

AT THE last Big Flame National conference we decided to investigate the possibility of forming a new revolutionary organisation. The first major part of this investigation has been our series of meetings on unemployment: now comes the publication of a manifesto

that makes concrete the way we see the new organisation being built. Copies of the manifesto of which we publish a summary below can be obtained from the National Secretary, 217 Wavertree Rd. Liverpool 7, price 25p. (10p + 15p postage).



TOWARDS A NEW REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION



1.

MODERN CAPITALISM AND REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

While our goals of a revolutionary struggle for communism remain unchanged, our political strategies must be based on the actual conditions of struggle, not dictated by universal formulae.

The post 1945 conditions have changed vitally and pose new problems. We cannot conceive of a continuous epoch stretching from the early years of this century. Pushed by working class needs and a desire not to repeat the confrontations of the inter-war period, the international bourgeoisie made many changes in their system. These included attempts to institutionalise the class struggle by further integration of the unions and the development of working class mass consumption, creating an interventionist state that took on power to supervise the whole of social life and industrial changes that altered the face of the working class.

These changes not only widened the basis of class struggle, but changed the concept of socialism. No longer could it be identified simply with planning, nationalisation and welfare. Instead, it has made clearer the need for total liberation in all areas of life and specifically the need to end the alienation of wage labour.

None of the changes in the system abolished its fundamental contradictions, merely expressed them in different ways. The autonomous struggles of the class to separate its needs from capitalism, and the independent movements of the specifically oppressed sectors combined in the sixties with the continuing competitive contradictions of the system throughout the world, to produce a new crisis of inflation and recession.

Despite all the limitations of the struggle in this period, it accelerated the crisis enough to necessitate capital and the state to launch a general attack on the strengths of the working class in an attempt to re-stabilise and regenerate their system.

2.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING CLASS

The changing face of the working class is the product of two forces. Firstly, the labour process in modern capitalism has increased the alienation of work and de-skilled and proletarianised much of the workforce. Secondly, the law of capitalist development which creates an ever-expanding non-productive sector in the social sphere.

This means that it is impossible any longer to reduce the political definition of the working class to its industrial sector, or to any section like 'the labour movement'.

White collar workers undergoing proletarianisation will play an important part in modern class struggle. While many hold contradictory class positions, it is for the left to win

them to socialism as the system worsens their conditions.

In this light we cannot any longer see students as 'the educated children of the bourgeoisie'. Most are not betraying their class by becoming activists, but prefiguring their declining position in modern capitalism.

Schoolstudents and youth are also an important part of the movement. Their own specific needs and struggles are best expressed within an independent revolutionary youth movement.

Throughout Europe the use of immigrant labour has been another important factor in altering class composition. This is the material basis for the centrality of the black working class.

Women also occupy a more vital role today, although women's struggles have always been significant. Their even greater relevance comes from two main factors. Women are now one third of the total industrial workforce. Secondly, capital's plans for extended and controlled markets, plus the use of the welfare state to aid production, have increased the significance of the family. The housewife becomes a central figure in the struggle for socialism.

When we talk of divisions in the working class, we must recognise that life in capitalist society is also sliced up and compartmentalised. At the heart of this is the split between work and personal life. Our family and leisure are retreats and sources of satisfaction to us. But because of the way they are structured under this system, they are increasingly unable to compensate for our alienation at work. This is why we maintain that that political struggle must cover every aspect of people's lives.

3.

REFORMISM AND POPULAR POWER

Reformism can be distinguished from revolutionary Marxism on two grounds. Firstly, it has a limited conception of what socialism is, not be-

ing interested in the revolutionary transformation of the whole of society. Secondly, an inadequate understanding of how to achieve socialism; a gradualism that not only fails to confront bourgeois state power, but ignores the necessity for self-emancipation of the working class.

Reformism is still more rooted in Britain than in some other countries because of its imperialist tradition and because of the particular way class relations developed, producing a particularly inward-looking working class movement, with little Marxist influence.

There is no permanent and unchanging 'ideological hold of reformism' over the working class. Its basis changes as the conditions change. The kind of reformism that is characterised by simple illusions in parliament and social democracy has declined. The post-war reforms and economic expansion created the conditions for a reformism more rooted in the daily experience of the class: reflected particularly in the predominance of delegated and sectional struggles.

The class struggle is therefore more volatile; actions and organisations more often by-pass reformist institutions. This makes it easier to develop their revolutionary potential. Too often the left misses these opportunities because it regards the struggle of one sector, or the daily struggle in general, as inevitably limited and reformist. But consciousness is not a fixed category. No struggle is *in itself* either revolutionary or reformist - this depends on the context, content and form it takes.

For these reasons we reject any strategy that is based on entryism or exposing Labour. This, as we indicated, misunderstands the relationship between Labour and the working class. The task is to develop the aut-

onomous power of the class to counteract reformism's power, which keeps it dominant. This will accelerate the decline in ideological illusions. Entryism leads to identifying the working class with the Labour Party and other reformist institutions and holding back the development of a mass alternative. We do, however, support the general struggle of the left inside the Labour Party and seek to make it useful for the building of a mass movement outside.

We put the building of mass politics at the centre of a break with reformism. A movement of popular power that learns from the experiences in Chile and Portugal, that will break with the bureaucratic and limited political processes that dominate the working class movement.

4.

THE TRADE UNIONS AND WORKING CLASS AUTONOMY

The working class has a dual nature, it exists as labour power inside capitalism and (potentially) as an autonomous class against it. The trade unions correspond to the first and reformist side only.

The reformist functions of the unions have been accelerated by their qualitatively increased integration into the state machine in the post-war period as co-managers of the economy economy. The working class therefore comes into conflict increasingly with the goals and structures of the union apparatus. However, we recognise the historical influence of the unions and their minimum functions in bringing workers together.

In this light the rank and file revolt in Britain tends to use the union framework, even when radically go-

ing beyond its goals. We work inside this contradiction, encouraging workers' use of the unions from a conscious understanding of the limitations of trade unionism and the need for autonomous anti-capitalist politics.

Hence our tactical relations with the unions is based on the strategy of building a political alternative to trade unionism. We do not accept that the solution is to replace right wing leaders with left wing ones, although we would support this if it were useful. We also seek to develop the beginnings of mass organisation, independent of the unions, recognising that this will be a long term, uneven and discontinuous process.

We attempt to build rank and file power and organisation, but we reject the strategy of 'rank and fileism'. This simply sees the problem as a contradiction between union leaders and the rank and file, rather than between the limitations of trade union politics and the needs of mass anti-capitalist struggle. It leads to strategies based solely on union activity and a gradual run-down of genuine activity amongst the rank and file.

5.

PARTY AND CLASS

The need for a vanguard, cadre organisation arises out of the uneven consciousness, experience and struggles of the working class.

At a further stage, when the struggle and the vanguard has reached a certain level of maturity, the party will be necessary. Its role is to politically unify the vanguard, arming and leading the proletariat to seize power.

Although the nature of state power is more complex and diffuse today, the need for the party has not altered. The necessary existence of autonomous institutions like soviets cannot guarantee victory. The party's role is also vital in establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat and ensuring the continuity of the revolutionary process.

Intervention in the struggle is made more effective by encouraging a process towards democratic centralism in the vanguard organisation. But the degree of centralisation must serve the situation, not the other way round.

These general principles cannot be universal formulae.

The type of organisation must flow from the conditions it operates in and reflect the changing nature of the working class, capitalism and the state.

The over-emphasis on leadership and other unimaginative formulae, characteristic of much of the left, arose from the failure to analyse class in new conditions. They have become cut off from the class by putting their own growth first and by seeing politics as external formulae. Unless we can learn from and develop the seeds of communism that are inside the struggle we are in danger of creating an elitist relationship that has so often led to the degeneration of revolutions.



Hospital Demonstration February 1977.

Gazette photograph

Necessity and desire are not sufficient conditions for the formation of the party. The maturity of political conditions has not been reached where any organisation in Britain has earned the right to call itself the party. The role of the revolutionary organisation today is to help create the conditions of mass struggle that lay the basis for party formation.

6 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

As the international basis of capitalism develops, the class struggle needs a similar dimension. But it must be a realistic one.

International solidarity work must be made relevant to the struggle here and priority be given to activity that connects with the experience of particular sectors, such as the black or Irish community.

There are no universal formulae or strategies for advancing the revolution. Different countries have different specific characteristics and development. Our analysis must start from who actually is the motive force taking the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle forward, rather than blowing the trumpet of our 'fraternal' organisation, no matter what its real position.

The nature of modern imperialism still creates situations where the immediate task is national liberation. The role of the revolutionary organisation is to concretely tie that process to the struggle for socialism.

There will be no instantaneous and combined world revolution. While complete socialism and transition to communism is impossible unless on a world scale, the process

of building socialism has to start in specific countries, often in different conditions. It is short-sightedness and metropolitan arrogance to write off any possibility of building socialism until the Western working class has made its revolution.

Post-revolutionary societies are transitional societies whose development can take many forms. Russia and her Eastern European satellites are neither socialist nor capitalist, but rather class systems of a new type, where the proletariat is dominated and exploited by a new ruling class. China is a society of many contradictions, both in domestic structure and foreign policy. Its future development is not clear, especially at the present time. But as it has clearly embarked on major and unique transformations of many as-



pects of social relations, we regard the road to building socialism as still open.

7 OUTLINES OF A REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

The general principles we have outlined enable us to identify certain characteristics of the present situation.

Firstly, on the basis of our analysis of the changed post-war nature of capitalism we cannot describe the present capitalist offensive as 'back

to the thirties'. On the contrary, using the changes they are embarking on a series of measures aimed at restructuring employment, production and services to make the system safe for the eighties.

Secondly, from what we have learned about the changing composition and power of sectors of the working class, we can identify the emergence of new vanguards in the present crisis.

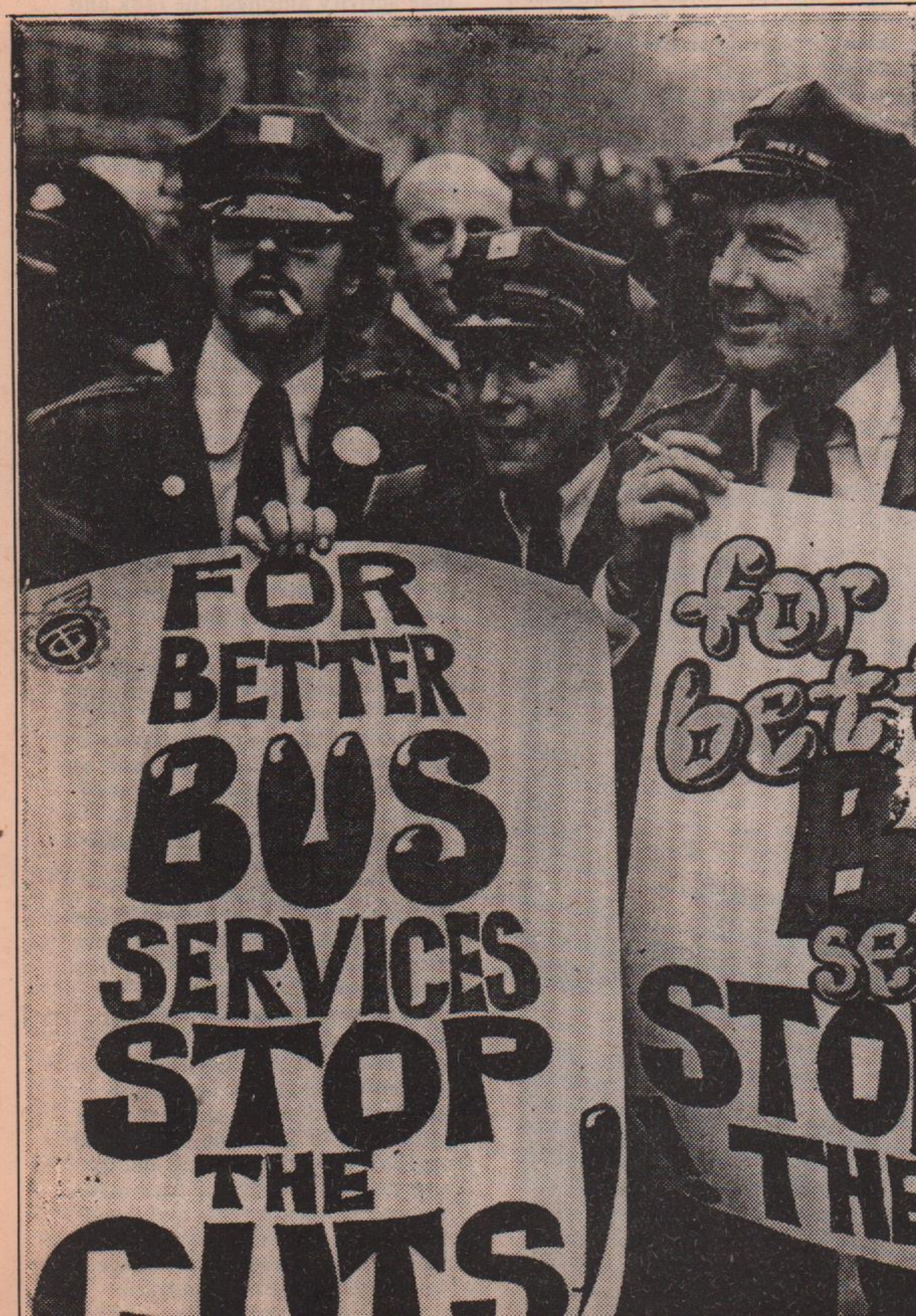
In particular, we acknowledge the leading role taken by many women, black people and public sector workers, often designated as 'weak' sectors previously.

Thirdly, on the central question of unemployment we must take into account the changes in work and the workforce. We do not think that the 'the right to work' perspective creates the conditions for the unification of

the experience and struggle of employed and unemployed; although it has proved a useful weapon in some more limited circumstances. The perspective embodied in the slogan 'Less workload for the employed - more jobs for the unemployed' brings together the need to fight exploitation at work with the need to create jobs.

Big Flame

UNEMPLOYMENT FILM TOUR



Essex is being hit hard by unemployment. The County Council has decided to axe over 2000 jobs in the next financial year, through natural wastage and redundancies.

The burden of the cuts will fall most heavily on education. 400 schools cleaners and dinner ladies will go, plus ancillary staff. Swimming and music provision will be reduced too.

Three meetings on the Big Flame Unemployment Tour in Colchester dealt with these issues. The Newsreel Collective's film, Unemployment - The Gaffers' Strike, was shown at the Technical College, in the University and in the town.

A demonstration against the cuts is being organised and some union branches are fighting to stop the growing unemployment in the area. At one of the meetings a member of NALGO explained how his branch were trying to stop overtime in order to create 12 new jobs for the unemployed. He hoped other branches would follow suit. It was a practical way of uniting the employed and the unemployed.

Another theme at the meetings was claiming. One result of the unemployment film tour in Colchester is that a group has been formed to re-build the Claimants Union, a vital step when so many unemployed are unaware of their entitlement or scared to fight for their rights alone.

Tuesday 8th March. 7.30
Dame Collett House, Ben Jonson Rd. London E.1
(In conjunction with East London Claimants Union)

Unemployment Film Tour
Friday March 18th. 7.30
The Roebuck, 108A Tottenham Court Rd. London W.1
Speakers from Big Flame.
Admission Free.



meetings

CONFERENCE ON RACISM AND FASCISM. Sat. Mar.12 1.30-5.30
Stockwell Hall, Stockwell Park Rd. Brixton. Organised by All Lambeth Anti-Racist Movement.

RALLY OF SEFTON PENSIONERS AND WORKERS ASSOCIATION on bus cuts and pensioners bus passes.
Mon. March 7th. Knowsley Rd. Bootle. 7.30 pm.

MERSEYSIDE DAY OF ACTION AGAINST THE CUTS
March 2nd. Assemble Islington Square 11 am.

KIRKBY RALLY AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT.
March 5th. Assemble 11.30 am outside the social security office.

MERSEYSIDE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CUTS
Thurs. March 3rd. 7.30 pm. Trades Council Buildings, Victoria St. Liverpool

CACTL DEMONSTRATION
March 19th. 1.00 Highbury Fields, London N5

CACTL DEMONSTRATION
March 12th. 11.00 Oxford Rd. Manchester.

BF OPEN EDUCATION MEETING ON IRELAND.
March 30th 7.30 pm Red Deer, Pitt St. Sheffield.

BIG FLAME MEETING ON FASCISM
Weds. March 9th. 7.30 pm. Speaker from Brixton and Croydon Collective. Castle Hotel, Oldham St, Manchester

FILMS AGAINST FASCISM
Friday March 4th. 7.30 pm. People's Centre, Moss Side, Manchester

DEMONSTRATION against RENEWAL OF PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT.
Sun. March 27th. 2 pm Shepherds Bush Green, London.

Merseyside..... 217 Wavertree
Liverpool 7
051 263-13

Manchester..... 14 Piccadilly
061 223-45

Leeds..... 80 Harehill
Leeds 7.
0532-6205

Birmingham..... c/o People
768 Bristol
Birmingham

Sheffield..... 0742-5871

There are also groups in South London, and members in Norwich, Chester, Cambridge, Brighton, and East and West London.

For more information contact

National Secretary,
217 Wavertree Rd.