

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p

Ireland—ten years of war

SMASH THE PTA!

British imperialism doesn't mess about. When it comes to the ten year old war in Ireland, a war of national liberation on its very doorstep, it wheels out the big guns. Neave is blown up — Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees orders the Special Branch to mount raids on republican sympathisers in all Britain's major cities. Eighteen soldiers die in an IRA ambush at Warrenpoint — Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is helicoptered in to show that Britain is resolute in adversity. And now Maurice Oldfield, Britain's most experienced intelligence administrator, has been sent to the Six Counties to coordinate RUC and army operations there.

But British imperialism is nothing if not subtle. The computerised files the army runs on people in the Catholic ghettos of Derry and Belfast hold information so detailed that it includes the colour of the paper that decorates their living-room walls. South of the border the trained assassins of Britain's notorious Special Air Services stalk their prey in civilian clothes and unmarked limousines. And in Britain the state has special means of outlawing criticism of its domination of Ireland: the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

How the PTA works

At 6am you wake to find that a dozen uniformed and plain clothes police — complete with pistols and alsatians — have burst into your house. They search it and confiscate or overturn your belongings. Then you're arrested, taken down to the police station to be searched, photographed and fingerprinted and held for seven days without charge and without access to a lawyer.

Teams of interrogators question you repeatedly. Each session lasts eight hours. They abuse you, tell you your friends have informed on you, that you've been watched and that your phone has been tapped, warn you that a long jail term is certain and beat you up. They give you incriminating documents to read in the hope you'll leave your fingerprints on them. They offer you bribes and police protection to reveal the political and sexual persuasions of your friends.

Back in your cell you can't hear the outside world: the walls are soundproofed.

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TEN YEARS OF THE IRISH WAR FIVE YEARS OF THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT TROOPS OUT NOW! SELF-DETERMINATION FOR IRELAND!

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION
Saturday 24 November 1979
Assemble 2pm Kennington Park, London (Oval Tube)
MARCH TO BRIXTON PRISON

Organised by the REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST TENDENCY

You can't switch the light off to sleep. Your food is spoiled or drugged, and you're denied exercise, washing facilities, a change of clothes and medical attention. Even if you're pregnant.

You can be charged merely for withholding information or for deeds as yet undone — for conspiracy to commit an offence. If you're released you can be re-arrested at any time. By now you have lost your job, been disowned by your neighbours and have had your family's name dragged through the mud. If you're Irish you can be deported without trial.

What the Act is designed to do

More than 4200 people have been held under the PTA since it was introduced — by a Labour Government — five years ago this November. But of those detained only two per cent have been charged and one per cent convicted. So is the Act inefficient in use? Not at all. It does the job it was designed to do: to suppress all dissent on the Irish question.

Anybody who dares speak out against British imperialism's role in Ireland runs the risk of being branded as a criminal — as a terrorist. Just as the state brands every Irish freedom fighter as a psychopath, so it regards those who call for the immediate withdrawal of troops and for self-determination as a danger to the realm.

Labour supports the PTA

They are indeed. Both Tory and Labour parties are absolutely convinced of this. Policy on the PTA is not just bipartisan: it is monolithic. On the six occasions the Act has come up for renewal in Parliament, no more than a handful of *Tribune* MPs have voted against it — and then only because they felt that existing legislation was quite effective in dealing with 'terrorism'. To come out in support of the right of the Irish to pursue their struggle by any means necessary is too much for these 'socialists'. They have chosen to express their disquiet over the question of Ireland in a more tactful manner.

One demo Whitehall didn't mind

On 12 August a 10 000-strong demonstration headed by the Young Liberals paraded through London demanding 'an end to British involvement in Ireland'. Left-wing Labour MPs backed it; so did the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. Why, given the state's efforts to silence all opposition to its Irish

policy, was it untroubled by this march?

The reason is simple. In recent months certain sections of bourgeois 'public opinion' — *The Guardian*, for example — have concluded that Britain's interests in Ireland are not properly served by the presence of troops alone. The army shows no sign of winning, and the IRA has made a series of military and intelligence coups. In the USA, leading capitalist politicians like Edward Kennedy have voiced their concern about Britain's failure to stabilise its relations with Ireland, a country which imperialist investors value highly as a base from which to export to the EEC. The Young Liberal demonstration was a direct response to these trends. It did not encounter state hostility because it had nothing to do with denying Britain the right to oppress Ireland and everything to do with persuading Britain to oppress the Irish more discreetly.

The demonstration did not so much as mention the PTA. Instead, it bemoaned the waste of 'taxpayers' money' on the troops. It wanted Britain to reassure the Irish of its intention of doing them a favour by withdrawing — some day. In short, it was a pro-imperialist demonstration. That was why it did not trouble the state. Indeed, Secretary of State for Ireland Humphrey Atkins has now outdone the Liberals and their left-wing entourage and launched a political initiative of his own in Ireland, doomed by Loyalist intransigence though it has proved to be.

The way forward

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency led a counter-demonstration to the Liberals' march. We call not for more subtle methods of British domination of Ireland, but for the defeat of British imperialism there. What an opportunity that would represent for the British working class!

Today Britain is stepping up repression in Ireland. The security forces are now helping Loyalist killer squads murder Catholics; cross-border surveillance and counter-insurgency is now firmly established. And we can be sure that the PTA will be invoked again and again to clamp down on anyone trying to expose that repression. That is why the RCT is holding a national demonstration to denounce Britain's military occupation of Ireland and to protest the PTA. Join us and show your solidarity with the Irish people and their battle for self-determination. Stand up and be counted against the British state.

Leyland THE CRUNCH

The workforce at BL has got a long fight on its hands. It faces a smooth and ruthless boss in BL Chairman Michael Edwardes. At his elbow stands financier Leslie Murphy of the National Enterprise Board. Behind them both is Industry Minister Keith Joseph, the harsh face of entrepreneurial capitalism. Together they are determined to make BL pay its way.

In September Edwardes announced his plans. They included:

- 25 000 redundancies
- closure or winding down of 13 plants
- review of another 36 plants, involving 14 000 jobs.

Altogether the jobs of a quarter of the workforce — 40 000 out of a total of 160 000 — are under threat.

In his drive to win workers' consent to his plan, Edwardes has a powerful ally at both national and plant level: the trade union leadership. After an initial flurry of protest union leaders came around to endorsing Edwardes' strategy. The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions gave the plan its backing on behalf of the unions at BL. The Transport and General Workers Union, whilst approving Edwardes' objectives, was wary of a revolt in its ranks; so it kept up a half-hearted opposition as Edwardes put his plan to a ballot at the end of October; but its mute criticism of the TGWU meant that, in effect, it gave support for Edwardes. It helped him to get the backing of the overwhelming majority of BL workers — over 85 per cent voted in favour of his plan.

On the same day the ballot result was announced, management made its reply to the unions' 30 per cent wage claim. At a time when inflation is running at 16 per cent, BL offered five per cent — together with a punitive productivity deal which would deprive shop stewards of the right to negotiate manning levels and the pace of work. This scheme which entails the loss of more than 10 000 jobs, has been resisted for the last 18 months. Now, in the wake of the ballot, it seems likely to go ahead.

Thus BL workers have a double fight. Not only do they have to take on Edwardes, Murphy and Joseph, but — more urgently — they have to deal with TGWU chief Moss Evans and Stalinist Leyland Combine Committee convenor Derek Robinson. This is the only way to save workers' livelihoods at BL.

Decline to nationalisation

The British car industry is in a mess. It has become a symbol of the problems that have afflicted British industry throughout the 'seventies. For the last decade it has been unable to withstand fierce competition from Japan, West Germany and the USA. With its legacy of obsolete technology, low productivity and declining profitability the motor industry exemplifies the plight of Britain's manufacturing sector at a time of world capitalist crisis.

Well before it was taken over by the NEB

continued on page 2

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...Leyland

from page 1

in 1975, the British-owned car industry was in serious trouble. The British Leyland Motor Company was formed in 1968 to bring together a number of failing car and commercial vehicle firms; it only survived until 1975 by borrowing extensively and writing off depreciation costs by the million. Between 1968 and 1972 its share of the home market fell from 48 per cent to 31 per cent, while foreign car imports soared from 5 per cent to 23 per cent.

The onset of world recession in the mid 'seventies led to nationalisation: the formation of British Leyland, later BL, was the only alternative to collapse. Only the state could provide funds on the scale required to avoid bankruptcy. In an attempt to restore profitability the government pressed ahead with a major programme of rationalisation. With the Ryder Report of 1975 a major drive began to increase productivity, hold down wages and destroy shop floor organisation. At the same time the government set about integrating shop stewards into management strategy through the ruse of 'worker participation'.

From consultations to closures

Both the TGWU — which represents more than two thirds of BL workers — and the AUEW welcomed the NEB take-over. Indeed, Harry Urwin, Moss Evans' deputy, is a member of the NEB. Helped by full-time plant convenors, senior shop stewards and area officials, the trade union bureaucrats have played a full part in BL's rationalisation programme.

The official trade union movement is committed to BL. The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, which coordinates union negotiations with BL management, has accepted the introduction of a centralised corporate bargaining apparatus. Through this machinery the union leadership has given in to pay and productivity deals designed to weaken organisation on the factory floor and widen differentials between skilled and unskilled workers. Corporate bargaining has allowed management to draw shop floor representatives into accepting speed-up and relaxing shop floor controls — as well as redundancies and closures.

Union collaboration with management has disarmed BL workers. The employers have been given a free hand to foster divisions within and between plants. As a result a number of disputes — such as those of the toolmakers — have had a largely sectional character and have not received the wider support they deserved. And inter-plant strife has brought bitter defeats: it has contributed to closures at Park Royal, AEC Southall and Cowley.

The left lines up

On their own the BL bosses and the trade union bureaucrats could not get the workers' cooperation. For that they need the left. And they are fortunate in having a left wing in the unions which is just as anxious as the government about 'our' motor industry. AUEW leader Bob Wright, a prominent member of the Broad Left, summed up the patriotic outlook of the bureaucracy's left wing in 1976:

'Britain must take whatever steps are necessary, with the backing of the trade unions, to ensure that British Leyland, now all but publicly owned,

must not only survive but expand in order to meet the challenge of the future of a British-based and viable car manufacturer.' (*Trade and Industry*, 16 July 1976, p177)

Devoted to the NEB as the spearhead of its 'alternative strategy' for British capitalism, the left was even keener than the union leadership about the government take-over. It threw its full support behind 'worker participation'. Derek Robinson welcomed the Ryder Report, enthusing that because Tony Benn and Eric Heffer had helped draw it up it 'reflected some of the progressive commitments of Labour's manifesto'. Today the consequences of those 'progressive commitments' are plain for all to see.

The showdown

Even with a succession of productivity deals under its belt, BL's fortunes have continued to decline. Its share of the UK car market has shrunk by a further 10 per cent since 1975: imports now account for well over half the cars bought in Britain each year. BL's market share outside the UK is minute; only three per cent in Europe and far less elsewhere. With less than two per cent of world car production, it comes bottom of the league of major car producers.

BL's crisis dictates drastic measures. The last 15 months have seen 1800 redundancies go through. Gaining confidence from the minimal trade union opposition to the first round of redundancies and the closure of the Speke No 2 factory, BL's management has been preparing for more ruthless measures. Hence Edwardes' announcement.

Edwardes was widely commended for his resolute action. He was an example to other employers; his measures, said the *Financial Times*, were 'precisely the way' to deal with lack of competitiveness on the world market (*Financial Times*, 11 September 1979). And when BL workers showed signs of resistance, Edwardes and Murphy had no hesitation in threatening to liquidate the company, rather than back down on their proposals. Nothing less could make BL profitable in today's international recession.

From outrage to acceptance

Edwardes' announcement created problems for the trade union bureaucrats. They need to retain the confidence of both the government and the workers if they are to succeed in mediating between them. Their first response to Edwardes' plan was anger — not because of what it meant for BL workers, but because they had not been formally consulted. Their second response was to issue strongly worded protests: to keep in with the workers they could not be seen to take such massive redundancies lying down. 'Moss Evans takes tough line on car firm's closure plan: union chief's war cry over BL job cuts' reported *The Guardian* (22 September 1979). There followed a couple of weeks of token opposition, plus an agreement, not to initiate any action, but to back any action that local trade union representatives might choose to take.

Once it became apparent that there was going to be no major upsurge of militancy, the bureaucrats' fear of losing control over the rank and file receded. They stepped boldly forward, dropped their rhetorical

opposition, and recommended that their members accept the Edwardes package. The union leaders at once became management's bully-boys. Commenting on the assistance given the bosses by the CSEU, *The Economist* noted recently: 'it is the Confederation not BL management, that is trying to sell Sir Michael's plan to the shop stewards'.

Labourism: management's friendly critic

In their determination to force through the Edwardes plan the trade union bureaucrats have an important weapon — the influence of the Labour left and the CP, especially among the convenors and shop stewards committees in BL's major plants. The left opposes the plan — on the grounds that it is not in the best interests of the British motor industry. Writing in *Tribune*, left-wing Labour MP Leslie Huckfield denounced it as a 'Tory strategy that will strangle the industry' (21 September 1979). The Midlands Communist Party issued a statement protesting that the plan would make BL 'a small, third rate car producer at the mercy of its multinational competitors' (*Morning Star*, 12 September 1979).

The Labour left and the CP share Edwardes' objective: making BL a first rate car producer. Derek Robinson 'labelled the plans "disastrous" both for Leylands and the British motor industry' (*Morning Star*, 11 September 1979). This left-reformist outlook reaches right down to the factory floor. A meeting of TGWU shop stewards representing 75 per cent of the workforce issued a statement echoing the commitment of the entire labour bureaucracy to British capitalism:

'It is our opinion that Leyland's philosophy will mean the total demise of the only British-based manufacturer. We will not allow this to happen. We believe Leyland does have a future.' (*The Guardian*, 15 September 1979).

Edwardes knows that BL has a future only if it sheds labour on a large scale and smashes shop floor organisation. His plan serves both aims. As long as they remain committed to BL's future the shop stewards will be forced to sacrifice the future of tens of thousands of BL workers.

Active workers at BL know that nothing less than all-out action — strikes, occupations and pickets — can beat the bosses. The problem is how to get the support of the mass of workers, confused and demoralised by a succession of setbacks and a trade union leadership that works hand in glove with management. The way forward lies first and foremost in a struggle against the trade union bureaucracy at every level. Reinforced by the integration of shop floor representatives and sustained by the ideology of Labourism, this leadership is BL's best friend and its workers' mortal enemy. Workers will have to tell their leaders that they are concerned about their jobs and wages, not BL's problems of productivity and sales performance; their standard of living, not the viability of British industry. Once they have dealt with Evans and Robinson, BL workers will be in a much stronger position to tell Edwardes that, if BL cannot survive, then the bosses must provide — workers will not pay the price for the capitalist crisis.

Judith Harrison

RALLY

the next step — TAKE IT!

Why a new paper?

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BREAKING NEW GROUND

The widespread use of courts, lockouts and selective victimisation by employers has become a prominent feature of the present phase of the class struggle. Employers' organisations like the *Patronat* in France, the *Confindustria* in Italy, the *CEDE* in Spain and the *CBI* in Britain are demanding new legislation to curb the activities of trade unions. They seek to reorganise the institutions and practices formed in the struggles between labour and capital in the post-war period. The organisations of the working class, and the established procedures for wage bargaining, are barriers that the bourgeoisie must overcome if it is to slow the tempo of the capitalist decline.

Backed up by the French state, the *Patronat* was able to force the unions to accept a reduction in the scope of unemployment benefits. In Spain the employers are demanding a new 'viable framework' for labour relations — viable for capital, that is. Their proposals would give them greater freedom to impose redundancies and to penalise workers in breach of contract. The Spanish government has drafted a 'workers' statute', comparable to the proposals of the Thatcher administration. This Europe-wide offensive is not a conspiracy. It is the inevitable response of a class fighting for survival.

The end of an era

The new phase of the bourgeois assault reveals the intensification of class conflict in Europe. During the period 1974-78 the European bourgeoisie succeeded in winning the labour movement to a policy of class truce. The reformist, communist and social democratic parties were able to limit the destabilising effects of the capitalist crisis by reconciling workers to the need for austerity measures. Class collaboration was institutionalised through the Historic Compromise in Italy, the Moncloa Pact in Spain and the Social Contract in Britain. Whatever title it went by, some form of social contract was accepted by the trade union leadership of every major European country.

Class collaboration was justified on the grounds that this 'temporary' crisis was bad for all and that all sections of society had a common interest in restoring a healthy capitalism. Workers were told to do their share for the sake of the nation. In return for their acceptance of deteriorating living standards workers were promised a greater say in the running of the state and prosperity — some time in the future. The dominant influence of the reformist leadership in the labour movement ensured class peace during this period. There was no significant anti-capitalist current in the working class and the radical nationalism of the labour bureaucracy appeared as a plausible alternative. Workers looked to the state rather than their class for a solution to the problems of the day.

Increasingly wages policy was undermined by the reality of the capitalist crisis. The cumulative impact of falling living standards and growing unemployment led to the bitter realisation that prosperity was not around the corner; workers were forced into defensive struggles. By late 1978 the labour leadership had to fight to contain working class unrest. But the growth of shop floor militancy did not represent a rejection of the politics of the labour bureaucracy. It was a response to the consequences of policies which workers themselves accepted. Nevertheless this was enough to upset the delicate equilibrium between the main classes.

Beginning in late 1978 and continuing up to the present, militant struggles emerged in the European working class. Many of these actions were directed partly against the trade union bureaucracy itself. In Rotterdam, the recent unofficial strike of dockworkers was directed not only against the employers but also against the

trade union bureaucrats. In Italy unofficial rank and file action has put considerable pressure on the trade union leadership. The *Financial Times* noted that vigorous unofficial action in Italy 'has helped undermine the whole understanding, however precarious, on which the previous moderate line rested'.

The bureaucracy turns red

The labour bureaucracy could not just stand by and repeat its tired phrases about 'responsibility', 'consultation' and the 'national interest'. It had to respond to rank and file pressure or risk losing control over the working class. Despite its record, the union leadership had no hesitation in placing itself at the head of militant struggles. When the Lorraine steel workers exploded in anger against proposed redundancies, the French labour bureaucracy, particularly the Stalinist dominated CGT, moved swiftly to take over this protest. The Italian labour leaders sanctioned the militant metalworkers' strike and the public sector workers' demand for the linking of wage increases to price rises. In Britain, the bureaucracy was at the head of this winter's public sector strike and recently led the ten-week engineers dispute.

The radicalism of the union leadership reflects the new dimension of the class struggle. Its ability to suppress the contradiction between labour and capital has been undermined by the experiences of the working class. The labour bureaucracy has not delivered the goods and nobody believes that austerity programmes are only temporary. However, working class pressure was not the only factor that compelled the bureaucracy to adopt a new image.

The employers put the boot in

The bourgeoisie would like the trade union leaders to do all its dirty work. Collaboration in industry and consensus on the major issues of the day is the bosses' favourite policy system. What the bourgeoisie can only do by force the social democrats, especially their left wing, can achieve through persuasion. However, there are two forces that can upset the harmonious relationship between the labour bureaucracy and the bosses. First, the capitalist class sometimes has to take measures which require the restriction of trade union rights; this is what is happening at present. The labour bureaucracy is forced to respond because anti-union legislation and the abandonment of traditional bargaining procedures represent an attack on its position.

Secondly the bureaucracy faces rank and file pressure. Collaboration inevitably leads the unions towards the bosses and further away from the rank and file. However if the union leadership gets out of touch with the membership and can no longer maintain control then it loses its usefulness for the capitalists. This is what has begun to happen during the past year. This concern underlies *The Economist's* complaint that today's 'union leaders are shadows of their predecessors in the 1950s and 1960s... they cannot lead and cannot deliver' (*The Economist*, 6 October 1979).

The bosses have seen that the labour bureaucrats can no longer be relied upon to maintain control and the unions have recognised that unless they modify their approach they will lose their grip on an important section of the working class. The trade union leaders are obliged to mobilise their members to strengthen their control over the rank and file — and to show the bosses that they still count. This is the meaning of the Thatcher Government's policy on trade unions and the proposals contained in the recent CBI report *A new deal for industrial relations*. At its November conference the CBI called for

closed shops to be outlawed and for labour agreements to be made legally binding.

A new deal

The method of class collaboration that evolved during the past five years no longer works. Institutionalised consensus has been weakened by working class pressure, the aggressive thrust of bourgeois strategy and by the instinct for self-preservation of the labour bureaucracy. However, both the bourgeoisie and the union leadership are aware of the dangers of confrontation politics. On one thing they are agreed: the class struggle must be limited to conventional channels.

The bourgeoisie wants to weaken trade union organisation as a prelude to future collaboration. It is taking the appropriate legal measures and, on the industrial front, it is determined to teach the labour movement a lesson. The employers are not interested just yet in an all-out assault the outcome of which they cannot predict. In such a battle they face not just the Labour leaders but the entire working class.

The bureaucracy for its part is also aware of the dangers of class conflict. Its militant rhetoric is always tempered with assurances that they want consensus politics to be re-established. This was the message behind the President of the TUC Tom Jackson's speech at this year's TUC congress. He warned that the unions will not restrain wage demands when the Government had abandoned 'all attempts to control the rocketing level of prices, withdrawn from consensus policies and deliberately fostered unemployment'. Jackson and his colleagues will just have to wait. Before a new deal can be struck the bourgeoisie must test out the response — the working class.

In France the upsurge of the class struggle during the recent months has forced the Government to adopt a cautious stance. After a series of discussions with 'both sides of industry', Prime Minister Barre announced in October that he wants a better 'industrial relations climate'. To show his sincerity Barre indicated that special efforts should be made to improve the living standards of the lower paid.

In Italy the Cossiga administration does not know which way to turn. The confidence of the Italian bourgeoisie was shaken by the recent gains made by public sector unions. The bourgeoisie does not know how far it should go in emulating Fiat and Alfa Romeo's witchhunt of union militants.

The British ruling class has also not decided how far it should go yet. The captains of industry are concerned with the dangerous consequences of provoking the whole of the working class. This is why the present trend is towards selective attacks aimed at the weaker sections of the working class — women workers and badly organised workers in small plants.

What next?

The reaction of the working class to the present phase of the crisis is a mixture of militancy and political confusion. The rising tempo of militant action has placed many labour bureaucrats on the defensive. Italy supplies one of the clearest instances of the dilemma faced by the reformist leadership of the working class. As the *Financial Times* observes, the Italian Communist Party and trade union officials are finding less and less room for manoeuvre:

'The real irony is that by its very reasonableness and by advocating more moderate policies, the Communist Party appears to have lost out politically to the radicals and the extreme left, while the trade unions have seemingly lost out — so far at least — to the hotheads in the factories.' (*Financial Times*, 23 October 1979)

In Britain the 'hotheads' are at it too. During September there were more working hours lost due to strikes than during any

month since the General Strike of 1926.

The rise of trade union militancy has not been matched by the emergence of independent class politics. Even in important disputes such as the strike at Vauxhall Motors, Ellesmere Port, where workers rejected the advice of the trade union bureaucrats, the influence of reformist politics has prevailed. This example is typical of the general trend. In Britain attitudes to the Labour Party among militants vary from demoralisation and cynicism to the hope that the left can push the party in a progressive direction.

It is not the case that all militants enthusiastically support reformist politics. Rather, to active workers it seems that there is no political alternative to the traditional reformist organisations of the working class. The potentially disastrous consequences of this conclusion have come to the fore in Italy, where many militants have been driven to consider individual terrorism as a way forward. For revolutionaries the strategy must be different: to seize the opportunities provided by the intensification of the class struggle and show how an alternative leadership can be built in present-day conditions.

At the moment, when the first skirmishes of a long drawn out class war are being fought, there is no place for the tedious platitudes which have passed for Marxist politics in the post-war period. Many militants realise that the present strategy of the labour movement is inadequate for the defence of the working class. But where is a real independent working class strategy going to come from?

The launching of *the next step* in this period of flux and ideological confusion needs no justification. Thousands of active workers face the problem of political isolation on the shop floor. Others have seen their struggles thwarted not by the capitalist class, but by representatives of labour movement organisations. Plausible solutions like workers' co-ops, alternative plans and joint consultative committees have come and gone and disillusioned workers have been left to pick up the pieces.

The absence of an alternative working class leadership is not just a problem of organisation. The bourgeois offensive has an important ideological dimension — racism, the Irish War, the oppression of women are questions which require independent working class answers. *The next step* will consistently take up these issues. A clear delineation of the class interests that they raise will weaken the influence of the existing leadership of the labour movement.

The aim of this review is to break new ground. We do not propose to emulate the existing newspapers of the left — with their pages of descriptive articles and pompous calls to action. Not everyone will find this review to their liking. That's because *the next step* is not written for everyone. The review is written for those who are actively committed to defending the working class and for those who realise the need for new political solutions. We believe that this still small section of the working class must be united around a programme that reflects the experience and interests of the international proletariat.

We want active workers to take this next step with us. The foundation of a new working class leadership is a prerequisite for winning the mass of workers to anti-capitalist politics. With this review we begin a new stage in the struggle for revolutionary communism. We ask our readers to share their experiences with us and assess our arguments in relation to the political problems that come up in day to day struggles. In this way a vital discussion of working class politics will emerge and *the next step* can become a living force in the class struggle.

Racial oppression mounts

DOWN WITH IMMIGRATION CONTROLS!

Europe

MIGRANTS FIGHT ALONE

Throughout Europe migrant workers are under attack. German towns have imposed strict quotas on the number of foreign workers permitted to take up residence. In 1976 Munich, Frankfurt, Mannheim and Stuttgart all slammed shut their city gates. Racist intimidation has become the norm. Gendarmes now carry out random checks on foreigners travelling on the Paris Metro. Anyone who dares to answer back and anyone who isn't carrying papers can be detained or thrown out of the country.

Police attacks are rampant. At the same time impending state legislation will slash the number of foreign workers in Europe by more than 200 000 a year. The Swiss authorities already have stringent controls on migrants: 250 000 foreign workers now enter the country every year on work permits valid for periods as short as three months.

Boom: migrants in demand

Migrant workers were brought into Western Europe during the 'sixties and early 'seventies. Faced with drastic shortages of labour, governments recruited workers in former colonies and backward capitalist countries such as Spain and Portugal, Turkey and Greece. Millions of workers found low-paid, unskilled and arduous jobs manufacturing cars and trucks, rebuilding Europe's cities and waiting at tables. They did the jobs that French and German workers could no longer be forced to do.

The ruling class vehemently opposed any moves to assimilate migrants into the indigenous workforce. Employers used every means possible to maintain their isolation, confining them in the worst jobs and even going to the lengths of building dormitories to house this new workforce. The bosses got the backing they needed from governments which allowed entry by work permit only which, in most cases, denied immigrants the right to settle permanently.

Crisis: migrants forced out

Migrant labour is a crutch supporting Europe's decrepit capitalist system. The employment of immigrants depends on the welfare of these economies. So with the onset of recession in the early 'seventies every European country tightened up its immigration laws. More than 100 000 workers were expelled from Switzerland. In 1973 a succession of governments announced bans on all new immigration from outside the EEC. In the following two years, half a million 'Gastarbeiter' were obliged to take up government pay-offs and leave Germany. Last year alone France gave the boot to nearly 400 000 African workers.

The isolation of migrant workers has drastic consequences for the entire working class. Set apart from the rest of the labour movement they form a huge international reserve army of labour. Employers have been quick to exploit their vulnerability to enforce deteriorating conditions - first on black workers and then often on the workforce as a whole. Wage cuts and speed-ups have been forced through against migrants as a preliminary measure to a wider offensive on workers' living standards. The ruling class has pursued this strategy with resounding success.

In every European country foreign workers are being singled out for attack. Passport raids on the Paris Metro and the new nationality law in Britain illustrate a Europe-wide drive to tighten immigration rules and intensify the repression of ethnic minorities. The isolation of foreign workers from the unions and the strength of the chauvinist politics of Stalinism and social democracy in the European labour movement have left migrants wide open to these attacks.

The importance of the struggle against immigration controls is the theme that runs through the different contributions to this page. This legislation makes the racial and national divisions in the working class respectable. It enables employers from the French steel industry to the Lancashire textile industry to impose lower wages and worse conditions on immigrant workers.

The labour movement's failure to resist tighter controls - from the Barre-Bonnet and Stoleru measures to the Nationality Act - inevitably means that it can't defend migrants against the attacks of employers and the state. The ruling class can use the divisions imposed by law and reinforced by inaction from the trade union movement to attack the working class as a whole. The struggle against immigration controls is the way to defend immigrants and build the international unity of the working class.

By putting migrants under pressure first, employers have strengthened their position, whilst avoiding a fight-back from better organised sections of the labour movement.

This onslaught on migrants has been supported by frenzied police activity. Not content with sackings and mass expulsions, the ruling class is now actively pursuing a vicious strategy of strengthening control over ethnic minorities. French magistrates readily dispense one month prison sentences to immigrants caught on the Metro without work permits. Deportations are on the up: procedures are now so slick that a case can be pushed through in just over an hour. At Gorges-les-Gonnesses and Thionville, whole communities of immigrants have found their homes occupied in police operations which far outdo in ferocity the Metropolitan Police activity in Southall. In France, Germany and Switzerland migrants are prohibited from organising resistance; they are banned from all political activity. Residence permits are withdrawn from those who can't produce a clean political record.

Right-wing groups have been given a boost by the racist drift of government policy. Physical assaults on Africans in France have increased dramatically. In Marseilles right-wing groups launched a series of bomb attacks in 1973. One explosion - at the Algerian embassy, where migrants queue up for their immigration papers - left several dead and dozens maimed.

The unions take a stand

Despite this barrage against migrant workers, no major section of the European labour movement has yet come to their defence. The European Trades Union Congress has taken its stand - alongside the ruling class. Its strategy is to encourage aid for backward capitalist countries to make sure that foreigners don't come looking for jobs in Europe. That way they won't trouble the European trade union bureaucrats.

There has been little response to the oppression of blacks from either of France's two largest unions, the CGT and CFDT. Along with the teachers union, the FEN, they have passed resolutions opposing mass expulsions, but have done no more than hold a couple of pickets and a demonstration. Even these have not been called in opposition to the laws which enforce the expulsions, only to protest at the repressive way that they have been used. The CGT's support for migrants can only be half-hearted because it agrees that immigration should be regulated.

The French Communist Party, the CGT's political mentor, opposes the entry of Spain into the EEC, fearing an influx of low-paid workers into France. The unions

police migrants in the workplace: they can get the sack if they vote the wrong way in union elections. The activities of the unions in factories make them accomplices to the current government policy of expelling 200 000 foreign workers a year.

Chauvinism: a cautionary tale

Its failure to defend migrant workers has important consequences for the whole French working class. In June there were large demonstrations against Barre's plans to rationalise the French steel industry. Workers threatened with the sack barricaded the town centres of Longwy and Denain, disrupted train services and stormed police stations. But this explosion was channelled in a chauvinist direction by the PCF. It directed the anger of French workers, not against French capitalism but against its competitors in Germany. Blaming foreigners for redundancies the PCF could not challenge Barre's scheme for revitalising the French economy at the workers' expense.

The fate of the migrants employed in Longwy gives this sad tale a bitter twist. Workers employed by Usinor were told that they could collect £5000 severance pay if they went back home. Not surprisingly there was no opposition to this from the trade union bureaucrats and their Stalinist supporters: their concern ended with a narrow defence of French workers. The PCF bears a major part of the blame for this defeat: the potential for a fightback was destroyed by squalid French chauvinism which accepts and reinforces the isolation of migrants.

Foreign workers have been shunted in and out of Europe, deprived of elementary rights and confined to marginal jobs for the last two decades. The bourgeoisie has been allowed to introduce and consolidate dangerous divisions within the working class. The labour bureaucracy has been complicit in this oppression, seeing migrant workers at best as a nuisance and at worst as a threat.

These attacks on foreign workers must be challenged if the workers' movement in Europe is to defend itself against redundancies and closures. The ruthless plans to cut the workforce throughout European industry show that it is not only the jobs and wages of foreign workers which are at stake.

The ruling class is prepared to use any means to push through its attacks on migrants. It will consciously promote chauvinism - French, Swiss, German and British - to win support for these attacks. We must meet them head-on with a determined fight for the interests of the entire working class: an end to all immigration controls and full political rights for migrants.

From Eden

Britain

BLACK WORKERS FIGHT BACK

In August Asian workers in the Lancashire cotton industry won an important industrial dispute - at Courtauld's Maple Mill in Oldham. Like most other strikes fought by black workers in Britain, they received scant support from the official labour movement.

Their union, the Amalgamated Textile Workers Union, refused to make the strike official. Oldham Labour Party wished them good luck, but couldn't be bothered to send a speaker over. Len Murray wrote a fraternal note enquiring 'Why don't you speak to your trade union?' - and enclosed a heap of material on trade unions.

There are 6500 Asians living in Oldham; three quarters of those at work are employed in textiles. Courtauld's, the largest textile employer, owns 14 mills. An overtime ban began on 23 July in the Ring Room in its Maple Mill II in protest at management attempts to get workers to work extra time for no pay.

The conflict extended on 2 August when three doffers refused to do the work of five for no extra pay. As a result all 16 men on the shift were sacked. On 3 August 140 Asians went out on strike and the mill closed.

The strikers produced leaflets in Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali and English to distribute in Oldham. The strike was won within a week. Courtauld's depends almost entirely on black labour, finding it impossible to get white workers to accept the foul working conditions. This time Courtauld's had overstepped itself and decided to settle in case the dispute spread to its other plants.

Pam Lawrence of Manchester RCT recently interviewed a leading militant about the strike.

Can you tell me something about the workforce at Maple Mill II and about conditions there?

There are approximately 675 men in both mills - Maple Mill I and Maple Mill II. More than 450 are from overseas. Most of them are Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and a few Africans. These workers are all confined to working in departments that carry out difficult work - spinning, cleaning, doffing. There is only one white man doing a similar job. Most of the white workers do fairly easy jobs, such as supervisors, foremen. Certainly none of them work on multishifts.

Conditions are really bad. There are no adequate facilities - no rest, smoking or dining facilities for the workers to take a break from the job. One department was not allowed to take a break at all. The men worked non-stop in 12 hour shifts, while most departments were allowed two half-hour breaks.

Temperatures were exceedingly high. Air conditioning is not maintained during the night shift. Under the Factory Act the temperature should be 60-80 degrees. Here temperatures are kept around 100-120 degrees.

Machinery is never stopped for servicing and cleaning, floors are cluttered and lighting is poor. Accidents are not uncommon.

Can you explain the shift system, and say what wages you earn for such long hours?

The shift is called multishift. We work two weeks of nights and two weeks of days, a 42 hour week. They are twelve hour shifts. Take home pay for a week on day shift is £45. For a night shift, £55. Single men get less.

All of you belong to a trade union. Have you ever complained to the union about the conditions?

The union we belong to is the Amalgamated Textile Workers Union. Before the strike we had never had any response from the union regarding our complaints. Our complaints to management only brought the response: 'You come from a hot country, you must be used to high temperatures'.

The union did nothing. We have only one shop steward representing us. There are four shop stewards representing about

100 people. Our shop steward was only given his position one and a half years ago.

During the strike the unions refused to believe us. It never made the strike official. As a result, none of us obtained any strike pay.

The union has never printed any of its rules in languages other than English. Most of the Asians find it difficult to understand the rules and become easy victims of the management - doing extra work, allowing themselves to be sacked for trivial offences.

How much support did you get from white workers in the mill?

We received support from only one white worker in the mill - he was working alongside us. The others crossed picket lines and simply laughed at our attempts to get more rights.

We tried to stop lorries entering the mill. Most of the lorry drivers crossed the picket lines. Those that didn't went in to talk to management and then drove in with management.

Do you see the strikes as an important step forward?

Yes, we do. Most of our demands have been met. We have won concessions from both our own trade union and management.

As a result of the strike we now have four Asian shop stewards in each mill. All of us are now entitled to two half-hour meal breaks. Arrangements have been made to fix the heating system, clean the frames, put furniture in the rest room and send the stewards on training courses - as well as distribute literature in Asian languages. It is now also agreed that where

there are changes in the conditions of employment, eg manning agreements, these should only take place in consultation with the workers concerned.

Have you talked to workers in other mills so that they too can see the need to win these trade union rights?

We have started the process but it will be some time before certain things can be achieved. Conditions in some other mills are appalling. Courtauld's even pays different rates to two Asian workers doing the same job. It tells one of them to 'keep quiet about his extra pay. We want to expose all this, but it will be a slow business visiting each mill and talking to the workers there.

TORIES TURN THE LABOUR SCREW

DEPORTED

Jayesh, 16, Sanjesh, 13, and Diptesh, 10, sons of Manju Patel, a railway worker in Gillingham, for entering illegally to join their divorced mother; back to India.

THREATENED WITH DEPORTATION
Kabire Gurbuz, 15, Lewisham schoolgirl, for living with her father and stepmother; back to Turkey.

Said Bibi, 80, blind and partially deaf, visiting her son in Rochdale; back to Pakistan.

Nasira Begum, Stockport housewife, because her husband deserted her; back to Pakistan.

THESE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE THOUSANDS DEPORTED OR AWAITING DEPORTATION SINCE THE 1971 IMMIGRATION ACT WAS INTRODUCED.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS. That's what the Home Office calls them. In 1978, 934 were detained. Picked up in their homes, at work or in the street, few make national headlines. Hardly any of their appeals are successful. None of them have the right to stay in Britain.

Every day blacks entering Britain face disgusting intimidation: virginity tests, X-ray screening and tests of 'abnormal sexuality'. This summer a Pakistani cricket fan was refused entry because he couldn't explain in English what a wicket-keeper was! Anyone who fails the immigration officers' tests is bundled into a plane and sent away. All these attacks on black people take place within the law.

Immigration controls keep out foreign workers. But that's not all. They also allow police to harass the entire black community in Britain. All blacks are suspected illegal immigrants. In the eyes of the law, they are all the same. So homes are searched without warrants, youths are picked up under 'Sus', or, like the Virk brothers in East London, sent to gaol simply for defending themselves against racist attacks.

All-party agreement

One government after another has raised the 'problem' of black immigration to this country and passed restrictive immigration laws which have fostered divisions in the working class. Today Labour and the Tories are agreed that a new British nationality act is needed. In 1977 Labour worked out the details. It aimed to limit immigration into Britain through the creation of a new category of citizenship. British Overseas Citizens would be denied entry. Most of those who would become BOCs are presently living in Africa and Asia. When introduced the new law will also allow much stricter internal control.

Although there is no doubt that it will bring in an act shortly, this year's

Tory conference showed that the ruling class is in no hurry. Present internal controls are working better than ever, and as yet there has been little opposition from the working class. In the meantime it is likely that the Tories will toughen up existing immigration legislation and see what response there is from the labour movement and the black community. They have already confirmed their intention to end the right of people settled in Britain since January 1973 to stay permanently. Further restrictions on issuing work permits and the denial of the right of work permit holders to settle after four years have also been announced. Soon a brand new Home Office computer will be added to the police armoury for hunting down blacks.

An injury to one...

These attacks are not simply directed against blacks, but against the whole working class. If we sit back and let people be lifted and thrown out of the country we are accepting the right of the state to do whatever it likes. How can we fight back when the government attacks the closed shop, the right to picket and the right of women to keep their jobs after they've had a baby? We can't let the attacks on blacks go unchallenged. We have to defend them if we are to defend ourselves.

It's not just the Tories who attack the black community. Things weren't all that different when Labour was in power. The approach of Merlyn Rees, who led the crack-down on illegal immigrants for the Labour government, differed little from that of the new Tory Home Secretary William Whitelaw. In 1977 Rees said:

'I strongly condemn illegal entry... I do not shrink from firm action to deal with it, and it will remain the Government's normal practice to send away those who entered in this way on or after 1st January 1973.' (Hansard, 29 November 1977)

Labour didn't repeal the 'Sus' laws. It presided over a large-scale extension of their use in inner city areas. The Labour Party packed the detention centres with 'undesirable' blacks. And the last Labour Government showed that it could bring immigration to a standstill without making any changes in the law.

But what about the people in the Labour Party who have recently come out as staunch defenders of Mrs Patel and her children and other people threatened with expulsion? Former Labour MP Bob Bean claimed that he could defend Mrs Patel. While money for a one-way ticket to India was being raised, Bean, in his own words, 'reached an understanding with the Home Office' saying 'everything will be done to deal with this case expeditiously and sympathetically'. Yet sympathy was not forth-

coming. The Patels have been refused permission to return to Britain altogether. All the appeals to the state did nothing to help. They only strengthened the view that the state can be benevolent.

The Tories at war

What's more all these Labour MPs accept that Britain needs some sort of immigration controls - perhaps not quite so racist, nevertheless... They can't argue against Margaret Thatcher when she says: 'If we are to operate a firm control it is inevitable that difficult decisions will have to be taken'. And she's right - if you agree that immigration controls are necessary you're in no position to quibble about a few people who are particularly hard hit. When pressed on the question, Labour MPs agree:

'No system that restricts people from coming to Britain can be administered without some people suffering. But at the very least the rules should be operated humanely.' (Labour Weekly, 10 August 1979)

That's why Labour can't fight racism. There are no nice ways of telling blacks they're not wanted here. At least the Tories aren't hypocritical.

The British state has launched a war against the black community. Even the ruling class says so. A magistrate at Barnet told the Southall defendants:

'Like the soldier who fights on the battlefield, the police officer is a trained man. Confused the situation may be to those who just go along to shout in a demo. It is not confused in the minds of the police.'

Quite right! Those who tell us to trust the state stand waving a white flag in the middle of the battlefield. Left-talking Labourites don't want to fight back. They only want to soften the blows. We should take a lesson from someone as hard-headed and class conscious as Metropolitan Police Commissioner David McNee. His message to blacks after Southall was short and sharp: 'Keep off the streets of London and behave yourselves (and) you won't have the SPG to worry about'.

White flag from the left

The Labour lefts want to see a nicer police force without the Special Patrol Group. 'Soften the blows' pleads Labour. 'What's become of the good old British bobby?' asks *Tribune*: 'one of the first tasks facing the next Labour Government will be to reintroduce supervision over the activities of our police force. They must also put policemen back on the streets as friends of the community rather than have them to make war against it.' (*Tribune*, 10 August 1979)

The CP too is trying to marry the interests of the state and the working class. According to the *Morning Star* we need a police force which is publicly account-

able and under more democratic control. *Socialist Challenge*, weekly paper of the IMG, thinks that 'a campaign for the election of magistrates and judges is long overdue. It will not resolve too much, but it will make them accountable to someone'.

All in it together

The reformist left and the radical left are all in it together. They would have us believe that the police and the courts can be reformed in the interests of workers. Looking for much nicer, more discreet and more humane solutions with help from the 'good old British bobby', the reformist left acquiesces in the attack on black people.

They have come together now to launch a campaign which Dave Cook, the CP's national organiser, describes as a 'springboard for a huge all-Britain demonstration against the present obscene racist laws and the draconian timing of the Tories' (*Morning Star*, 5 October 1979). On 20 October, a national conference met in London - not to discuss the political character of this demonstration but to rubber-stamp the campaign slogans 'Stop the Tory immigration proposals and the British nationality act' and 'Repeal the 1971 Immigration Act'. For the organisers the aim of the mobilisation is to beg the state to be less racist.

Amidst cries of 'let's have unity' and 'yes, in principle we would like to support your demands but...' the RCT's amendment calling for opposition to all immigration controls was defeated. We appeal to all active workers to reject these flabby compromises. Mobilise for the national demonstration on Sunday 25 November and join us in the struggle to smash all immigration controls and stop the nationality act.

Fenna King

**Demonstrate
AGAINST THE NEW
NATIONALITY ACT**

**25 November
Join the RCT under the banners:**

**SMASH ALL IMMIGRATION
CONTROLS
FOR WORKERS' DEFENCE
AGAINST RACIST ATTACKS**

**Assemble: Speakers Corner 12.00
Rally: Trafalgar Square**

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE: THE BIG SLEEP

For *The Economist* it was an occasion at which 'socialism, root and branch, was offered by speaker after speaker as the cure for Britain's economic ills'. For *Tribune* MP Eric Heffer it marked 'a watershed in the history of the Labour Party'. Right-wing papers greeted it with hysteria; left-wing papers were euphoric. But did this year's Labour Party conference really deserve the reaction it got?

Why it had to go that way

To understand the conference we have to go back to 1978. Then, as now, the British economy was in deep crisis. Treasury estimates indicated that the competitiveness of British industry against foreign capital had declined by 7.3 per cent over the previous 12 months. In five years productivity had grown by a princely 1.6 per cent. In these circumstances Prime Minister James Callaghan had no choice but to embark on stage four of Labour's policy of wage restraint.

The figure Callaghan set for wage rises was a tight one: five per cent. Yet only seven *Tribune* MPs brought themselves to abstain when it was put before Parliament in July. Later that summer came more sell-outs. The TUC/Labour Party Liaison Committee document *Into the 'eighties: an agreement*, which contained proposals for a permanent incomes policy, was endorsed by both TUC congress and the Labour Party conference; and the draft manifesto issued by Labour's National Executive Committee confirmed that a new Labour government would 'seek an understanding with the unions' on pay.

It's worth recalling this. It is ridiculous to maintain, as party secretary Ron Hayward did at this year's conference, that the Labour Cabinet flouted the decisions made at the TUC and Labour Party conferences of 1978. The conferences did not throw out the principle of wage restraint: they rejected the particular severity of the pay curbs that Callaghan and Chancellor Denis Healey had decided on — five per cent.

Britain's 'winter of discontent' began in the final months of 1978. Ford workers, lorry drivers and hospital workers forced union bureaucrats like Moss Evans of the TGWU and Alan Fisher of NUPE to live up to their promise of opposition to Callaghan's wages norm. And it was this, and nothing else, that lost Labour the election. The Labour Party depends for its electoral success on the support of the middle class — and the middle class was indeed perturbed by strikes, pickets and disrupted services. While Labour's working class vote held up, the middle class flocked to the polling booths to put Margaret Thatcher in power.

After this debacle Labour had to have an inquest. The unions that dominate the party called for a major inquiry into organisation and finance. Their leaders had scores to settle. They were angry with Callaghan for his rigid adherence to a pay policy which they could not get their members to accept; and they were disgusted with the incompetence of a party management that had presided over Labour's worst electoral performance since 1931.

Callaghan backed the inquiry in the hope that its focus on procedure and organisation would shift attention away from Labour's sordid record in government. The left opposed the inquiry — because its frame of reference would prevent the exposure of the leadership. Over the summer

a compromise was reached: the conference would see a full debate on Labour's defeat, but the inquiry would go ahead.

At the October conference the left chose to take on the leadership by pushing three issues to the fore: the arrangements for electing the party leader, mandatory re-selection of MPs by constituency parties, and control over the election manifesto. Like the unions' inquiry, this initiative marked an attempt to solve the political problems facing the party by procedural means. For this reason Tony Benn was bound to dominate the conference. As the *Financial Times* explained: 'by adroitly rallying his forces around the theme of "democracy" rather than "socialism" he has built up more effective alliances than his opponents expected'.

When Benn said that the conference was the moment of truth 'not only for the party but for the nation', he showed why the left had to pick internal democracy as a stick to beat the right with. On every other issue the politics of the Labour left differ little from those of the right. The whole party is unanimous that Britain must be made strong again — and that workers must therefore moderate their protests 'in the national interest'.

The aim of the left was to make the party's nationalist politics more responsive to working class pressure. Party chairman Frank Allaun recognised this when he stressed the need for this leadership to take rank and file opinion into account. Otherwise the party would risk becoming irrelevant to its constituency. The task of the Labour Party conference was to channel the tide of workers' disgust with the party into calmer waters. And in this it succeeded.

Strikes no, infighting yes

While the conference agonised over the merits of the Channel Tunnel, and at the behest of the NUM condemned 'wasteful competition' between Britain's energy industries, thousands of engineering workers were crippling their employers with a series of two-day strikes. There was not a whisper of this at the conference. That is how seriously the Labour Party treats the class struggle.

The only hint that the conference was aware of the class struggle came when Lambeth Council leader Ted Knight pleaded with the party to come to the aid of those Labour councils refusing to implement the cuts. This came from the same Ted Knight who himself proposed cuts in Lambeth's social services — until his colleagues persuaded him that he should put up the rates instead. But the conference refused to go along with him when he boldly contended that fighting the cuts would involve breaking the law. Why? Because law and order is what the whole edifice of British democracy is built on — and the Labour Party loves British democracy.

If it's not British democracy, it's party democracy. But the victories won by the left on this score are hollow. The conference votes in favour of re-selecting MPs and giving the NEC the last word on the party manifesto have little consequence: they will have to be ratified by the inquiry into party democracy if they are ever to come into effect.

These two votes show exactly how far left the unions were ready to go. They showed their true colours when the conference came to consider the procedure

for electing the party leader. AUEW chief Terry Duffy spent two hours trying to persuade Jim Murray, convenor at Vickers Newcastle, to help swing the engineers' delegation behind Callaghan — and he succeeded. The result was that the conference voted to maintain the status quo.

The unions wanted to register their displeasure with Callaghan but not to throw him to the wolves. And their wish was the Labour Party's command: as Benn discovered, it is one thing to top popularity polls among the constituency parties, but it is quite another to win support in the solid centre of the conference hall where the great trade union delegations throw their weight about.

A little less oppression, please

When it comes to the rights of the oppressed, Labour's commitment to democracy becomes even more farcical. So dismayed was the NEC about motions criticising party policy on Ireland that it confined the debate on them to 30 minutes. The left-wing delegates who argued for the motions did not call for Troops Out Now. They began, not from the right of the Irish to self-determination and the political relevance of this to the British working class, but from the need to reduce violence in the Six Counties. From this pacifist standpoint they could only denounce the British army as being just as reprehensible as the IRA. In time-honoured social-democratic style they equated the violence of the oppressed with that of the oppressor.

Yet even thoroughly opportunist politics like these created panic among the party leadership, such is its commitment to bi-partisan policy on Ireland. When the debate began Callaghan left his normal position on the platform to sit beside Michael Foot, who was charged with replying to the motions from the floor. 'If you are going to be shouted down, I want to be beside you', he comforted the man who was once editor of *Tribune*. But he needn't have bothered. The Labour Party leadership will never be shouted down on Ireland — not, at least, at Labour Party conferences. The worst it can expect from dissident delegates is pleas to tone down Britain's oppression.

The conference was also concerned about the extremes of repression meted out to blacks in Britain. It called for the repeal of the 'Sus' law. Typically, however, this was motivated, not by an explanation of why today's police are so fond of the 1824 Vagrancy Act, not by a denunciation of that Act's increased use under the Labour Government, but by the claim that it was a negation of British democracy and justice. But 'Sus' is what British democracy and justice are all about. The British capitalist state depends for its survival on the repression of potentially disruptive minorities. Why else did Labour send the Special Patrol Group to beat Southall's blacks into submission for coming out on the streets to protest against the National Front? The 'Sus' law is not an aberration: it legitimises state repression.

And the conference was adamant that, on the question of abortion, the Corrie Bill was too oppressive. Instead of upholding the democratic right to free abortion on demand, it eulogised the 1967 Act — the same Act which severely restricts access to abortion and has encouraged a flourishing private trade. More, it reasserted Labour's view that abortion is a question of

conscience: up to individual women to decide, up to individual MPs whether to vote for even tighter controls. For the conference the Corrie Bill was another piece of Tory excess, not part of a general drive to put women out of work and back into the home. Torn between radical bourgeois feminism and traditional chauvinism, it could not see the defence of women's rights as crucial to the defence of the whole working class.

Labour welcomes the 'Trotskyists'

In his first interview after the conference Benn appealed to 'political activists on the ultra-left' to join the party. Hayward had already explained why while the proceedings were still going on. He was, he said, sick of party activists being described as Trotskyists and Marxists. He told the trade unions that if that particular section left the party it could not easily be replaced. He's right: Labour's loyal opposition is vital to its survival. It's one of Labour's strongest means of keeping its political stranglehold on the working class. The entryist left embodies the lost hopes of generations — the hopes that Labour might one day be a socialist party.

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency, which stands under the banner of Trotskyism and Marxism, is also sick of Labour Party activists being described as Trotskyists and Marxists. For the simple reason that they aren't. They prefer the politics of left-reformism. Take *Militant*. Of Benn's Brighton speech, it noted: 'it was the first time in many years that a speaker from the platform at Conference seriously attempted to answer the ideas and programme of Marxism'. By the 'programme of Marxism', *Militant* meant nationalisation. That Benn swung Labour against this was unimportant; he had 'seriously attempted' to deal with *Militant* politics. Big deal. For 30 years *Militant* has 'seriously attempted' to make what it calls Marxism acceptable to the Labour Party. Now it's succeeded — almost.

Always concerned with democracy, the International Marxist Group's newspaper *Socialist Challenge* contended that, while mandatory re-selection was fine, NEC control of the manifesto, though worthy, did not go quite far enough. Decisions on the manifesto, it thought, would best be left to the conference. And the proposals on choosing the party leader through a new electoral college, though equally worthy, also did not go far enough: the conference would be a better judge of character. And of course Benn, though very worthy indeed, did not go far enough either. *Socialist Challenge* plays more-democratic-than-thou to the bitter end: it called for greater democracy at conference and for a greater

Revolutionary Communist Pamphlets No3

WHO NEEDS THE LABOUR PARTY?

Published before the General Election in May, this pamphlet calls for a break with Labour. It retains its relevance in the battle against the politics of Labourism today.

35p

We didn't vote Labour

DEMOCRACY YES — C

effort to build local branches. With enemies like these . . .

The outcome

The main outcome of this year's Labour Party conference was the left's success in shifting the focus of discussion onto the question of rules and procedure. Its promise to make the leadership more responsive to the opinions of the rank and file was fulfilled. The acceptance of the left's procedural proposals is certain to rekindle pro-Labour sentiment among workers. It

shows how the Labour Party seeks to maintain its influence in the working class.

The problem with the Labour Party is not its bureaucratic anti-democratic structure, but its politics. Bipartisanship on Ireland, support for immigration controls and ruthless defence of British imperialism's interests worldwide — these are just some of the features of Labour's reactionary politics. The Labour Party can never defend the interests of the working class. Its role is to make bourgeois policies palatable in the labour movement.

The conference showed how the Labour left can ignore all the vital issues facing the working class and present the question of party democracy as a matter of central importance. And because of the political weakness of the labour movement, it can get away with it. Workers will continue to try to make the Labour Party more democratic or push it leftwards until a credible alternative is established. The plausibility of this strategy is affirmed every time the radical left urges critical support for the Labour Party.

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency is committed to fighting Labour Party politics. To give Labour any electoral support is to accept the present alternatives facing the working class. For workers determined to defend their class, there is no choice between Labour left and right, just as there is none between Labour and Tory. The Labour Party conference confirms that the future for class politics lies through an uncompromising struggle against Labour and all it stands for.

James Wood

COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS: A KNIFE IN THE BACK OF US ALL

The 36th Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain, held in November, is unlikely to arouse great interest in the workers' movement. The main controversy surrounds the question of inner-party democracy — a question which seems very remote from the problems workers face today. How, at a time of unprecedented attacks on the working class, has the CP come to be locked in a state of paralysis, decay and introspection?

Why the CP still matters

Appearances might suggest that the CP is irrelevant. Far from it. In the declining sectors of British industry, where the CP has traditionally had a strong trade union base, it has managed to persuade rank and file workers to scrap existing trade union practices and hand in their cards — all in the name of 'British industry'.

Shipbuilding is a good example. Leading CP unionist Jimmy Airlie, until recently shop stewards' convenor on the Clyde, has fought hard to justify redundancies in this sector. He saw more than 11 000 jobs go in British shipyards during the last two years of the Callaghan Government. Just this summer he succeeded in rallying workers behind a management drive to meet production schedules on ships destined for Poland — by ending trade union restrictions on overtime and holiday work and by dropping demarcation rules. Today Clyde workers form a pool of labourers taken on and laid off according to the ebb and flow of ship orders. Meanwhile Airlie and other AUEW officials scour the world for clients to rescue British Shipbuilders from extinction.

Airlie is much more than a super sales rep. Recalling the broader struggles to rid shipbuilding of 'Victorian work practices', he recently described his achievements like this:

'It wasn't an easy battle for these problems have deep roots. We had to convince the workers that change was necessary for the sake of unity and to secure the future of shipbuilding. The stewards made that breakthrough and established a new concept in the mind of the workforce — that it was *their* industry; *their* responsibility; and that its future was in *their* hands. Where else has such a position been achieved? Where else do shop stewards speak for an industry and not the management? . . . We're pointing the way for shipbuilding. Management has fallen in behind us.' (*Marxism Today*, October 1979)

CP trade unionists like Airlie are able to offer the bosses class collaboration more effective than any right-wing union bureaucrat could ever hope to get away with. The reason is simple: the CP puts forward a radical nationalist strategy which relates to workers' fears and frustrations. That is why it is so significant.

Banging the Great Britain drum

The influence that the CP wields in the labour movement rests on the party's past association with the Russian revolution and the Soviet Union. But though the old revolutionary phrases still linger on in CP publications, they now merely form the basic vocabulary for the CP's brand of militant chauvinist politics. Today workers who are spontaneously driven towards questioning the capitalist system are diverted along a nationalist path by the CP.

Recently the CP's Union Jack waving has become more frenzied. *Morning Star* editor Tony Chater holds that British nationalism is the nationalism of the oppressed; as far as he is concerned 'the multinationals must not be allowed to reduce our country to the status of a de-industrialised off-shore dependency of the EEC' (*Morning Star*, 28 April 1979). For Airlie nationalism has become nothing less than a religious crusade: 'I know', he says, 'there's a lot of talk about organising at a European level — forming a front with the European Metal Workers. But I believe that the Lord helps them that first help themselves' (*Marxism Today*, October 1979).

Banging the Great Britain drum all the way from King Street to the shop floor, the CP helps the employers to help themselves to higher profits. For to back 'our own' industry means to back all things British — including the British state. Yet it is the British state that today takes a lead in driving down workers' living standards. Longer hours, more accidents at work and still more redundancies are the practical consequences of the CP's politics.

The CP in search of an identity

In the past everybody knew what the CP was — a tough-talking organisation that combined radical nationalism with loyal apologies for the Soviet bureaucracy. Over the years, however, the CP has moved closer to reformism, until today there is little to distinguish it from the Labour left, except for the occasional statement on the achievements of Soviet medical science. To take one example: when, in the run-up to the last General Election, the *Daily Mail* printed the CP's election manifesto next to Labour's to show the similarity between the two, all CP General Secretary Gordon McLennan could stammer was that the CP really believed in Labour's programme but that Labour didn't.

As the CP's declining membership shows, the working class is not too drawn toward a third-class replica of the Labour Party. And inside the CP members are acutely aware that the party has no distinct identity. So during the past 10 years the CP has tried to make itself more attractive to

people by voicing the discontents of the petit bourgeoisie. But it has had to face competition from the Labour Party and the Liberals in the race to win feminists, ecologists, academics and pacifists.

Rather than becoming a source of stability, the CP's new petit-bourgeois recruits have strengthened the tendency towards fragmentation within the CP. What has happened to old-fashioned party loyalty now that CP Executive Committee member Sue Beardon can attack her colleagues for failing to realise that, for women, 'political commitment may also include wanting to spend time with their children creatively or change attitudes in their personal lives' (*Comment*, 29 September 1979)? This kind of 'political commitment' will never build a party or win votes. No wonder the CP's industrially-based sections regard the antics of its liberal feminist wing with increasing hostility.

What debate?

A party that is an alliance of heterogeneous social groupings — trade union officials, academics, feminists and community workers — can only be maintained through bureaucratic manoeuvres. The CP seems bound for disintegration as it struggles to accommodate a range of sectional interests. The current debate on inner-party democracy expresses the tensions it is under. The new recruits want less discipline and more time to change 'attitudes in their personal lives'.

The debate began at the 1978 congress. It considered a number of resolutions demanding the 'democratisation' of the CP's internal structure — but decided not to put them to the vote. Instead it set up a commission to look into inner-party democracy, and it is this commission's report which is the cause of all the fuss at this year's congress. The report accuses the leadership of being bureaucratic and elitist and demands drastic changes: more open elections for the Executive Committee, the right for EC members to publicise their differences with official policy, restrictions on the period of office for full-timers and more independence and funds for local branches. The EC is confronted with a document which directly threatens its position. The relaxation of party procedures begun by the leadership to appease its new liberal recruits is rebounding on it.

The tirades against the bureaucratic methods of the leadership are levelled with the liberal aim of decentralising power. The EC's critics are unable and unwilling to understand the real cause of the CP's ossification — the absence of political training, serious argument and genuine initiative within the party, and above all its lack of political independence. The

'I don't want to be accused of narrow nationalism...but if there has to be cuts — and I'm not saying there necessarily has to be — but if there has to be, then I'm arguing that these cuts shouldn't be made in Britain. . . . There have already been massive cuts in our industry so — if you like — we've done our bit. . . many of these foreign yards have been building British ships and we're for British ships being built in British yards.' Jimmy Airlie, CP trade unionist, *Marxism Today*, October 1979.

opposition treats bureaucratism as a technical problem, or blames it on the defects of individuals. It can only offer new rules or new leaders for answers, not new politics. Bureaucratism however is not a matter of protocols or personnel. Bureaucratic tendencies are now rampant within the CP because of its political relationship to the working class. The *Report of the commission on inner-party democracy* puts its finger on the central issue when it notes that the CP 'does not seek exclusive leadership' of the working class.

The consequences of this explicit rejection of the battle for revolutionary leadership go beyond the CP's practical activity. It leads to the sycophancy the CP shows toward the management of firms like British Shipbuilders and the understudy part it plays to Labour. It is the root cause too of the complete inactivity of most of the CP's membership. But more than this — it means that discussion within the party is ultimately pointless.

In or out of party congresses, debate can only be inconclusive, for there is no need to give Marxism a clear organisational expression. Declarations and exhortations suffice: members are expected to be enthusiastic exponents of the line, not politically independent cadres. This is why the CP is bureaucratic — because it has abandoned the side of the working class. And it is also why the most the CP can bring itself to discuss is 'democracy' versus 'bureaucratism'. Unconcerned about giving workers the leadership they need, the CP has turned its attention to a debate about debate itself.

Needed: scrutiny — and exposure

For all its internal problems the CP continues to be a danger to the working class movement. Many militants still take this party's claim to be communist at face value. Despite its crisis of identity and despite a declining, ageing and ever more disparate membership, the CP continues to be the best organised left-wing force in the trade unions. Despite its reactionary programme the CP can present itself as a Marxist alternative to the Labour Party. That's why active workers must pay close scrutiny to this organisation — even to its ever more esoteric discussions on inner-party democracy — and why every opportunity must be seized to expose its real character.

Sabena Norton

CLASS STRUGGLE NO

ONE OR TWO THINGS TONY CLIFF FORGOT

An assessment of the recent experiences of the British labour movement, the setbacks it has suffered and its future prospects can only be welcomed. In a major article, 'The balance of class forces in recent years' (*International Socialism*, No 6), Tony Cliff, the leader of the Socialist Workers Party, attempts such an analysis. This article presents the thinking behind the policies of the SWP.

The first forty pages are devoted to describing the erosion of shop floor organisation in a number of industries and the recent decline of trade union militancy. This account draws sober, often pessimistic, conclusions. For example, when dealing with the shipyards, Cliff notes that an 'abysmal betrayal of every trade union principle is taking place in an area where unemployment is overwhelming' (p4).

When it comes to explaining the cause of this decline of working class militancy, Cliff doesn't take any chances. In true diplomatic fashion everything becomes a possible explanation:

'The change in the balance of class forces in Britain has been caused by a whole number of inter-related factors: incomes policy; the massive establishment of productivity deals which has been associated with the weakening of the independence of convenors and shop stewards; the widespread (sic) of workers' participation in industry; the move to the right of "left" trade union leaders like Jones and Scanlon; the integration of convenors into the trade union structure; the role of the Communist Party... the ideological trap of the concept of "Profitability", "viability" etc. combined with a loyalty to Labour even when Labour attacked workers' living standards; the impact of the economic crisis - cuts, sackings, etc. etc. on all the above factors.' (p27)

Cliff provides a catalogue of *symptoms* rather than explanations. Why did workers accept incomes policy, productivity deals, participation in industry or the concept of profitability? On the real issues Cliff remains silent.

From Cliff's confused analysis it is possible to extract two 'explanations' for the decline of trade union militancy. One explanation is psychological, the lack of confidence of the working class: 'Lack of confidence to break, or at least loosen, the vice of government and employers, is the key impediment to raising class consciousness' (p44). The other theme is the weakening of the power of shop stewards as a result of incomes policy and productivity deals. Let's take this point first.

Cliff creates his own problems

Today Cliff is unequivocal on the question of shop stewards. The decline in their bargaining power is the 'single most important factor in the deterioration of shop floor organisation' (p27). In the past Cliff was just as unequivocal about shop stewards. In 1970 he saw the shop stewards as the vanguard of the working class.

'We believe that the vanguard section of the working class, in other words the most advanced section of the working class, the 200 000 shop stewards of this country, should be organised not only industrially but also politically. There should not be individual shop stewards like individual marbles in different shops, but a shop stewards' movement that will have also political life of its own, and this will be the revolutionary party.' (*Idiot International*, 6 June 1970)

For Cliff, the revolutionary party was nothing more than a movement of shop stewards.

Since then the SWP has tried to offer an *organisational* means of getting shop stewards together. The problem that faces the SWP is that in recent years it has become apparent that the shop stewards are far from revolutionary. In many cases they have supported management plans for rationalisation and accepted the view that redundancies are inevitable.

The divergence between reality and the SWP's shop steward fetish has forced Cliff to draw a false contrast between yesterday's militant shop stewards and those of today. His theme of a 'dynamic change' in the balance of class forces depends on this contrast.

In fact the only place where a 'dynamic change' has taken place is in Cliff's head. The decline of militancy does not signify a change in the balance of class forces. Whereas earlier Cliff overestimated the shop stewards, today he underestimates the potential of the working class.

The shop stewards

A militant shop steward is not the same as a revolutionary worker. Shop stewards represent workers at the point of production. Because of their position, they inevitably become involved in industrial disputes and often take a militant stance against management. However, shop stewards represent workers on a particular

Tony Cliff tells it like it is:

'In summing up one can say that the third stage the British working class has entered is a "negation of the negation" - synthesising elements of the first stage (the 'twenties and the 'thirties) - class-identification - and of the second stage (1945-65) - self-confidence. The synthesis is higher than the individual elements joined in it and pregnant of greater revolutionary possibilities.' Tony Cliff, *International Socialism*, April/May 1969.

'As one element in an equation the ideological impasse is both a cause and an effect of the crisis of the movement'. Tony Cliff, 'The balance of class forces in the recent years', *International Socialism*, Autumn 1979.

shop floor in a particular industry. In the recent past they have been unable to go beyond the particular interests of the section they represent to express the general interests of the working class. This will remain the case until revolutionaries extend their influence in the workers' movement.

Shop stewards always reflect the political trends dominant in the working class movement. During the Second World War they played a leading role in integrating workers into Britain's war effort: in engineering they took the initiative in establishing the Joint Production Committees which organised speed-ups and enforced longer hours. However, in the 'sixties this potential for collaboration was obscured by the prevalence of shop floor militancy. During this period of relative prosperity there was considerable scope for local bargaining and shop stewards emerged as an important force in industry. But even then the shop steward wasn't what the SWP imagined him to be. The bourgeoisie had a much more realistic appraisal. For instance, the Donovan Report on trade unions noted:

'The shop stewards are rarely agitators pushing workers towards unconstitutional action. In some instances they may be the mere mouthpieces of their workgroups. But quite commonly they are supporters of order exercising a restraining influence on their members in conditions which promote disorder.' (*Donovan Report*, 1967, p9)

The SWP confused the pursuit of trade unionism on the shop floor with revolutionary politics. The potential for class collaboration is inherent in the politics of the shop stewards as long as their activity is pursued within narrow trade union terms. The militancy of the shop stewards was restricted to demanding higher wages and better working conditions. They never questioned the right of the capitalist to his property or to his profit. On most important political issues of the day shop stewards had no independent policy. When it came to issues such as racism, Ireland or the viability of industry, the shop stewards' point of view was *essentially* the same as that of the bourgeoisie.

This phase of trade union militancy was

made possible by the post-war boom. The onset of recession brought it to an end. Because trade union militants had no independent political standpoint they were forced to accept capitalist logic. 'Wage rises cause inflation', said the bourgeoisie - and the shop stewards could not disagree. 'Industry can only survive if we raise productivity and trim the workforce.' Again no reply. 'Make sacrifices in the interest of the nation', requested the Labour Party. The shop stewards raised their hands in affirmation.

Reformism

To this day Cliff and the SWP have not understood what happened to trade union militancy. Wage militancy is the class struggle in its simplest form: it is quite consistent with reformism. As long as the class struggle stays on the level of wages and conditions it is not yet anti-capitalist in character. Moreover, militancy is continually undermined by the refor-

mist leadership of the working class. Workers who accept the primacy of the national interest are forced to abandon militancy when the interest of the nation demands it.

In the 'sixties militant workers did not directly confront the obstacle of reformism. This was not because reformism was not dominant in the working class but because at the time it had only a limited role to play. Reformism becomes important when the intensification of social contradictions leads workers to look actively for an alternative. In the different conditions of 1974 the Labour left appeared to offer just such an alternative.

In the 'sixties many workers felt that they were doing well: they were not looking for political solutions. As a result the membership of the reformist political parties declined. Cliff and his comrades misunderstood this development, thinking that the Labour Party was no longer significant. For them reformism was no longer a force to be reckoned with. In 1974 the SWP was still peddling the illusion that the spontaneous struggles of the working class could easily overcome the 'residue' of reformism:

'There can be no doubt that the presence of the Labour government will aid the revolutionary left in the long-term. The residual illusions which many workers still have in Labour and in the possibilities of reformism will be put to the test and will be proved to be mistaken in even more decisive manner than 1964-70.' (*International Socialism*, No 67, March 1974, p7)

It was the SWP that was 'proved to be mistaken'. The 'illusions' were those of the SWP - the period saw a strengthening of reformism in the British labour movement.

How it adds up

Cliff has a lot of explaining to do. He knows that things have changed but he can't say why. Cliff's adaption to militancy led him to underestimate the need for revolutionary politics in the past. Today he continues down the same road, trying to bring yesterday's militant back to life. This is how he defended the SWP's focus on trade unionism:

'The fact that the commitment called by Rank and File's Defend Our Unions Conference - the

Code of Practice, is so elementary - solidarity, respect for picket lines, collecting money, organising blacking, should not disguise the point that to get such a code accepted and *acted upon*. . . will be a very hard task to achieve.' (pp45-46)

For once Cliff is right. In fact, working class unity will *never* be achieved through trade union politics. The problem with the Code of Practice is not that it is 'elementary' but that it does not create the basis for independent class politics.

At present workers are divided among themselves because in practice they are united behind the strategy of the ruling class. Workers may react to their own particular exploitation, but they accept the general premises of their class enemies. Trade unionism can unite workers within a factory or a single industry, but it can never achieve class-wide organisation. In fact trade unions reproduce the divisions that already exist within the working class - that is why they have seldom supported the rights of blacks, women or the unemployed. Cliff's politics begin from where the working class is - and leave it in exactly the same place.

The record shows that workers don't need to be told how to be good trade unionists. But it also shows that workers face political problems which undermine trade union solidarity. Support for the liberation struggle of the Irish or the defence of immigrants does not arise spontaneously from trade union experience. Workers don't need platitudes about their 'confidence'. They need an answer to the charge that wage rises cause inflation and a reply to the accusation that strikes are at the root of Britain's problems.

Because the day to day activities of workers do not in themselves provide answers to questions like these, revolutionaries have an obligation to take them up from the point of view of the working class as a whole. The role of a revolutionary party is to give a clear organisational expression to class consciousness. For the SWP, the task is to give an organisational expression to militancy.

Cliff's old project of building an umbrella organisation for shop stewards marked an abandonment of revolutionary leadership. A decade later he still wants to generalise the prevailing consciousness of the working class. Workers who want political answers have to rely on their common sense - the SWP certainly won't tell them anything new. But we can now see why Cliff attaches so much importance to the level of 'confidence' in the working class. In the past he over-estimated the shop stewards, but as the years have passed his optimism has turned to pessimism and he has grown cautious. All his talk of working class confidence reflects his own lack of confidence in the ability of workers to become class conscious revolutionaries and not merely good trade unionists.

Frank Richards

Revolutionary Communist Papers No6

OUT SOON

With the collapse of its 'rank and file' movements, the SWP is left puzzling over the decline in militancy and squabbling about its past analysis and future perspectives. But how is it that reformism has come to hold such a grip on the working class? For a discussion of the origins of the modern shop stewards movement and its relationship to the working class, order the next issue of *Revolutionary Communist Papers* now.

75p

MILITARY ALERT

Bokassa goes DIAMONDS AREN'T FOREVER

On 21 September news of a 'bloodless coup' reached radio and tv stations around the world. Emperor Bokassa The First had been deposed and replaced by his nephew and former special adviser, David Dacko. French troops had been involved, and that was all there was to it. But why had France's President Giscard d'Estaing sent the army in on somebody who, it was later revealed, had given him diamonds worth no less than £110 000 as a friendly gesture?

Giscard had begun to put the squeeze on Bokassa in August, when he halted nearly all aid to the Empire. Reliant on France for half its funds, the CAE's already fragile economy disintegrated rapidly. Bokassa turned to Libya for help, boarded a plane to Tripoli for talks and so gave France the opportunity to launch the raid it had been rehearsing for months - 'Operation Barracuda'.

French soldiers stationed in Zaire, Gabon and Chad flew into Bangui, the capital of the CAE, while a specially trained strike force was airlifted from France to occupy key provincial towns. Dacko, himself overthrown by Bokassa in 1966, was duly installed as President - whereupon he proclaimed that the military was welcome to stay ten years 'if necessary'.

Behind the coup

France had no choice but to kick Bokassa out. His brutal regime had become a source of permanent unrest - which threatened to overturn the delicate balance of capitalist relations in the CAE and so put French interests there at risk. For France, the defence of the CAE as a source of vital raw materials like uranium meant that Bokassa had to go. That was the only way to re-establish 'stability'.

So what's new?

Popular euphoria at Bokassa's downfall was short-lived. Dacko's new government, even more openly puppeteered by France, gave little cause for celebration. The Oubangui Patriotic Front, led from exile by Dr Abel Goumba, described the intervention as a 'real colonial reconquest' and called for a general strike which was widely heeded by students and teachers. Pop-

Spurred on by the recession, imperialism is on the march in Africa once more.

In more prosperous times the big capitalist powers did their business there through ambassadorial manoeuvres and the establishment of black regimes ready to co-operate with every order. But now these methods are proving ineffective, as competition for raw material supplies, export markets and spheres of investment grows fiercer by the month - and as the African people persist in struggling for their liberation. Today the green-jacketed paratrooper is coming to replace the grey-suited diplomat in Africa. Invasions are no longer the exception, but the rule.

Imperialism moves fast in Africa, and the British labour movement needs to follow events there closely. The next step will bring news and analysis of the most important ones. Here we look at two recent developments that at first sight seem perplexing: the overthrow of Bokassa, Emperor of the Central African Empire, and the apparent liberalisation of South Africa's labour laws. We show why, after propping up the CAE's bloody dictator for a decade, French imperialism decided to oust him. And we explain why the apartheid regime has become so keen to recognise black trade unions.

We also look at how to give solidarity to the national liberation movement of a country with which British imperialism is at present deeply concerned: Zimbabwe. This is the main aim of our coverage of Africa - to build a movement in the working class against Britain's oppression of the African masses.

ular demonstrations showed that the new President's appeal to the youth to 'return to work and stop mixing in with politics' was ignored.

Back in France the government fared little better than Dacko. While the coup was condoned amid an outbreak of hysteria about cannibalism, Giscard came under fire. Revelations about his family's investments in the CAE were followed by publicity about his personal links with Bokassa - and the little matter of the diamonds. The French Communist Party, always anxious to show its sense of responsibility, called on Giscard to issue a firm denial that the incident had taken place - 'in the interests of France' (*Financial Times*, 12 October 1979).

The protests made by other imperialist countries scarcely concealed their envy. Both *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times* contrasted Britain's patient diplomacy in Zimbabwe and Uganda to France's decisive action. The American state department gave France an official pat on the back (*Le Monde*, 27 September 1979), while the *Wall Street Journal* regretted that the US government did not act more hastily to protect America's own interests in Africa. All agreed that France's intervention had ended a period in which not only its own interests but also those of other countries investing in Africa had been endangered. As for the diamonds affair - that was an indiscretion which could be forgiven with ease.

Lindsay Finch

UNIONS UNDER APARTHEID

Black trade unions in South Africa, long the target of vicious state intimidation, have suddenly become respectable. When Minister of Manpower Utilisation Fanie Botha announced laws allowing black migrant labourers and commuters from the homelands to join registered trade unions, it was a remarkable about-turn for the South African ruling class. What did it mean for black workers?

Until a few years ago South Africa's ruling class was confident that it could contain the militancy of the country's expanding black trade unions. But after the Soweto uprising of 1976 it was forced to redouble its attempts to create a privileged layer of black workers and an urban black middle class. The government set up the Wiehahn and Riekert Commission to report on the reform of labour legislation and of South Africa's pass laws. As one business organisation put it, what was needed was a means of buying off materialistically minded blacks in the hope that they would then back the whites against the 'irresponsible economic and political ambitions of black agitators'.

That is why Botha has agreed to recognise certain black trade unions and abolish South African industry's statutory colour bar. Yet racial discrimination is as much a part of the system as it ever was. The

white trade unions uphold it: in collusion with the employers they maintain closed shop agreements which exclude black workers from every major industry. Less than one per cent of jobs have been opened up to blacks by Botha's new legislation. South African capitalism can only exist by denying black workers their democratic rights: no amendment to the statute book can alter that.

The white unions' first response to Botha's measures was outrage: they threatened to repeat the Rand Rebellion of 1922, in which white mineworkers rioted in protest against dilution by blacks. But Botha rapidly reassured them that their members would be better protected against competition from black labour than ever before. Loyal servants of the ruling class, they will never support black workers.

The point about the new legislation is that it isolates the independent black trade unions. They cannot gain legal recognition, for to do so means registering with the established white unions and opening their books to inspection by the South African state. Ruling class strategy is clear: to institutionalise black unions and so control the black working class more firmly. Indeed, the independent unions are now at a crossroads. Any concession to the legitimacy conferred by registration would spell disaster for black workers.

These events in South Africa have important implications for British workers. In part, the new trade union laws were introduced as a concession to foreign investors in South Africa. *The Economist* observed:

'The government has also realised that its earlier policy of denying recognised trade union rights to black workers posed problems for foreign companies... foreign firms are facing demands from black unions for recognition. Some would suffer political embarrassment back home if they refused.'

Britain is one of the main bulwarks of the apartheid regime. Yet so far British companies investing and trading in South Africa suffer little 'political embarrassment' back home. The working class has every interest in changing this situation right away. By sabotaging the plans of British capitalism for South Africa, the working class will not only provide effective support for black trade unionists but also weaken its own exploiters.

Moses Dube

LABOUR SOLD OUT YEARS AGO

The battle for national liberation in Southern Africa has put world imperialism under immense pressure. Now it is making strenuous efforts to hold on. Over Zimbabwe, for instance, intrigues by slick operators like Andrew Young and David Owen have been followed by wheeler-dealing at Lancaster House and repeated helicopter raids on guerrilla camps.

Yet the struggles of the African people have gained little support in this country. There is no widespread hatred for Britain's imperialist manoeuvres in Africa. The British working class - potentially the most important ally of the liberation movement - has no independent position on them.

All the past attempts to build solidarity with the freedom fighters of Africa have been based on radical British nationalism rather than anti-imperialism. This year's Labour Party conference is a case in point. Speaker after speaker condemned South Africa. Speaker after speaker chastised the

Tories for turning a blind eye to Britain's huge investments there. Why? Not because they oppose the subjugation of the African working class to white rule, but because of all the jobs for British workers that could be created if the money invested in apartheid were pumped back into the economy here.

Many of those who sympathise with the African cause like to make the point that British policy in Southern Africa is misguided. They say Britain should stop all contact with South Africa - because there are better pickings to be had elsewhere. Urging British capitalists to drop their white clients in favour of black ones, *Tribune* advises the bourgeoisie that 'our trade with Nigeria alone is now larger than with South Africa'. For *Tribune* 'our trade' always comes before the interests of the African working class.

Radical British nationalism on Africa does not stop with economic arguments.

Britain, it appears, is politically obliged to set an example to the rest of the world in Southern Africa. When Carrington began his talks with Muzorewa, Nkomo and Mugabe, activists in the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Socialist Workers Party and International Marxist Group formed the Zimbabwe Emergency Campaign Committee to publicise the grave moral issues at stake. Denouncing Smith's regime as 'illegal', the ZECC pontificated: 'British people have a unique responsibility to ensure that there is no sell out of the people of Zimbabwe'. But when UDI was declared in 1965 Labour Party Ministers did not feel it was 'illegal'. They went along with Smith, holding that 'the natives' weren't quite ready for self-government. Smith's regime was only 'illegal' to those who accepted Britain's 'legal' right to oppress Zimbabwe - to those who preach the British people's 'unique responsibility' to that country today. Was the Smith regime

any more 'illegal' than the regimes that preceded it, or any more illegal than the directly colonial regimes Britain ran in Kenya or Uganda?

The ZECC's fine and upright 'British people' divide into two classes. British capitalists have a responsibility all their own - to make their profits, and to that end to oppress the African working class. British workers also have a responsibility: to separate themselves from the pro-imperialist politics of the Labour Party and its hangers-on and to open a second front against their state's domination of Southern Africa.

Revolutionary
Communist
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**THE BATTLE
FOR AFRICA**
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60p



Engineers take action

DUFFY FEELS THE SQUEEZE

The story of the recent engineering strike is well known. A series of one- and two-day strikes was called by the AUEW bureaucracy and found wide support among rank and file engineering workers. The Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) met the union's challenge in forthright fashion: it went out of its way to crush the workforce. After running for 10 weeks, the dispute ended when class solidarity on both sides began to crumble. A growing number of employers gave way to the workers' demands and Arnold Weinstock, director of GEC — one of Britain's largest engineering concerns — warned that he would pull out of the EEF unless it made concessions to the unions. On the union side, the leadership of the EEFU pressed for a settlement by threatening to make a deal with the bosses on its own. The strike was wound up in classic bureaucratic style with secret negotiations at the Labour Party conference, talks late into the night at Gatwick Airport and a sell-out.

But there is more to the engineering strike than this. How did a reactionary bureaucrat like Terry Duffy come to lead some of the most significant industrial action that Britain has witnessed in the late 'seventies? Why was the strike so solid and why did the employers respond with such grim single-mindedness?

No option for the bosses

The EEF had been preparing for a show-down for months beforehand. After long deliberations it reached a fresh policy on how to deal with the unions and, in March, issued a new code of practice for all its members.

The code underlined the need for employers' unity: any company accommodating to the unions would be expelled. As *The Economist* noted in the midst of the strike, the only division in the engineering employers' ranks was between 'hawks', who wanted to hold out against the strikers as long as possible, and the 'superhawks', who wanted to smash the strike quickly — through lock-outs and recourse to the law if necessary.

The aggressive stance taken by the employers was forced on them by the impact of the capitalist crisis on the engineering industry. The output of Britain's engineering sector is lower today than it was in 1974. Squeezed on all sides by more productive rivals, British companies find themselves fighting a rearguard action on the world market. Profits have fallen so low that most cannot afford to invest in new technology and so match the productive capacity of their foreign competitors.

To overcome their crisis of profitability engineering employers have embarked on a campaign of rationalisations: weeding out inefficient plants, increasing shift work, speeding up production lines and sacking thousands of workers. More than 50 000 engineering jobs have been lost in the 12 months preceding June this year.

To assure its members' survival the EEF has sought to undermine trade union organisation among the engineers. Its greatest desire is to quell shop floor power and move toward a system in which local pay bargaining is coordinated with national wage negotiations. That way it can use tame union bureaucrats to mediate between its member companies and rank and file workers. In addition it wants to widen wage differentials so as to divide the workforce and neutralise skilled workers.

This two-pronged attack is essential if the engineering employers are to break down union resistance, keep the lid on wage rises and push through further redundancies. One way or another the EEF has

to discipline the unions before mounting the savage attacks on the workforce that are required. The EEF's tactics in the engineering strike were not adopted out of a malicious intent to teach the workers a lesson. The employers had no choice. They are not simply 'anti-union'; they are instinctively concerned with the preservation of their class.

The bureaucrats and the Broad Left

Even before it began, the confidence with which the EEF viewed the strike was reinforced by its appreciation of the pro-capitalist nature of the AUEW leadership. As late as the middle of July, Duffy commented that he was 'optimistic' that strike action could be averted. To the Federation it was obvious that he and his colleagues were committed to 'moderation' in the pursuit of wage claims and, even more so, to the elimination of unofficial protest. It was also obvious that the AUEW leaders shared its own objective — the regeneration of the industry on a profitable basis. With this much in common, the EEF had grounds for hoping that the union would accept the means it put forward to set British engineering to rights — wage cuts and redundancies. After all, Duffy & Co have proved willing in the past to sacrifice 'sacred trade union principles' in the interest of the engineering industry and the British nation.

The EEF also knew that the AUEW's main ginger group, the Broad Left, was committed to most of the leadership's goals. True, the Broad Left occasionally makes militant noises. But hasn't it pledged itself to supporting the regeneration of British industry too? Didn't Communist Party member and British Leyland Longbridge convenor Derek Robinson support Leyland chief Michael Edwardes in his plans to revitalise the ailing automotive company — despite the fact that they meant mass redundancies? And didn't Jimmy Airlie, now assistant divisional organiser of the AUEW and a long-standing hero of the Broad Left, tell Clyde-side trade unionists to scab on shipbuilders conducting an overtime ban at Swan Hunter on the Tyne because they were jeopardising orders and failing to create the impression that 'the British shipbuilding worker is second to none'? For the EEF it was clear that, when forced to make a choice, the Broad Left would subordinate engineering workers' interests to those of the industry.

No choice for the workers

The resistance of the engineering workers to the employers' assault surprised the EEF and the AUEW bureaucracy alike. Before the strike, the press speculated that the planned stoppages would not be popular, if only because workers were more interested in local bargaining than in national agreements. The right-wing drift in the AUEW bureaucracy was also held as evidence that engineering workers had little fight in them. On the day of the first stoppage the *Financial Times* ran the headline 'Limited support forecast for engineers' strike today'. Yet a day later it was forced to eat its words, sheepishly recording 'Backing for engineering strike above expectation'.

Despite the absence of any lead from the AUEW leadership and despite the barrage of anti-working class propaganda from the media, the engineers were prepared to fight. Both before and during the stoppages they showed the spirit of class struggle. Their tactics were militant and inventive. In many cases employers' efforts to lock workers out were frustra-

ted: at Rosedale Plastics in South Wales, for instance, workers barricaded the factory with their own cars and threw a 24-hour picket round it when the bosses announced that closure was imminent.

Rank and file response to the strike was strong because of the deteriorating conditions faced by engineering workers. Real wages have been declining as employers have used the threat of redundancies to keep pay demands in check. In a number of smaller plants many workers earn less than the national minimum wage. The engineering workers had had enough of promises about future prosperity. What the EEF didn't understand was that they had no choice but to struggle.

Such was their militancy that Duffy and his allies were forced to adopt a radical posture. At its April meeting the AUEW national committee agreed to press for pay increases of £20 for skilled workers and proportionate increases for other grades. From then on, in public at least, Duffy had to talk tough — a development which the EEF had not counted on.

Duffy had no choice. Had he ignored the mood of the membership he would have lost control. Though the AUEW leaders are quite prepared to collaborate with the bosses, the extent of their collaboration is restricted by the need to maintain a degree of credibility with the rank and file. To do otherwise would be to run the risk of losing the support of their own membership.

The AUEW leadership sought to mediate between workers and capitalists by limiting the scope of the engineers' struggle to one- and two-day strikes. Short, sharp national stoppages would simultaneously curb militancy and endow the bureaucracy's national negotiations with credibility. Local negotiations could be pushed to the background and the threat to the bureaucracy's position from local and unofficial action could be contained.

This fitted in precisely with the aims of the employers. But at the same time the bureaucracy had to put the employers on a three-day week to show them the pressure it was under. As Duffy told them during negotiations:

'You can take my submissions as the barometer of opinion of our people. We feel we have the pulse of our workers, and our workers are so frustrated that we are being accused of delaying tactics, and I can tell you that we are facing some hostility for not delivering already.'

'I hope that we can find this afternoon some means of placating our members, because the alternative, I feel, would be drastic to the Engineering Industry.'

Terry Duffy, speaking at the national conference between the EEF and the CSEU, July 1979.

The result

The employers got Duffy's message. They offered a formula designed to save face on both sides. The AUEW bureaucracy grabbed it, backtracking on all essential points. In exchange for a pittance for its members and the vague promise of a one hour cut in the working week in two years' time, the union leadership called the struggle off. Duffy moved in swiftly to clamp down on unrest among the rank and file. At Rolls Royce, he intervened personally to force workers protesting against the lockout there to go back.

The bourgeoisie greeted the result of the strike with a sigh of relief, followed by celebrations. Enthusiasms about the bargain struck, *The Economist* exclaimed 'average labour costs will not rise by more than 1 per cent over the year because of this' (*The Economist*, 13 October 1979). The EEF achieved both its main objectives: national and local negotiations are to be synchronised from now on, and the wedge between skilled and unskilled workers has been hammered in still further — pay rises for unskilled workers are five per cent less than those for skilled.

The engineers got little out of their lengthy battle. The AUEW leadership suffered no major challenge to its policies or to its conduct of the strike. The Broad Left merely carried out Duffy's legwork. It did not prepare the workers for the struggle. On the contrary, it was fully complicit with Duffy's manipulative running of the dispute. Of course, when the combative temper of the workers became apparent, the Broad Left began to make radical mutterings. But at most it did no more than give expression to rank and file militancy. The problem with the Broad Left was not its inactivity but its politics. Sharing the same basic strategy as the AUEW bureaucracy, it could offer no alternative to the many active workers who looked to it for a lead.

The aftermath

Just a few days after the dispute was over employers in Manchester began announcing redundancies. The AUEW leadership was soon back at work doing what it knows best: recommending that strikers return to work (at Chrysler's engine plant, Stoke) and accepting mass redundancies (at British Leyland). For its part the Broad Left was soon busy looking round for ways of making the engineering workers' militancy help its sympathisers gain official positions in the AUEW.

The solidarity that rank and file engineering workers showed meant that the employers were unable to inflict what might well have been a serious defeat on the whole working class. But, despite a courageous and prolonged struggle, the dispute resulted in a stalemate. Even so, the engineering strike contains a number of important lessons for the British labour movement.

In this crisis the employers are fighting for their lives. Conscious of their class interests, they will use any means at their disposal to defend the capitalist system. Workers must therefore respond to their offensive with class-conscious determination.

The strike shows that the *politics* of the Broad Left and the right wing can only lead to defeat. Their identification with British industry forces them to sacrifice workers' struggles in the interests of the nation. Engineering workers really had only one choice to make: between the capitalists' right to their profits and the workers' right to defend their living standards. These two rights are fundamentally opposed to each other. In practice the right to profits leads to redundancies, wage cuts and poverty; the right to defend workers' interests leads, not to the circumvention of the crisis, but to the overthrow of the capitalist system.

The Broad Left is ready to use very militant language to identify the rights of workers with those of the capitalists. That is what radical British nationalism is all about. But the Broad Left has no monopoly on militancy. As the strike showed, even right-wing trade union bureaucrats are forced to adopt militant phraseology when under pressure. Next time workers must ensure that militancy is transformed into conscious anti-capitalist politics. This is the language the capitalists really fear.

Helen Swift

IRAN: KURDS AGAINST KHOMEINI

Khomeini has launched a full scale military campaign against the Kurds. But his hopes that resistance could be easily crushed have been dispelled. In recent weeks control of the Kurdish regional capital of Mahabad has passed back and forth between the Iranian army and Kurdish rebels. The Kurds are now dug into the impenetrable mountains which straddle the border with Iraq. They are continuing the war using the guerilla tactics for which their Pesh Merga fighters are renowned.

The impact of the Kurdish rebellion has reverberated across the world. Even the dithering Carter was forced to act swiftly and rush supplies of arms to the Iranian government. The Kurds have been a problem for the new regime right from the start: immediately after the overthrow of the Shah the liberal Ayatollah Taleghani was forced to begin negotiations with them. He promised a degree of self-government that would have guaranteed federal powers to the Kurds similar to those held by individual states in the USA. But the instability of the new Iranian government made this solution impossible.

The Kurds made the most of the chaos which accompanied the Shah's fall. Rebels seized land and established committees outside the control of the religious authorities. This was a serious threat to Khomeini's plans to crush unrest from nationalities throughout Iran — a necessary step on the way to re-establishing stable capitalist relations.

The Turkomans, whose homeland rests close to the Soviet border, were quickly defeated. The Arabs, concentrated in the oil-rich south-west, have matched Khomeini's growing power with staunch opposition. It is the Kurds, however, who are the biggest thorn in Khomeini's side.

The regime in Qom grudgingly admits that the Kurds now control 8000 square miles of Iranian Kurdistan. From their secure mountain bases Kurdish forces have launched guerrilla attacks, seized frontier posts and wiped out a number of military detachments. Things look bleak for the government, now faced with a winter campaign in areas where it is widely hated.

Who are the Kurds?

Hill fighting and guerrilla warfare are nothing new to the Kurds. Although they form a nation of some 15 million people, they have been denied the right to self-determination throughout the twentieth

century. The origins of Kurdish national oppression lie in the carve-up of the Middle East that the imperialist powers arranged after the First World War.

Although the imperialists initially toyed with the idea of granting Kurdistan independence, the plan was quickly abandoned when it became clear that their interests were best served by slicing up the country and its population. Today there are some six million Kurds in Turkey, another four million in Iran, 2.5 million in Iraq, 600 000 in Syria and a further 100 000 in the USSR.

Since the 'twenties the oppression of the Kurds has been reinforced by the imperialist domination of the Middle East. When necessary the imperialist powers have supplied the military hardware to crush Kurdish rebels. In 1930 Britain supplied air support for the Iraqi army to help it secure control of the oil discovered in Iraqi Kurdistan. In Turkey the Kurds have been subjected to a policy of 'Turkification' — resettlement throughout eastern and south central Turkey. In an attempt to destroy their national identity the Kurds' language has also been outlawed.

In Iran, SAVAK, the Shah's secret police force, was responsible for arresting hundreds of Kurds and administering the suppression of Kurdish culture. Iranian Kurdistan has been starved of resources and condemned to economic isolation and backwardness: although it contains almost a fifth of the population, only three per cent of Iran's industry is sited there.

The Kurds have never given up the fight for self-determination. They revolted against Turkey in 1925, 1928 and 1937, and against the Iraqi and Iranian regimes throughout the 'twenties — and in 1930-32. The struggle reached a new pitch in the 'forties, during the Allies' occupation of Iran. The arrival of the Red Army in 1941 stimulated Kurdish resistance to the central government and, after five years of running their own affairs in practice, the Kurds formally declared the Mahabad Republic in December 1945.

Stalinism in Kurdistan

At first the USSR was willing to encourage the Kurds. Stalin believed that he could use the newly formed Kurdish and Azerbaijani Republics to press the Iranians into granting an oil concession. This was his only motive. When Soviet forces withdrew on the understanding that such a concession would be granted, the year-old republics were swiftly overthrown by the Shah.

Since the Second World War Kurdish unrest has flared up on a number of occasions. A succession of reactionary regimes in Iraq has faced a sustained campaign ever since the early 'sixties, when Mulla Mustafa Barzani, leader of most of Iraq's Kurds and founder of the Stalinist Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP-Iraq), returned from exile in the Soviet Union.

In 1970 the Ba'ath regime in Iraq tried to bring an end to the war by promising the Kurds equal rights with Arabs and guaranteeing autonomy within four years. The Ba'ath wanted to grant a limited degree of autonomy while retaining control over the oilfields in the region. Barzani agreed to this shabby compromise; but the Kurds continued their struggle for independence.

When the agreement came up for ratification in 1974 the Kurds rejected it. Barzani now complained of discrimination against the Kurds in jobs, education and other areas. The military conflict intensified until March 1975, when the Shah and Iraq's present leader, Saddam Hussein, signed the Algiers Agreement. Iraq ceded its right to various Gulf territories to Iran and in return Iran agreed to close its border with Iraq and stop all aid to the Kurdish insurgents. This action left thousands of Kurdish refugees to starve to death in the mountains. Barzani left his fighters to their fate. This terrible defeat was followed by mass deportations of Kurds to the southern, Arab part of Iran.

Led by petit-bourgeois elements, the Kurdish opposition parties have been unable to provide a consistent defence of their people. These parties — the KDP-Iraq and its counterparts in Turkey and Iran — represent the interests of the small traders and landowners. However most of their fighters are peasants or workers. Mass pressure from this base has forced the Stalinists to put forward demands for land reform — demands they were not prepared to concede when they controlled the short-lived Mahabad Republic.

In their valiant struggle the Kurds can expect little support from the Kremlin. Its role has been despicable. Anxious to preserve its foothold in Iraq, the Soviet bureaucracy signed a 'friendship treaty' with the repressive Ba'ath regime in the early 'seventies — while Kurds were being slaughtered in their thousands. The Soviet bureaucracy has not raised a whisper about the genocidal policies pursued against the Kurds. It fears that a successful

liberation struggle in Kurdistan would win support among the Kurds in the USSR — something the Kremlin, which has a large number of national minorities under its domination, is anxious to avoid.

The Kurds and the working class

Kurdistan is a crucial issue for the Iranian working class. Khomeini has used the Kurdish revolt to whip up Persian chauvinism. Frenzied crowds in Teheran volunteering to fight the Kurds show how nationalist sentiment can be used to bolster up Islamic reaction. As he throws the full might of his 'revolutionary forces' against the Kurds, Khomeini continues his assault on the rights of other minorities, women — and the recent gains of Iranian workers.

The Kurds' revolt against the Khomeini regime has created common ground among the countries with substantial Kurdish minorities. These countries are united in their determination to curb the movement towards Kurdish autonomy. The long-standing hostility between Turkey and Iraq has cooled as both countries have turned to face a common enemy. Turkish ministers have paid frequent visits to Baghdad and Teheran to discuss the Kurdish question. Khomeini's threats of holy war against Iraq have been softened by his need to build a united front against the Kurds. Nevertheless, the Kurds today stand closer than ever before to achieving self-determination. There is little future for the predominantly Sunni Kurds in a Shi'ite theocratic state in Iran. They are the only force to offer sustained resistance to Khomeini. The weakness of both the Iranian and the Iraqi regimes and persistent instability in Turkey provide enormous possibilities and a strong stimulus towards Kurdish unity.

The present leadership of the Kurds is one of the main barriers to unity. While the Kurds aspire towards self-determination the KDP has clearly shown that it cannot fight consistently for national independence. In November the KDP-Iran set its face against mass demonstrations in Mahabad, fearing that they might prejudice its attempts to negotiate a sell-out with Khomeini. Persian workers have a responsibility to support the struggle of the Kurds for self-determination. Their support will be instrumental in weakening Khomeini and strengthening proletarian tendencies in the Kurdish camp.

Nick Jenkins

...Cuts

(continued from page 12)

1200 hospital workers took to the streets in March 1978. June saw nine local hospitals stop work in protest, and a month-long work-in in the casualty department followed directly after. When the casualty was closed down at the end of July a six-month long occupation to prevent the conversion of the hospital began.

The refusal of building workers to cross picket lines helped force the AHA into making 'concessions': a day surgery for out-patients, a daytime-only minor injuries clinic and the retention of a few medical beds. But the threat that a prolonged occupation would mean closure without conversion pushed the workers into accepting this compromise and calling off their struggle. The unions and the radical leaders of the Keep Bethnal Green Hospital Campaign claimed a victory. Yet today, a few months later, the conversion itself has been halted due to lack of funds.

The Keep Bethnal Green Hospital Campaign could not lead the hospital workers' tenacious struggle to victory. It blamed the closure on short-sighted policies and stupid bureaucrats in the Area Health Authority. It played on the particular qualities of the

hospital and drew up petitions pleading with the government to show clemency. By making Bethnal Green a special case, the campaign distanced itself from other public sector struggles. By appealing for a more enlightened government attitude to Bethnal Green, it paved the way for the ultimate destruction of the hospital. Like so many other campaigns, it could not politically unite workers to see their common interest in rejecting every aspect of the cuts.

How to build a real fightback

This year's round of cuts was met with widespread militancy at first. On 12 September more than 2000 workers marched through Hackney, disgusted at threats to close St Leonard's Hospital and nearby secondary schools. Protest meetings were attended by more than 500 people. By late September, however, the crowds had disappeared, leaving only an isolated core of activists.

Those who led the campaign to save St Leonard's just repeated the mistakes made in the Bethnal Green campaign. The only difference was that this time the Community Health Council, the state's watchdog, stepped in to ensure that workers'

protests got stuck in the same well-worn groove. As for the Hackney Schools Stay OK Campaign, it reassured the ILEA that current levels of education spending were quite adequate, and put forward a pie-in-the-sky plan to deal with the problems facing the schools.

Workers are angry about the cuts and willing to take action to prevent them. But campaigns like these cannot turn this anger in a positive political direction: they merely give it a radical organisational form. They are actually worse than useless, because they undermine the will to fight the cuts that does exist.

Only if we show other workers why capitalism has made ruthless cuts to solve its profit crisis, why Labour councils will always implement them and why we must defend every section of the working class against their effects can we tackle the bourgeois offensive head-on.

When reformists argue that workers should defend the NHS we should point out how 'gains' like this fail to meet the needs of the working class. Who but the worst cynic could see the squalor of the Mothers' Hospital or pass by the dilapidated estates of East London and still maintain that these are gains?

Unlike the Labour Party and the Communist Party, we have no desire to rescue British capitalism's 'welfare state'. It is nothing but a means of ensuring that we do not arrive dead or incapable when we clock in for work each morning. Our concern is the defence and improvement of the jobs, conditions and wages of public sector workers and the health, education and housing of the whole working class. That means directly confronting all capitalist attempts to burden us with the crisis. We don't ask for progressive policies from the government, but demand that it maintains every existing provision. And we are ready to force the state to provide more and better services — the services we need. We say no to those who try to reconcile workers' interests with those of the employers by proposing alternative plans for getting round a few redundancies here or spreading the cuts a bit more fairly there. All jobs and services must be defended.

Our living standards depend on class unity and class politics. That means unequivocal rejection of all cuts and closures, and a refusal to bargain away workers' livelihoods for the bosses' economy. This is the way to bring the campaigns against the cuts to victory.

The lobby against the cuts

IT'S ABOUT TIME!

In the three years since the TUC last called a demonstration against the cuts, it has stood and watched billions of pounds being lopped off expenditure on social services. Where workers have tried to resist the cuts it has failed to lift a finger to help them. Indeed, when NUPE, NALGO, the GMWU and the TGWU called their members out in their thousands on a demonstration earlier this year, it was not to protest about the cuts but to indicate their displeasure at the injustice of the Labour Government's five per cent wage norm.

So far the cuts have mainly fallen on local authority and NHS building programmes. But it hasn't just stopped there: schools and hospitals have been closing, recruitment has stopped and thousands of jobs are disappearing through natural wastage.

Now the Tories are taking up where Labour left off by talking about direct reductions in spending on welfare benefits and outright redundancies. Conservative Social Services Secretary Patrick Jenkin has set up a 450-strong task force to check up on social security 'spongers'; school meals are under threat and prescription charges have been raised from 25p to 70p. Plans have already been made to dismiss tens of thousands of civil service workers. And yet the ruling class is far from satisfied: a recent issue of *The Economist* argued that cuts were pointless unless they meant cuts in jobs.

The fight against the cuts has only just begun. On this page we look at three aspects of that fight. Fay Seymour shows how the Corrie Bill can only be repulsed by a campaign for free abortion on demand; Ian Sinclair draws some lessons from the struggle against the cuts in East London, and Inez Landa talks to one woman up against the housing crisis in London's dockland.

HOUSING

The cuts can't just be measured by Government White Paper figures running into billions of pounds. They're measured in human suffering. Sharon G's story shows how bad that suffering can get.

Sharon lives in one of 30 flats in Alberta House on Preston's Road Estate, a pre-1914 complex on the Isle of Dogs. All the other blocks on what's called the Canadian Estate have been emptied; but the council has decided that Alberta must stay. Sharon has been fighting to get rehoused for the past six months:

'We're second class citizens. I'm not allowed a decent home to live in. I've come from a slum - in Liverpool - and because of that they've put me back in another one. I want to go round the streets to try to get something going. We've got to go to extremes to get anything done.'

Along with women from Ottawa House, Sharon went on rent strike early this summer. After an all-night vigil outside Downing Street, a petition was sent to Margaret Thatcher, who in turn despatched GLC housing chief George Tremlett to come and survey the Estate. The council ordered more than 100 workers in to clean the place up before his visit. It didn't help. 'Shocked' and 'close to tears' by what he saw, he reported: 'When I saw for myself the conditions in which these families are living, I was horrified and felt a profound sense of shame that a public authority could be acting as a slum landlord'.

Seventy per cent of housing in Newham was built before 1919 and 48 per cent of homes there have no bath or inside toilet. In Tower Hamlets the figures are little better: 45 per cent and 40 per cent. Seventy four year old Wally G has lived in Alberta for 15 years: 'They should demolish the whole estate. Hardly any maintenance work has been carried out in all the time I've been here - it's an absolute disgrace.' Wally is forced to travel regularly to the local public baths for a wash. Yet as Sharon puts it, 'these places are filthy - I was bitten by a rat and had to go and have a needle at St Andrew's Hospital.'

The same day that George Tremlett gave an account of his visit to Alberta everybody on the Canadian Estate got a letter from the GLC saying they'd be moved to new homes. But soon after Alberta tenants found out that they would have to stay put. Women took their children to picket the GLC's headquarters in protest. By this time they were desperate. Sharon:

'They weren't expecting us to sleep out all night, but we did - kids and all. We spent one of the most comfortable nights of our life on the steps of County Hall. We asked to see Tremlett in the morning. They said he was busy, in a

meeting. We said we'd wait till he came out. Then the secretary went away looking angry and came back with Tremlett. He looked annoyed.'

Tremlett promised in writing that, whether they were in arrears or not, they'd be moved out. But that hasn't happened. So Sharon phoned local left-wing Labour MP Ian Mikardo to see what he could do to help. She soon found out:

'They told me he was on holiday. But I knew he wasn't away. He was just down the road at the Mile End Hospital fete the other day.'

All over the country there are thousands of working class women living in conditions like Sharon's. What she says about the Isle of Dogs seems true of all of British capitalism: 'Once you get on it you can't get off'. But there is an escape.

If we abandon petitions to Thatcher and refuse to place our trust in officials, if we reject the left-wing Labour MPs and Councillors who issue cynical apologies for the cuts; if we mean what we say when we say 'no to all cuts' - then we'll demolish capitalism and its slums forever.

EAST LONDON CUT TO SHREDS

St Leonard's Hospital in Hackney has been ravaged: all surgical wards are closed and the casualty department reduced to a first aid post. The outpatient clinic of the London Hospital at Mile End may lose 20 per cent of its staff - or close one day in five. St Matthew's Hospital in Hoxton is to close altogether. Yet while the workers subjected to these attacks have shown their readiness to oppose them, few anti-cuts campaigns have met with success. Let's take a look at the record in East London to see why this has happened.

The harsh face of crisis

In East London traditional industries like the docks have been declining for years. Before the advent of recession the fall in private sector employment in the area was disguised by the expansion of jobs in the public sector. In the early 'seventies the cuts primarily hit construction plans and 'prestige' projects; employment was only slightly affected. Today, however, funds for public expenditure are limited as never before. Many working class districts lack even basic amenities. Hundreds of jobs in classrooms and wards all over

East London are now at risk. And public sector workers face rigid wage restraint through the application of cash limits on local authority spending.

Whether it's health, housing or education it's the same grim picture. Conditions in hospitals are so bad that staffing at St Andrew's Hospital, Bow, is at danger levels, and St Matthew's can only recruit agency nurses. At Whitear Walk, Newham, council tenants live in constant fear that their children will be bitten by rats, and in Hackney the handful of housing estates that have been built are so poor that residents are clamouring to leave. As if this is not enough, Hackney is likely to see half its secondary schools close in the near future.

Scabbing councils, divided unions

By last winter public sector workers had had a brimful. More than 6000 struck for a £60, 35 hour week. Hackney council formally supported them - but let the Labour Government send troops in to scab on striking ambulancemen. Newham council beat the workers with capitalist economics: threatening that even modest wage rises would jack the rates up enormously, it forced local trade unionists to accept the nine per cent settlement agreed nationally. Tower Hamlets council tried to break the dustmen's strike by hiring scab labour - complete with police protection - to clear its rubbish. All three local Labour councils carried out the directives of the ruling class to the letter.

While the strikes confirmed the militancy of East London workers they revealed some important political weaknesses too. Their organisers couldn't coordinate action between different public services, let alone develop solidarity between public and private sector workers. Many strikers were more worried about differentials than anything else. As one Newham ambulanceman justified NUPE's wage demands: 'We are not even considered an emergency service, only an "essential" one. We want parity with police and firemen.' With one group of workers trying to force a differential over other, less "essential" groups of workers, unity was impossible.

Bethnal Green: a hollow victory

The Bethnal Green Hospital campaign is often cited as a classic example of how trade union militancy can beat the cuts. But the opposite is the truth.

In October 1977 the City & East London Area Health Authority announced the closure of the hospital's casualty and surgery departments. Bethnal Green was to be converted into a geriatric hospital; when new geriatric facilities were ready elsewhere it was to close completely. A campaign to save it soon sprung up. Undaunted by the AHA's refusal to consider their demands,

continued on page 11

ABORTION

If John Corrie's Abortion (Amendment) Bill gets passed in Parliament in November it will stop as many as 30 000 working class women a year from getting the abortions they need. Who can afford what private clinics charge - at least £30 for a consultation and at least £50 for an operation? The Corrie Bill means that women workers everywhere will have to leave their jobs and have children they don't want. Some may find part-time work, in which they will face low wages, bad working conditions and weak unionisation. But most will find themselves alone at home looking after the kids and getting the dinner ready.

Why has the Corrie Bill come about? It's not hard to find the reasons. In 1967, when the law on abortion was made more liberal, the British economy still had some steam left in it. Women were needed for jobs in factories, offices and above all the expanding public sector. It made economic sense to allow some of them to avoid having children if they wanted to. But today things are different. The economy is nearing collapse. The ruling class is forced to boost unemployment so it can keep wages in check, cut the public sector to the bone and get the working class to take on the task of looking after the young, old and sick for free. That's why it's tightening up on abortions - so any woman who gets pregnant will have to lose her job. And if that woman works in the public sector, so much the better: that's one less 'unproductive' job to pay for.

No wonder we keep on hearing that a woman's place is in the home. Why else did speakers at the recent Tory Party conference bemoan the demise of the family? What's even worse is that more and more trade union leaders are saying that where redundancies take place, women should be the first to go.

It should be obvious that the Corrie Bill is only part of the bourgeoisie's general onslaught on the working class. Once we accept the right of the capitalist state to do with working women what it likes we're all done for. This shows how wrong it is to raise the demand for 'a woman's right to choose'. The right to abortion is not an individual matter. The whole working class has an interest in defending it. The Tories and Labour would like to make abortion an issue of individual conscience. We have to assert working class control over every aspect of society - childbirth included.

The slogans 'No return to the backstreets' and 'Defend the 1967 Act' are equally wrong. As if backstreet abortions do not still go on - as if the abortion facilities made possible by the 1967 Act are good enough! Women workers need abortions so they can go on earning; they need more and better facilities, not the lousy ones that are available today. What we want is free and safe abortion on demand. Nothing less is good enough for the working class.

Fightback AGAINST THE CUTS

MARCH 28 November
12.00 Speakers Corner to
Houses of Parliament
Meeting Central Hall Westminster

NO CUTS, NO CLOSURES
FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND
DON'T LET THE
LABOUR PARTY SABOTAGE
THE FIGHTBACK