakness and decline of British capitalism. As every post-war Tory government understood, it would cost the capitalists far more than they gained to em-

bitter the workers by direct assaults and attacks. It would launch the nation, i.e. in their terms the ruling, class onto uncharted seas. They have had this lesson renewed by the experience of the bone-headed Heath government, who have adopted the policies of their predecessors for the time being at least.

Thus the ruling classes tested out the resistance of the trade union and Labour movement, and of the organized working class in the local government workers' strike and above all, the miners' strike. It is this last that convinced them that all-out conflict was too dangerous. The active support the miners received from the students and the sympathy of the professional and small business layers of the population, revealed the dangers. Thus the possibility of an all-out show-down with the workers, in the immediate period ahead, has receded. The possibility of a general strike has been postponed to the indefinite future."

The Militant's difficulties in adjustment were therefore understandable when, only two months after all this was published, it had to deal with precisely the possibility of a general strike in the immediate period ahead.

The results were spectacular. On March 9 the Militant capitulated to a position it had been fighting persistently for a period of over two years. It carried a lead article which, despite the most incompetent formulations, expressed a position essentially almost indistinguishable from that of the CHARTISTS. On March 16 this "new turn" was disowned. Then Militant's centre pages carried an enormous rambling article by Ted Grant aimed not so much against the CHARTISTS as against its own lead-article of two weeks ago, although this was disguised as an attack on the CHARTISTS. This was on March 23. Clearly the group's leadership was in a state of inner turmoil. Since then, the temporary lull in the class struggle (at the time of writing) has allowed what was a developing crisis to settle down.

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Let us look, then, at the lead article of March 9. We must remember that it was written just after the TUC's decision, taken on March 5, to call a "Day of National Protest and Stoppage", which was later to be fixed for May 1st. During this stoppage, wrote the Militant,

"mass meetings, marches and demonstrations should have as their theme the call for the working class to take power."

This was really somewhat stupid. "Calling on the workers to take power" would not be a particularly useful activity during a one-day protest stoppage. And even in an indefinite General Strike it would be the wrong way to start going about things. It would be necessary to confront the "leaders" with the demand "Take the Power!", not help them shuffle off responsibility in that way to the rank and file. But more of that later. Despite its clumsiness, the sentence showed a healthy revolutionary spirit unusual for the Militant. Yet more was to follow. "The ranks of the movement", the article continued,

"should not wait on the leaders to make a move. Trades Councils, together with Constituency Labour Parties, the Labour Party Young

Socialists and union branches in every city, town, district and village should immediately convene conferences with delegates from all the factories in the locality! .... A network of mass committees of action, based on the already existing Labour organizations but broadened to embrace all sections of the working class could really prepare for a "day of action" which would shake the Tory Government from top to bottom. If successfully carried out on these lines a one day general strike would then prepare the Labour and Trade Union movement for an all-out general strike."

The CHARTISTS had consistently acted on the basis that the demand for a one-day General Strike was useless unless placed in the context of preparation for an all-out General Strike at a later stage. But this was the first time such a position had been put forward in the pages of the Militant, which had persistently called for a 24-hour stoppage and left it at that, its supporters going out of their way to attack our position as ultra-left. It was good to see the change. But still more was to come. "An indefinite General Strike", ran the article,

"raises the workers' struggle on to a higher level. It is not a demand to be lightly tossed about. If the whole Labour movement were to come out for an indefinite period, they would not merely be challenging this Tory government. It would be a challenge to the whole system of capitalism!

That is why to call for an indefinite General Strike in order to force a general election to get rid of the Tories, misses the whole significance of such actions. IT WOULD BE A STRUGGLE FOR POWER between the working class on the one side and the capitalist class and the whole might of its state machine. It would force the ruling class to mobilize its forces to take on the workers. The workers will therefore need to be equally prepared to organize itself (sic.) for the task of overthrowing the bosses' state."

This passage immediately placed the Militant head and shoulders above the "revolutionary" charlatans who then as now were calling for a General Strike "to defend basic rights" or to "force the Tories to resign". The article warned of the complete unpreparedness of the TUC General Council for such a strike.

"As in 1926, the 'leaders' would go into battle with only one thought in their minds--how to end the strike as soon as possible. The result would be a foregone conclusion....defeat for the working class."

But this absence of leadership was no excuse for trying to hold back from the inevitable struggle. "The workers", wrote the MILITANT,

"cannot simply wait for the leaders to be convinced of the need to conduct a struggle for power. Events will move too fast. There is an urgent need to prepare the movement for a struggle which their leaders may stumble into unexpectedly just as they have with Monday's call for action."

But even this was not enough for the Militant of March 9. It was not just treating the General Strike negatively as a danger to be prepared "against" and avoided if at all possible. No. An all-out General Strike was treated here as a necessary follow-up to the one-day "protest" strike. The Labour leaders, ran the article,

"must be pressed to wage a massive campaign to ensure 100% success for the one-day stoppage. Then the question will be posed....

'What next?' The only answer is to prepare for an indefinite General Strike to bring the working class to power! THAT WILL BE THE ONLY COURSE OPEN TO THE LABOUR MOVEMENT!"

For a tendency which had been denouncing the slogan "Prepare for the General Strike" for the past twelve months on the basis that the miners' strike had postponed the very possibility of such a strike to the "indefinite future"---for such a tendency this was progress indeed.

Moreover, anyone reading the passage would have assumed it advocated pressing the Labour leaders to prepare for the General Strike. The leaders, said the article, should be "pressed" to ensure a 100% stoppage for the 24-hour strike, as a prelude to the all-out strike itself. Was the Militant, then, like the CHARTISTS, confronting the leaders of the Labour movement with the tasks of struggle for power? If any doubt on this score might have remained, they were cleared up in the concluding words of the article:

"Only the organized working class have the power to change the system. They can bring the country to a full stop, as they will show in the one-day general strike. They can also use this power to start it running again on a totally different basis, where the vast wealth of the country can be used to provide a life of plenty for all, for working people, the old and sick, where good housing will be taken for granted and education will be a means of opening children's eyes to new horizons.

That is the task posed before the leaders of the labour movement in the immediate future. Militant supporters are urged to take the initiative in the struggle which is unfolding, to achieve it."

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On first reading this article, the CHARTISTS could hardly believe their eyes. After years of resistance---so it seemed---and under the impact of events themselves, the Militant had quite suddenly turned a somersault and capitulated to the positions of the CHARTIST lock, stock and barrel---omitting only the slogans "Prepare for the General Strike!" and "Labour, take the power!" From now on, thought the more naive of us, how could they continue their attacks on us---or even justify the fact that there are two marxist tendencies in the Labour Party?

But the cynics were proved right. The leopard, as somebody said, does not change his spots. With next week's Militant everything had been put back to normal.

The March 16 issue had two headlines. The first was the following:

"T.U.C.---Organize 24-hour Protest Action!"

That is actually what it said. It called, in other words, for the TUC to carry out the very betrayal it had already decided on. The TUC on March 5 had decided to confine all resistance to the Tories within the perspective of a 24-hour "protest" action. And here, two weeks later, was the Militant "calling" on the TUC to do just that. The second, bigger, headline was:

"Labour and T.U.C.---Campaign for General Election!"

As if Vic Feather, Joe Gormley and virtually everyone else involved in the "protest" had not spent the last fortnight doing little else than assure the Tories "all we want is an election", here was the Militant calling on them to "campaign" for one. Not even to force one---just "campaign".

"Protest" and "campaign"---the headlines gave only a foretaste of what was to come. The previous week's lead-article had insisted, as we have seen, that during the TUC's one-day action the "theme" should be the "call for the working class to take power". On March 16 this

had been carefully (and wordily) amended to the following:

"The central theme must be the need to bring to an end the whole system which the Tories stand for—the rule of the tycoons and the millionaires, the owners of the 300 monopolies who own the wealth of the country which was created by the working class."

In other words, the "central theme" was to be the "need for a socialist programme". Lest anyone might have read something revolutionary into that idea, the purely electoral implications intended were made quite clear. The previous week's article, we remember, had called for the setting up of action committees to provide an initiative in the struggle for power. This week, just above the passage quoted, one solitary reference to "committees of action" appeared, but in a very different context. Their only assigned function now was to "organize for the one day strike" and "prepare a campaign for the resignation of the government and the election of a Labour government with socialist policies."

In the entire lengthy article, not one reference to an all-out General Strike appeared. Neither was there any reference to the struggle as a struggle for power (now or in the future). There were calls on the T.U.C. to mount "action". But the action in mind was either left unspecified, or was confined to the question of the voicing of "protests" and the launching of "campaigns" against the Tories. This made even the call for a full stoppage on the "day of protest" no more than a reformist gesture. Apart from the slogan "For a Complete One Day National Strike!" and the inevitable "Labour to Power on a Socialist Programme", the author could end his article with only the following inspiring cries: "Victory to the Workers in Struggle!" and "Down With the Tories!" But he had done his job.

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Having sat down hard on the supporters of the March 9 lead-article, Grant now clearly felt that a full "explanation" for the astonishing zig-zags was much in need. Trotsky writes in his Lessons of October of the kind of marxist leader who inclines, as he puts it,

"to drag the party back at the very moment when it must take a stupendous leap forward... to see primarily difficulties and obstacles in the way of revolution, and to estimate each situation with a preconceived, though not always conscious, intention of avoiding any action."

In his article on March 23, Ted Grant provides a perfect example. Like so many good centrists before him, he managed to combine an apparently faultless theoretical analysis...with a conclusion which amounted to no action.

Britain's social relations, he began, are "more disturbed than at any time since the 1920's." Describing the way in which all sections and layers of the working class had moved into action in the recent period, he commented: "This is something which has not happened in even the biggest struggles of the past, even including the General Strike." He then went on to describe the Tories' Housing Finance Act, Industrial Relations Act and Prices and Incomes Policy. These were "crude class policies", dictated by the dire necessity "to limit the consumption of the working class to present levels for five years at least." "This", wrote Grant, "is a programme of bitter class war that does not leave room for that 'compromise' which was the method of British capitalism in the past. Class conflict is reaching an even more bitter level than in the 1920's which led to the 1926 General Strike." In this situation, one had to face the possibility of an indefinite General Strike in the immediate period ahead:

"The discontent of the working class will increase. Appetite comes with eating. The profound experience of a one day general strike will encourage the workers to demand further action from their organizations. In this atmosphere, demands for a complete and unlimited general strike will grow all the time....

There are all sorts of accidental factors, in a situation charged with conflict, that may trigger off an explosion and lead to an irresistible pressure on the T.U.C. to call a general strike."

Reading all this, one might have thought that here was a good marxist theoretician with his finger on the pulse of events. For the present author, however, the effect was spoiled by one thing. He encountered Ted Grant and a few of his comrades at the Institute for Workers' Control Conference in Nottingham at the end of March 1973. They were enthusiastically selling two things: Grant's "British Perspectives" published in January, and a "Special Double Issue" of Militant selling at fivepence and containing Grant's article on the General Strike. This author bought both, and read them side by side. The results were as follows. According to document A, the Tories' policies represented a "turn away from confrontation" based on (among other things) "the possibility at this stage of concessions". For document B, however, they represented "a programme of savage and bitter class war", a programme "that does not leave room for that 'compromise' which was the method of British capitalism in the past". For document A, the Tories' policies were based on the calculation that, "as every post-war Tory government understood, it would cost the capitalists far more than they gained to embitter the workers by direct assaults and attacks." Heath and his Ministers "have adopted the policies of their predecessors for the time being at least". For document B, the Tories' policies were based on the impossibility of continuing with the methods of their predecessors. Their inability to make concessions to the TUC was dictated not by whim "but by the crisis of British capitalism, in which they are as helpless as Feather himself. Thus they can only cajole and fool Feather without offering any real concessions. Meanwhile they are fuming and preparing revenge and a devastating blow against the trade unions at a suitable opportunity." According to document A "It is the pressure of the CBI which has sounded the retreat politically and industrially". For document B, however, the Tories were engaged not in "retreat" at all but in "crude class policies" and "provocations" in the interests of big business aimed at "squeezing a bigger share of the wealth, the surplus wealth produced by the labour of the working class." Finally, for document A, as a result of the "dangers" to the Tories of conflict "the possibility of an all-out show-down with the workers, in the immediate period ahead, has receded. The possibility of a General Strike has been postponed to the indefinite future." For document B, however, the movement had to prepare against the possibility of an all-out show-down and General Strike in the immediate period ahead.

Buying and reading both publications at the same time made their author appear merely comical. Moreover the January "Perspectives" document was not something written on the spur of the moment. On the contrary, it had apparently been drafted soon after the 1972 miners' strike. It represented the considered, long-term perspectives of the Militant group and was published in January 1973 in the full light of all the turbulent events of 1972. It was from the standpoint of these "perspectives" that the CHARTISTS had been attacked since the 1972 miners' strike and before.

But we must return to our subject. Grant's main purpose in his March 23 article was to attack the doubters in his own group by an open attack on the position of the CHARTISTS. Not having the nerve this time to accuse us of "lack of perspective" (the main charge against us at the 1972 Labour Party Young Socialists Conference), he chose now a most peculiar line.



Grant's objection to the slogan "TUC—Prepare for the General Strike!" centred....on the fact that it was addressed to the T.U.C.! For him, it seemed, it was permissible to call on the T.U.C. to organize a 24-hour "protest" strike. It was even permissible—according to his "Perspectives" document in a passage to be quoted more fully later—to call on it "to adopt an uncompromisingly Marxist policy of class struggle". But it was impermissible to call on it to prepare for an all-out General Strike, even although such a strike was now recognized as a possibility in the immediate period ahead.

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Let us examine Grant's arguments. Having described, as we saw above, how a number of accidental factors, in a situation charged with conflict, might "trigger off" an all-out General Strike in the period following the one-day "protest" stoppage, he continued (in an evidently strained tone) :

"It is this situation which indicates the pathetic approach of the little sect calling on the TUC solemnly "to prepare the general strike". THIS IS ENTIRELY COMICAL. The T.U.C., as events have shown and as explained above, is incapable of "preparing the general strike" even a 1 day general strike. That task in a given period is fulfilled by the Trades Councils, especially under Marxist leadership."

Leaving aside the somewhat low level of abuse, the thought expressed here is so confused that it is hard to know where to begin in dealing with it. The main idea seems to be that one should confront the reformist trade union leaders only with such demands as they are capable of carrying out. The trouble is that Grant himself breaks even his own principles here. For example, the fact that the T.U.C. is incapable of preparing even a one-day General Strike has not—so far as we know—stopped him from calling on it to do so. More. As was mentioned earlier, in his "Perspectives" document he quite correctly poses before the T.U.C. leaders a stark choice. In the period ahead, he writes,

"either the T.U.C. and the unions must be forced to adopt an uncompromisingly Marxist policy of class struggle, or there is no alternative but to try and arrive at an agreement with the state, which is now intimately linked with monopoly capitalism".

One assumes Grant would support the first alternative. So the T.U.C. is called upon "to adopt an uncompromisingly Marxist policy of class struggle". But it is incapable of doing so! Not to worry. Grant is apparently concerned only when one spells things out. To say that the T.U.C. must "adopt an uncompromisingly Marxist policy of class struggle" is permissible (perhaps because it could be interpreted along the lines of "adopting a socialist programme"). To say that it must prepare for the possibility of a General Strike is impermissible. We would put this question to Comrade Grant: just what kind of "uncompromisingly Marxist policy of class struggle" would it be if the T.U.C. "supported" the "principle" of the nationalization of the 300 monopolies....while remaining silent and inactive on the question of the General Strike and the struggle for power which events themselves are now beginning to pose?

When the French Communist Party in 1935 proposed to the reformist CGT and "left" workers' leaders the course of a General Strike against the Government, Trotsky wrote:

"With this we are in full accord. But we demand that the leaders of the working class organizations themselves understand and explain to the masses the meaning of the general strike under the present conditions as well as how it must be prepared."<sup>2</sup>

Trotsky's forces in France at this time were miniscule, and the time available for preparation for the General Strike could only be measured in months. But nothing was more alien to Trotsky's whole outlook than the passive fatalism of Comrade Grant. Trotsky knew perfectly well that the centrist and reformist French workers' leaders were psychologically and by nature incapable of understanding, explaining or preparing for a real General Strike. For a General Strike posed the question of power. "Nothing", as he explained,

"can be on a higher plane than the general strike, except the armed insurrection. The entire history of the working class movement proves that every general strike, whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has an internal tendency to transform itself into an open revolutionary clash, into direct struggle for power."<sup>3</sup>

One would as likely get struggle for power and armed insurrection from reformists and centrists as sweet smells from rotten beetroot. Was Trotsky therefore being "entirely comical" in placing such "impossible" demands on the reformist leaders? Not at all. He was acting in accordance with the elementary tactics of Bolshevism as tried and tested during the October Revolution and the months leading up to it.

The point is that the essence of centrism and reformism is refusal to struggle for power. The essence of Bolshevism is just the opposite. If the old leadership is to be defeated and a revolutionary leadership built in its stead, it is essential that in the period leading up to the revolutionary situation the issue which distinguishes the opposing sides is essentially the issue of power.

In the period leading up to the Russian October Revolution the Bolsheviks distinguished themselves from their opponents within the movement around the simple issue: whether or not to struggle for power. Even among the Bolsheviks themselves, this was the supreme question, the development of the social crisis reflecting itself in the increasing polarization between "social democratic" and communist tendencies within their own party. As the question of power begins to be posed point-blank by events, so must even the best revolutionary party begin to split under the strain. As Trotsky himself explains, speaking of this period in 1917:

"The fundamental controversial question, around which everything else centred, was this: whether or not we should struggle for power; whether or not we should assume power. This alone is ample proof that we were not then dealing with a mere episodic divergence of opinions but with two tendencies of utmost principled significance. The first and principal tendency was proletarian and led to the road of world revolution. The other was 'democratic', i.e., petty bourgeois, and led, in the last analysis, to the subordination of proletarian policies to the requirements of bourgeois society in the process of reform. These two tendencies came into hostile conflict over every essential question that

arose throughout the year 1917. It is precisely the revolutionary epoch—i.e. the epoch when the accumulated capital of the party is put in direct circulation—that must inevitably broach in action and reveal divergences of such nature. These two tendencies, in greater or lesser degree, with more or less modification, will more than once manifest themselves during the revolutionary period in every country. If by Bolshevism—and we are stressing here its essential aspect—we understand such a training, such a tempering and such an organization of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand; and if by Social Democracy we are to understand the acceptance of a reformist opposition activity within the framework of bourgeois society and an adaptation to its legality—i.e., the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state; then, indeed, it is absolutely clear that even within the Communist Party itself, which does not emerge fully-fledged from the crucible of history, the struggle between social-democratic tendencies and Bolshevism is bound to reveal itself in its most clear, open and uncamouflaged form when the question of power is posed point blank. ....As has been already said, the disagreements centred around the question of power. Generally speaking, this is the touchstone whereby the character of the revolutionary party (and of other parties as well) is determined." 4

The very slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" was a means of applying this "touchstone" to the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries who led the Soviets. The point was to bring out the essential difference between reformists and communists, showing, quite simply, that the Bolsheviks were for taking power, their opponents against it. Trotsky explains this in the "Transitional Programme". "From April to September", he writes,

"the Bolsheviks demanded that the SRs and Mensheviks break with the bourgeoisie and take power into their own hands."

The Bolsheviks knew that their opponents, being reformists, would never do any such thing. "Nevertheless", continues Trotsky,

"the demand of the Bolsheviks, addressed to the Mensheviks and the SRs: 'Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power into your own hands!' had for the masses tremendous educational significance. The obstinate unwillingness of the Mensheviks and SRs to take power, so dramatically exposed during the July Days, definitely doomed them before mass opinion and prepared the victory of the Bolsheviks."

In the period preparatory to a revolution our chief task is to break the working class from its reformist leadership. The more deep the crisis of capitalism, the more openly and desperately do the reformist leaders cling to what is left of the institutions and bodies representing the old ruling class. "Under these conditions", Trotsky continues,

"the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership, 'Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!' is an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character"

of the reformist leaders. It is not a question of picking and choosing which reformist workers' organizations to apply this tactic to. The demand "Take the power!" is not to be addressed only to bodies bearing already the formal characteristics of soviets. On the contrary it is necessary to apply this demand systematically to all the working class organizations even as they exist today. As Trotsky puts it:

"Of all parties and organizations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' and farmers' government." 5

When Trotsky in 1935 called on the reformist leaders in France to prepare for a General Strike, he was applying only a variation of this basic tactic. When in Britain in 1973 the CHARTISTS raise the slogan "T.U.C.—Prepare for the General Strike!", they are doing the same. It is an absolutely necessary slogan, rooted both in the immediate requirements of the situation in Britain today and in the tested traditions of Bolshevism.

In connection with both this slogan and the slogan "Labour, take the power!" we must finally ask Grant a few questions. Is the T.U.C. based on the working class? Does it speak in the name of the working class? Is it the organ which stands at the head of the Trade Union movement? Is it the organ which sold out—and was permitted to sell out—the 1926 General Strike? Is it the chief organ to be attacked in connection with the coming General Strike? Or should we rather ignore this body and place the demand "Prepare for the General Strike" only on "the Trades Councils, especially under Marxist leadership", whatever that extraordinary formulation might mean? (Why the "especially"?) And likewise with the Labour Party. Is it not the party to which the trade unions look for a political lead? Is it not, more than any other reformist party in Western Europe, in a position to take power on the basis of its own affiliated class organizations? Is it not therefore a classic example of the kind of party upon which above all should be placed the demand 'Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!?' Is it not absolutely necessary to make this demand in the period we are now entering, when—as Grant himself has very belatedly been forced to admit—the question of state power is beginning to be posed by events themselves? We leave it to Grant to think up an answer.

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The nub of the matter is this. Grant doesn't recommend placing any demands on the reformist T.U.C. leaders in connection with the General Strike or the question of power because, you see,

"BETRAYAL IS INHERENT IN REFORMISM. Power is posed in an all-out General Strike. Unless the leaders are prepared to fight for power **THEY MUST BETRAY THE MOVEMENT.**"

And there he leaves it. Had Grant been leading the Bolsheviks in 1917 (if readers will excuse the analogy), he would have been against calling on the Soviets to take the power because, after all,

the Soviets were led by Mensheviks, and, you see, "betrayal is inherent in Menshevism". It looks superficially like a very "left" and hard stand: betrayal is inherent in reformism; the reformists must betray etc. etc. But—as Trotsky pointed out on more than one occasion—such "ultraradicalism" is itself pure renegacy and betrayal when the conclusion is....don't confront the "leaders", keep on joking terms with them, don't engage them on the issue of power, don't demand that they do what they can't do—because, you see, betrayal is inherent in their policies.

We are obliged, unfortunately, to take Grant's position here in conjunction with his insistence that all criticism of the "lefts" in the trade union movement should be "friendly" and "constructive". While explaining academically in his "Perspectives" document that these "lefts" are "the real danger to the movement of the working class", he continues:

"But even the tiniest step forward they take must be supported, albeit critically and with explanations of the necessary measures which should be taken, and of the next step which must be taken. Criticism must be skilful and friendly. It should be positive, contrasting the Marxist programme, ideas, methods and policies, with the lame and inadequate policies of Left Reformism."

What a disgrace! Obviously the arguments should be kept on a political level. And obviously, in our dealings with the reformists, we must do our utmost to prevent our differences from obstructing unity in action on limited demands on which we can agree. But today the trade union "lefts" by stumbling towards a General Strike whilst doing nothing to prepare for it are leading the working class towards disaster. There is no earthly reason why we should be "friendly" towards them at all. On the contrary we should be ruthless in our attacks and demands on these people, understanding that while class-unity in action may be very much the point, "friendliness" is certainly not. How, in any case, can one be genuinely "friendly" towards people whom, in the small print of one's theoretical magazines, one describes as "the real danger to the movement"? The position reeks of hypocrisy. The task is not to "contrast" in a "friendly and skilful" way, the alternative merits of two sets of "programmes, ideas, methods and policies". It is to confront the reformists and centrists with implacable demands backed by an organized force: get on with the struggle; fight for power—or make way for those who will!

Grant's analysis, we concede, is faultless. As he says, unless the leaders are prepared to fight for power **THEY MUST BETRAY**. It is his conclusions which are bankrupt. For he refuses to follow through the logic of his statement in the only possible revolutionary way—i.e. by raising the demand that the leaders fight for power. This, according to him, would be "comical". Reformists cannot fight for power. Pure evasion and capitulation is thus wrapped up in the most impeccably "Marxist" verbiage. In his attacks on the CHARTISTS, Grant reaches—although from a very different standpoint—the very conclusions of those anarchists, "Red Moles" and others for whom revolutionary demands on reformist leaders are "entirely comical" and nothing more. Our job as revolutionaries is not to pander to these elements but, on the contrary, to destroy them politically as just one more obstacle in our path towards state power. As Trotsky writes:

"We must mercilessly expose the ultraradical capitulators and demand from the "leaders" clear answers to the question what to do; and we must offer our answer, for the entire country, for every section, every city, every district, every factory." 6

This pamphlet opened on the subject of perspectives. While we cannot detail our own perspectives here, it is perhaps time to tie up some strands.

We understand the position of the 'Militant' group. We know they think it is impossible to raise the "question of power" as an immediate issue facing the working class. The task—they tell us—is to ground ourselves in the situation as it really is, in the everyday struggles of the working class, rather than in the mere possibility of a General Strike at some stage in the future.

But in fact—as we answered such an objection in the November 1972 issue of the CHARTIST—

"this 'commonsense' approach is superficial in the extreme. It takes external show for reality. And while in 'normal' periods a political body founded on that basis can seem realistic and even imposing—the first breath of any real social crisis blows the dust from under its feet to reveal it suspended in mid-air.

For the CHARTISTS the task is precisely to base ourselves on the situation as it really is. But for us, the events of the miners' strike, and the even mightier upheaval over the imprisonment of the 'Pentonville Five', provide the firmest data for an understanding of this situation. These events were not peculiar aberrations, extraordinary episodes deviating from the "norm" of more peaceful class-relations. On the contrary they alone were able to tear away the outer show of normality which so easily deceives us—and to afford glimpses of what has become the true "norm" of class relations in Britain as a result of the struggles of the past few years."

This hidden "norm" is precisely a developing—as yet only embryonic—social crisis of power. The recent difficulties of the Militant stem from their inability to grasp or base themselves on this reality.

In this short pamphlet we have scarcely scratched the surface of the real problems involved. But one thing it is hoped has been shown. To the Militant group, the industrial crisis of February-March 1973—to the extent that it threatened once again the possibility of a General Strike—was yet another irritating "aberration" from the "norm" of more peaceful class relations set out in the "Perspectives" documents of Comrade Grant. Whenever the situation itself "suddenly" seems to raise the question of power, it appears to the Militant group only as an accident and a surprise—while the need to deal with it propagandistically is essentially a "distraction" from the basic programmatic and educational tasks. For these comrades, the idea that events themselves are beginning to dictate a transition from "education" to action is far from their minds. Still their ideal for Labour's youth organization in the coming period remains—as Grant puts it in his "Perspectives" document already quoted—that "the LPYS can be made into a vast educational school for the ideas of Marxism". This—as Grant in the same passage makes clear—is essentially their ideal for the trade unions and the Labour Party too.

The fact is that we are just beginning to enter a pre-revolutionary period. Grant was unable to foresee this, yet his own statement that the struggles today are more powerful and bitter than those of the early 'twenties amounts to an admission of this truth. The nub of the matter is this. Today even the most mundane, day-to-day economic struggles unavoidably raise the issue of state power. The issue may be obscured: indeed, it is the function of the reformists to obscure it. But it is there nevertheless, and must be faced. Under a leadership which fears an all-out confrontation with the state (and