



Chris Harman

Class struggle hots up

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*At the annual Easter rally of the Socialist Workers Party, **Chris Harman**, editor of **Socialist Worker** examined the state of class struggle in Britain today. We reprint his talk here.*

On the face of it, the situation in the class struggle has changed dramatically over the last four months or so. Last October we talked about the 'downturn'. We meant it was like being stuck in a calm of the class struggle, gradually drifting backwards.

It was miserable: no mass strikes, or pickets or demonstrations. Only when you talked about the general politics could you escape from the feeling of misery. If you looked at the struggle it was a story of defeats.

Then there was Warrington. Mass pickets, thousands of people fighting the police; things we hadn't seen for several years. There was a two-day shutdown of Fleet Street. Suddenly the class struggle was back in the centre of the stage. It was not just what Marxists talked about, it was something the press featured day after day. Then Warrington went down, and we were back in the downturn, back to the defeats. Then along came GCHQ.

Again, suddenly there was a situation in which masses of workers were taking action. There was a mass strike – a bureaucratic mass strike, lasting only a day or half a day – but a mass strike bigger than anything in the last ten years, with over a million workers on strike.

It was organised at tremendous speed. Outside the civil service, it was organised on one day. What was amazing was the sight of engineering factories which hadn't been involved in political strike action for ten years, out on strike. Places where you wouldn't expect workers to take action – like some of the nuclear installations – went on strike. There were reports of workers getting together and just walking out, because they felt they had to respond.

Most important strike

Then GCHQ went away. Now suddenly we are in the midst of the miners' strike. This is the most important single strike since 1974, the most important single confrontation against the Thatcher government. And again, before the nonsense at the Libyan embassy, it was a situation where the class struggle was the main item on the news day after day; not just for three or

four days, but five solid weeks. The miners' strike, the pickets and the battle between the miners and the police was the central news item.

Having said that, we have to be very careful how we analyse the situation. Because if we aren't careful, we will make mistakes which will to a small extent affect the outcome of the strike. To a much greater extent they can affect what we are trying to build; a network of politically committed militants, a revolutionary party rooted in the working class.

When we come to analyse the situation, we have to start from what we said before the struggle started.

We didn't just talk about the downturn, although we looked at how defeats bred defeats, at how the lack of confidence in the class led either to no fightback, or to a reluctance on the part of the trade union bureaucracy which led to further defeats. We also said that the situation of calm in the struggle was bound to be shattered sooner or later.

We argued this very hard against people like Eric Hobsbawm, who said that the working class was finished. I wonder where Hobsbawm is now during the miners' strike? I imagine he's gone off to Italy to see if the working class is finished there.

Against the idea that the class struggle was no longer central, we argued that the downturn had to be recognised; the slow defeat of the class, the drip-drip Chinese torture effect on the class struggle. But we also said that the situation could not last indefinitely. We pointed to two ways in which there would be a breakthrough, leading to an intensification of the class struggle.

Firstly, any revival in the economy would lead to increased confidence in the workplaces. The moment when workers are no longer faced with mass redundancies, when

they don't see every night on television a list of hundreds of jobs being lost, orders coming in, the company beginning to make money, then there's the feeling that the workforce should get some of it. That's when confidence starts to rise and there's an increase in fighting spirit.

Secondly we argued that in spite of the downturn, in spite of the defeats and retreats, the basic problem facing British capitalism hadn't been solved. That problem is that wages are too high for British capital to overcome the problem it faces in terms of the low rate of profit. Eighteen months ago, **The Economist** estimated that real wages had to be cut by 25 percent to solve the crisis of profitability. We argued that meant that the ruling class could not be satisfied with the drip-drip effect on the class. At some point when they believed they had worn working class resistance right down, they would really try to put the boot in.

So we argued that an intensification of the struggle could come from two factors: on one .hand, the increasing confidence on the shopfloor, and on the other that the ruling class really putting the knife in and in doing so arousing the working class to struggle. What has actually happened is a combination of those two things. But we have to try to analyse exactly what the particular combination, what the proportion is.

There has been a change of mood, which we began to notice before the miners' strike. For example, if you look at Cowley and Longbridge, they are not the same as they were under Edwardes. Now you're not talking about a situation in which the stewards are hiding in case any one notices them. Instead there is strike after strike; you don't even notice them now. Last week 800 workers at Longbridge came out on strike. It doesn't make the headlines any more. Now that Leyland is making money, workers have more confidence

and they go on strike with increased confidence. There is guerrilla struggle in the factories.

If you look at the strike over GCHQ, engineering factories from one end of the country to the other which hadn't taken action in years, came out. And they didn't worry that the stewards would be sacked if they took strike action.

Even if you look at the mines, before this strike there were the other disputes in Yorkshire like the one over bullying by the overseers, which was a very big unofficial dispute. Even last year there were signs of a change in mood in terms of a succession of small strikes here and there.

Change in mood

That change in mood, that increased confidence which is undoubtedly there, isn't sufficient to explain the intensify of the present struggle. Much more important in some ways than the change in mood is the fact that the ruling class has set about trying to put the boot in. Five years ago we talked about the fact that the ruling class didn't dare to make a frontal attack on the key sections of the working class. Instead their strategy was to attack on the edges primarily to soften up the movement until the time when they felt confident enough to attack the more powerful sections.

If you look at what's happened to wages under the Tories you can see the strategy at work. Powerful sections like the miners and power workers have actually done reasonably well in terms of wages. The attacks have been on the weaker

sections like workers covered by Wages Councils and young workers, and so on. Chipping away at the edges rather than going for a frontal attack.

In terms of the anti-union laws, the same strategy applies. People think there's a big difference between Prior and Tebbit and King. There isn't. Prior was the soft cop, Tebbit and King are the hard cops.

What did the soft cop involve? Passing the law, and being very very careful how it was implemented; not confronting the powerful sections of the class. Tebbit comes after Prior has done the softening up. Tebbit goes a bit harder. King comes after Tebbit and starts tightening the thumb-screws. No doubt someone will come after King and tighten them even more – if they get away with it.

This strategy can be called the salami tactic. When you cut salami you don't take a knife straight down the middle. You cut it one slice at a time. Having used the salami tactic on the working class movement for four years without taking on the central core of the movement, some elements of the ruling class – what we could call the Thatcherite wing – want to go faster.

They argue that much more can be done to push home the attacks. The steelworkers have been beaten. They believe they have beaten the Leyland workers with the Edwards Plan. Their target moved to the key, powerful sections of the class, the print workers, the miners and I'm convinced the dockers will be next.

They believe that the time is right to take on these groups of workers. But much of the ruling class has doubts. They're what we might call the Heath wing, who remember all too bitterly what happened ten years, ago.

They argue against moving too quickly, for caution, for collaboration with the trade union leaders. The Thatcherite

wing – the Institute of Directors, Eddie Shah and so on – think that the unions have been weakened so much in the last five years, and before that with the Social Contract, that the time is right to put the boot in. That’s what we’ve been seeing since November.

Look at Warrington. There the Institute of Directors and Shah decided to try to prove that the print unions were paper tigers. And they think that they got away with it. The evidence is that Robert Maxwell, who then offered Eddie Shah four million pounds to stop taking the print unions to court, himself took these same unions to court in the week before Easter. What happened to Maxwell? He understood that he didn’t have to go on being a soft cop, that it was possible to go in much harder.

So, following the attack in Warrington in November you had the attack on the shipyard workers, the national agreement forced down their throats with the acquiescence of the trade union leadership. The ruling class became more confident. The balance within the ruling class shifted away from the Heath wing towards the Thatcher wing. Then came GCHQ with Thatcher and Howe really taking an enormous gamble in banning trade union organisation in a section of the civil service. And they got away with it. That transmitted itself to MacGregor. If they can get away with it at Warrington and GCHQ, why not the miners?

MacGregor’s reasoning is: it’s spring. Scargill’s been turned over three times in ballots for industrial action. Now was the time to show that the miners, too, are just a paper tiger. So the boot goes in on the miners.

All these disputes show the ruling class on the offensive. It wasn’t the NGA who made Warrington a national dispute. It wasn’t the civil service unions or Len Murray who chose to raise the stakes at Cheltenham. It wasn’t Scargill or Jack

Taylor who made the miners come out on strike. It was the ruling class putting the boot in.

What is important of course is that when the ruling class puts the boot in, the shift in confidence in sections of the class translates into a fightback, whereas two years ago a fightback might have been less likely. So you did get a two day stoppage in Fleet Street over Warrington. You did get a magnificent response when Len Murray walked out of his meeting with Thatcher.

Ruling class attack

What about the mines? MacGregor, having got away with Kinneil, having got away with South Wales, believed he could get away with Yorkshire and provocative action. The preparations in terms of stockpiles are there, the calculation is that he can outlast the miners. Because of the shift in confidence of a section of the class, his action was met by picketing from a couple of pits in Yorkshire, who picketed out the rest of the area. Then the other coalfields started to move. The national leadership was forced to give the go ahead to the strike, which spread.

You can see here the combination of factors. The smaller factor was the growth in confidence in the class. The larger factor was the objective needs of British capitalism leading to a section of the ruling class wanting to have a go. Having understood the situation, we can also look at it from the point of view of the ruling class. Each time they attacked, they have provoked a response, but that response has not

led to victories by the working class. We have to be clear about it.

The mass pickets at Warrington were magnificent. They chanted 'the workers united will never be defeated' – but the class was not united, behind revolutionary behaviour, and they were defeated. Again, the response over Cheltenham was marvellous, but it was only a minority united behind Len Murray, who could call out a million workers on a one day general strike but couldn't have disrupted the security of Her Majesty's Government through organisation on the shopfloor in Cheltenham. If you look at the miners' strike, it seems fantastic – the picketing, the organisation, the demonstration in Sheffield ten days ago – marvellous. Except in the ruling class's mind they saw it over Warrington, they saw it over Cheltenham, and they believe they will get away with it over the miners.

For us it's tremendously important to be clear about the situation. It's very easy to get carried away when the struggle starts picking up, to get carried away by the fact that a fight is taking place, and to misunderstand the character of the fight.

In the class struggles both sides have lines of defence. What has happened with Warrington and CGHQ and what's now happening with the miners is that the ruling class is trying to break through our lines of defence. When that happens there is a tremendously big battle. You can't sit back and say 'this is offensive or defensive' or 'it's the upturn or the downturn' you have to throw everything you have into that battle. But you have to understand the character of that battle.

That is clearest when you look at the mines. Consider the timing of the dispute. If it were true, as the media would have us believe that Arthur Scargill engineered the strike to fight the government, the conclusion would have to be that

he was mad. Why else would he start a miners' strike in March?

If he was after a confrontation with the government, wouldn't he make sure that all the miners would come out? It is a strike provoked by the ruling class, part of a ruling class offensive which we have to respond to.

If you look at the other element in the situation – the changing mood of workers – you have to understand that it is a section, a minority of the class which has become more militant. The rest of the working class is still in the same mental state, the breakdown of solidarity and so on that it was two or three years ago.

The shift in the mood of the working class is fantastically uneven.

Compare the present miners' strike with the strike in 1972. In 1972 when the strike started there was total unity amongst the miners. In the present strike there was solidarity and unity in Yorkshire, but at the beginning there was weakness in South Wales and Scotland and still, six weeks or so into the dispute, there is this hole in Nottinghamshire. That's quite different from the situation in 1972. The downturn means that there is tremendous unevenness in the class, some sections ready to fight, other sections holding back. You see the unevenness in another sense, when you look at the organisation of the pickets.

Mass pickets

It is important for everyone to realise just how weak the picketing is. If you think about the demonstration in Sheffield ten days ago, you think it was marvellous. All those miners on the streets. Then you think: in

1972 there were forty thousand miners picketing. This time, in coalfield after coalfield, pit after pit, the story comes back: we can't get the money for petrol to go and picket.

The reason is that the downturn has had its effect. You don't even have to compare it with 1972 in the mines, you can look at the steelworkers' dispute in 1980 in a union which hadn't had a strike in fifty years. If you went to the strike headquarters in Stockbridge, it was like a military operation. They had a list of places where people had to go and they lined them up and sent them off. They reckoned half the steelworkers had volunteered for picketing.

With the exception of a few pits, that's not how the picketing is being organised in the miners' strike. There isn't that level of organisation or involvement. The unevenness means you have very militant pits where there are large numbers of miners volunteering to picket and others where that's not happening.

The unevenness is there in a third sense too, when you look at how the miners can win. In 1972 it was solidarity from other workers that was crucial to victory. Saltley wasn't in the mining areas, it was in Birmingham. It was the solidarity of thousands of engineering workers in Birmingham who went on strike and joined the miners on the picket line at Saltley coke depot which ensured success.

If you consider the situation today you see a minority of the class showing fantastic support and solidarity with the miners while other sections are very backward. In 1972 there weren't the squeals about layoffs that there are now. Workers didn't line up with their employers against the strike because of layoffs. Don't imagine it was because there were fewer layoffs in 1972. One and a half million workers were laid off as a result of the pit strike then.

That's why the strike won. A million and a half workers laid off means very large sections of industry where production had stopped, and profits were not being made. Today you have a situation where on the one hand there is fantastic solidarity, levies, real willingness to support the miners, and on the other hand, you have whole sections holding back. For us what is important is that this unevenness leads to real weaknesses and gaps in the organisation of the strike, and the blacking.

We can analyse the unevenness a bit more. We can say that the unevenness is as a result of two different factors – objective factors – to do with things as they are – and subjective factors, arguments, organisation, politics. Take the simplest example of the unevenness, that between Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. Partly, this is as a result of objective factors. In 1977, the Labour government and dear old Tony Benn, pushed through a productivity deal which had the effect that miners working in one pit could earn nearly twice as much as miners in another pit for doing the same amount of work. Now that is the beginning of a very important explanation for the differences between Yorkshire and the Midland coalfields. In Nottinghamshire you have a large number of pits where wages are twice as high as in some pits in South Wales, Scotland and parts of Yorkshire. But that's not the end of the explanation.

In Yorkshire there are pits with exactly the same high wage rates as those in Nottingham. So it's not just a question of the objective factor, it's also a question of the subjective factor; argument, organisation, leadership. When we ask ourselves why after six or seven weeks the strike isn't as developed as it was in 1972, we have to answer that it is partly a result of objective factors – the Social Contract, the productivity deal, the downturn and partly the result of

subjective factors. That is to say, the terrible, disastrous policies of the Broad Lefts in these industries

In the mines in Nottinghamshire, 25 percent of the miners voted for strike action. Now I suspect you wouldn't have had much more than that in Selby. But Selby came out and Nottinghamshire didn't. Why? Because the Broad Left in Nottingham is absolutely rotten through and through. Richardson, general secretary of the Nottinghamshire miners, was elected on a Broad Left platform. What does that mean? It means that instead of being based in one pit, with groups of workers round him who will picket out that pit, and set the strike rolling in Nottinghamshire from the first day that Yorkshire was out, he represents the whole of Nottinghamshire.

In reality he represents nothing. He can't bring a single pit out on strike. So to bring out Nottinghamshire you have to picket from Yorkshire.

Of course we're in favour of pickets going from Yorkshire to bring out Nottinghamshire, but nevertheless, it allows the right wing to argue that it's a question of Yorkshire versus Nottinghamshire. Instead of it being all miners together it becomes like a football match, were the lads from Yorkshire meet the lads from Nottinghamshire and fight it out. The right wing are able to play on it because of the rottenness of the Broad Left.

Building support

It comes back to the arguments we have been having during the downturn about building the politics, relating to the minority, not in terms of arguing for socialist revolution, but in terms of locating and

organising the minority in any factory or industry who will be able to set the ball rolling when the time comes. The politics of the Broad Lefts means that they rush to win the positions but they can't carry anything with them when it comes to the fightback.

When they can't carry anything with them they do even worse, which is what Richardson did. He led the moaners and complainers against the Yorkshire pickets. He didn't resign his position and say 'I'm going back to my pit to build support for a stoppage'. He spent four weeks first on one side and then the other, first trying to look like the Yorkshire miners, then trying to be indistinguishable from Chadburn.

If you look at the weakness of the picketing the question of Broad Left politics is important as well. In 1969 there was an unofficial strike in Yorkshire. The official leadership in Yorkshire then was rotten, right wing and corrupt.

Under those circumstances, the Panel met - that was the delegates from each pit including Scargill and other left wingers who are now in the leadership but then were rank and file miners - and they organised a strike against the Yorkshire leadership. The strike was organised by unofficial strike committees without a penny from the central funds in Yorkshire.

What happened to the people who led that struggle was that they got pushed further and further up the union structures, and more and more enmeshed in the bureaucracy. So now they are worried about spending the eight million pounds that the Yorkshire NUM has in its funds. They have got cut off from the ordinary miners. But because they are a left bureaucracy, not a right wing one, the militants on the ground in Yorkshire find it very hard to argue and organise against them.

If the leadership was right wing, it would be easy to argue against them in favour of picketing to stop the scabs. Because it is a left leadership, they can argue that those who want to do that are setting miner against miner, playing into the hands of the right.

Broad Left politics means that the input to the strike by the militants, the arguments and organisation are much weaker than they could have been.

On any reckoning in terms of ability, Arthur Scargill is a much better leader and organiser than Jack Taylor. Yet for six weeks the strike was run, or not run, by Jack Taylor. Why? Because Arthur Scargill saw the most important thing as getting elected President of the NUM and going to the headquarters in Sheffield every day. Because the special conference decided it was an area strike, and the constitution says area strikes are organised by the area, the running of the strike has been left to Taylor.

So you have the weird spectacle that Scargill who knows something about organising mass pickets, doesn't organise them, whereas Jack Taylor, who has no idea how to do anything, does.

Whenever Jack Taylor appears on television he's always in his office, never on the picket line. The reason why this is the situation is because of their politics. Broad Left politics means you abide by the constitution. You go up and up, and when you reach the top, instead of denouncing someone like Chadburn, you pretend he's on your side.

The unevenness is partly a result of objective factors, but when it comes to responding to that unevenness, plugging the gaps in the dispute, it becomes a question of politics. Of course, after a long period of downturn you're going to have unevenness, the question then is, how can it be dealt with? And then the question of politics is central.

If instead of a half a dozen or a dozen miners in Yorkshire in the SWP, we had had fifty or sixty, who had organised during the unofficial strike last year and had been involved in trying to build resistance in the last three years or so, I believe it would have made a considerable difference in terms of the picketing and organisation of the strike.

The trouble is that we as an organisation are too small and too weak to fill the gaps in the dispute. That doesn't mean we should sit around moaning about how terribly weak we are but we have to recognise the reality of the situation. The problem isn't just in the mines; everywhere in the class is this weakness in politics in each pit, factory and workplace.

One obvious way in which the unevenness shows itself is in the up and down nature of the strike.

It is a manic-depressive strike. You feel defeatist one day, over the moon the next, defeatist again the next. You get the same response talking to miners: the same miner who one day is saying 'Arthur Scargill walks on water' is very depressed about the strike the day after.

This isn't surprising when you consider the nature of the dispute. There is this massive struggle going on in which the ruling class has tried to break through our lines, and the minority of the class has rallied to fightback. But there's no effective leadership and no effective co-ordination, so the thing is very haphazard and accident prone.

What can we do in this situation?

There is a problem: the picketing isn't heavy enough, the blacking isn't adequate. Things have been bungled from the start, both in terms of the organisation of the strike and the organisation of solidarity. And our organisation cannot make up for that.

What to do?

There is a vacuum in the leadership of the strike and our organisation is not in a position to fill it. There is a danger in this situation, and that danger is that we will just service the strike. That we will just get involved in collecting money, for example.

Now of course we should collect money. We argued from the beginning that collections would not only raise money but would make sure that the strike was raised with other workers, would sow the seeds of solidarity, identify those people who would join us in supporting the strike and bring people closer to the party. But the danger is that the money has been so bungled at the level of the bureaucracy that we will merely try to fill the gap.

We have to collect money, but we have to do more than that. The same problem can arise with delegations of miners in some areas. The picketing has been so badly organised and mishandled that miners prefer to go round on delegations to other workplaces, trade union branches, Labour Party branches, etc rather than face the hard graft on getting the picketing organised and doing it. So we can get into the situation where we're taking miners on delegations and getting money, but not confronting the central problems of the dispute: the weakness of the picketing and the weakness in the blacking.

While we have to do the servicing of the strike we have to raise one central question: 'What is to be done?' That should really be our slogan in the present period. We have to say it when things look miserable; we have to say there are things which can be done to retrieve the situation. We also have to say it when things look exciting. It is very easy to get carried away. I always think it's a good idea to remember Lenin at

the Finland Station. After years of exile, poverty, misery, trying to produce a paper, police agents throughout the organisation, then four days in a sealed train going through Germany, he got off the train to be greeted by red banners, workers' councils, revolution.

It would have been all too easy to have said: 'Long live the Revolution!' 'The workers united will never be defeated!' Much harder to say: 'What revolution? Down with the War! Down with the provisional government, down with the capitalist ministers, the revolution is going down to defeat'.

As a revolutionary you must always ask the question: 'What is to be done?'

In August/September 1917, Lenin wrote a pamphlet about the need for the working class to take power. It wasn't called **Forward to Victory** or **Victory is Certain**. It was called **The coming catastrophe and how to avert it**. He was trying to answer the question: 'What is to be done?'

Central question

In the current struggle we have to get involved in servicing the strike, we can't stand on the sidelines but we must not forget the central question of how the strike is to be won. We have to look reality in the face. The truth is painful, but telling lies can lead to death. The truth about this strike is that it has been going on for six weeks and still the picketing isn't being effectively organised. Many of those weeks have been wasted weeks. In terms of hitting the capitalist class much more could have been done. We have to be honest.

If we tell the truth, occasions may come during the course of the strike when what we have to say could exert an influence, could have an effect. Because in situations when two great weights balance each other, a feather put down on one side can alter the situation decisively. But unfortunately it is also likely that the strike will run its course without us having any such decisive effect.

So what can we do? The key weakness is a weakness of leadership. The key thing we have to do – and we shouldn't be ashamed about this – is to build the network of revolutionary militants in the class necessary for the battle afterwards,

That sounds as if we don't care about the strike. But we don't take the attitude that strikes don't matter, except as far as they teach you to fight the capitalist class. We don't say that. Of course we say, this strike is tremendously important, everything must be thrown into winning it: organise levies, solidarity blacking and so forth.

But we also have to face the fact that our intervention may not make any real difference to the outcome of the strike but that we must make sure our forces are bigger when the next battle comes. Because the miners' strike isn't happening in a vacuum. It follows on from Warrington and the GCHQ.

The Thatcher wing of the ruling class produced Warrington, GCHQ and the miners. And whichever way the miners' strike goes, the Thatcher wing of the ruling class will be back. Maybe it will be the dockers next, maybe some other group of workers. But she'll be back. Thatcher's like a woodpecker. The way to deal with a woodpecker is to take its beak away. Every child knows what a woodpecker without a beak is called: a headbanger.

The key thing for us is that the struggle will not go away, no matter what the outcome. It is not true that any mass battle in the middle of a downturn which leads to victory

automatically generalises itself into further victories. Even in the upturn, even when the miners won in 1972, the engineering workers in Manchester went down to defeat shortly afterwards. In July 1972, the dockers won. Three months later, Heath's government imposed a nil percent pay freeze which was effective for three or four months. There was no revolutionary leadership in the class. What leadership there was, Len Murray, was off to do deals with Heath the moment the dockers won.

The key question for us, then, is building that revolutionary leadership. How do we do that? By raising our political profile all the way through. Every centrist or reformist asks: 'Do you stand for the interests of the party or the class?' Our reply to that is: 'The interests of the party and the class are the same.' The reason why the class has taken a hammering is that it doesn't have a revolutionary leadership in it, a leadership on the shopfloor, a leadership not involved in Broad Left manoeuvring, but instead leading struggles where struggles are possible. The possibility of beginning to build the elements of that political leadership is there.

First of all, recruitment. We don't expect massive recruitment, but we do believe every branch can put on four or five members.

Secondly, the branches have to systematically search out the minority of the class whose mood has changed. One easy test: which workplaces in your locality went on strike over GCHQ? In those places there is a minority of militants, of activists prepared to organise and struggle when the moment comes. If it comes to solidarity action with the miners, not just the one day strike in Scotland, but strikes in the whole country, it will be the minority who organise them.

How do we get to that minority? First of all of course by going round trying to get support for the miners. That's the first step. But it means nothing if you just knock on the door, get donations and go away again. Any Labour Party person could do that. What matters is doing that, but making sure that you sell a copy of **Socialist Worker**.

Role of politics

Look at the BLOC Conference in Sheffield in March. We had a meeting there attended by 400 delegates, addressed by, Tony Cliff. It was a very good meeting with much more detailed discussion than the rhetoric of the conference.

It is easy to say: 'Marvellous, we got 400 people to our meeting,' and forget that there were 2,000 other people at the conference. People who by and large are interested in reformist ideas in the Broad Lefts and so on. When our speakers at the conference made an intervention, they got applause. When Tony Benn or Terry Fields spoke they got more applause, but our speakers were applauded.

It means many of these people will buy **Socialist Worker**, they will relate to our organisation – if we seize the opportunities.

We have to understand the strike, and understand the key role of politics within it. It is not a question of being optimistic, or pessimistic about the strike. The key thing for us is to focus on the weaknesses of the strike, to locate them and focus on them.

This is not to demoralise people, but to say 'What is to be done?' If we do this, we can build the reputation of our

party, we can build up networks of militants around us, so that if there is a dock strike in November or a civil service strike next year, or whatever the next struggle is, we will be that much stronger. We will be more able to provide the leadership which will make victory not just possible, but certain.
