

Teachers Strike

One month after the miners strike the indications are that the defeat of the miners has not left the British working class cowed as in 1926. The state's £3 Billion investment in the strike is not showing any guaranteed returns. And if the miners strike was the most dramatic of the state's attempts to crush workers' resistance to austerity, there have been others - eg. the £200 Million spent over ten months to defeat 400 Civil servants in Newcastle so that efficiency measures could be imposed with a saving of £50,000. In strict terms of profit and loss such disputes do not make a great deal of sense but their real importance for the state lies in their encouragement of a 'mood of realism' - in other words apathy, fatalism and demoralisation.

Perhaps a significant pointer to the fact that this mood of capitalist realism is not sweeping workers is the present teachers strike. When what are called by sociologists the 'middle class' take up the class struggle, its a clear sign that the fragile 'social consensus' bought by the boom years is well and truly over. During the 70's the state attempted to focus its austerity attacks on the social wage (education, health care, welfare provision etc.) but in the 80's we have seen the attacks becoming more and more direct (jobs and wages) as the bourgeoisie's room for manoeuvre has narrowed. As Communists we insist that these

attacks are the direct result of the crisis and not the personal inclinations of Thatcher. (these may have an influence, but only a marginal one - witness the often similar strategies of the 'socialist' Mitterand in France). Teachers have thus been in the firing line for some 15 years, seeing wage cut after wage cut, in real terms, accompanied by increased workload and deteriorating working conditions.

To an extent, teachers have always been an easy target. Many cling to the mystique that they have little in common with other workers - that they are 'professionals' above the cut and thrust of industrial relations. Sizeable numbers (especially in primary education) regarded struggle for pay and conditions as anathema - a denial of their mythical status. But the steady erosion of teachers' living standards (an effect increasingly felt by even '2nd wage' earners) is changing this. The elaborate promotion structure brought in in the 70's to weaken resistance to attacks has similarly begun to lose its effect. Promotion movement has clogged up and promoted staff are feeling the pinch too.

And the attacks are not just economic; austerity comes in a wide-ranging package. Thus, teachers, like workers everywhere, face a worsening climate of interfering management, petty restraints, run-down of working conditions, promotion of



Once Again the Unions Lead Teachers to Defeat.

REAL ACTION not UNION FARCE!

For years now, as the EIS has conned and demoralised us with ineffective or non-existent action, there has been a running joke that they would one day call us out during the last week of term. Well, here we are!

This one-day charade is NOT just the result of "unfortunate timing". It is the end result of cynical manipulation by the management and the EIS. The management gain by saving wages at a time when no-one gives a damn if kids miss a school day or not, (it will all help to fund the ½% "compromise" they are no doubt planning) and the EIS gain by both appearing militant and appeasing its frustrated membership, while at the same time, not actually rocking any boats.

Many of us are here today unwillingly. Yes, we are outraged by the attacks on colleagues and yes, we want to take action to defend them, but here we are again dragooned into ineffectual posturing. Most of us know this choice of day is a farce and we know many are at work refusing, understandably, to be suckered by the union: inevitably, such division in our ranks will lead to demoralisation. Why is it that time after time issues come to a head at this time of year? "Unfortunate timing"? No. It's the way management and the EIS keep us passive and biddable.

If we want to stop this rot, stop the endless erosion of wages and conditions, stop the endless sniping of promoted apparatchniks at school and Torpichen Street, we must first take control out of the hands of the EIS and ignore its loyal opposition the Rank and File, who eternally call on us to be faithful since with a better leader here and more grass-root pressure there pigs might fly!

Meaningful action will only come when we form our own strike committees in school and then link up school by school to organise strikes, work to rules and boycotts on terms and at times which benefit us and not our bosses. We all know how much more effective this strike would have been on the first day the kids return after the holidays. Most of us know we've thrown money away today. Indeed, most of us can guess the eventual "negotiated" outcome to the whole present dispute will be a wage "rise" below inflation and a new contract which will hamstring us in the future. We're being suckered and are going to go on being suckered until we decide to organise ourselves for our own interests outside the union.

Teachers are not a special case. We face the same attacks on our living standards and our working conditions that every other group of workers face. If we fight this struggle alone we will be picked off and defeated just like the miners. Our only hope is to link up our fight with other workers, like those in the health and social services, who face the same attacks and are prepared to act alongside us. THE UNIONS WILL NOT ORGANISE SUCH A COLLECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE STRUGGLE. Even within the teaching profession they divide and weaken us - primary from secondary, union from union, Scotland from England. We must organise the struggle ourselves in elected strike committees linked up throughout the country, outside of, and when necessary, AGAINST the unions.

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