

A P P E N D I X.

We saw earlier in this pamphlet what had become of the "Perspectives" of Comrade Grant published as recently as January 1973. We here re-publish the CHARTISTS' perspectives and position on the General Strike published as long ago as April 1971. The following was the lead-article of Vol. 1 No. 5 of the CHARTIST, which was then the bulletin of the Young Chartists. Readers may judge for themselves which position has been borne out by events.

D A N G E R—G E N E R A L S T R I K E !

(April 1971).

FOR ALL SECTIONS OF THE LABOUR AND REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS NOW THE life-or-death question is not "Will there be a General Strike?" but "How do we prepare for it?". That a General Strike—in fact a working-class upsurge of far greater proportions than 1926—is being slowly prepared by the present class-conflict between the trade unions and the Tory Government cannot be doubted. That the TUC itself on March 18 was forced to vote on the question shows how far we have come since the fight against "in Place of Strife". Inevitably, the vote went against a strike.

But the sheer scale of the TUC demonstration in February, the almost unanimous response to the AEF and T&GWU's "Kill the Bill" strikes in March, the bowing of whole sections of the official TU leadership to the shop-floor demand for a one-day General Strike—these are events whose historical significance is wholly beyond the grasp of today's working-class "leaders" even on the "Left".

Suddenly, almost without warning, the whole situation in which we find ourselves has changed. Suddenly decisive sectors—even if as yet a minority—of the working class have become politicised as they have never been for decades—one can even say since the early and middle 'twenties. The March strikes were the biggest political strikes since 1926. The idea of political strike action has taken root and will dog the "moderate" leaders increasingly as the Tories try to impose their fines and laws.

And all the time the mood of hitherto "moderate" workers in their millions has hardened and become bitter as this Government's class-face has been revealed. With unemployment approaching the million mark, with prices literally soaring in every sector, with the lowest of low-paid groups such as the postmen being savagely victimized while police and top civil servants get favoured treatment—and with class measures such as the "economic rents" policy to top the lot—the demand to bring down this Tory Government is becoming a popular rallying-cry even apart from opposition to the "Industrial Relations Bill".

In the coming period anything could happen. The economic crisis is becoming desperate and allows little leeway for the ruling class. Every section of the people must be oppressed. Every major strike now becomes a political conflict with repercussions far beyond the industry directly concerned. And strikes are getting longer and more bitter. The postmen will not forget or forgive. With them, the Tories were lucky. But 'defeats' such as the postmen's—if piled up one on the other—are the kind of events which have led men to the barricades. One false move by the Tories against a section of workers in the future could provoke a revolt in which the pent-up anger of millions of until-now patient, long-suffering and "moderate" trade-unionists—joined by that of housewives, tenants and youth who have hardly thought politically before—exploded in a full-scale revolutionary upsurge and General Strike to put 1926 in the shade.

The terrible danger in all this arises precisely from the fact that our political "leaders" are almost oblivious as to what it means. Some

Labour Members of Parliament and right-wing trade union leaders, it is true, understand quite well what is happening and are consciously striving to lead us to defeat. They know full well that a full-scale General Strike would imperil capitalism itself, they have come down on capitalism's side and they are deliberately aiming to split and weaken the Labour movement.

But by far the most influential leaders nowadays are those on the "left", either in the Communist Party or on the trade-union wing of the Labour Party, and here the main trouble is the most hopeless confusion, and a self-delusion which deludes those who listen to them, too. Here, co-existent with a more or less vague desire for "socialism" is a most pitiable fear of the employing class, fear of the state and the army, fear of provoking a real conflict and struggle for working class power. "What happens after a General Strike? Are we advocating revolution and civil disorder?" asked Jack Peel at the TUC Special Congress. This right-winger was successful in frightening the delegates. They want to believe that a show-down can be avoided—and so they tell themselves and their supporters that it can, that "reason" and "negotiations" and "pressure" will settle things to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The terrible danger is that this leaves millions of our fellow-workers unprepared for the decisive show-down which is now inevitable. We are in a position in which a revolutionary situation is approaching. A General Strike is going to come, whether we like it or not. But a General Strike is a terrible weapon for those who are not prepared to handle it. A General Strike means that we challenge the constitution and government. We must be prepared to face the troops being brought in against us. We must know how to appeal to the troops, how to win them to our side, how to link their desire for democracy within the army to our own movement for democracy in industry and in society. A General Strike means that we either win or we lose. It poses the question of power. Either we and the whole labour movement take hold of the power of the state, or we are crushed for a whole period. A General Strike is not something to be treated flippantly. Any "leader" who demands an unlimited General Strike must be asked: "And what is your strategy for winning it? Should we follow you, how do you propose leading us to the armed conquest of power?" People who shout "General Strike!, General Strike!" and refuse to answer that question should be exposed as the "revolutionary" charlatans they are.

When the Socialist Labour League, rank-and-file Communist Party members and large sections of the shop stewards' and trade union movement raise the demand for a General Strike we CHARTISTS say:

"Yes! A General Strike really is the only way to defeat the Tory Government and its anti-union legislation! But to be successful a General Strike must transform itself into a full-scale social revolution. If we are not ready for a social revolution—and the whole labour movement should be ready for this—then we are not ready for a General Strike, and if we were pushed into such a strike it could only end in a fiasco."

That is how our position is put. We give neither an abstract "Yes" nor an abstract "No" to the call for a General Strike, but rather explain what the General Strike really means, solidarizing ourselves with the demand for a General Strike, raising it to the demand for the seizure of power itself, and at the same time warning of the dangers of a General Strike whose objective is anything short of armed insurrection, preparing the movement for the future tasks confronting it and doing all we can to prevent an adventuristic or premature outbreak.

Yes, this is a "cautious" approach. But far from being "reformist" or "compromisist" the Young Chartists in this respect are acting in

the best traditions of Bolshevism. If we have our way, then when we embark on the General Strike the whole movement will have been prepared in advance, and we will utilise the opportunity to conquer the armed power of the state.

To seize power under a Tory Government would not be easy. The ideal under present circumstances would be for the Government to be forced into resignation by the threat of a General Strike, or by such nationwide and planned industrial and political mass action as simply made it impossible for the Tory Government to govern. Do we support those who demand "A General Strike to force the Tories to resign"? Of course we do! A General Strike really could force the resignation of this government, and really could bring to power a Labour Government which would legislate a Socialist programme—but that is because a General Strike poses the question of power, disintegrates and shakes the ruling apparatus to its roots, infects the Army, the civil servants, the mass-media workers etc., and thereby makes possible the seizure of power by the labour movement and working class. A General Strike leadership whose aim was simply to call off the strike in return for a General Election would be worse than useless. From an objective standpoint it would be criminal. Just as one does not use a sledge-hammer to knock in a pin, one should not use a General Strike to obtain elections to decide which new representatives of the bourgeoisie should govern the working class. If one uses the General Strike weapon it should be treated with the respect it deserves and used as an integral part of the social revolution and a means of conquering state power. Otherwise only disaster can follow.

If there were a General Strike against the Tory Government in the near future, if the whole apparatus of the bourgeois state became paralysed, if the troops were sent against us and their officers feared they would refuse to shoot, if workers began to occupy their factories, and then....the Tories promised elections and the strike were called off—then what would be the result? The ruling class would have received the fright of its life. It would believe—rightly—that its very existence as a class had been threatened. Its Tory representatives would feel—rightly—that they had won a lucky victory in getting the developing revolution nipped in the bud so easily in exchange for elections. The militant workers would feel cheated and defeated, having tasted power only to be robbed of it. The Tories would revel in their victory, the workers' leaders would be howled down by the bourgeois press, "law and order" would appear victorious, the political parties would vie with each other for the "law and order" vote—and the outcome of the elections would be a foregone conclusion. The possibility of a new General Strike might not arise for a whole period, and a "Labour Government with a Socialist Programme" would be a prospect no less distant.

We support the slogan "for a General Strike to bring down the Tory Government" because we support the socialist programme, the working class seizure of power and the nationalization of the monopolies by a workers' government. As far as the Young Chartists are concerned, we would be quite happy to lead an armed insurrection and a working class seizure of power tomorrow. However, that possibility simply is not on the agenda. Nor is it on the agenda for any of the other "Marxist" groupings in the country. The mass of ordinary workers have not even heard of us, let alone recognized us as "leaders". Our task is to gain credibility for the idea of revolution, for the idea of seizing power, and to do this will require a long, long period, probably many years, of patient work in the trade unions, in the co-operative movement, in the Labour Party and in every other part of the labour movement. We must know how to unite our forces with those of other sections of the movement, how to participate in the day-to-day

struggle for economic demands, how to get results, how to retreat as well as how to advance. We must become a real power in the movement, and we will not do that by issuing abstract demands for instant General Strikes.

We would be ready for a General Strike and a seizure of power tomorrow—if the working class followed our lead. If we were in the place of Vic Feather and the leaders of the Labour Party—i.e. if we had the mass support they have—we would be in a position to throw out the Tories and seize state power without delay, and we would do so. We would use our position to strengthen the whole working class, bringing the authority and weight of the TUC and Parliamentary Labour Party behind every strike action in defence of wages and conditions, ensuring that no section of the movement was left isolated, forcing the Tory Government to confront the whole weight of the labour movement at every point, forcing concessions out of them on wages, the £20 National Minimum wage, Equal Pay, a rent and price freeze, mobilizing huge demonstrations not to "let off steam" but to reveal the movement's strength and to help all sections of the working population identify with it and feel its power as their own. If—in the Labour leaders' place—we really dug our heels in against the Tories and employers, if we really used the strength available to us, if we unconditionally backed the shop stewards', tenants' and other movements from Congress House and from Parliament, if we used all the means of propaganda at our disposal to issue our class appeal and won actual gains for the people despite the Tories and employers—then the whole weight of the working class would rally in a body to our support. Even more backward workers and large sections of the middle class would be convinced in action that we were a movement and a Labour Party prepared to back them and defend their interests come what may.

Such a force as this could topple the Tories almost without effort. We would demand elections. If the Tories refused to hold them, then a General Strike—prepared in advance—could be called, we could take over our factories and places of work and elections could be held through our own labour movement organizations and under our own auspices. If the Tories allowed a General Election, that would be better still, and we would use the General Strike to take power after assuming office in Parliament. With the press and mass media taken out of the control of the millionaires and operated by the journalists, technicians and workers themselves, the Tories would be unlikely to win another election again. And if the Labour Party became what it should be and what it was originally set up to be—that is, an organization embracing all the working-class parties and unions within it—we in the Labour Party would be in a position where we held power permanently, and elections were held not to decide between Tory and Labour but only to decide the composition and policies of the Labour Government.

We would immediately proceed to legislate the nationalization of the giant monopolies—Ford, ICI, the Insurance Companies—without compensation and under workers' control. We would ruthlessly crack down on any attempt to "mutiny" in support of the "Crown" or the old order, if necessary appealing to the troops against their officers, arming the entire working class if need be. That is how we would act if we were in the shoes of the trade union and Labour leaders in the period ahead. That course of action is what we mean by our "socialist programme". That is how we pose our demand that the TUC and Labour leaders call a General Strike to force the Tories to resign. For us it is part and parcel of the programme of revolution which we openly proclaim.

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R E F E R E N C E S .

1. Leon Trotsky, Lessons of October, (The Essential Trotsky, Unwin Books, 1963 p 173).
2. Leon Trotsky, Whither France, (Lanka Samasamaja, 1961, p 73).
3. Ibid. p 74.
4. Leon Trotsky, Lessons of October, pp 126-127.
5. Leon Trotsky, The Transitional Programme, New Park, pp 37-38.