

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p

Fighting redundancies

MASS UNEMPLOYMENT used to be a thing of the past. But now it's back. Today unemployment overshadows all other issues in the labour movement. Redundancies are announced, not in ones and twos, but in tens of thousands; increasingly it is taken for granted that a job is a privilege. The threat of sackings is often sufficient to quell militancy amongst workers. In steel and shipbuilding the issue is no longer voluntary versus compulsory sackings but bargaining over the size of the redundancy payments.

The most significant feature of working class reaction to unemployment is not the absence of a will to fight but the lack of any political solutions. The last five years have taught workers that the traditional answers simply don't work. Workers' co-operatives and nationalisation do not save jobs. The traditional leadership of the working class has no solution to unemployment; it merely expresses condolences to the mounting numbers on the dole.

Who will survive?

The capitalist class is fighting for its system, its way of life. In the recession capitalism cannot continue without making millions of workers redundant. It was appropriate for the chemical giant ICI to make the announcement of 3000 sackings the central plank of its 'survival' plan. The viability of British industry is expressed in profit margins. The restoration of profitability demands that less workers work harder. Capitalism needs more workers on the dole so that those still in employment will think twice before they object to low wages and deteriorating working conditions.

The survival of the capitalist system and the interests of the working class are fundamentally antagonistic. Nowhere is this clearer than in the fight to save jobs. Every successful step taken by workers to defend jobs only deepens the crisis and makes it harder for the employers to save their skins. That's why the bosses try to obscure this conflict of class interests. Their redundancy plans are always presented as being in the interests of workers too, as a painful measure necessary to bring about more jobs in the future.

The problem

The problem is that the British labour movement is committed not only to de-

fending jobs but also to saving British industry. In plants up and down the country workers have adopted the goals of the employers as their own. When the inevitable results of rationalisation - redundancies - are declared in the shipyards or in the motor industry, then workers are forced to fight against the consequences of policies which they accepted in the first place. But by this time it is often too late. Having adopted the goals of the employers, trade unionists are in a weak position to object to the means for realising them.

It is not surprising that the labour movement lacks an independent outlook. For many decades the labour bureaucracy has tried to blur the antagonism between labour and capital. Its defence of the 'national interest' and 'British industry' has been consistently directed against any anti-capitalist trends in the working class.

Today the trade union bureaucracy and the Labour left continually identify workers' interests with plans to overcome the crisis. These plans are unrealistic because they envisage progressive solutions within capitalism. And they are reactionary because in the end they become apologies for attacks on the working class. The fantasies about nationalising industry and planning production that dominate the editorial offices of *Tribune*, the *Morning Star*, and *Militant* are not just harmless dreams. They perpetuate the view that the problem is particular policies or politicians, rather than the social relations of capitalist production. They nurture the illusion that a progressive alternative can come about through new policies and new politicians.

This is what leads workers into major defeats. At present there is no credible alternative to the politics of the labour bureaucracy. Unless workers are prepared to defend jobs regardless of the effect on company profits, the competitive position of industry or Britain's interest, they will be drawn into an unstoppable process with disastrous results. It starts with natural wastage; then, when the company points out its weak market position, the unions are forced to agree to voluntary redundancies, and finally it ends in outright closures.

The discussions of struggles at Leyland, Vauxhall and in the engineering industry in this issue of *the next step* all emphasise this point. The recent setbacks suffered by the working class are the outcome of

the politics of Labourism - the politics that unite the labour movement around the 'national interest' and effectively divide workers against each other. Behind an organisationally unified labour movement lies a working class divided along sectional, industrial, racial and sexual lines.

The solution

The solution must measure up to the scope of the problem. *Socialist Worker* can't even identify the problem.

'There is a weakness in our movement. Shop floor organisation has been weakened by government policy during the last ten years.'

'That is the only explanation of the success the Tories and the employers have had so far.' (8 December 1979)

But the question is why has shop floor organisation been weakened? Because it was based on Labourist politics - and these politics cannot make trade unions strong in a period of crisis. But for *Socialist Worker* the problem is one of organisation and not politics. That's why its solution is a 'rank and file organisation'. And its politics? The SWP reiterates basic trade union principles - the same principles that the last few years have shown to be insufficient.

Today, when the defence of living standards only creates more difficulties for the capitalist system, trade unions can only provide effective defence for workers if they mobilise around clear anti-capitalist politics. Rank and file organisations, slogans - even very radical slogans - cannot fight unemployment. We need a political alternative. To fight unemployment it is necessary to unite active workers around the following principles.

- * Because the defence of jobs and the needs of employers are fundamentally antagonistic every action has to be fought from an anti-capitalist perspective.
- * Workers can take no responsibility for solving the crisis. They can have no interest in their company's profitability or its competitive position. We approach the issue of wages and jobs not from the point of view of British industry but solely from the need to defend the living standards of the working class.
- * Workers have a responsibility to defend

the unemployed. Workers who are sacked must be paid full wages while unemployed. At national level and on the shop floor trade unions must organise the unemployed in their own ranks.

- * When an individual capitalist can no longer maintain production, workers must force the capitalist class, through its state, to take over the running of the factory and guarantee all jobs. This is a necessary temporary measure. Active workers should point out that there is nothing progressive about nationalisation and that the bourgeois state cannot be relied on to defend the interests of workers. Only the class struggle can press the bourgeoisie and its state to maintain employment. Only workers' vigilance can stop a nationalised industry pushing through sackings at the first opportune moment.
- * As long as capitalism survives every job is up for grabs and every victory is only temporary. To ensure the long-term defence of workers' interests it is necessary to undermine the power of the capitalist class and organise support for the overthrow of the bourgeois state.
- * In the course of struggle it is essential to challenge the alternatives of the conciliators. The reactionary content of alternative plans, workers' co-ops and of workers' participation must be exposed. A clear line must be drawn between those who are out to defend the interests of the working class and those who peddle 'progressive' counter-crisis solutions.
- * The fight against unemployment demands a range of tactics. Respect for contracts, court injunctions and the law is dangerous because force is the only language that the bourgeoisie understands.

These principles cannot just be declared: they have to be fought for. Workers who want to defend their class must be prepared to argue for clear anti-capitalist politics. They must be prepared to challenge the alternatives offered by the Labour Party and its friendly critics. To ignore them is to tolerate the domination of bourgeois politics in the labour movement.

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No British plans for Zimbabwe!

'Britain is about to acquire a new colony. Rhodesia . . . is to come under the crown for a brief period of British rule more direct than it ever had in the old days.'

(The Economist, 17 November 1979)

Ever since it began in December 1972 Zimbabwe's war of national liberation has been a serious threat to imperialism. British governments have tried again and again to end it by wiping out armed resistance and

transferring power to a suitable black regime - a regime which will safeguard Britain's interests in Zimbabwe. That's what the Lancaster House talks were all about.

Africa has been through this before. Even the conference setting is the same. In the early 'sixties Lancaster House was the scene of negotiations which decided the future of a number of African nations. Now Zimbabwe follows the rest of Britain's imperial possessions as Her Majesty's

Government manoeuvres to establish a stable political form for continued imperialist domination. Lord Carrington had a simple brief - find a set of malleable black leaders; eliminate any opposition which poses a threat to capitalism; keep Zimbabwe open for profitable investment and make sure British imperialism can keep its hands on the country's valuable raw materials.

Carrington has got just about all he

...Zimbabwe

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wanted out of the Lancaster House talks. Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, the leaders of the two wings of the Patriotic Front, finally conceded to virtually every point of the plans he laid on the table back in September. Under pressure from Britain, the Rhodesian army and the presidents of the Front Line states, the Patriotic Front made a series of shabby compromises which guarantee the status of the leadership in the New Zimbabwe but betray the cause of the workers and peasants there. The way is now clear for Britain's appointed Governor General, Christopher Soames, to direct the combined fire of Rhodesia's security service and the Commonwealth forces against the 'hard core' guerrillas. The terms of the ceasefire agreement have allowed British imperialism both to immobilise those guerrillas who have gathered at the assembly areas and to continue the war against the freedom fighters who have chosen to stay in the bush.

The tremendous mass response that greeted the returning guerrilla leaders indicates the importance that the Patriotic Front compromise had for British imperialism. The problem for imperialism was the war. With the backing of the Patriotic Front, Soames now has a reasonable chance of ending it — or at the very least to transform it into a civil war between the collaborators and the hard core. The guerrillas dealt with, Soames will be able to ratify Britain's chosen regime by holding an election. And whoever gets elected, the freedom fighters will pay the price.

'British responsibility'

Despite the fact that it poses a mortal danger to Zimbabwean workers and peasants the Lancaster House agreement has met with little opposition in Britain. This should come as no surprise. Backed by the Communist Party and the Labour left, the Anti-Apartheid Movement has constantly called on British imperialism to exercise its 'responsibility' in Zimbabwe. It has always seen the British state as a progressive agency compared with Smith's reactionary Rhodesian Front. Soon after Smith made his Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, the AAM called on the Labour Government to send troops to Zimbabwe. Under the title 'OK Mr Wil-

son — let's have action' it advised:

'a major requirement for British policy must be a decision to remove the Smith regime by force of arms. Nobody doubts the ability of Britain to achieve this quickly and effectively. Such courses of action have been employed elsewhere, indeed in regions more difficult and remote, with little hesitation... If this country's policy is to be credible to the peoples of the world, and be shown to be sincere and determined, then there can be no baulking at taking decisive military action to remove the Smith government'. (*Anti-Apartheid News*, April 1966)

To be 'credible to the peoples of the world', to be 'sincere and determined', British imperialism should have despatched the army. Yet right up until late last year the AAM continued to call for British responsibility in Southern Africa! It even

but an attempt to reconcile British working class support for the African people with continued support for British imperialism. That the British state could never and can never adopt a policy that is in the interests of the African masses is merely explained away by reference to government cowardice or shilly-shallying. And even that the AAM is prepared to forgive. As Labour MP and International Anti-Apartheid Year Coordinating Committee chairman Frank Hooley put it, 'however pusillanimous or inept British Ministers have been over the past 13 years, the ultimate goal of their policies has been honourable' (*The Times*, 25 October 1979).

The Labour Party and the Anti-Apartheid Movement provide a valuable service

Public meeting

BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN ZIMBABWE

Speaker: Alan Harding

22 February 1980
7.30 pm

Friends House
Euston Rd., London
Euston Tube

joined with the Socialist Workers Party and the International Marxist Group to set up the Zimbabwe Emergency Campaign Committee (ZECC) to give that call a wider hearing.

Now the AAM and ZECC have got what they asked for. Commenting on the British government's decision to send Soames and his security advisers to rule Zimbabwe, deputy Foreign Secretary Ian Gilmour recently remarked: 'we are always being told to assume responsibility for Rhodesia. That is what we have done' (quoted in *The Times*, 12 December 1979).

The terrible Tories

That type of responsibility, however, is not quite what the AAM and ZECC had in mind for Zimbabwe. Now they see the problem as being 'Tory policy' on the issue.

Back in 1965 the AAM welcomed Wilson's election as being in the interests of African people, joyfully announcing:

'We have for the first time a British Government broadly sympathetic to the fight against apartheid. It is our task to show that the British public demands of it a positive policy against apartheid and against racialism.' (*Anti-Apartheid News*, January 1965)

This so-called 'positive policy against apartheid' has never amounted to anything else

for imperialism: they take the oppression Britain overseas in Africa and wrap it up for home consumption in pious phrases about sympathy and honourable intentions. Hooley's whitewashing of Ministers 'over the past 13 years' shows that he feels that even the Tories weren't such bad guys over Zimbabwe after all. In practice, the anti-Tory rhetoric of the AAM dissolves into bipartisan defence of British imperialism.

Patriotism to the rescue

The AAM has always tried to merge solidarity with the African masses with support for the British nation:

'to struggle today for a decisive and sharp change in the course of British policy — away from defending apartheid and towards a principled stand of effective opposition against all vestiges of racism — is a profoundly patriotic task'. (*Anti-Apartheid News*, October 1966)

But 'effective opposition against all vestiges of racism' demands a struggle against the state that sows racism wherever it has influence in Southern Africa — the British state. Solidarity with the African people means hostility to the British nation state. The only thing that distinguishes the patriotic pro-apartheid, pro-Smith sentiments of the Tory Party from the patriotic anti-apartheid, anti-Smith sentiments of the

AAM is the fact that the AAM's position is more influential in the British labour movement than the Tories'. That is why socialists must denounce it at every opportunity.

British nationalism is the deadly enemy of the African masses. But the ZECC continues the patriotic tradition of the AAM. It believes that 'the British people have a unique responsibility to ensure that there is no sell-out of the people of Zimbabwe'. The ZECC's concept of the 'British people' obscures antagonistic class interests. The British ruling class has to secure imperialism's interests in Zimbabwe — something it is doing fairly successfully at the moment. The British state never sells anybody out. It merely defends capitalist relations.

On the other hand the working class has its responsibility: to back the struggles of the oppressed against imperialism — to oppose all manoeuvres of the British state. Talk of 'sell-outs' only betrays the left's illusions in the British state and holds back the development of a working class anti-imperialist movement.

The ZECC's attachment to the British state is made all the more obvious by its faith in sanctions. Believing that sanctions can serve progressive ends, the ZECC joins in parliamentary controversies over the who-did-what of sanctions busting. The only point at which it fails to join the ruling classes is over their own hard headed appraisal of sanctions as token measures — measures adopted to indicate British displeasure with UDI and at the same time appease black African states hostile to the Smith regime.

The ZECC's whole strategy is to mobilise the labour movement to put pressure on the British state to pursue progressive policies — sanctions included — in Africa. But as Britain moves nearer and nearer towards military intervention in Zimbabwe it becomes more urgent than ever to build working class opposition to the British state. With its all-class diplomacy and commitment to government initiatives, the ZECC is an obstacle on the path to winning British workers to blacking arms and goods to Zimbabwe and South Africa.

British reformists will balk at actions of class solidarity because they are a direct challenge to the British state. That's why such actions are the only effective form of solidarity. Moral and patriotic appeals to the British people are no threat to the state — and no use to the African people.

André Robinson

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In Labour's shadow

No major advances can be recorded in the struggle for anti-capitalist politics in the Britain of the 'seventies. Throughout the decade socialism remained on the sidelines of the working class. Now the labour movement enters the 'eighties without any serious reappraisal of its traditional political strategy — despite the defeat of the last Labour Government. The membership of the major reformist organisations continues to decline, yet there appears to be no alternative to them.

Unable to face this impasse, the left looks for excuses. It argues that workers are demoralised and unconfident — and that this explains the 'downturn' in the class struggle. The left-reformists in the Labour Party and the union bureaucracy complain that workers are not prepared to respond to their initiatives. After the recent demonstration in support of Derek Robinson, self-righteous left union officials demanded 'where are the other workers?'. The same theme was taken up by the left-wing Labour MPs at the rally after the national anti-cuts demonstration last November. While they proudly described their battles on the National Executive Committee to get the party to accept their call for the march, they decried the fact that not enough workers had been prepared to lose a day's wages and heed it. Alex Kitson even went as far as to blame working class voters for Thatcher's victory. Ever more distant from workers' hearts and minds, and ever more conscious of its inability to act with the decisiveness that the crisis demands, the left of the labour bureaucracy projects its own ineptitude and weakness on the working class.

Why militants are isolated

The working class has not lost its will to fight. Far from it. While the reformists moan about the 'downturn', the class struggle continues — often in very militant style. More and more people are joining trade unions. Last year's increase in days lost through strikes shows that workers are prepared to fight to defend their interests.

If there is demoralisation among trade union militants it is the result of the hopeless strategies offered them by the very same people who now blame the working class for it. Given the experience of the last five years, who can blame workers for not getting excited about nationalisation or the NEB, co-ops or alternative plans? These solutions have been tried and have failed: they do not get much of a hearing now. Meanwhile, the absence of a plausible alternative to them heightens the isolation that militants on the shop floor feel today.

Yet union activists committed to anti-capitalist politics have always been isolated. In the past, they could reduce the effects of this isolation by taking up militant tactics. *Left-wingers built up their credibility in the unions not through advocating socialist politics but by gaining a record as reliable activists.* Only this fact explains their isolation from workers today: it stems not from an ebbing away of socialist ideas — for these have never had much hold — but from the failure of militancy to achieve results. There is less and less reason for rank and file trade unionists to back the militants. This is why stewards had so much difficulty mobilising support for Derek Robinson; why also the radical shop stewards committee at Talbot's Linwood plant could not pull the workforce behind its recommendation to oppose all redundancies.

Workers who have allowed shop stewards to get on with it for years are today just unlikely to oppose them as remain inactive. The depth of the recession has generated deep fears in the labour movement — fears which, once they break out, reveal the fragility of many of the structures of militant trade unionism. Suddenly it emerges that this shop stewards committee has little active support, that that combine committee only exists on paper and that the other trades council doesn't represent

anybody. And now that the left is forced to pay the price for relying on these institutions, it chooses to blame workers rather than recognise its own failure to win support for anti-capitalist politics in the labour movement.

The question the left won't answer

Having ignored the struggle for anti-capitalist politics, the left can only survive by uniting workers against a particularly objectionable aspect of capitalist society — the Tories. To the left the Tory Government came as a relief. Now *Tribune* MPs can settle down to the cushy job of criticising unpopular measures and *Socialist Worker* can fill its pages with detailed exposés of ministers' lifestyles and financial interests. But saying 'I didn't vote Tory' or even fighting to 'Kick out the Tories' only begs the question: who will replace Thatcher?

No matter how aggressively it may be presented, anti-Toryism avoids the real problem — that the Labour Party, the only alternative workers have to the Tories at present, cannot defend their interests. Anti-Toryism skates over the reactionary era of the last Labour Government and becomes a way for the left to breathe new life into the Labour Party. In effect, it ensures that the strategy which has been tested under eight Labour governments, the strategy which is the only one with any credibility in the labour movement, remains unchallenged.

Labourism keeps politics out of the unions

It is true that the Labour Party is the creation of the trade unions and that the trade unions are rooted in the working class. But the trade unions don't only base themselves on workers' interests. Over the years they have become an essential part of capitalist society — as witness their legal status. Any threat to that society, major recession or unstable labour market included, is also a threat to them. The labour bureaucracy cannot change society without putting its own existence at stake. Thus the role of the unions is both to defend workers and to defend the existing order. Inevitably they end up mediating between workers' aspirations and the system which crushes them.

The Labour Party grew up as the political arm of the trade union movement. Its job was to ensure that the gains of the trade unions were consolidated and extended through Parliament. In return for recognising the legitimacy of working class organisations it claimed the right to define the labour movement's attitude on broad political questions. Today the consequence of this division of labour is that trade union affairs are separated from politics. The working class has become preoccupied with 'industrial relations'; broader political questions are discussed from a classless point of view. In effect, the Labour Party politically integrates the working class into the capitalist system.

The union bureaucracy's disregard of politics puts the working class at a tremendous disadvantage. While the bourgeoisie deals ruthlessly with all questions — immigration, Ireland, the position of women, foreign policy, education — the labour movement's horizon is restricted to issues that directly impinge on the trade unions. In the end it is concerned only with negotiations about the terms of sale of workers' labour-power. It is not that the union bureaucracy does not raise political questions; rather that, when it does, it presents politics as a matter for the community to be anxious about, not as something which always divides society into hostile classes.

Yet politics has everything to do with

everyday trade union practice. The bourgeoisie certainly appreciates this: the bosses pursue class politics all the way to the negotiating table. However, because 'both sides of industry' accept bourgeois norms and channels, workers are forced to draw back when their interests threaten to escape these channels. The role of Labourism is to ensure that workers never go so far as to threaten capitalist social relations.

When class contradictions come to the fore workers are confronted with political issues such as 'law and order' and the 'national interest': the very issues on which the Labour Party shares the same outlook as the Tories. While workers have repeatedly shown their preparedness to ignore both the law and their leaders' calls for moderation, they can only go so far without independent working class politics. And Labourism is always there — always ready with a solution, even a radical solution if need be. For behind Labourism lie the social framework and ideology of the ruling class, working away to ensure that the Labour Party remains the only credible alternative.

So long as trade unions are dominated by Labourism, hallowed trade union principles like the closed shop, effective picketing and support for victimised militants cannot be effectively maintained. By their commitment to the Labour Party the unions renounce politics and press their members into accepting capitalist oppression. They always resolve the conflict between defending workers and preserving capitalist institutions in favour of the latter. Unions can only be defended by eradicating the influence of Labourism.

The movement we need

The movement we need will be constructed by answering the problems facing the movement today. All the problems of the moment — the isolation of trade union militants, the weakness of shop floor organisation and the frequent acceptance of redundancies and cuts — are the result of the primitive stage of class politics. So far, the most active militants have been forced to spend their energies in narrow sectional disputes. There exists neither a party nor a programme that can unite even the most active workers around a struggle against capitalism. Instead militants are tending to unite around all the backward prejudices that are codified in the Labour Party's programme.

To build a living movement we must challenge the terms on which the day to day actions of workers are fought. The point about the current situation facing socialists is this: the more broadly and clearly we can express the interests of the international working class, the more we will be able to respond to the immediate issues that come up on the shop floor. Widening the compass of the workers' movement cannot but lead to a confrontation with Labourism. The watchword of the labour bureaucracy is 'keep politics out of the trade unions'. The movement we need will be built by workers who reject this false divide between politics and economics and in doing so build a real alternative to the Labour Party.

It can be done

The failures of the past decade are the failures of the politics of the left and not of the working class. It is not surprising that the Labour Party has dominated working class politics for so many decades. Since the 'twenties the militant left has been preoccupied with pushing the Labour Party in a leftward direction. Writing on behalf of the young Communist Party in 1923, Tom Bell asked 'how are we to secure or infuse into it that definite work-

ing class direction in Labour Party policy which will counteract the influence of our Mensheviks?' (*Communist Review*, October 1923). Ever since the left has been trying to 'infuse' the Labour Party with a 'working class' direction. Whereas Bell may be excused for his illusions in the malleability of the Labour Party, which only formed its first government a year later, the left today has no excuse for preserving these illusions. It has wasted important opportunities and restricted political activity to manoeuvres within and around the Labour Party.

The potential for building a powerful alternative to Labourism is there to be seized. All that is required is for revolutionaries to reclaim for the working class the right and the duty to express its point of view on every political question. To destroy the wall between economics and politics is to eliminate one of the main instruments of bourgeois class domination. Support for the liberation struggle in Ireland and Zimbabwe and defence of the rights of blacks and women are principles in which the entire working class has an interest. Consistent propaganda and activity on these issues will allow active trade unionists to unshackle the mass of workers from the chains of Labourism. *Defence of the oppressed against imperialism clarifies the struggle on the shop floor.* It shows that every conflict between an individual employer and a group of workers is actually a struggle between two classes for survival.

At present, life under capitalism forces many workers to see survival as the choice between 'my job or yours'. But as anti-capitalist politics develop the choice will more and more be seen as 'my class or yours'. The confusion that prevails in the British labour movement is not entirely a bad thing. More and more workers are prepared to listen and discuss new solutions. Coherent class politics can have an impact not only because the traditional strategies of the left-reformists look tired and unconvincing but also because revolutionary communism can show what's really going on.

In place of Labourism — revolutionary communism

The immediate goal of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency is to build a revolutionary party. Because we know that grandiose slogans and loud calls to action will not bring this any closer, we devote all our resources to winning active workers to the struggle for an alternative to Labourism. We relentlessly attack the narrow focus of present-day political discussion and the narrow strategy that follows from it — anti-Toryism.

To do this best we pursue issues which highlight the reactionary nature of Labourism. That's why the RCT is in the forefront of the struggles against British imperialism's war in Ireland and against racism. The common cause which the Labour Party makes with the Tories on Ireland and immigration controls is but a heightened expression of the pro-capitalist politics that Labourism offers on all questions. Mobilising support for self-determination for the Irish and for workers' defence against racism helps us to rally active workers against the Labourist positions of the trade union bureaucracy.

Today Ireland and immigration controls appear remote from the concerns of workers on the shop floor. But this is only because the survival of Labourism depends on workers not taking them up. Throughout this century the labour bureaucracy has done everything in its power to dissipate workers' energies in the routine matters of the day. Every step we take to bring broader questions closer to the shop floor frees more workers from their allegiance to Labourism — workers who will constitute the nucleus of the new and independent working class movement of the future. This is the stage the proletariat must pass through if it is to unite against capitalism in the battles ahead.

The Smash the PTA campaign



It's still an uphill battle to win workers to support the Irish liberation struggle. The British labour movement still tolerates Labour/Tory bipartisan policy on Ireland. These are the facts of political life in this country and they are what inform much of the practical work of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency. Our aim is to mount a systematic challenge against the popular consensus behind British imperialism's rule in Ireland.

To fulfil that aim we have begun a campaign to destroy the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Why concentrate on the PTA? What does it have to do with the working class? The answer is this: the PTA is the main weapon the bourgeoisie uses to fight its Irish War in Britain — and it's one of the main ways in which that war has an impact on British workers. By consistently opposing it we can show people why the troops must be forced to pull out of Ireland now. Below we explain what we are doing in the struggle against the PTA and why the radical left refuses to join it.

We began propaganda and agitation on the PTA in earnest last summer, picketing Paddington Green police station, London, over the detention of republican sympathisers there. In the autumn we initiated discussions on our trade union resolution on the Act in a number of union branches (UCATT, South London and AUEW-TASS No 16 Divisional Council, for example) and trades councils (Lambeth; Battersea and Wandsworth; Tameside). On 13 November we protested outside the BBC's headquarters in London after the PTA had been used to confiscate footage of IRA activities in Carrickmore made by a Panorama film crew.

On 24 November 1979 we held a 400-strong demonstration against the PTA in South London. People came from all over the country: there were contingents from Oxford, Colchester, Manchester and Birmingham. The **Smash the PTA Campaign** was born.

Since then we've been making modest but important progress. In December, NORCS — the National Organisation of Revolutionary Communist Students — started a debate on the PTA at the National Union of Students' conference which forced the NUS executive to organise a demonstration against the Act in March this year. And, when the Special Branch and the Bomb Squad made their swoops later that month, we helped organise pickets of two London police stations and led a mobilisation outside Liverpool's Brixton prison — within hours of the arrests.

Actions like these are our reply to the growing terror spread by the British state. Let's look at that of the radical left.

How is it that organisations claiming to call for 'Troops Out Now' fail time and again to combat state repression against the Irish community in Britain? Why does *Socialist Worker* manage to dig up the dirt about secret business deals and corrupt TUC practices, yet finds it impossible to discover *when, where and for how long* people are held under the PTA — still less mount a campaign for their release?

Take the arrests at Liverpool, for instance. When we picketed the police station there for seven consecutive days and nights we didn't expect any help from liberal do-gooders in the National Council for Civil Liberties. And we didn't get it: more vehemently opposed to the just violence of the IRA than to the unjust violence of the British state, they stayed at home. But we might have expected assistance from the SWP and the Merseyside branch of the Troops Out Movement. However, we didn't get it from them, either. Just like Liverpool Trades Council, which is committed to fight the PTA on paper but has never

done anything about it, the local radical left didn't bother to show up — bar a few TOM members. It was rainy and cold, pickets were 'boring', it was Christmas anyway. . . .

These sorts of excuses don't just hide sloth or organisational incompetence. They cover up the radical left's cowardly fear of bringing the revolutionary significance of Ireland's cause to the attention of the British working class. Despite the fact that workers in this country are beaten up by the SPG, hammered by court injunctions and made redundant in their thousands by the government, the radical left refuses to point out to them that they have every interest in seeing the British state defeated in Ireland — that every blow against British imperialism there is a spur to workers' victories here. Instead it reasons: Ireland is an unpopular issue; therefore there is nothing to be gained by raising it; if we do have to raise it we must do so in the most

question — for its 'Better Life For All Campaign' and for its proposal for a Bill of Rights for the Six Counties. The TOM points to the very words its initials stand for. But class-conscious workers cannot and will not be convinced by sleight of hand like this. They will want to know why the SWP, the IMG and the TOM followed the Liberal Party on 12 August and why they support the pro-imperialist British Withdrawal Campaign now.

The reason is simple. On Ireland, as on every other issue, the radical left holds firm to the idea that the narrower the demand the wider will be its appeal. That is why it is always out to condemn our approach as 'purist' and 'sectarian'.

But the radical left is wrong both in theory and in practice. In theory, because only wholehearted anti-imperialist politics can give workers the independence from 'public opinion' on Ireland that they need; because only it will ensure that the wear-

a noisy chant is all that is needed to turn 'the masses' into militant anti-imperialists? Because if you do, you must forsake Marxism for magic; for only relentless exposure of the class content of Britain's war will persuade British workers to side with their real allies — the Irish freedom fighters.

Smash the PTA!

This is where the Smash the PTA Campaign comes in. Its purpose is to make Ireland as much an issue in the working class as all the others the radical left is so fond of — wages, jobs, the cuts and so on.

So long as the war continues the PTA will be employed to intimidate anybody — especially if they are Irish — who has the temerity to denounce British policy on Ireland. The PTA is not merely an infringement of democratic rights: it is an instrument of war. We intend to turn this fact to workers' advantage by using it to highlight the need for anti-imperialist politics in the labour movement.

We direct our campaign at the working class because it is the only class that has an interest in the defeat of British imperialism in Ireland. We ask workers to oppose the PTA not as a favour to the Irish people but because it is in their own political interest. Unless the working class has an independent policy on Ireland it will not have the political strength to defend itself against the government and the capitalists on other issues. The Great British consensus on Ireland is only the most striking expression of the unanimity between the labour movement and the bourgeoisie over the need for cuts in public spending and the rationalisation of British industry. The Smash the PTA Campaign is an attempt to snap that unanimity in two.

The campaign has three immediate objectives. First, to organise defence for victims of the PTA — by means of legal aid, pickets and publicity. Second, to obtain and disseminate information about the use of the PTA, whether it be information on the harassment, detention and torture of individuals or details about the suppression of meetings and censorship. Third, and most importantly, to play a part in building an anti-imperialist movement against the Irish War in the British working class.

Our goal is effective solidarity with the Irish liberation struggle. We reject the British Withdrawal Campaign's search for respectability, not out of lofty principles but because its narrow focus actively prevents people from joining the struggle against the all-out war waged by British imperialism.

What you can do

Join the campaign against the PTA. Take up the issue in your trade union branch or student union, argue with your workmates and friends and get them to affiliate to the campaign.

Join in the defence of PTA victims. We need people who are willing to respond to arrests under the PTA by attending protests and helping with publicity at short notice. It has to be short notice, for the more time the police have with a detainee the more time they have to intimidate him or apply for deportation. This is particularly important in the Merseyside area where 200 people are held under the PTA each year.

Information on detentions is very hard to obtain. The state does everything in its power to hide its arrests under the PTA and to make it difficult for detainees to communicate with friends and solicitors. We need an information network so that we can give victims of the PTA the best possible defence and publicity. Help us build that network.

Kate Marshall

27 January 1980 Birmingham
BLOODY SUNDAY DEMONSTRATION
to commemorate the murder of 14 Irish people by British troops
in January 1972
Join the RCT contingent and support
our call for:

Troops out now!
Self-determination for the Irish people!
Prisoner of War status for all Irish anti-imperialist prisoners!
Smash the PTA!

Coaches leaving Manchester at 11am from Cavendish House,
Manchester Polytechnic, New Cavendish Street and from Students Union,
Manchester University, Oxford Road
Coaches also leaving from Canterbury, Central and East London

1 February 1980
Meeting to launch the Smash the PTA Campaign
Holborn Library, 32-38 Theobalds Road, London WC1
near Holborn tube 7.30pm

popular way. In practice, this means that the radical left drops its formal adherence to the demand 'Troops Out Now' for something more acceptable.

What's in a word?

Very few people in Britain go out on the streets calling for Troops Out Now. The radical left has never fought consistently for the slogan of immediate withdrawal. What it has done is trail along behind the Young Liberals' demonstration of last August, which demanded 'an end to British involvement' in Ireland. What it has done is support the 'British Withdrawal Campaign' dedicated to — well, withdrawal, of course. What it has not done is come out into the open and say that *British soldiers* must be removed now.

'Involvement' means *killing and torture* of the Irish people and it must be *ended* — not at some unspecified date but *at once, immediately, forthwith*. Anything else is an *insult* to the thousands of Irish who have to endure British oppression *day after day after day*.

And it's not only an insult to the Irish. It's a *danger* to British workers too. By leaving the question 'how long can this go on' unanswered, the radical left actually strengthens workers in the belief that Britain has a right to be in Ireland. It reinforces their identification with the British state and undermines their consciousness of themselves as members of a class. It fails to break up the all-class consensus on Ireland that dominates every aspect of British society.

Never mind the quality, feel the width

Many left-wing organisations dispute what we say about their record on Ireland. The Socialist Workers Party and the International Marxist Group point to their censure of the Communist Party for its utopian and reactionary positions on the Irish

ness many feel about the war in Ireland can be turned from exasperation with the Irish people into hatred for the British state. In practice, because, like any other class, workers can only be motivated by their class interests — can only be roused to action, not by the moral appeals of human rights organisations, not by the brave reports of 'investigative journalists', but by loathing for the class enemy.

Hatred for the British state! Loathing for the class enemy! That is what the *International Marxist Group* and the *Socialist Workers Party* should have instilled in workers since the army first went in 10 years ago. It was Lenin's contribution to the working class movement to show that what was principled in politics was also what was expedient. Anti-imperialists can only gain popularity if they have something to say. 'Purity' has nothing to do with it. As for 'sectarianism', that — the placing of one's interests as an organisation before those of the working class — is exactly what the IMG and the SWP have been guilty of in their desire to win friends and influence through pro-imperialist politics.

The radicalisation experience

Individuals in the SWP often say they agree with our criticisms of their party's support for the British Withdrawal Campaign. But they try to defend themselves by suggesting that it is vital to get the masses out on the streets so that the left can persuade people to change their minds from 'withdrawal' to Troops Out Now.

Comrades in the SWP: do you seriously believe that centuries of British chauvinism can be wiped aside in a short Sunday stroll from one part of London to another? Do you really think that waving a few banners in the West End will radicalise people enough for them to renounce their national origins, their upbringing and their culture in an hour or two? That a lively leaflet or

Their freedoms and ours

The employers' offensive is not just about forcing down wages, pushing through redundancies and reducing public expenditure. They prepare the way for these attacks with an intense ideological campaign directed at the working class. 'Freedom of the individual' is the rallying call of capitalists everywhere as they move to defend their class interests in the crisis. Here we examine what this call for freedom is all about. In our next issue we will look at another key ideological question — democracy.

Freedom is the password for anybody who wants to wreck working class organisation. It was the National Association For Freedom (now the Freedom Association) that organised the biggest scabbing operation since the General Strike — at Grunwick. Thatcher was elected by millions of middle class voters because she promised them freedom from the tyranny of the trade unions, freedom from the effects of the closed shop and freedom from the spectacle of unions making decisions democratically — at mass meetings. And freedom is used directly to attack the living standards of the working class. 'Freedom of choice' in health care and education helps foster a booming private sector, while state provisions of hospitals and schools are cut back.

The poisonous ideology of individual freedom isn't just let loose by the British ruling class. In the USA, the land of the free, an anti-trade union lobby named 'Right to Work' has succeeded in outlawing the closed shop in 20 states and driving union membership down to 20 per cent of the workforce. It also provides the backing for specialised union-busting outfits. Ceaseless propaganda about the right of the individual to opt out of union membership, together with the widespread intimidation of militants, has created a climate of opinion in which American unions now lose three out of four ballots for recognition. Verbiage about freedom saps the strength and destroys the organisation of the working class everywhere.

In Britain trade union traditions are far stronger than in the States. On purely trade union issues, freedom has yet to make the inroads it has done in America. But on wider, political questions the British left has swallowed the freedom bait hook, line and sinker. To take just one example, education: the radical Hackney Schools Stay OK campaign has protested the closure of secondary schools in East London by saying that it lessens 'parental choice' over where children should be taught — the very justification used by the Tories to boost public and grammar schools.

Freedom means different things to different people. While bourgeois bluster about freedom goes with a series of political and organisational blows against the working class, the ideal of freedom retains a powerful grip on the labour movement. Why can't these ideals of freedom and equality be realised in capitalist society? What does freedom mean for the working class?

Bourgeois individualism

Individualism was the ideology of the emerging bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century. Its first advocates were the Physiocrats, who pioneered the early, agricultural phase of capitalist development. Because the dominant ideology before them — the ideology of the mercantile capitalist which favoured the strict regulation of economic activity — worked against their interests, the Physiocrats portrayed it as a disturbance to the 'laws of nature' — the same laws of nature that made their crops grow. For them the uninhibited activity of individuals was the best assurance that proper order would be established within the economy.

The doctrine of economic liberalism was most fully developed by Adam Smith, the spokesman of the capitalist manufacturers of the late eighteenth century. In bourgeois political economy Smith upheld the freedom of the individual and opposed state interference. For him, the interests of the individual and those of society were in complete harmony.

Smith's optimistic viewpoint was the product of an epoch in which the nascent industrial bourgeoisie still played a progressive role; an epoch in which its interests coincided with the needs of the overall economic development of society. The liberalism of the manufacturers played a positive part in freeing the productive forces of the capitalist economy from the remaining shackles of feudalism. More, the rising bourgeoisie drew the working class itself under the banner of liberty, equality and fraternity in its struggle against the old regime.

Today's bourgeois ideologues try to justify their anti-working class policies by invoking Smith. But in fact Tory Secretary of State for Industry Keith Joseph and right-wing political commentator Paul Johnson have more in common with the vulgar bourgeois economists who followed him.

From the 1820s on, the vulgar economists cynically defended capitalism not just against the landed aristocracy, but also against the threat of the working class — a threat thrown up by the industrial revolution and represented by the early socialists. The vulgar economists — men like Say, Bastiat and Bentham — saw that capitalist society could not live up to its earlier ideals. And they were quite clear which of the two was more worth preserving:

'When scarcity and equality are in conflict, it will not do to hesitate a moment. Equality must yield.... The establishment of perfect equality is a chimera; all we can do is to diminish inequality.' (Bentham, *The theory of legislation*, 1826).

Just like their twentieth century successors, the vulgar economists were quite prepared to forget all their talk about freedom when the freedom of the working class was at stake.

The inequality beneath

Today the ruling class still has to explain away the contradiction between the *formal equality* of all individuals in capitalist society and the *real inequalities* of a society divided into antagonistic social classes.

In the capitalist market place all individuals meet on equal terms: everybody can exchange commodities free of personal ties or legal constraints. This goes for those who sell the products of other people's labour, for those who sell the products of their own labour — and for those who sell their own labour-power as a commodity. These capitalist relations of exchange are reflected in political rights (bourgeois democracy) and legal rights (equality of all before the law).

The equality enshrined in these rights masks a profound inequality. Some individuals — the small class of capitalists — own the means of production: land, raw materials, machinery and factories. Others — the vast majority, workers — own only their ability to work. For them freedom means 'freedom' from property and the 'freedom' to sell their labour-power to a capitalist in exchange for wages.

The capitalist puts the worker to work with his means of production: the product of the worker's labour thus becomes his property. The capitalist ensures that the value of the products his employees make is greater than the value he paid out for means of production and wages. He does this by paying them less, in value terms, than the value they create, so he extracts *surplus-value* from them. The free exchange between the worker and the capitalist thus conceals the exploitation of the

worker in production. The repetition of this exchange reproduces the relation of inequality — and it is this relation which lies at the root of the antagonism between workers and capitalists.

That antagonism becomes ever sharper because capital cannot systematically raise the level of the productive forces of society — and therefore cannot consistently improve the position of the working class. The stagnation and decay of twentieth century capitalism exposes the contradiction between the bourgeoisie's promises and its inability to develop social production sufficiently to fulfil them. In its parliaments, courts and schools, the bourgeoisie offers freedom and equality for all. But it cannot deliver.

It cannot even deliver formal *political* equality. After more than 200 years of capitalism bourgeois democracy remains the exception rather than the rule. As the experience of fascism has shown, even the most advanced capitalist countries cannot guarantee democratic rights. In backward capitalist countries military rule is the norm. The bourgeoisie boasts about universal suffrage but dares not hold elections over most of the face of the earth.

Nor can it deliver equality for *women*. In Britain legislation such as the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts may declare women equal before the eyes of the law and assert their right to the same pay as men. But the realities of life today deny these rights. The effect of the capitalist crisis of the 'seventies has been to *widen* wage differentials between men and women, and to drive women into part-time work or back into the home. It is the accumulation of capital that determines the position of women in society. Under capitalism a legal right is not a social freedom.

What we mean by freedom

For the working class freedom is not the abstract ideal it is for the bourgeoisie. From its earliest days the working class has always had to fight for freedom — freedom from poverty due to inadequate wages, freedom from physical destruction due to excessive hours and appalling conditions at work. This freedom can only be guaranteed under socialism, a form of society which can develop the productive forces sufficiently to provide genuine social equality.

Capitalists hire workers as individuals, not as groups. But capitalists bring workers together in the workplace. To defend themselves against capital, which will stop at nothing in its relentless drive for profit, workers organise as a class.

Among the first results of collective organisation were the Factory Acts of mid nineteenth century Britain. Marx explained how, at the time, workers had to 'put their heads together, and, as a class, compel the passing of a law' that would 'prevent the very workers from selling, by voluntary contract with capital, themselves and their families into slavery and death'. He continued: 'In place of the pompous catalogue of the "inalienable rights of man" comes the modest Magna Charta of a legally limited working day, which shall make clear "when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins"' (*Capital*, volume 1). For Marx freedom meant collective action to improve the circumstances of the working class, not metaphysical slogans.

Defend the closed shop!

According to the bourgeoisie every citizen should have the right to opt out of joining a trade union. But the bourgeoisie's 'citizen' does not exist in reality; it is merely a legal fiction. The division of 'citizens' into rival classes is evident from a simple examination of the closed shop debate. On one side stands the Tory Party, posing

as the champion of workers' rights; yet the Tory Party has fought against the working class, and especially its right to organise, from the dawn of trade unionism. On the other stand the trade unions, the organisations in which workers band together to defend their rights against the incursions of the employers.

When the apologists for bourgeois society protest about the decline of individual freedom and the rise of trade union power, they speak of a freedom which means nothing to the working class. Freedom from wage cuts, harsher working conditions and redundancy can be defended only through collective organisation. When the 'right to work' becomes the right to scab, and the freedom not to belong to a union becomes the freedom to smash shop floor organisation, the class content of bourgeois freedom becomes apparent. As Trotsky observed in the 'twenties' what may appear from the point of view of capitalist democracy to be personal liberty appears from the point of view of proletarian democracy to be the liberty of political strike-breaking' (*Where is Britain going?*, 1925).

Free abortion on demand!

Today the right to abortion is being challenged on two fronts. Not only does Tory MP John Corrie's Bill threaten to restrict access to abortion by law; the cuts in the NHS threaten to restrict facilities in practice. The first casualty of the cuts in Lewisham, for instance, was St John's Hospital, the area's only abortion clinic, while at Mile End the only day care abortion centre in East London is threatened with closure.

Yet by calling for 'a woman's right to choose', feminists, trade unions and radical political groups resurrect the bourgeoisie's ideal 'citizen' — this time in female form. They neglect its class content: the fact that only the ruling class can afford to enjoy any freedom of choice over abortion. Lenin's observations about divorce — another issue of women's rights — apply equally to the issue of abortion today: 'under capitalism the right of divorce as all other democratic rights without exception, is conditional, restricted, formal, narrow and extremely difficult of realisation' (Lenin, *On the emancipation of women*, 1916). Though abortions were made legal by the 1967 Abortion Act, it was always hard to get one, even before they began to close the hospitals. The main obstacle to getting abortions is not legislative but social.

The conscience of radicals

Nothing can be gained in the sphere of women's rights by raising the demand for individual choice. But for the SWP abortion is a *class* question only insofar as the Conservative Party recognises it as such. Of the Corrie Bill, the SWP noted:

'The Tories are attacking abortion rights. For the first time abortion is clearly a party political issue — the Tories imposed a one-line whip on their MPs instead of letting it be a matter of conscience on which MPs are allowed a free vote.' (*Socialist Worker*, 27 October 1979)

What are we to think of this? The SWP criticises the Tories for pursuing their class interests, yet ignores Labour's abandonment of the interests of workers and of women. Is the Labour Party's free vote according to conscience preferable to the Tories' disciplined one?

This is the sort of muddle that 'a woman's right to choose' leads to. In adapting to the pressures of feminism, the organisations which take up this demand confuse working class support for women's rights with the claptrap of ruling class freedom of choice. They wind up with the position of the Labour Party: after its 1979 conference declared for 'a woman's right to

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Prior's anti-union laws Carving us up in the courts

On 7 December 1979 Employment Secretary James Prior presented Parliament with the Tory Government's long awaited Bill on trade union reform. He had timed the event with some tact: it was a Friday, and the festive season was just about to begin. As *The Times* noted, the intention was 'to draw the sting of union hostility by getting the Commons second reading debate out of the way before Christmas'. And, though Labour backbenchers met Prior by jumping up and down in rage, though Len Murray of the TUC condemned the Bill as 'irrelevant' and 'unfair', he has indeed drawn that sting.

The main purposes of Prior's Employment Bill are:

- * to stop the formation of closed shops
- * to weaken union democracy by encouraging secret ballots
- * to restrict closed shops and picketing by Codes of Conduct
- * to outlaw flying pickets
- * to remove safeguards against dismissals and tighten maternity provisions.

What do Prior's measures represent, and why is the leadership of the official labour movement doing so little to oppose them? To find out, let us first of all look back at the way anti-union legislation began to take shape 10 years ago.

No to Castle, no to Heath...

By the late 'sixties British capitalism was sliding into crisis. Wages were down and strikes were up. To tighten up on the unions the Labour Government decided to bring in harsh new laws covering 'industrial relations'. They were outlined in Barbara Castle's White Paper *In Place of Strife* (January 1969). Its provisions: statutory settlement of inter-union disputes, secret ballots on major strikes and a compulsory 28 day 'cooling-off period' before a strike could begin — all backed by the threat of legal sanctions for those ignoring them.

Still fresh from the militant struggles of the post-war boom, workers soon put paid to Labour's plans. But while *In Place of Strife* was dropped, the TUC gladly shouldered responsibility for policing unofficial strikes. Labour left office, having whittled down shop floor power considerably: the succeeding Tory Government of 1970-73 whittled it down still more.

In December 1970 the new Conservative administration introduced its Industrial Relations Bill. Its clauses were as severe as the problems besetting the British economy of the early 'seventies. Unions were required to register with the government, end the closed shop, be legally bound to keep agreements with employers, hold mandatory secret ballots on strikes and wait 60 days before embarking on industrial action. Failure to comply meant heavy fines and worse.

Again workers repulsed the bosses' manoeuvres. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets in protest. But though the Tories' legislation was rendered inoperable by the class struggle, it was already clear that simple militancy was not enough to defend trade union rights. The Government inflicted a major defeat on striking postal workers. Redundancies multiplied in the docks, in shipyards and in steel mills. And, in late 1973, three building workers were sent to prison for 'intimidatory' picketing at a Shrewsbury site the year before.

Heath had been intransigent: as he replied to union pleas for more consultation, 'I am not negotiating. This is Her Majesty's Government'. Words like these, not actions like the jailing of the Shrews-

bury pickets, were what angered the trade union leaders. They were disgusted with the Industrial Relations Act, not because it was a means of propping up British capitalism, but because it did not prop up British capitalism enough. It was, in tired TUC bureaucrats' language, 'a recipe for chaos'.

With the return of a Labour government in 1974 harmony was restored to the land once again. The jailed Shrewsbury pickets were forgotten. Attention swung to Labour's Employment Protection Act (EPA).

... but yes to 'Employment Protection'

Labour was better than the Tories at using the trade union bureaucracy to quell working class unrest. All Labour needed to do to get the TUC's help was to repeal the Industrial Relations Act and give union leaders more of a 'say in national decision-making'. That was what the EPA was designed to do. At the same time, the TUC could cite it as evidence that the Government was fulfilling its side of the Social Contract. The EPA helped make Labour's version of wage restraint more palatable to workers. As ever, legislation served very specific ends — the ends of the ruling class.

When he gave details of the EPA in Parliament in April 1975 *Tribune* MP and Employment Minister Albert Booth told MPs that it placed no obligations on management to agree with the unions — only to confer with them. The bourgeoisie approved and so, of course, did the TUC. It was what it had been looking for all along.

With the Social Contract given full approval at the TUC the previous year, and the working class increasingly disorientated by its loyalty to Labour in power, Booth saw no need to lay down the law on the closed shop, secret ballots and picketing. He certainly had no intention of extending workers' rights to stop vehicles and discourage scabbing. Instead, Booth merely tinkered with some of the more liberal provisions of the old Industrial Relations Act and introduced a few meagre measures of his own. The period after which newly employed workers could go to a tripartite government/management/union industrial tribunal to claim unfair dismissal was shortened from two years to six months. And the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) was set up to deal with disputes over trade union recognition.

These innovations offered workers almost nothing. As socialists our task is not to defend sops like the EPA as 'gains' for the working class, but to ridicule them, to expose their meagreness and to show how easily employers can get round them. All the same, it is worth looking at the example of ACAS to highlight the illusory nature of the benefits afforded by the EPA.

Len Murray likes it — and so does George Ward

ACAS was established to aid both trade union bureaucrats and employers. It particularly comes in useful on the unorganised fringes of industry, where union leaders are most anxious to extend their control: as *The Times* commented the year the EPA was passed, the higher the level of unionisation in an industry, the more likely it was 'to have its own satisfactory machinery for settling disputes'. In backward areas like distribution and catering, however, ACAS was able to maintain the calm between capital and labour that was essential to the Social Contract — by enmeshing disputes over union recognition in a web of evidence, counter-evidence and legalistic intrigue. The presence of trade

unionists on its Council gave it a gloss of independence and respectability.

The merit of ACAS to the employers is that it is a nice, neutral way of wearing down militant struggles for recognition. The average recognition process takes one year to complete (ACAS, *Annual Report*, 1978). For strikers that can mean one year on a picket line. Even then there is only a one in five chance of recognition being granted: in 1977, for instance, only 178 out of 1038 recognition references actually succeeded. This is hardly surprising, for ACAS cannot force employers or scabs to give evidence at its proceedings — and the courts are only too willing to overturn ACAS rulings on the grounds that they were made with insufficient information to hand. Lastly, workers sacked in recognition disputes have even less chance of getting their jobs back. In 1977 again, 44 per cent of dismissal cases were withdrawn without settlement, and 77 per cent of those who were offered compensation got less than £300 (*Financial Times*, 26 September 1979). Not a lot for an employer



Behind the law — the bosses' interests

to lay out to beat the union. And not a lot to live on for workers forced to search for a new job.

The defeats of immigrant workers at Grunwick and Garners are all that ACAS and the EPA hold for the working class. What is the difference between Labour legislation and Tory legislation? Only that Labour law is the more subtle of the two.

Towards Labour's 'Concordat'

By 1978 the Labour Government had enacted a full programme of labour legislation. At industrial tribunals the burden of proof of fair dismissal was said to lie with the employers. Workers found to be unfairly dismissed were entitled to all of two weeks' pay as compensation. Women workers were protected against dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy, and were offered six weeks' maternity pay and 29 weeks maternity leave. And workers not given work by their employers were empowered to claim up to five days pay per quarter — but not if they were laid off as the result of industrial action, of course.

The 'winter of discontent' of 1978-79 soon revealed Labour's real concerns, however. Having despatched thousands of police — on foot, mounted and in the snatch squads of the Special Patrol Group — to help scabs get into Grunwick in 1977, having sent in the army to smash the firemen's strike of the same year, Labour threatened to break the ambulancemen's strike of last winter with troops. Disputes

like that at *The Times* convinced it of the need to destroy the closed shop. The continuing volatility of the workforce in sectors of industry like British Leyland made it conclude that secret ballots were the order of the day. And the lorry drivers' strike impressed upon it the need to end 'secondary picketing' and limit the number of pickets on a line.

The result was that, in early 1979, Labour drew up with the TUC a new and still more repressive Social Contract — the 'Concordat'. It enshrined all the principles of trade union reform that the Conservatives hold dear: 'individual freedom' to opt out of joining a union, an end to union votes at mass meetings and a derisory right to stand outside factories while scab lorries hurtle by. Indeed, in proscribing strikes in essential public services the Concordat went further than the Tories have yet dared to go.

Prior's progress

Today James Prior has grabbed back the clothes Labour stole from him. And he has not done this without subtlety, either; he has judged his every step with care.

After the Tories' victory in May, Prior began to tone down his party's propaganda against the unions. He declared himself only too ready to talk with the union leaders. Why? Because the Social Contract has taught the Tories that, on the whole, persuasion is the most effective way of dealing with the working class.

Prior put no proposals for anti-union laws in the first session of the new Conservative Government. In September, after conferring with the TUC, he published some 'discussion papers' 'inviting people's views' on various aspects of the EPA. The bourgeois press welcomed them: 'Moderation is the motto' applauded a *Financial Times* editorial at the time. With unemployment on the rise, Prior found little need to do away with the protective legislation of the past: he knew that workers would not be able to gain much from it in practice.

Meanwhile the labour movement suffered a series of legal reverses — under Prior's watchful eye.

In October a TGWU official was fined £750 for 'extorting' money from a transport firm during the lorry drivers' strike, a decision seen by the assistant director of the Scottish CBI as 'a precedent' (*Financial Times*, 27 October 1979). When night-shift workers at Leyland were found sleeping they were sacked with the approval of an 'immediate appeal hearing'. An Employment Appeal Tribunal ruled that dismissing an employee because she was expecting a baby did not amount to sex discrimination 'because there is no male equivalent' ('Pregnancy dismissal "is not sex bias"', *Financial Times*, 8 November 1979).

The labour movement took these setbacks in silence. Nor was there much reaction, beyond ritual outrage, when the police took the opportunity presented by several industrial disputes to step up their harassment of pickets. And the ruling class began making preparations for the battles ahead. *The Times* celebrated its return with an eight-part series which, under the heading 'Can the Government deal with the strikes?', went into the finer points of how, in times of national emergency, the army could be deployed to run everything from sewers to power stations. On 3 December, Manchester Chief Constable James Anderton made a speech defining picketing as a privilege and calling for a new law on the matter.

With recession looming in the new year and the labour movement reeling under the impact of body blows in the motor,

shipbuilding and steel industries — as well as in the courts — the time was ripe to push through the legislative framework to deal with the stormy class struggles to come.

Law and order

This was the build-up to Prior's Bill. Its main purpose is to consolidate 'law and order' in industrial relations. That existing law was sufficient to allow the bourgeoisie to smash working class organisation *in practice* was apparent from the events of the preceding months. Prior's Bill aims to 'lay down the law' on the focal points of the struggle between workers and employers — the picket line and the shop floor. It aims to turn class conflict into legal disputation, to channel the class

struggle into the courtroom. Conscious of the official labour movement's respect for the judiciary and its faith in the fairness and impartiality of the state, the bourgeoisie calculates that the Employment Bill will be a powerful deterrent against working class activity. Codification of industrial relations law thus goes hand in hand with the day to day reinforcement of state coercion directed against the working class.

The Employment Bill throws out the bulk of Labour's trade union legislation. Now anybody will be able to opt out of a union on the grounds of 'deeply-held personal conviction' and one fifth of workers in a non-unionised firm will have the right to veto attempts to form a union. Now pickets will be confined to their own

workplace: the kind of tactics used by the miners in the early 'seventies and by tanker drivers last winter will be illegal. The Secretary of State will be empowered to issue codes of practice to regulate the conduct of pickets and set limits to shop floor organisation.

The labour bureaucracy is paralysed before Prior's proposals. When he first issued his September 'discussion papers', the TUC bleated that his motive was 'not the promotion of industrial peace or the protection of personal freedom' but 'the pursuit of political prejudice' (TUC, *Bargaining or battleground?*, 1979). But the Tories are not 'prejudiced' at all. Theirs are just the measures to bring 'industrial peace' to British capitalism and to encourage scabs

to indulge in a little 'personal freedom'.

Prior's Bill marks the beginning of a major offensive. The fact that the TUC would rather turn a blind eye to it is hardly surprising; it was after all the co-author of its prototype, the Concordat. But the TUC's attitude makes it all the more vital that we prepare for the onslaught to come. Only if the labour movement throws off its traditional faith in the law and its application by the state, only if it sees through the reactionary character of every piece of legislation enacted by the Labour Party in government — only then can it hope to repel the attacks it will face in the months to come.

Russell Osborne

Overseas students

Up against the state, up against the NUS

For the last ten years Labour and Tory governments have been working hard to empty British colleges of overseas students. The Tory offensive last term brought them a good deal nearer to achieving this. Students must lose no time in building a national campaign to block any further advances.

The main thrust of the Government's attack has been on fees, which in last July's budget were raised by 20 per cent. At the beginning of the October term Secretary of State for Education Mark Carlisle told universities that they would have to charge their foreign students the full cost of their courses from 1980 onwards. The new price of a year's course in Britain? Anything up to £5000.

No wonder applications have tumbled. But higher fees are only the more obvious aspect of the Government's initiative. The Tories' new legislation on immigration erodes overseas students' rights still further. Neither they nor their families will be able to take jobs to finance their stay. They will have no chance to change courses once they start — and they will have to leave Britain immediately their studies are over. The immigration authorities will decide who is entitled to enter a college and will deport more and more students for 'overstaying', particularly in cases of 'conduct constituting a threat to the public good' (that is, political activity). Like foreign workers throughout Europe, students from the backward capitalist countries of Africa and Asia are being reduced to the status of migrants. They are being made to pay for the crisis of British capitalism.

It is not just a matter of education cuts — though every time the state succeeds in defraying some of the costs of educational expenditure without incurring opposition, cuts are that much easier to push through. Just as the US government has begun spot checks on Iranian students' entry permits to foster political support for military intervention in the Middle East, so the Tories' clampdown on overseas students helps reinforce racism throughout higher education. Even the *Financial Times*, generally aloof from the tabloids' chauvinist excesses, complains of 'the injustice whereby large numbers of British taxpayers are required to finance education for families better off than themselves' (10 August 1979). Not known for its sympathy for students, the bourgeoisie has now discovered that they are poor — providing they are not 'foreigners'. **The student movement will neither beat the cuts nor rid itself of racism unless it defends overseas students to the hilt.**

Small beginnings

So far, student resistance to fee increases has been only partly successful. Although thousands up and down the country have joined in occupations, sit-ins and boycotts — and have won a few concessions as

a result — many struggles have petered out once it became clear that the authorities were not going to give in easily.

In most colleges the authorities have had no hesitation in taking a hard line and calling in all the forces of the state to crush opposition. At some they broke occupations with writs and injunctions; at others they didn't even bother with this formality. At the very moment students at North London Polytechnic were planning their occupation at a union meeting the director sent staff home for the afternoon and called in the police. The administration at Manchester university also worked closely with the police: two van-loads of helmeted thugs were sent to smash a street demonstration, seven students were arrested, and a further 150 were threatened with expulsion. For overseas students that could mean deportation.

Such drastic measures were not always necessary. In many cases the authorities were able to place themselves at the head of student campaigns. The Association of University Teachers and other dormant unions were sufficiently roused by the threat posed to their members' jobs to make some militant noises. Senior figures in Britain's most prestigious colleges demanded immunity from higher fees, asking the Government to make its economies somewhere else: LSE director Ralf Dahrendorf, a man with a long history of suppressing student unrest, pleaded that it would be wrong 'to run down world renowned institutions like Oxford, Cambridge and the London School of Economics' (letter to *The Times*, 20 November 1979). Yet all these respectable and impassioned protests came to nothing. The AUT soon returned to its slumbers and Dahrendorf left less 'renowned' institutions to their fate.

NUS Accountants (UK) Ltd

Students in different localities had different experiences. But they all suffered the same national leadership. Even the most successful occupations were left isolated from struggles elsewhere. Here and there a speaker from the National Union of Students would turn up to tell militants to toe the NUS line, but that was all. At least the smaller colleges were spared the insult.

Nevertheless, the NUS bureaucrats are still calling the shots. Up and down the country they have settled into a cosy routine of negotiations with senates and polytechnic directors, hoping to fob off overseas students with a few minor concessions. Why?

The NUS leadership stands by Britain's interests, at home and abroad. Its 'defence' of overseas students starts with the premise that the Tories have chosen the wrong policy by mistake. After getting an independent audit of the nation's accounts drawn up, the NUS leadership announced

that overseas students had the right to come to Britain because, as it put it, 'all evidence suggests that they bring a clear net benefit to the UK, even in purely monetary terms' (United Kingdom Council for Overseas Students Affairs, NUS, London Student Organisation, *Overseas students: a subsidy to Britain*, 1979). What if NUS leaders have got their sums wrong? Well, there's always another nationalist argument. Concerned at maintaining Britain's imperialist power over the oppressed nations of the world, the NUS leadership argues that 'we' would be foolish to be 'shortsighted' about overseas students: when they return home they will occupy influential positions and give British firms lucrative export orders.

Brilliant. But the ruling class is not convinced. It gave up trying to persuade people to 'Buy British' years ago and it is not about to risk its cash nurturing a generation of Anglophile entrepreneurs today. Imperialist domination is a serious business: over Southern Africa, for instance, the Government has no hesitation in keeping students from Zimbabwe out of Britain and sending Lord Soames and an entourage of counter-insurgency experts there instead.

Nevertheless the NUS soldiers on. In a paper submitted to a conference on overseas students in London last October, it argued that the education of overseas students should be geared more closely to the Government's plans for capital export, investment and 'development'. Though they don't much need them, Keith Joseph and Mark Carlisle now have the Labour left and the Stalinists of the NUS leadership at their elbow.

The NUS bureaucrats have left overseas students defenceless and have worked hand in glove with the college authorities, not because they are spineless — though they are that too — but because they want to put the Great back in Great Britain. Of course the NUS leadership is not militant enough; of course it can't organise its way out of a paper bag. But the real point about it is that its chauvinist strategy leads students in completely the wrong direction. That is why it must be ruthlessly exposed in the student movement.

The NUS leadership's friendly critics

The occupations and sit-ins of last term have shown that students are ready for action. But it won't be forthcoming from the NUS leadership's rivals on the radical left. When the battle against fee increases was in full sway, *Socialist Worker* greeted it with the breathless observation that the Labour Party's 28 November march against the 'Tory cuts' 'couldn't have come at a better time for us' (*Socialist Worker*, November 1979). But it is not 'Tory cuts' that overseas students are suffering from. They're suffering because

even at the best of times capitalism can't provide free education for all — and in times of crisis it can only survive by solving its problems at the expense of the weakest, most isolated groups in society. The experience of the last 10 years shows clearly that, whichever party is in power, the government has had no option but to reduce overseas student numbers and subject higher education to swingeing cuts.

What next?

The defence of overseas students does not mean just another scrap with the college authorities. Like workers struggling for the maintenance of the closed shop, like women fighting for free abortion on demand and blacks organising against physical assaults, students today find themselves up against the state. A campaign to defend the democratic rights of overseas students will only be effective if it is approached as part of an anti-capitalist struggle against the state — against state racism, state immigration controls and state attacks on higher education.

Student militants urgently need to take stock of the experiences of the last three months. Their struggles have been fragmented; they have not succeeded in drawing the majority of students to support their actions. These problems will not be overcome simply through national co-ordination, important though that is. The most pressing task is to build political opposition to the cowardly pro-imperialist politics of the NUS leadership.

A start has been made. In December a meeting of 60 student militants from all round the country was held in London to assess the campaign so far and develop a strategy for the future. Initiated by students from Kent university, the meeting was strongly supported by the student wing of the RCT, the National Organisation of Revolutionary Communist Students. It agreed to begin an organised campaign to defend overseas students and challenge the NUS leadership. A conference of student activists aimed at extending this campaign has been called for 12 January.

The stakes are high. The NUS conference in Blackpool in December was the occasion for the physical intimidation of militants by both the state and the NUS leadership. Members of a delegation from the Six Counties of Northern Ireland were detained by police under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, while the NUS bureaucrats called in the police when a demonstration of 50 overseas students took place outside the conference doors. We must bring anti-imperialist politics into every section of the student movement. Unless we do, the ruling class will have its way with full-cost fees — and with its other plans for higher education too.

Kevin Green

CARWORKERS: PROFITS AND JOBS

Reinstate Robinson!

FORGET ABOUT BL: SAVE JOBS

The victimisation of Derek Robinson, senior convenor at BL's Longbridge plant, came as a major shock to the labour movement. For the first time for many years a prominent trade union official has been summarily dismissed simply for putting forward union policy in opposition to a management plan. Robinson's sacking by chairman Michael Edwardes was a serious challenge to working class organisation; it met with instant strike action at Longbridge.

Nobody was more surprised at Edwardes' action than Robinson himself. He had built up a close relationship with BL management over the past decade. Shortly after his downfall he told *The Sunday Times* 'I have been made out to be a monster yet only 12 days ago I was called out of my bed at midnight by the management to help resolve a dispute which blew up and could have led to a stoppage'. Robinson had, after all, been an enthusiastic supporter of the 1975 Ryder Plan to revitalise Leyland. He had not hesitated to endorse the first part of Edwardes' rationalisation plan of 1978. Why did he now have to go — and why was Edwardes able to get away with such a flagrant attack on trade union organisation?

Edwardes' plan . . .

The management at Leyland has to be ruthless. To transform BL from the unprofitable mess it is today into an efficient enterprise it needs to rationalise production and end shop floor power once and for all. That means sacking almost a quarter of the workforce and closing 13 plants. It means forcing through a productivity deal that offers workers a paltry five per cent pay rise and threatens to eliminate shop floor controls on work rates and manning levels. If Edwardes gets his way the new Mini Metro will be produced by gangs of workers who can be shifted around the factory floor at will. Manning levels will be slashed and productivity stepped up through tighter supervision and more intensive labour.

To push through these changes BL management must do away with all the trade union practices that have become prevalent in the British motor industry over the last 25 years. The limited protections shop stewards have built up against supervisors on the factory floor must now be destroyed. That is the motive for Robinson's expulsion. As Longbridge boss Ray Horrocks explained, Leyland management 'will not tolerate people who are trying to sabotage the company and its plans'. Robinson's victimisation is intended as a lesson to all shop stewards: accept wage restraint and tighter discipline at work — or get out.

The Robinson affair heralds a new phase in the class struggle. Turning away from the old policies of collaboration with the union bureaucracy, the bourgeoisie has begun to launch direct attacks on the organised labour movement. BL is a testing ground. As *The Economist* pointed out, if Edwardes proves successful 'he will be held up by delighted government ministers as an example to all bosses'. If the new tactics can be applied to the motor industry, where shop floor organisation is particularly strong, they can be used anywhere else. While the ruling class gauges their success, workers must look to their

defences. Let us first consider Robinson's strategy against Edwardes.

. . . and Robinson's

The occasion for Robinson's sacking was the publication by the Leyland Combine Committee of a 16-page pamphlet entitled *British Leyland, the Edwardes Plan and your job*. For BL management it was nothing short of an outrage. For workers too it should be notorious — but for different reasons.

The basic premise of the pamphlet is that BL and the British motor industry must be put on a profitable footing once more. This theme is repeated again and again.



**Robinson:
a victim of his own politics**

'The future of Britain as an industrial nation is in the balance. Workers have a right to be heard. We have a vested interest to ensure that Britain remains a competitive producer of manufactured goods.' (page 3)

'We are interested in the success of BL not its failure. We consider that without BL the British motor industry would go into an irreversible decline. And this in turn would have a catastrophic effect on the whole of British manufacturing industry.' (page 6)

'In the interests of our members, workers generally, and in the national interest, Britain's manufacturing base must be defended.' (page 13)

Throughout, the pamphlet condemns the Edwardes' Plan as bad for BL, bad for British industry and bad for workers — in that order. It reiterates the judgement of the *Morning Star* that Edwardes' proposals are 'madness' (page 5). It rails against the plans for the bus and truck division: they are just not 'sound business' (page 9). And it indicts Sir Michael Edwardes, successful executive and the man who was declared Young Businessman of the Year in 1976, for his failure to make profits.

The Combine Committee's 'alternative to Edwardes' is a programme consisting of seven points. The first five are all about improving BL's competitive position — by working existing capacity harder, increasing investment, mounting an extensive sales campaign, imposing import controls and introducing the latest technical developments. Only on the last two points does the Committee come to consider the fate of BL workers. It calls for improved wages and conditions, and for 'real industrial democracy'. And why? Because one is 'crucial to the success of BL' and the other is the way 'to achieve success at BL' (page 12).

Edwardes could have accepted all the Committee's suggestions bar its demand for import controls (which would not be expedient, given the likelihood of foreign retaliation) and its plea for higher wages and better conditions (which would not enhance the profitability of BL). 'Industrial democracy', for instance, has, in

the form of 'worker participation', played a very useful role in bringing BL workers round to accepting rationalisation plans in the past. The call to action with which the Committee's pamphlet concludes is typically ambiguous. First there is bravado:

'In other industries like UCS work-ins and occupations have been necessary to prevent closure. If necessary we shall have to do the same.' (page 13)

Then there is the catch:

'Fight for the industry, your job and Britain's future.' (page 13)

This is the substance of Robinson's challenge to Edwardes. It boils down to an alternative business strategy — a strategy which plays a distinctive role in the class struggle at Leyland.

Mr Robinson and the workers

Over the past decade shop steward organisation in the British motor industry has become more and more institutionalised. At BL in particular, representatives of shop stewards in the larger plants have been drawn closer into the official union structure — especially since the Ryder Plan introduced 'participation'. Operating from the senior convenor's office in a factory of 16 000 workers, Robinson, a full-time official, is as much a part of the trade union bureaucracy as his union's general secretary, Terry Duffy. His position allows him to mediate between Leyland workers and their bosses on every issue, from wages and conditions to labour discipline and redundancies.

This is where the Robinson plan comes in. Unlike Edwardes', which clearly goes against workers' interests, it suggests that BL can be restructured to their benefit. But for BL to become a going concern in capitalist society requires all the measures Edwardes wants to introduce. Robinson's alternative plan commits workers to a profitable BL and merges their interests with those of the capitalists. Its role is simply to make redundancies more palatable.

Robinson's equation — Save BL — save jobs! — doesn't square up. The workers who voted to save BL are already finding out what that salvation entails. As for saving jobs, it is only rank and file fear of redundancies that has forced Robinson to couple his call for a profitable BL with militant noises about work-ins and occupations.

Robinson is merely BL's obedient servant. Pete Freason, former director of production at Longbridge, appreciated his help.

'Mr Robinson cannot be accused of being consistently anti-management . . .

'Indeed on occasions he has been surprisingly articulate in swinging the 20 000 workers behind a management plan.' (*Birmingham Post*, 20 November 1979)

Although Robinson has been the victim of a vulgar anti-communist witchhunt in the gutter press, more farsighted commentators have noted how the radical nationalist politics of British Stalinism have assisted Leyland's management. Last year the *Financial Times* dubbed him 'Man of the Week' for his work in reconciling BL workers to redundancies and wage restraint. One Leyland executive told the *Birmingham Post* that 'he did keep politics out of the factory. When we discussed communism over the nego-

tiating table it was always in a jocular form'. Unfortunately for the workers, the joke was on them. Far from keeping politics out of the factory, Robinson brought the politics of class collaboration right down to the factory floor.

But now things have changed. Since the acceptance of the Edwardes Plan Robinson has become expendable. Those militant noises must be silenced. Once Edwardes felt that the workforce had been cowed by mass redundancies and harsher discipline, he proceeded to dispense with the old buffer between bosses and the shop floor. Making an example of Robinson acted as a demonstration of how determined management was to deal with shop stewards throughout the company. And Robinson duly went down the road, having co-operated to the full in the defeat of the only force that could save him.

Defend Derek Robinson!

The victimisation of Derek Robinson represents a major attack on the labour movement. But top priority in the campaign to defend him and shop floor organisation generally must be to reject the dead end strategy of his Combine Committee.

In its haste to declare elementary trade union solidarity with Robinson the radical left has completely ignored the content of his pamphlet. Robinson is a victim not only of Edwardes but also of his own politics. Everything he stands for stands as an obstacle to the development of a consistent struggle for the defence of workers' living standards at BL. This does not alter our commitment to his defence, but it does determine the form that this defence must take — a vigorous challenge to class collaboration and nationalism in British industry.

The Socialist Workers Party is blind to what Robinson is all about. It treats his victimisation as a trade union issue. The way to fight it is with 'elementary' trade unionism. Arguing that the need for the SWP's 'Rank and File Code of Practice is now more starkly demonstrated than ever before', *Socialist Worker* proclaims that 'its immediate application in the defence of Derek Robinson and the trade union organisation at Leyland is, actually, the only way forward' (*Socialist Worker*, 24 November 1979).

Today, when Edwardes has done away with management/union procedures built up over decades, the SWP counsels workers to reply to him with narrow trade unionism. It is like taking a revolver to a tank.

Why did elementary solidarity in support of Robinson — strikes, pickets, demonstrations — come to nothing? Because workers could see no alternative to the Edwardes Plan. No wonder Duffy and the AUEW executive met with little rank and file resistance to their refusal to support Robinson with official strike action.

Only a strategy which puts the interests of the workers to the fore — against both Edwardes' and Robinson's advocacy of the interests of the company and the country — can defend jobs. A class attack demands a class response. That is the only way forward for BL workers today.

Helen Swift

JOBS DON'T MIX

The Vauxhall strike UNIONS IN DISARRAY

The last words uttered by shop stewards at Vauxhall Motors' factory at Ellesmere Port in Cheshire, as they returned to work empty-handed after a bitter ten week strike, were that they would 'not sit at the same bargaining table again as southern stewards' (*Financial Times*, 13 November 1979). This outburst expressed the frustrations and resentments of a militant but deeply divided workforce, defeated in the plants and on the picket lines by an employer skilful in exploiting conflicts among its members.

Divisions in the ranks

Strife between different sections of Vauxhall workers goes back a long way. In 1977 skilled workers at Ellesmere Port broke ranks in pay negotiations. The fitters struck against the firm and the leadership of the AUEW — and also against less skilled workers in their own union and in the TGWU. Their demand was conceded in principle, but no money was forthcoming. In 1978 shop stewards throughout Vauxhall swallowed management arguments about the low profitability of the company and accepted a 5½ per cent pay deal under Labour's incomes policy. Craftsmen held out for a bigger increase, but eventually made do with the wider differential that resulted from a fixed percentage increase.

Trouble brewed up again in August last year. In response to company-wide demands for a 25 per cent rise and a 36 hour week, management came up with a 17 per cent increase — but dangled the offer of an extra 2p an hour in front of fitters and electricians. The move was designed to take advantage of the divisions which had emerged in 1977 by giving craftsmen a new differential over other workers. Outraged by what they saw as the outcome of 'backdoor dealings with an elitist group', setters, semi-skilled workers and production workers at Ellesmere Port all walked out on a 24 hour strike. It proved to be the start of a battle that was to last nearly three months.

Within days 4000 AUEW members at Ellesmere Port voted to back their original claim with indefinite strike action. Another 3000 of their workmates in the TGWU soon joined them. Only Ellesmere Port's fitters wanted to work on. Some went to the lengths of climbing over fences to avoid pickets: but the company laid them off too.

Attempts to spread the strike through the Vauxhall chain met with little success. Even the 400 pickets who travelled south to Luton and Dunstable could not persuade workers there to come out in sympathy. At Dunstable only the engineers resisted the 17 per cent offer. Right from the beginning, divisions between skilled and less skilled workers and between plants in the north and the Home Counties weakened the fight for decent wages.

The split between the Cheshire and Bedfordshire workers deepened as the strike continued. After four weeks of action, the Ellesmere Port engineers remained adamant and their TGWU brothers voted by 2 to 1 to keep up the strike. The Dunstable engineers continued to stand firm too; but apart from them the unions at Luton and Dunstable formally accepted the management offer.

In the last week of September AUEW and TGWU pickets were set up at trans-

port depots on the East Coast to prevent the movement of cars or parts between Britain and Europe. By the end of the week there were 130 pickets at Harwich, and Ipswich and Felixstowe were blockaded too. Then the police attacked.

Pickets smashed

On 30 September a driver tried to take his lorry through the picket line: a detachment of police from the Special Patrol Group waded in to clear his way, arresting 10 pickets, including Ellesmere Port TGWU convenor Tony Woodley.

While men were charged with obstruction, assault and criminal damage to police uniforms, Woodley merely protested 'Only the day before we had reached an agreement with the local police about stopping vehicles and talking to their drivers, but the agreement was totally ignored by the SPG' (*Liverpool Post*, 1 October 1979).

The police continued to ignore it. They put two workers in hospital — one with an arm injury and another with concussion — and made five more arrests. Woodley was outraged:

'Our men have been kicked, punched and thrown around . . . some of the policemen on duty have acted like thugs. We believe that we have picketed completely within the law' (*Liverpool Post*, 6 October 1979).

The upshot was that union officials at Harwich appealed to national TGWU leaders to press for an official inquiry into police brutality on the picket lines.

What were the lessons of Harwich? Today, when more and more police are being deployed against strikers and pickets, any appeals to the state to soften its tactics can only undermine workers' own resistance. The events on the East Coast reveal a serious problem — a problem within the trade unions.

The drivers responsible for breaking the picket lines were TGWU members employed at Vauxhall's Luton factory. They decided to transport blacked goods during the strike. Lorry drivers' convenor Peter Ashford proclaimed that 'it would be a blow for democracy if the parts did not get through' (*Financial Times*, 11 October 1979). Scabbing conducted under the label of democracy is nothing new in the labour movement. But it still remains a much more serious danger to the working class than police brutality. Police are paid to act like thugs against pickets: instead of pleading with the state to clamp down on them, the unions would do better to strengthen their own ranks.

The Harwich picket was abandoned after a further week. Having supported the strikers throughout, local delivery drivers caved in under the threat of lay-offs. More, the Harwich Dock Company took out a High Court injunction against five senior union officials, ordering them to lift the pickets. TGWU carworkers section national officer Granville Hawley told Ellesmere Port convenor John Farrell that picketing would have to 'cease forthwith — that is immediately' and reminded him of 'the difficulties that can be created for the trade union movement with the thinking of the present government with relation to picketing'.

Although the Harwich pickets withdrew before the injunction could be served, it turned out to be a useful precedent for the bosses in the next phase of the dispute.

Immediately the Ellesmere Port workers turned to picketing Vauxhall dealers' showrooms, the dealers got an interim injunction to halt what they called 'secondary' picketing. The pickets were not easily intimidated. As one explained to a reporter from the bourgeois press, 'We are staying here despite an injunction' (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 1979). Only when solicitors for Liverpool's biggest Vauxhall dealer demanded that the defiant pickets be jailed for contempt did they desist.

Divided we fall

With the strike still solid, management stepped up its dire warnings about the precarious future of the Ellesmere Port plant. The workers were told that Vauxhall would not continue operations if they did not boost the company's flagging profitability by making substantial sacrifices on pay and productivity. Facing mounting pressure from employers and the state, trade union officials urged the strikers to call off all pickets and to return to work pending further talks.

A week later the workers at Ellesmere Port voted to accept the 17 per cent and go back to work. The strike had cost them £1000 each. For AUEW convenor John Turnbull it was a bad decision: 'I never believe in coming out in dispute and coming back for nothing.' But the convenors had had no alternative to offer. Effective picketing had been destroyed by force of law, despite Woodley's declaration that 'we have said all along that we intend to keep the picket lawful'. The convenors' commitment to legal picketing meant abandoning the workers' strongest weapon.

The factory officials now handed over the strike to the regional trade union bureaucracy. District Secretary Clifford Keech breathed a sigh of relief: 'They have gained nothing, but the matter is now to be discussed in procedure'. The 275 setters who began the strike in August held out for another two weeks, an action justified by the senior steward John Lewis on the grounds that 'people were now aware of their existence and that they were not to be trifled with'. Section by section the Vauxhall workers were forced back to work — on the employer's terms.

The details of the final settlement revealed a major setback. Basic increases averaging 13.7 per cent were tied to productivity agreements and the relaxation of shop floor controls — total labour flexibility, performance quotas and the acceptance of alternative work at management's command. Once management scented victory it rammed home further disciplinary measures. On the eve of their return to work TGWU members received a letter from plant manager Don Vallance demanding the correct work rate throughout a shift, precision time-keeping and full manning on all jobs. Management had the whip hand: within hours a steward had been sacked and other workers disciplined. Woodley was later threatened with dismissal after he took two hours off on union business.

Which way to unity?

The problems highlighted by the Vauxhall dispute are those of divisions in the working class and the official labour movement's awe of the police and the courts. But the radical left ignores them.

The Workers Revolutionary Party, for example, called for 'the opening of the books of Vauxhall Motors to inspection by trade union committees'; this 'would show the case for nationalisation of the entire industry under workers control, and without compensation' (*The News Line*, 29 October 1979). How would opening Vauxhall's books help the workers at Ellesmere Port? Just across the Mersey, workers at British Leyland's Speke plant learnt all about BL's books in that company's extensive participation exercises — at the cost of thousands of redundancies. And which trade union committees? The unions at Ellesmere Port are so divided that they have no joint shop stewards committee — and after the recent strike the prospect of a combine committee with the Luton and Dunstable plants is further away than ever.

In contrast to the ritual chanting of the WRP, the Socialist Workers Party reassured workers that 'the hard core militants backed by the vast majority of the workforce have shown that the flying picket can beat anything the bosses throw at you' (*Socialist Worker*, 10 November 1979). This after the 'vast majority' of the workforce at Luton and Dunstable had failed to give Ellesmere Port pickets the solidarity they needed; this after the police and courts had broken up the picket lines. One month later, *Socialist Worker* published a letter detailing the oppressive conditions now prevailing at Ellesmere Port. Its solution to them: 'get back to the basics of trade union organisation — solidarity at every level between workers' (Tony Cliff, 'It's time to close ranks', *Socialist Worker*, 15 December 1979). As usual, *Socialist Worker* gets 'back to the basics'. It never asks why the basics have been lost and why they have not proved sufficient for today. Instead, it summons workers to . . . yet another rank and file conference.

The unions at Vauxhall are divided because they have accepted a measure of responsibility for the firm's weak financial position in the past — and for improving it in the future. In 1978, for instance, they agreed to a token wage rise out of concern for the company's profitability. Again, though particular sections of the workforce have resisted wage restraint aggressively, they have not rejected Vauxhall's corporate goals. Sections have been preoccupied with increasing differentials, not with defending the living standards of all Vauxhall workers.

Fitters at Ellesmere Port stormed out of a shop stewards' meeting when they were asked to forget their 2p extra and join the fight for the 25 per cent across-the-board rise. Identification of the interests of the workers with the fortunes of the company and a conviction that Vauxhall could ill afford to pay the increase were the decisive factors in destroying workers' unity. These are the causes behind the refusal of skilled workers at Ellesmere Port and the majority of the workforce at Luton and Dunstable to back the full claim.

Workers at Vauxhall must leave the company's problems to their employers. That is the only way they will overcome the divisions within their own ranks — the divisions that have wrecked the struggles of recent months.

Simon Peterson

Engineering sackings Tough battles ahead

'Everyone — businessmen, economists and Ministers — now accepts that next year will see no growth in the British economy. The only question posed by the forecasts and surveys of businessmen's plans is: How great will be the decline?' (*The Observer*, 11 November 1979)

'Now you see it, now you don't' was how one engineering worker put it when *the next step* asked him how he saw the future for his job. Since the settlement of the AUEW's national claim last year thousands of workers up and down the country have been experiencing the same uncertainty.

Engineering workers in Greater Manchester have suffered more than most. During and immediately after the national strike employers throughout the area took their revenge on them:

- * 18 September **GEC** tried to put its Trafford Park Turbine section on piece-rates
- * 20 September **Ward and Goldstone** 200 out of 2250 jobs lost
- * 9 October **Mather and Platt** 390 jobs eliminated at Park Works, Newton Heath; Globe Iron Works, Radcliffe to close — 60 jobs to go; another 60 jobs at Bradley Fold, Radcliffe to disappear. Total jobs destroyed: 510
- * 12 October **Foden** 400 out of 2800 jobs to vanish at Sandbach, Cheshire; aluminium foundry to be shut down
- * 13 October **ICL** Dunkinfield plant to close — all but 100 of the 900-strong workforce to be made redundant
- * 24 October **General Engineering** 130 sackings at Radcliffe
- * 31 October **APE Crossley** 150 jobs lost at Openshaw diesel engine plant
- * 10 November **Sim Chem** 60 staff workers given their cards at Cheadle Hulme and Whitefield plants.

Behind the attack on jobs, wages and conditions lies the falling profitability of Britain's engineering sector. Faced with low rates of return on their capital, engineering companies are unwilling to invest in new plant and machinery. Result: their weak competitive position on the world market gets weaker still, making them no match for West German and Japanese firms.

Since almost a third of British engineering output is exported, the industry is also highly vulnerable to downturns in world demand. And world demand is shrinking with the international recession. No wonder the City isn't keen on buying shares in British engineering. Last year a leading financial weekly described the outlook for the sector as 'horrendous', and predicted a fall in both capital investment and manufacturing output in 1980 (*Investor's Chronicle*, 16 November 1979).

The employers have only got one option left open: to make the workforce pay. Their strategy is to write off less competitive factories and rationalise production in the more lucrative ones. So in the former, workers have a fight against massive redundancies on their hands, and in the latter, speed-ups and cuts in real wages are the order of the day.

For the Engineering Employers Federation a jobs shake-out has the additional merit of deepening divisions among the

engineers. Redundancies hit the unskilled more than the skilled. And it's the same story on pay. After its recent settlement, the EFF gloated that it had secured 'the widening of differentials between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled grades' — 'a major goal' (*EEF News*, October 1979).

So far there has been little response to these setbacks to employment in Manchester. Much of the blame for this dire state of affairs rests with the Broad Left. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, this forum for activists in the AUEW has overseen a steady decline of engineering jobs since the 'sixties.

Redundancy is the key issue confronting rank and file militants. Here we begin a discussion on it by printing interviews with two shop stewards from the Manchester area. They talk about their experience of fighting redundancies — and about the main problem they have met so far: the difficulty in finding arguments to persuade their workmates that redundancies can be beaten.

Stan Meeds is TGWU steward and chairman of the joint union health and safety committee at Fairey Engineering, Stockport. Management there has recently announced its intention to cut more than 90 jobs. Although workers forced management to redeploy elsewhere in the plant press shop workers earmarked for the chop, voluntary redundancies were accepted.

Can you tell us something about Fairey and the background to the dispute?

It's a medium size heavy engineering factory — the main product is bridge work, especially for the export market. It's also involved in nuclear work. A couple of years ago the company went bankrupt and was placed in the hands of the receiver. But there was a Labour government at the time and the company was taken over by the National Enterprise Board, with no immediate loss of jobs.

Now the bridge work is tapering down. The orders just aren't there any more and management have come to the conclusion that they have to cut manning levels. A couple of weeks ago they called a meeting to say they needed 96 redundancies and that most of them would be 'non-productive' office staff. It turned out that 72 were to come from the shop floor and that the whole press shop would go.

The unions would only accept voluntary redundancies — it would have been difficult to go much further. Management came back and said that voluntary redundancies were only possible if they came from sections of the workforce laid down by them. This was completely unacceptable. After further discussions management agreed to allow those workers who would be retiring next year to take redundancy. If these workers refused to take redundancy or, due to the nature of the job, couldn't be redeployed elsewhere in the factory, we would not have accepted their redundancies.

Which unions are represented in the factory?

There are fourteen to fifteen hundred workers employed, half manual and half staff. The majority of manual workers are in the AUEW. Next comes the T and G and the boilermakers, followed by the electricians. APEX represents the clerical staff and AUEW-TASS the draughtsmen.

Why did you say that it would be difficult to oppose all redundancies?

There's not been a lot of work coming in for a couple of years now, so people

on the shop floor have had the experience of slack working. When management say there is no choice but to cut the workforce, workers see the logic to it.

The redundancies in this case are relatively small, so it's hard to get support for a dispute — especially when most workers are conditioned to think that it's not possible to win.

Also, a large number are willing to take redundancy. The state the engineering industry is in has led a lot of workers to think that if they go on strike they'll just lose money and win nothing in the end.

How can shop stewards overcome these obstacles and make it possible to fight all redundancies?

The way management puts the issue is that redundancies are crucial for the viability of the company. It tells workers they must accept some redundancies if the rest of the jobs are to stay. At the moment the majority of shop floor workers accept this.

Some of the stewards do too. And those who don't can see no practical alternative. They are accountable to the shop floor and so can see no point in launching a fight against all redundancies and losing because they don't have support.

What you would have to do is to show that management has only its own profits at heart. The difficult job — and you would have to do a lot of groundwork before you got very far with it — is to convince the workforce that they can resist, and come out with something from it. So you would have to propose what to do afterwards. Otherwise you could be faced with a situation where the factory as a whole is closed down.

What sort of alternative are you looking for? Nationalisation? Help from the NEB?

No, neither. They wouldn't change the market forces which create redundancies. At Fairey the shop floor would agree, because they've experienced both of these. Although you have to be careful. A lot of people think that redundancy is coming about because there's a Tory government, when in fact even if there was a Labour government the engineering industry would need restructuring just the same. The shop floor might support the NEB or nationalisation under a Labour government.

So what needs to be done?

Well, shop stewards are beginning to realise the need for an alternative — a political alternative. There was a time when shop stewards could gain certain advances on wages and conditions. This allowed them to build up their factory organisation. But today, no matter how well organised you are, when management says 'you're no longer needed' you need more than just organisation.

Up to now we've had no answers — no answers whatsoever. The shop stewards' organisation could be completely decimated because it has no answers. All most shop stewards do is react to what management does. What is needed is for shop stewards to convince the workforce to begin to think outside the present structure and to take control of production into their own hands.

Do you mean like the workers at Triumph Meriden and Kirkby?

No. That was just within one factory. You can't change control within one individual factory. It has to be the whole economy. Islands of socialism can't exist in a sea of capitalism.

What has that to do with the immediate fight against redundancies?

Well, you have to use the experience workers have gone through. You're talking about workers who have something to protect. They've gone through the period when things were going well, they've been through nationalisation and the NEB. If you can relate to these experiences and use them to point out that the old answers haven't worked — then you're making a start.

You've got to direct these arguments at people who are already active, such as stewards — at least to start off with. You have to get them across to these people first because unless you convince them you'll never convince the shop floor. These are the ones that have had to acknowledge that they have had no answers in the past.

John Taylor is Boilermakers Society shop steward and Joint Shop Stewards Convenor at Adamson's Containers (ACROW), Reddish, Manchester. The company has recently tried to victimise shop stewards and trade union activists, and the workers at the Reddish plant have been out on strike since August as a result. At the beginning of December management made its offer: a lump sum payment of £150 to be paid back at a rate of £12 per week and a demand for Taylor's resignation as shop steward. Management threatened to close the factory down completely if these terms were not met. Even though Taylor's resignation was modified to 'suspension on full pay pending an inquiry', a mass meeting of the workforce rejected the employers' demands three to one.

Recently the management has launched a vicious campaign to harass the Adamson's pickets. The Tactical Aid Group, the Manchester equivalent of the SPG, has been attacking them. On 19 December three were arrested — only to be released later without charges. Other pickets were threatened with arrest for stealing the wood they were burning to keep themselves warm.

Can you tell us what led up to the present strike?

This is the third dispute in the 10 years since I started here, and this one's the biggest. Within ACROW as a whole there have been five or six major disputes, all of them over trade union rights. Cope Cranes at Sunderland was occupied for 13 weeks. The men at Adamson and Hatchett at Manchester went out for 10 weeks when management refused to negotiate over a move into a new factory. Workers at Thomas Storey at Stockport spent 10 weeks on strike to get the convenor and all the stewards there reinstated. And at Hull there was a one day stoppage throughout the city when a staff shop steward at Priestman Brothers was sacked. It got him reinstated. At Adamson's Containers in Reddish — as at Thomas Storey — the employers have attempted to sack the convenor and all stewards.

What about the present dispute?

We've had this brand new freight container plant for 12 months now. There are 260 shop floor workers and 74 staff. Three months ago we were placed on a three day week. Then the redundancies were announced — 45 of them.

All along the company has insisted that it will pick the men to leave. Shortly before the negotiation procedure came to an end I was called into the Managing Director's office and asked to name my price and leave the company. Naturally I refused.

By this time we'd got the redundancies down from 45 to 39, due to natural wastage. We said we wanted voluntary redun-

Money markets in chaos

BEHIND THE DOLLAR'S DEMISE

It isn't often that bankers hit the headlines. While capitalist politicians expect to see their names in lights as frequently as they feel their status demands, the money men pursue their dealings quietly — almost secretly. So when Paul Volcker, chairman of the United States Federal Reserve Board, was splashed across the front page of every 'quality' newspaper the world over on 7 October 1979, it should have been apparent that the financial position of the West's major economic superpower was, at the very least, worthy of discussion.

Should have been apparent to the workers' movement, that is. But unfortunately the ruthless measures Volcker took to halt the slide of the world's leading currency, the dollar, went almost unnoticed in the columns of the left-wing press. While the *Financial Times* observed that he had 'administered the most effective shock to the US economy since the original OPEC price increase of 1973' (*Financial Times*, 9 October 1979), Volcker's rearguard action to stave off America's decline caused little comment in the *Morning Star* or *Socialist Worker*.

But in decline the USA certainly is. A month before Volcker announced stringent curbs on the growth of America's money supply, *Business Week*, prestigious New York journal of economic analysis and stock market tips, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a major survey of past, present and future trends for world capitalism. It wasn't much of a celebration. *Business Week* proclaimed: 'The post-war period of US leadership and central bank coordination is now over. The international monetary system is sliding once again into economic competition and financial anarchy' (*Business Week*, 3 September 1979).

Business Week is right. Competition between the USA, West Germany and Japan is getting tougher every day. Though Frankfurt bankers approved of Volcker 'putting America's house in order', his decision to tighten up on bank reserves and let US interest rates soar upwards soon unleashed retaliation from the German Bundesbank. On 31 October 1979 it raised interest rates by a full percentage point, and by 12 November the trans-Atlantic 'interest rate war' drove *Business Week* to warn that the USA and West Germany were 'on a collision course' over monetary and exchange rates policies.

Competition doesn't end there: it hits trade too. As the dollar sags further, European and Japanese exports into the USA work out dearer in dollar terms while US exports cost less. The world balance of trade thus moves in favour of the USA, pressing other nations to stiffen protectionist measures. At the same time American efforts to stabilise the dollar through deflation make it harder to sell into the States. They exacerbate inter-imperialist rivalries.

And anarchy really does rule in Wall Street and the City. As the dollar's international exchange rate plummets, holders rush to buy German marks and Swiss francs — or gold, silver and copper. In doing so they push the price of the dollar down still more. A consequence: US companies anxious to invest abroad find they no longer have the assets to do so.

The dollar — good as gold

Why was Volcker forced to take steps unprecedented in the entire history of US banking? What lies behind the chaos on the world's money market? The international working class has every interest in cutting through the mumbo-jumbo of the banking world and understanding the global monetary crisis for what it is — an expression of the tumbling profitability

of the capitalist system.

There was a time when dollars could buy anything. The condition on which the USA bailed Britain out during the Second World War was the destruction of the Sterling bloc and the opening up of the British Empire, Latin America and the Middle East to US capitalists. Britain's financial crisis of 1931 had proved that the pound could no longer continue as the world's leading currency; but by 1944 the USA was ready to take up the position that Britain had vacated. It did so at a conference of all the Allies at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in July of the same year.

One of the most important decisions of the conference was to set up the International Monetary Fund. The IMF laid down two rules. The dollar was to be convertible into gold at the fixed rate of 35 dollars an ounce. And the values of other currencies were to be fixed in terms of dollars alone, so that exchange rates could be changed only as a last resort. This had two consequences.

First, the dollar became the main currency for countries to hold their reserves of foreign exchange in. By the end of the war the USA held more than two-thirds of the world's gold. It had enough reserves at Fort Knox to cover every green bill that foreign firms or governments held. The dollar's convertibility was unquestioned. It gained acceptance as the world's strongest currency because each piece of paper printed by the US mint was backed by solid gold guarantees.

Second, the dollar became the universal means of conducting world trade and settling debts after the war. While the European and Japanese economies lay in ruins, the USA was responsible for more than half the world's total industrial output. Demand for its commodities was enormous, and so was demand for the dollars to buy them with. When, in 1947, the USA began Marshall Aid, a massive programme of loans to Western Europe to assist its struggle against 'communism' and accelerate post-war reconstruction, the money it sent came in dollars — claims on the products of the massive US economy. The only way to do business across national frontiers was to do business in dollars.

The dollar's unique position did not simply reflect the USA's domination of the world economy. It helped strengthen it. To pay for imports, foreign governments had to build up their foreign exchange reserves — which meant their dollar reserves. This allowed the USA to maintain economic expansion at the expense of other countries, for it could buy both their exports and their factories merely by handing over the dollar bills they needed so desperately in exchange. More, it bought them cheap: the dollar's high exchange rate made it worth a lot of money. And cheap imports helped check domestic inflation, while cheap foreign assets made foreign investment an easy way to make a fast buck.

The giant stumbles

It was not surprising that the USA ran heavy balance of payments deficits throughout the post-war period. But that was no problem; in fact it showed once again how the dollar helped the USA out while other countries suffered. Balance of payments deficits forced other countries to deflate and cut back imports (particularly Britain, which was famous for its 'stop-go' policies). That was the only way to maintain the exchange rate, for a currency only counted for something if a country could pay its way. But the exchange rate of America's currency was fixed, so the USA could spend as much as

it liked. The trouble was, it was all too much of a good thing. Behind the mighty dollar the US economy was fundamentally weak. A crash was bound to come.

Despite the fact that it ran a positive balance of trade throughout the post-war boom, the USA did not enjoy the very rapid growth rates of West Germany and Japan. While the German and Japanese ruling classes profited from the defeats they imposed on workers before, during and immediately after the war — and took advantage of the destruction of capital that the war brought to re-establish accumulation at a higher level — the US economy expanded relatively slowly. Between 1960 and 1971, for instance, investment in the USA was only 17 per cent of Gross National Product, compared with West German and Japanese figures of 25 and more than 30 per cent respectively. Again, between 1950 and 1970 the USA's share of world manufactured exports fell from 27 to 18 per cent while West Germany's rose from 7 to 20 per cent and Japan's shot up from 3 to 12 per cent.

Why couldn't America maintain substantial investment and basic competitiveness? The reason was simple. More than any other major capitalist nation except Britain, the USA suffered from a tendency inherent in capital accumulation: the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

It works like this. Each capitalist tries to build up more surplus-value by raising his firm's productivity — by introducing more automation. But that leaves him with bigger bills for machinery and raw materials, and fewer workers to exploit for him to pay them. So his profitability decreases. Yet the process doesn't just stop there. To improve what he perceives as his 'margins', the capitalist raises his prices. When he finds his suppliers doing the same, he is forced to look for loans.

So along with slow growth and a declining share of world trade, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall brought the USA inflation and a massive expansion of credit. As if that wasn't enough, it gave a double boost to America's balance of payments deficit. First, more productive countries like West Germany and Japan accrued substantial dollar holdings from the proceeds of their competitively priced exports to the USA. Second, US enterprises, disappointed with the low profitability of their undertakings at home, stepped up capital exports to more lucrative investment sites abroad — so adding to the stock of dollars outside the USA.

Money madness

Matters finally came to a head in 1971, the year in which the USA declared its first trade deficit of the century. By this time inflation was on the rise. Total indebtedness had leapt from 500 billion dollars in 1950 to 2000 billion dollars. And the value of US liabilities overseas far exceeded what was in Fort Knox. The 'Eurodollar' market — dollars held by European firms and governments for the purpose of long-term investment — alone had grown from a mere 2 billion dollars in 1960 to 60 billion dollars.

On 3 May 1971 bankers all over Western Europe panicked. Everybody wanted to 'get out' of dollars and into something else — be it German marks, Japanese yen, Swiss francs, whatever. In West Germany a billion dollars changed hands in two days. By late July, US reserves were at their lowest level since before the war as governments demanded conversion of their surplus dollars into gold at the official price. Speculation against the dollar raged in Frankfurt, Tokyo, Zurich, Paris and London. Devaluation was certain.

President Nixon had to act. On 15 August

he ordered a wage freeze, tariffs on imports — and the dollar's release from convertibility with gold. It was the end of an era. The dollar proceeded to float down on the money markets of the world, making US exports more competitive, the purchase of imports and foreign assets more costly — and making dollar holders abroad very angry. The international monetary crisis began in earnest.

Cut loose from its golden anchor, the world's money system broke up amid stormy seas. One by one, European governments followed Nixon's example and devalued their currencies to ease their balance of payments deficits (Britain pioneered the development of this new weapon of international competition by its June 1972 decision to let the pound float). At the same time, they used their new-found freedom from the discipline of gold and the dollar to expand the money supply and issue massive quantities of credit. The result was simple: rampant inflation. Money wasn't worth anything any more.

Carter's last stand

By 1978 the USA was ready for a new dollar crisis. From 3 billion dollars in 1971, its trade deficit had reached a crushing 34 billion. In the first 10 months of the year the dollar fell by 18 per cent against the German mark and by 26 per cent against the Swiss franc and the Japanese yen. On 1 November President Carter was forced to take drastic action to prevent a complete collapse of confidence in the dollar. He raised interest rates, placed restrictions on bank lending and — with the co-operation of foreign central banks — set up a 30 billion dollar fund to support it.

Carter's conversion to monetarism solved nothing. By the summer of last year he was forced to adopt still more stringent measures to curb roaring inflation and the burgeoning growth of America's money supply. Interest rates were sent through the roof and credit controls were tightened sharply. To 'defend the dollar' the US economy had to be squeezed remorselessly. At the same time the US ruling class opened an all-out campaign of nationalist hysteria against the oil supplying nations of the Middle East. The reason: OPEC's higher prices meant that more dollars left the USA, so worsening America's liabilities abroad and putting its currency under renewed pressure.

When the member countries of the IMF met in Belgrade in the first days of October 1979 the USA came on its knees. It proposed that central banks open a dollar 'substitution account' — that they help America write off its overseas liabilities by replacing some of their dollar reserves with IMF 'Special Drawing Rights', an artificial money based on a weighted mix of 16 major currencies. But though everybody was concerned about the havoc the international monetary system was in, nobody wanted to foot the bill to end it. As *The Economist* laconically observed, member countries 'did not even agree to set a date for agreement' (6 October 1979).

The size of the dollar holdings of foreign

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Revolutionary Communist Papers No 3 The recession: capitalist offensive and the working class

The chaos of the monetary world and the confusion it causes reveal a ruling class losing control of a system it can't understand. The Marxist theory of crisis, which gets to the root causes of the recession, is the key to ensuring its resolution in the interests of the working class.
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...money chaos

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private capitalists give an indication of the USA's problems. The Eurocurrency market, three-quarters of which is denominated in dollars, has grown at an annual rate of 23 per cent over the last five years: it now lies at about 1000 billion dollars (*Fortune*, 24 September 1979). 'Confidence' in the dollar is now critical: 'with hundreds of billions of dollars in "stateless" money moving about the offshore Euromarkets outside the control of central banks, there is no limit to how far the dollar could plunge if private investors and speculators lose confidence in the US currency' (*Business Week*, 12 March 1979).

'Take the money and run' — but where?

Capitalist governments, banks and corporations will forsake the dollar. But how can they protect the value of their wealth? The mad scramble to get rid of dollars — politely termed 'diversification' in banking circles — can only exacerbate the monetary crisis and sharpen the struggle of the imperialist powers to redivide the world market.

The bourgeoisie has two options — gold and other foreign currencies. Gold is certainly in demand: from its official price of 35 dollars an ounce (1971), it has risen to 150 dollars (1974-75), 250 dollars (February 1979) and now to more than 510 dollars. The IMF and the US Treasury have sold tons of gold from their reserves to keep the price down, but to no avail. In August 1979 a single West German bank

bought up nearly all the US Treasury offered — yet the price kept on rising. Nothing can be done. Capitalists want to get rid of their worthless bits of paper and buy money with a real value. And so the dollar plummets further.

Can other currencies provide the stability the dollar lacks? In recent years, the strength of West Germany's economy has made its currency the main refuge from the dollar crisis. Since 1974 the German mark has become the second most important reserve currency after the dollar. Capitalists have confidence in its value; worldwide mark holdings more than doubled last year.

But while the mark remains the pivot of the European monetary system (EMS), it cannot replace the dollar on a global scale. As West Germany's Finance Minister put it at the Belgrade IMF talks:

'Germany is a medium-sized country that does not want to take over a leading position in world monetary affairs. The US alone must handle this' (*Financial Times*, 4 October 1979).

West Germany can use the EMS to try to consolidate its position in Western Europe, but it doesn't have the power to dominate the world economy in the way the USA did after the war.

The same is true for another potential reserve currency, the Japanese yen. Official holdings of yen have risen rapidly, yet they still form only three per cent of world currency total reserves — less than a third of the mark's share. But like West Germany Japan is using its currency to impress its economic superiority upon its neighbours. Commenting on moves by the

Japanese Government to 'internationalise' the yen, one financial journal has remarked:

'The idea of an economically powerful country, to which surrounding countries are tied by monetary affiliation, must have appealed . . . to all Japanese who believe that Japan has a special position in Asia. Yen hegemony in Asia would serve to secure and support Japan's increased presence.' (*EuroMoney*, July 1979)

Today's currency impasse is only an expression of the growing tendency for world capital accumulation to break down. The decline of the dollar and the crisis of US capitalism make rivalries between different powers more and more vicious. The world economy is breaking up into competitive regional blocs. There can be no return to financial stability now that each national capital has to save itself regardless of the consequences. Instead governments will copy Carter's treatment of Iranian money held in US banks and confiscate their enemies' deposits. Or they will speculate wildly, moving vast sums of money in and out of different currencies and different vaults.

Volcker took the steps he did to save the dollar as a desperate attempt to counter the effects of the collapse of American profitability. He may control the US Federal Reserve Board, but he cannot control capital's descent into disaster. The working class has every interest in closely monitoring developments in the world of banking. As imperialist rivalries turn from economic sanctions to military skirmishes the capitalist class will look to workers to carry out its war plans.

Tony Allen

...freedom

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choose', members of its parliamentary wing decided that it was their 'right to choose' whether or not to vote for Corrie's repressive Bill — and many of them did. Workers can have no truck with such equivocation on a key issue like abortion.

The call for 'free abortion on demand' cuts through the ideological dross of individualism. It is a definite demand for a particular service that is immediately needed by women. It expresses working class interests — the only point of view that can defend women or other oppressed sections of society. Campaigning for this demand clarifies the real issue: under capitalism the problem is not lack of rights but capitalist social relations, which cannot develop the resources of society sufficiently to guarantee the rights it proclaims.

Levin's choice

'Choice is a moral question at bottom, its economic and political forms being only a reflection of that truth.' (Bernard Levin, *The Times*, 27 November 1979)

Unlike Bernard Levin, a sage man of letters kept by *The Times*, workers can only eat if they work. For them the choice between selling their labour-power for wages or staying at home and starving does not present much of a dilemma. Everything else follows from this. Not being paid enough wages to meet Harley Street consultants' charges or to pay public school fees means that workers do not spend much time agonising over whether to use the decrepit hospital down the road or whether to send the children to the local comprehensive. For workers being in a union is not a matter of religious persuasion but of maintaining living standards and working conditions.

But for Levin, choice is not a question of economics but of morals. He proclaims the ideal of freedom of choice in a society where economic reality denies that choice in any important sphere of life to the vast majority of its citizens. To revive the spirit of the bourgeois revolution two centuries too late, Levin has to go back in the mists of time — to classical theology. But Levin's fondness for ancient idols does not stop him from idolising today's scabs and today's advocates of union secret ballots.

Freedom for the working class is not a matter of ethics. The only freedom which means anything to workers is the freedom to enjoy good housing, schools and hospitals and a decent standard of living. For all its cant and clamour about liberty, the bourgeoisie cannot deliver these simple freedoms to the working class. Today its survival depends on depriving workers of the limited freedoms and rights they have achieved. That is why freedom for the working class means the overthrow of the capitalist system — freedom from the wages system on which the whole edifice of bourgeois society rests.

Nor is freedom for the working class an individual matter. In their struggle against capital workers can only advance as a united class. And to be united they must reject the divisive ideology of a decadent ruling class and acquire an outlook of their own. Individualism, the ideology the emergent bourgeoisie used to get the workers on its side, now hinders the development of an independent working class outlook.

Nor, finally, is freedom for the working class a matter of laws. Workers must be prepared to break the law to advance the demands of their own class: demands which point beyond today's formal equality to the real social equality that only a classless society can provide.

Mike Freeman

Inez Landa

Labour bureaucracy against the cuts?

After five years in the corridors of Westminster and Whitehall the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC are back in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square protesting about cuts in public expenditure. The Day of Action planned for March follows last November's 50 000-strong demonstration against the cuts — a demonstration called by the Labour Party and addressed by senior Labour politicians and trade union bureaucrats. These events — like others, such as the anti-cuts march through Lambeth held by the South East Region of the TUC and the Labour Party last year — are part of the labour bureaucracy's efforts to salvage its tarnished reputation and keep the fightback under its control.

The rally on 28 November proclaimed the need for labour movement unity against the Tories. Clapped-out Labour leader Callaghan and *Tribune* firebrand Denis Skinner, moderate COHSE chief Albert Spanswick and militant NUPE supremo Alan Fisher unanimously denounced Thatcher, Howe and Joseph and their reactionary policies. But the stirring calls for unity could not hide the disunity revealed that same week. The TUC was paralysed by Robinson's victimisation at Leyland as the AUEW refused to defend him with strike action — even after the TGWU had notified its readiness for a strike. Again, engineers picketing Charing Cross Hospital got no solidarity, either from their own union or from the hospital unions. Government preparations to send in the troops to break the strike proved unnecessary; a mob of scabbing doctors and nurses, spurred on by press and television, was enough to do the trick. This was the reality behind the pious words from the rally platform.

Yet the Labour leadership did not escape rank and file wrath on 28 November. The record of the Labour Government was too recent a memory for Callaghan and Hattersley to be accepted as defenders of the working class. Only the combined forces of the police and stewards recruited from the *Militant* tendency were enough to suppress criticism of the betrayers at the post-

march rally. Spanswick's scabbing role in last winter's public sector strikes was not forgotten: he was barracked constantly.

The day was saved for the bureaucracy by the left. Skinner managed to keep order and drew applause by talking tough. Their alternative to workers disgusted with the Labour leadership: a different type of Labour government.

This was and remains the central theme of Labour's campaign against the cuts: 'Fight the Tory cuts: bring back a Labour government — unlike the last.' The new government of the left would be different from that of Callaghan and Healey. It would, in Skinner's words, 'implement socialist policies which are drawn up for it in a manifesto not written by the people who led us up the garden path last time'. As *Tribune* MP Stan Orme made clear, it would be totally opposed to Tory defence of privilege and totally committed to defending the weak and needy. And Callaghan was only too happy to give wholehearted support to these pious commonplaces.

Nobody from the left said 'unlike Callaghan, we will make no cuts in public spending'. In fact left-wing party chairman Frank Allaun said Labour would cut expenditure — on arms, the EEC and on the police. Other rally speakers made the point that a renovated Labour government would cut the rich, not the poor. But what did this amount to? Nothing more than their desire to redistribute the cuts. The Labour lefts agree with Thatcher on the need to reduce public spending to restore the British economy; they merely criticise the level and direction of the Tory cuts and the motivation for them. They want less cuts, more equitable cuts, Labour-type cuts — but cuts all the same.

It's not long since Denis Healey, who started the cuts in social services now carried on by the Tories, made the same promises. In 1973 he too was going to 'squeeze the rich until the pips squeak' and bring about a 'fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families'. What went wrong? In a leaflet

for the 28 November demonstration, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy group, which includes stalwarts of the left Joan Maynard, Jo Richardson, Ernie Roberts and Audrey Wise, gave its answer:

'The first round of public spending cuts came from the Labour Government. It was directly contrary to Labour Party policy, but at the same time, there was no way the labour movement could effectively counteract the undemocratic outside pressures upon the Labour Government'.

Of course. It was all the IMF's fault. The bankers were to blame. And if not the bankers, the mandarins in the Treasury. Or possibly the Brussels bureaucrats, the menacing multinationals or the evil machinations of the media. But not the Labour Party.

How ridiculous! Far from being 'directly contrary to Labour Party policy', Callaghan's cuts were an integral part of it, just as wage restraint (via the Social Contract) and state-imposed redundancies (via the National Enterprise Board) were. Both wings of the Labour Party were and are dedicated to putting Britain back on its feet again: all the Labour left objects to are the brutal consequences of this — the collapse of the social services, growing poverty and mass unemployment. For the left the problem is not Labour Party policy but the undemocratic pressures which frustrate its full implementation. That's why it sees the solution in bringing democracy to every walk of life. It wants 'democracy' in the Labour Party, 'democracy' for British imperialism over the EEC budget and 'democracy' in the application of the cuts.

The Labour left may disagree with Thatcher's cuts strategy — and with Callaghan's before. But its concern for the revival of the British economy ensures that it will swallow all the measures it now finds so unpalatable if it ever gets the chance to form another Labour government. Fairer cuts in future — that's what the Labour left offers those who campaign against the cuts today.

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Labourism paralyses the fightback

Review: Noreen Branson, *Poplarism 1919-1925*, George Lansbury and the councillors' revolt, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1979, £7.50, pp242.

For the working class the 'twenties was a time of lockouts, wage cuts and mass unemployment. The East London borough of Poplar was particularly hard hit by the slump. The struggle led by the Poplar councillors to maintain living standards in the area contains important lessons for today's campaigns against cuts in social services spending. It is also the subject of Noreen Branson's recent book, *Poplarism 1919-1925*.

The Poplar councillors won some short-term victories. To keep the rates down, they withheld revenues due to the central authorities. After six weeks' imprisonment over this protest they won a degree of equalisation of the burden of unemployment relief among the poorer and richer boroughs of London. At a time when wages everywhere were being forced down, they kept up municipal workers' wages and the level of unemployment benefits.

But these gains were transient. As the crisis of the 'twenties persisted and the labour movement suffered a succession of defeats, the advances won by the councillors went by the board. Poplar too was obliged to cut both wages and benefits. In the end the people of Poplar wound up with what workers everywhere else did: grinding poverty and appalling unemployment.

Branson concentrates on the early victories, eulogises George Lansbury's leadership of the Poplar struggle and neglects the later setbacks. She also ignores the role of the Labour Party in reconciling the working class to falling living standards. After a decade of slump the 1929 Labour Government presided over a major offensive by the ruling class; with its acceptance of proposals to cut unemployment benefit it hammered the final nail in the coffin of Poplarism. Lansbury was the mayor of Poplar during the councillors' struggle; he was also a Cabinet Minister in MacDonald's 1929 Government. No history of Poplarism can be complete without an analysis of the role of Labourism in the 'twenties — yet this is entirely lacking from Branson's superficial study.

Labourism and Poplarism

The Poplar struggle engaged the attention of both established and emergent leaders of the Labour Party. Lansbury, then a left-wing member of Labour's National Executive, played a leading role in the Poplar campaigns. A radical pacifist and Christian socialist, he united the disparate elements of the council. He found an ally in the young Clem Attlee, then alderman of the adjacent borough of Stepney. The leadership of the Labour Party, nationally and locally, was appalled by Poplar's defiance of the law and lack of respect for proper constitutional procedure. London party secretary and mayor of Hackney Herbert Morrison was embarrassed by Poplar's prodigality. He was trying hard to present Labour as a party capable of sound financing and sensible administration. Party leaders Ramsay MacDonald and Jimmy Thomas were equally concerned about the effect on their electoral image.

Lansbury was only pushed into action by the more militant councillors — notably John Scurr, Charlie Sumner, Charlie Key and his own son Edgar who became a leading member of the early Communist Party. Lansbury held the councillors together and ensured that the campaign stayed under Labour's wing. Lansbury's radical strategy of winning reforms by pressurising government gained plausibility

when Poplar won some concessions through left-wing Clydeside MP John Wheatley who became Minister of Housing in the 1924 Labour Government. But Lansbury did not attempt to make the Poplar campaign part of a broader anti-capitalist struggle in the way that John Maclean had tried to connect the Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915 with the revolutionary anti-war movement of his time. And as the Communist Party proved itself unable to build a credible class alternative to the Labour Party in the 'twenties, Poplar's hopes of becoming part of a broader fightback receded. The Labour leaders were determined that Poplarism should not spread and so further discredit their commitment to class collaboration, while the left had no strategy to overcome the isolation of Poplar from the rest of the labour movement. Labourism thus led Poplar to defeat.

Lansbury is a key figure in the history of the Labour Party. Upon his election to Parliament in 1922 he went straight to the front bench of the party, then in opposition; in 1929 he took responsibility for unemployment policy and in the 'thirties he led the party. As a left-winger Lansbury gave the reactionary politics of the Labour bureaucracy a socialist stamp.

Lansbury's proposals to deal with unemployment paved the way for cuts in services and benefits that followed. In 1929 he put forward a pension scheme to encourage early retirement at 60 and a plan for the settlement of the unemployed in Western Australia. These schemes had the backing of the trade union leaders: the object was not to defend the working class as a whole but to protect organised workers against competition from the unemployed.

As the number of unemployed rose to two million Lansbury endorsed a series of alternative proposals to solve the crisis — proposals drafted by Labour left-winger Oswald Mosley. The 'Mosley Memorandum' advanced a primitive Keynesian solution to the slump: import controls, increased pensions, public works and the expansion of credit. Lansbury and Mosley accepted the need for the rationalisation of industry but sought a more humane means of achieving this than the politics of deflation and austerity favoured by the majority of MacDonald's Cabinet.

The government rejected their plans and continued its attacks on the working class. In mining areas, several Boards of Guardians, responsible for administering local authority social services, tried to follow in the footsteps of the Poplar councillors; they got short shrift from the Labour government (Wal Hannington, *Unemployed struggles 1919-1936*, 1936). Mosley departed to found what became the British Union of Fascists, but Lansbury remained loyal to the Cabinet. At the 1930 Labour Party Conference he defended the government's record on unemployment.

Six months later unemployment passed the two and a half million mark. The government accepted recommendations for drastic cuts in social services and a cut of 20 per cent in unemployment benefit. While Lansbury and his Cabinet supporters quibbled over whether it would be possible to save the national economy with a 10 per cent cut in benefits, MacDonald defected to form the National Government with the Tories and the Liberals.

This is where the Poplar story ends — not in 1925 where Branson leaves it. By wage reductions, cuts in meagre pensions and relief allowances and chronic mass unemployment, workers in Poplar and throughout the country paid a bitter price for their continuing loyalty to Labour. Lansbury, local hero and leading figure of the Labour left, personifies the function of

Labourism — to reconcile the working class to the demands of British capitalism.

Poplarism today

Sixty years after it began the Poplar struggle has become topical once more. Current conflicts between central and local government over cuts in public expenditure have given it renewed relevance. The dust jacket to Branson's book claims that the Poplar campaigns 'exemplify in clear and unambiguous form the uncompromising battles which continue to be fought between central government and socialist councils'.

While Branson gives no contemporary examples of 'uncompromising battles' and fails to provide any clues to the whereabouts of 'socialist local councils' today, this theme has been taken up widely. For Moira Leahy of NUPE, writing in the Socialist Workers Party's 'rank and file' paper for NHS workers, 'the story of the Poplar councillors illustrates the fact that local bodies (such as Councils, Area Health Authorities) can lead campaigns and that the campaigns can be successful' (*Hospital Worker*, September 1979). And in recent months local councils such as Lambeth and Area Health Authorities such as Lewisham have taken the lead in protest against reductions in public spending in local government and the health service. But can sentiments like Leahy's and initiatives like Lambeth's lead the fightback to victory?

The answer must be no. Poplarism's contemporary equivalent is a product of conditions different from those of East London in the 'twenties. The rate support grant and cash limits ensure that central government control of local authorities is much tighter today. And the laws brought in to deal with Poplar and re-enacted in the 1972 Local Government Act enable the government to keep a much tighter rein on local councillors. The present Government's Local Government, Planning and Land Bill aims to increase central control still further.

More important, Labourism is not the same today as it was in the 'twenties. The period immediately after the First World War was one of intense class struggle. The labour movement was in ferment under the influence of the Russian Revolution, the end of the war and a series of militant trade union struggles. The Poplar councillors reflected the political strength of the working class in this period. In her biographical notes, the best part of the book, Branson details the backgrounds of the councillors. Mostly middle-aged workers, they were veterans of the class struggle — in the trade unions (craft and general), in the wider political struggles of the small revolutionary groups that finally merged in the Communist Party, and in the campaigns for women's rights and Irish independence.

Today the picture is very different. The political traditions represented by the Poplar councillors now have little purchase in the labour movement. The Labour Party has now formed eight governments in its long and sordid history, and, although it has betrayed workers on every occasion, it still retains their allegiance. The Labour councillors who currently protest about the cuts reflect the decay of class politics and the stagnation of Labourism. Mostly young professionals, they are veterans of misguided struggles to replace reactionary Labour MPs with less reactionary ones; veterans only of committee room wrangles over whether to cut services or increase the rates.

Ted Knight

— a Lansbury for our time?

One thing however remains the same: the function of Labourism. From dissident mayor of Poplar George Lansbury to dissi-

dent Lambeth council leader Ted Knight, the function of Labour Party politics has been to accommodate workers' needs to the reality of capitalist society in crisis. Explaining his decision not to go ahead, for the moment, with further cuts in Lambeth's services Knight stated: 'we believe it is against the national interest for Government to drive in on the service provided by local authorities' (*South London Press*, 18 September 1979). Knight may take up the fight against the cuts, but his pursuit of the national interest ensures that he does so only to defuse workers' resistance to the sacrifices demanded of them. Knight went even further; he 'accused the Government of embarking on class warfare'. Knight is dead right. His purpose in making this charge, however, is not to declare class war in reply, but to dissuade the government from its pugnacious policies. With this in mind Knight recently invited Tory Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine to Lambeth for a debate. Knight follows the pacifist Lansbury and all those in the labour movement today who decry 'the most right-wing Tory government since the war' for its 'divisive and doctrinaire policies'. He yearns for the consensus politics of the boom when Labour politicians did not come up against the conflict between their party's working class base and its commitment to the national interest.

For us the fact that the Government has embarked on class warfare must be a signal for the labour movement to counter-attack. The current programme of public spending cuts is essential to stabilise British capitalism and safeguard the interests of the ruling class. The fight against it must therefore be a broad anti-capitalist fightback — not just a narrow anti-Tory crusade. If any council takes consistent action to defend workers' living standards it will deserve and get our support. But so long as the strategy of Labourism guides councils in their policies we can have no confidence in them.

Recent events confirm this all too vividly. When, for example, 200 Labour group leaders met in Coventry before Christmas to work out a common strategy against the Tories, they told public sector trade unionists that they 'could not commit themselves' to a refusal to implement Tory cuts (*Morning Star*, 10 December 1979). By contrast, our strategy is to bring revolutionary communist politics to workers affected by the cuts — to build campaigns that are independent of the agencies of the state, around a programme that rejects Ted Knight's national interest and puts workers' interests first. This is the only way to make sure that Labourism does not sabotage workers' struggles today as it did — with disastrous consequences — in the past.

Meanwhile in Poplar

This approach is entirely foreign to Branson. For her the Poplar councillors have helped to ensure that 'attitudes and behaviour' have 'changed much over fifty years', and their immediate aims 'have long been officially recognised as desirable' (pp227-28). The inhabitants of Poplar, now incorporated in the borough of Tower Hamlets, can hardly share her complacency. They still face high unemployment, low wages and bad housing plus rate increases imposed by a bureaucratic and reactionary Labour council. In Britain today more than four million people eke out a living on supplementary benefits: the number of claimants in Tower Hamlets far exceeds the national average. They all face degrading means tests — means tests administered in the same Poor Law spirit that the Poplar councillors contemptuously rejected more than half a century ago.

The Poplar councillors' refusal to sacrifice workers' living standards to help Britain out of the crisis can provide us with inspiration for today's struggles. But Lansbury's politics and Branson's apology for them can only paralyse the fightback that is now just beginning.

Mike Freeman

A reply to Vishnu Sharma

All immigration laws are racist

The Communist Party has a very positive and constructive attitude to the capitalist state. Whatever the problem — be it racism, unemployment, the war in Ireland or public spending cuts — the CP looks to the state for an answer. It should be obvious that on all these issues the state acts very decisively to preserve the interests of capitalism. But it isn't to the CP. Even when the actions of the state contradict the CP's faith in its progressive character, the answer is simple: the state *ought* to be better, more democratic, more generous and more concerned about the problems of working people.

The CP's solution to racism is 'non-racist' immigration controls. By contrast, the Revolutionary Communist Tendency has consistently opposed *all* immigration controls. We have attacked the CP's position because we contend that the only controls the capitalist state can implement are racist ones. Now the CP has felt it necessary to defend itself. In a two page article in its fortnightly review *Comment*, Vishnu Sharma, member of the Executive Committee of the CP, of the steering committee of the ANL, and ex-leader of the Southall Indian Workers Association, dismisses the RCT's argument as 'fatally defeatist' (10 November 1979). Will Sharma's dream of non-racist immigration laws come true? Let's look at what the CP has to say about the matter in more detail.

Dogma on the state

Ever since racism became an important political issue in British society, the CP has demanded that the state should put an end to it. While the state arrests, detains and deports thousands of black people the CP responds by demanding that the state legislate *against* racism. When Labour was in power, CP National Organiser Dave Cook called on the government to 'conduct a campaign against racism just as it does on safety measures' and asked that a series of anti-racist leaflets be produced and 'distributed in every government and local authority property' (Dave Cook, *Racism: a knife at the throat of us all*, 1978).

For the CP racism is a social disease, an irrational ideology which springs from the minds of frustrated British people. Accordingly its strategy has been to call for state

action against individual racists and the NF — through the Race Relations Act — and for bans on racist propaganda and processions. The CP is insulted by racism because it jars with its faith in the institutions of democracy; so the institutions of democracy must come to the rescue.

Faith in democracy is also very dear to the bourgeoisie: it blinds people to the exploitation and oppression on which the existence of capitalist society depends. The House of Commons debates over Tory Home Secretary William Whitelaw's proposals to change the rules for administering the 1971 Immigration Act showed this very clearly. Not only former Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees, but also Cabinet Secretary Cyril Townsend and many other Tory MPs were upset about the discriminatory character of the new legislation. Laws which are openly 'racist, mean and rather contemptible', as Sir Nigel Fisher, Tory MP for Surbiton put it, are too much for the bourgeoisie. Racial oppression — yes; immigration controls — of course; detentions, deportations, dawn raids, passport controls — most certainly! But a bit more discreetly, please! That is the voice of a ruling class scared that the violence it is compelled to use will belie the ideology of national unity and social peace that is so dear to its survival. Open coercion, particularly if it is sanctioned by law, is a double-edged sword: it shows workers what the state really is — a class state. That is why the bourgeoisie is frightened about overdoing it.

Democratic oppression

Vishnu Sharma and the Communist Party are just as frightened as the bourgeoisie. All they do is give its fears a more radical expression. What is more, they offer a positive strategy to make racial oppression less brutal. As Vishnu Sharma puts it: 'We are against illegal immigration. However, the *inhuman treatment* of those detained in prison must end' (Vishnu Sharma, *No racist immigration laws*, 1979). Vishnu Sharma has a 'minimum programme' for a 'totally new set of democratic non-racist immigration rules and procedures based on humane considerations'. It contains pleas that detention *without trial* should end, that *children* should not be detained, that the government should *publish* the

instructions it gives to immigration officials, that it should *inform* the public of the number of virginity tests carried out and that it should set up an *inquiry* into the conduct of the Immigration Service. With all this it is impossible to detect any difference between the prevarications of bourgeois politicians and our 'communist' Vishnu Sharma. What he says is: yes, carry on with your immigration laws and regulations — but, please, carry on with them more sensitively and *democratically*. *Publish* them, so that we in the CP and our 'broad democratic alliance' can rest confident that whatever happens happens by the proper channels.

It is surprising that Sharma's programme does not include the demand for popular election of immigration officers, given that the 'democratisation' of the police force is one of the central planks of the CP's platform on law and order. Black people would no doubt be immensely relieved if, instead of the vicious thugs who make up the SPG and the Immigration Service, nice people like Vishnu and Dave were to check passports and inspect their genitals in a comradely manner. It would all be recorded; everybody could be kept informed. . . .

The bourgeois state — a racist state

Farcical plans to make racism less racist and more democratic are the only possible conclusion of politics designed to mitigate and cover up the effects of oppression. Vishnu Sharma speaks at length about how easy it is to get 'on the slippery slope to racist laws'. But Sharma isn't on the slippery slope at all: having accepted the right of the state to control workers' movements, he's already right at the bottom.

In elaborating the familiar state socialist argument for immigration controls, Sharma tells us that the Communist Party 'wants to see a world where all people can come and go without restriction', but that 'the material conditions for this cannot be said to yet exist'. Immigration controls, in other words, are necessary to keep people out of countries where there isn't enough to go round. *This is nothing but an apology for British imperialism*. It is an argument that most racists would agree with, because it says exactly what they say: 'I'm not a racist,

but this little island of ours is far too overcrowded already'. Sharma only indulges in clever talk about 'material conditions' to suggest that the immigration controls of an imperialist state like Britain can perform some kind of supra-historical, technical or natural function. Quite the opposite: they perform a very specific role for capital.

Ever since the current recession began every capitalist state has brought in legislation to give immigrants second-class status by law. Every capitalist state has used immigration controls to regulate the flow of migrant labour from backward capitalist countries according to the needs of capital accumulation — to enable capitalists to dispose of their migrant workforce as soon as it is no longer needed.

Under the 1948 Nationality Act, which gave Commonwealth Citizens the right to settle as British Citizens in the UK, Britain recruited migrant labour from its former colonies. But since the 'sixties immigration rules have been amended to restrict people's rights more and more. All the immigration acts and regulations on the British statute book serve one purpose only: to curtail the rights of blacks already settled in Britain as well as those of all future immigrants. In this way capital gets what it needs — a second reserve army of labour made up of the oppressed and exploited masses of the backward capitalist countries in Africa, Asia and the less developed regions of Europe.

The Campaign Against Racist Laws, which the CP supports, wants to repeal the 1971 Immigration Act and objects to Whitelaw's proposals. But a campaign which is not directed against the right of the state to impose immigration controls cannot fight racism. It is not only that the Campaign Against Racist Laws is ineffective. It channels the energies of anti-racists into futile wrangles over the terms of racial oppression. It bargains with the state about how many can be excluded and how closely the state can regulate the movement of the working class. All the CP's dogma of non-racist immigration controls does is give British chauvinism radical credentials.

Sabena Norton

East London

Workers Against Racism

In the last three months several black people in East London are known to have died as a result of racist attacks and hundreds of others have been subjected to assaults they knew weren't even worth reporting — since nothing would have been done about them. Some of the violence has come from members of the National Front; much has been the work of ordinary, unorganised British racists. But for blacks by far the biggest problem is attacks by the forces of the state. The 'Sus' laws and immigration legislation give the police a free hand to beat blacks up as and when they please.

So far, attempts to defend blacks have adopted the NF as their sole focus and have gone up the dead-end road of pressuring the state to act against racism. Although several big marches against NF activities in the Brick Lane area were held in East London in 1978, they were largely symbolic; they failed to provide blacks with the physical defence they so

urgently need. Within weeks the thousands of demonstrators dwindled to a handful of activists. Not surprisingly, state harassment and intimidation hotted up once more and the black community was left to fend for itself.

Another 'anti-fascist' jamboree

Last month saw a new mobilisation. Some 800 people marched to Hackney Town Hall to persuade the Department of the Environment to refuse the NF the right to have its headquarters in East London. This demonstration was little more than a reunion for demoralised veterans from the Brick Lane episode of 1978. Its organisers — Labour MPs plus Communist Party bureaucrats and Socialist Workers Party radicals from Hackney Trades Council — showed they had learnt nothing in the previous year. They *didn't even know what has actually been happening in East London*. Referring to the spate of racist killings and woundings there, their leaflet

observed that 'the ideology that prompted those attacks emanates from the headquarters of the fascist National Front in Great Eastern Street'.

Comrades! Blacks were stabbed and shot at in East London long before the NF moved its HQ from suburban Teddington to its current site. Since then, racist attacks have increased all over the country, even though NF membership and electoral performance has stagnated. It is nonsense to single out the NF as the source of racist ideology and racist attacks.

The December 1979 demonstration was a diversion from the real struggle to defend black people. When one arm of the state — the police — was continuing to rain blows on the black population, it called on another — Hackney Council — to protect blacks from the NF.

For and against workers' defence

The political myopia of the demonstration's leaders makes them incapable of

defending blacks. If, like local Labour MP Arthur Lewis, you agree that Newham is a small overcrowded borough that would be better off without any more black workers (*Newham Recorder*, 6 September 1979), then you only go out on the streets to fulminate against the NF and plead with the state to do something about it. You don't go out to guard black people against bottles and knives. You don't fight back against police raids and arrests.

By contrast, the East London Workers Against Racism (ELWAR) campaign is prepared to use its fists. Why? Because it refuses to accept 'respectable' state racism and fights uncompromisingly against all immigration controls. Because it shows workers that class-conscious opposition to police terror against blacks is just what they need to mount opposition to Council closures of schools and hospitals.

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency fully supports ELWAR. We will help it mobilise pickets of the police stations,

courts and prisons where blacks experience British democracy at its most brutal. We will take the next step to housing estates, workplaces, tube entrances and street markets to help it organise workers to demand freedom for black people from state oppression. We will hold street meetings and public forums to work out how physical defence for blacks can best be established. And we will expose the narrow politics and conciliatory tactics of the opportunists in the local labour movement.

East London workers can't afford to sit on the fence any more. Every minute lost building workers' defence makes another racist murder more likely. The only way to get working class unity on the issue of racism will be to draw the battle lines now. On one side will be those who still believe that the NF is the main problem, those who politely complain in all the right places that 'better relations between the police and the black community' are what is needed. On the other will be ELWAR, resolute in its defiance of the government

and all its representatives — right down to the friendly bobby on the beat. Some will try to blur the distinction between what we need in East London and what exists today. They will say we should all get together again — Labour Party MPs, trade union figures, the Council for Racial Equality — just like in the good old days of the Anti-Nazi League, so that we can get 'more publicity'. But look at their achievements. After years of grovelling before the state, there is not a single black person in East London who they can point to and say 'we defended him'.

Once East London workers take up the struggle for equal rights for blacks — the right to live in peace and to walk the streets without fear — they will be strong enough to resist the most vicious cuts in social services, to beat back higher rents and rates, and to put an end to sweatshop working conditions. That is why ELWAR deserves their support.

Fran Eden

Three good reasons why you should support ELWAR

Police attacks on 'overstayers'

Police are now used to serve notices of refusal on overstayers. In the past such notices were sent by registered post. Now they have 14 days 'grace' after the notice is served to get out of Britain (Home Office circular No 115, 3 July 1979). They have no right of appeal. During this period they are still liable to arrest and prosecution. This new procedure means a substantial extension of police involvement in immigration control.

Passport raids

August 1979. One lunchtime, two policemen and two immigration officers walk into the Curry Centre, Lee High Road, Lewisham, where owner and workers are all Bengalis. They are looking for Mr A whose wife wants to join him in Britain. He isn't there, so the officials demand that everybody, including three Bengali customers sitting in the restaurant show them their passports. They are questioned for nearly two hours. One worker says afterwards: 'I always carry my passport because we have been harassed for a long time so we have to have them with us' (Spectrum, Lewisham Community Relations Council newspaper, October 1979).

Spying on the sick

'Doctors, help us detect illegal immigrants', urges a DHSS circular sent out in October 1979. Hospital doctors and administrative staff are to watch out for patients who they suspect may be 'ineligible for NHS treatment' (The Guardian, 5 December 1979). Facts are pooled between the Home Office and the DHSS.

There are a thousand more reasons. ELWAR aims to build labour movement defence against all forms of racist attacks — be they by the state, the National Front or unorganised thugs.

ELWAR

East London Workers Against Racism

Public meeting
Bow Road Town Hall
Bow Road, London E3
24 January 1980, 7.30pm
Speaker: Russell Osborne

Picket of the Home Office to demand that Kumar Shah be given immediate right of entry into Britain. He has been prevented from coming to this country for the past 10 months and has suffered continual harassment by the British High Commission in Bombay. Smash all immigration controls! Free entry for Kumar Shah!

4 February 1980, 12 - 2pm
50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1
St James Park tube

SARF

Students Against Racist Fees

12 January 1980
Conference of Students
Against Racist Fees (SARF)
University of London Union
Malet Street, London WC1, 10am - 5pm

Revolutionary Communist Pamphlet No 6
Higher Education:
FIGHT THE CUTS
DEFEND OVERSEAS STUDENTS
20p (+15p postage)

This conference and this pamphlet aim to develop a strategy to roll back the ruling class offensive against overseas students. For further details and pamphlet orders: BM RCT, London WC1V 6XX

...engineering

continued from page 10

dancies and gave the management a list of 63 volunteers. Whether we like it or not, 63 people *did* volunteer. Management still refused to pick from that list — and it was welder for welder, sacker driver for sacker driver, paint sprayer for paint sprayer, so there should have been no problem.

We explained to the members that management was trying to smash the shop stewards and union organisation. The members agreed that if anyone was on the list who didn't want to be they would take industrial action. The shop stewards were all at the top of the list and the activists were there too. We've been out since the 28th of August. During that time we've tried to get other ACROW plants to join us, but with little success.

How has management tried to undermine the strike?

Aside from the blank cheque I was offered, another steward, David Howells, was told he could have the personnel manager's job if he broke the strike. Of course, he refused.

Again, the company offered a settlement whereby all the workforce would go back, but within a week all the people on the redundancy list would leave. This was to make it look as if we'd won a victory!

The company's tried to bribe my wife. They were talking in terms of twenty thousand pounds. I told them what they could do with their money. Then there were the scabs — hidden in the boots of company cars. They sneaked in the back way with a police escort. So we've been forced to put mass pickets on.

My wife has had threatening phone calls. The latest episode is a letter, supposedly from one of the strikers' wives, saying she has no money and is desperate. But somehow she found £25 for stamps and envelopes and photocopying to send out letters to all the strikers' wives.

What are the main unions involved in the strike?

The biggest is the AUEW. Then comes the Boilermakers Society, then the EETPU. But within the plant we have a joint shop stewards committee — we're all one as far as industrial action is concerned.

Of the clerical staff, seventeen are in

AUEW-TASS. At first we didn't ask them to join us. When we did two weeks ago they voted against.

Why is it difficult to get other ACROW plants out?

We've visited all the plants — as far away as Sunderland and Essex — and spoken to the stewards. But that is speaking to the converted. The problem is convincing the other men that we need their support.

One of the things we've done is form a combine committee throughout ACROW. We got five of the 10 plants to the first meeting and got the support of the other five too. This is without doubt one of the biggest reasons they're trying to get rid of the stewards here.

Another reason is that this is the highest paid plant in ACROW. Stewards elsewhere are taking our rates as an example. ACROW want to reduce our rates and to do this they have to get rid of our organisation.

How is ACROW affected by the crisis in the engineering industry?

There have been 5000 redundancies announced in Manchester recently. And, though the downturn isn't affecting ACROW as much as other companies, the company's looking to the future. That's why it's trying to get rid of the stewards. Without them these men in here would be absolutely murdered.

How will the dispute be won?

The best way we can win is to get the whole of ACROW out. We have to get ACROW blacked all over this country and possibly abroad. We have to have more pickets outside ACROW plants and especially outside Adamson's. We need people to come down and visit the picket line.

What about the union leadership nationally?

Nationally — it's an utter disgrace. Neither the Boilermakers nor the AUEW have done anything nationally. We're fighting a constant battle to get strike pay. It's just starting to come through after 12 weeks. No, they've done nothing.

Keith Tompson

How to fight voluntary redundancies

It isn't easy to resist voluntary redundancies — especially when the employers make them attractive to workers by offering lump sums in compensation. But voluntary redundancies mean less jobs for the working class. Active workers know that every voluntary redundancy weakens the whole workers' movement; it enables the bosses to use the threat of sackings against those still in employment.

Often management plays 'democratic' by telling workers that they can decide who is going to be made redundant among themselves. Yet once workers embark on the course of choosing volunteers for the chop, management has established a precedent for future sackings. Active workers understand this; the problem they face is that their understanding is not shared by many on the shop floor.

Workers who are committed to the defence of their class have no alternative but to argue against voluntary redundancies — whenever they are proposed. Even if they lose the argument with their workmates they must remain firm against voluntary redundancies. Only in this way — by arguing for the interests of the whole of the working class — will they be in a position to gain credibility as consistent fighters against unemployment.

The struggle to defend jobs and living standards will be a protracted one. Active workers must ensure that it is not undermined by short-term considerations or by concessions to popular opinion. Every blow for class independence, every argument against management's right to sack workers will contribute to the building of a new political leadership in the working class.

Iran in turmoil

THE IMPERIALISTS CLOSE IN

The occupation of the US embassy in Tehran has given American imperialism an excuse to unleash a new colonial drive in the Middle East. The 50 American hostages held captive by Iranian students are a side issue. US Treasury Secretary William Miller admitted as much when he stated that 'the taking of hostages in Tehran alone would not have provoked the American decision to freeze Iran's assets' (*The Guardian*, 30 November 1979).

In March 1979, former American Energy Secretary James Schlesinger warned that the USA would be prepared to intervene directly in the Middle East if its oil supplies were disrupted. In the weeks before the seizure of the embassy the American press was rife with speculation about a raid. A major article in *Business Week* warned: 'Again and again, as OPEC pushes the West toward the edge of economic survival, the option of a military response becomes more and more reasonable' (19 November 1979).

Events in Iran only added impetus to the chauvinist hysteria about Arab 'sheikhs' and Persians that sprang up during the USA's petrol shortages last summer. As the recession gains momentum jingoism like this draws public opinion behind American imperialism. Ten years on from the mass mobilisations against the Vietnam war, military intervention is now acceptable in America.

US imperialism in desperate straits

To American capitalists the fall of the Shah meant more than the loss of an old friend. It was a sign of diminishing US influence in the Middle East. The upheaval in Iran taught the US bourgeoisie that vital interests abroad could no longer be maintained by expensive gifts, lucrative business deals and arms sales alone; today jet fighters, paratroopers and marines are what is called for.

The basic inefficiency of American industry has lost the USA vital export markets in the Middle East. Dogged by falling productivity, US capitalism is no longer able to match its rivals' performance there. *The Daily Telegraph* points out: 'Nowhere is the United States more in retreat than in the Middle East with the loss of the competitive edge American business once held in building and developing that crucial part of the third world' (3 December 1979). Today America's old monopoly over construction contracts is gone: once a clear leader in this sector, the US now ranks a poor twelfth. The humiliation is worse in high technology and manufacturing. In these fields the USA has not only fallen behind countries like West Germany and Japan, but behind India and Brazil too.

What is true of the USA in Middle Eastern markets is true of it everywhere else in the world. America just cannot deliver the goods like it used to. As a result, it is forced to make up for its industrial weakness by exercising its military muscle. Now the oil-rich Middle East is coming up for a pummeling.

Oil is crucial

To re-establish profitable production at home, the US bourgeoisie must not only attack the American trade union movement: it must cut the cost of the raw materials it imports — and especially that of oil. The ultimate guarantee of cheap raw materials in general and cheap oil in particular is direct political control over supplies. As domestic profit rates fall further, this becomes an ever more realistic option: 'there is another scenario that many still think unthinkable: open warfare, in which either the industrial West as a group, or the US going it alone, gives up trying to work

with OPEC and instead invades the oil fields' (*Business Week*, 19 November 1979).

Mighty America was momentarily stunned by the violation of its embassy in Tehran. As *Time* magazine put it:

'The frustration was almost palpable. There was the US, long a superpower, being nakedly blackmailed last week by a mob of fanatical Iranian students. The whole world, so it seemed, was witnessing Washington's humiliation as the Carter Administration desperately struggled to find an acceptable solution.' (19 November 1979)

It wasn't long before military invasion appeared on the list of acceptable solutions.

A falling out among thieves

The timing and method of American intervention will be determined not only by the resistance of the Iranian people, but also by the likely repercussions of an invasion among rival capitalist powers. For the turmoil in Iran has heightened imperialist rivalries. Every banker knows that Carter's freeze on Iranian assets held in US banks was as much directed at America's imperialist competitors as at Iran.

On 19 November 1979 Chase Manhattan announced a default call on a syndicated loan of 500 million US dollars to Iran. It had of course got a majority of the loan syndicate's members to agree to this beforehand — but only a majority. Members split along national lines: the four non-American ones — Swiss Bank Corporation, Union Bank of Switzerland, Toronto Dominion Bank and National Westminster — voted against calling a default. All seven US syndicate members voted the other way.

A few days later the American banks grabbed the assets and left foreign bankers out in the cold. Then Morgan Guaranty Trust used a court order to snatch Iran's 25 per cent stake in the giant German corporation Krupp. European bankers, previously anxious to maintain a neutral stance over the economic war between the USA and Iran, were outraged.

It wasn't that they were above stealing Iranian assets. But they were angered that American manoeuvres had upset the already shaky world banking system. And they were jealous too: they want a piece of the action in Iran for themselves. For its part, US imperialism is only too aware that every further step towards the seizure of Iran will be resented by belligerent rivals keen to defend their own interests in the area.

The Ayatollah's 'achievement'

Back in Iran, Khomeini's regime has achieved one thing: it has managed to contain the upsurge of popular hostility that toppled the Shah. Having instigated massive strikes and having played a major role in the revolutionary upheavals of 1978-79, Iranian workers are now under severe attack. Estimates of unemployment range from 30-50 per cent. Apart from a one-off payment of 130 US dollars, Iran's two to three million unemployed have received no social security benefits. Those factories still functioning are working at half capacity. The vast majority of Iran's 1.2 million construction workers are now out of work and even the prestigious oil workers face the prospect of wage cuts — though when Oil Minister Ali Moinefar announced this to a meeting in Abadan he was 'given a rough ride by spanner-chucking workers'

(*The Economist*, 10 November 1979).

One after another each section of society offering resistance to Khomeini has been the subject of systematic repression — women, national minorities, left-wing organisations and even the liberal press. The minorities in Kurdistan, Khuzestan and Baluchistan, and the Turkomans and Azerbaijanis have all suffered the wrath of the revolutionary guards.

What's Khomeini up to?

Khomeini and his supporters are not trying to return Iran to the Middle Ages; they are not irrational religious maniacs. What they appreciate is that Iran's crisis requires dramatic solutions.

The Shah's failure to develop Iranian capitalism was the main reason why the bourgeoisie supported his overthrow. Once he had gone it was still left with a stagnant economy that had little prospect of surviving for long in the face of cut-throat world competition. So now the bourgeoisie has taken the only course open to a backward capitalist country — state intervention and protectionism. Yet this strategy can only bring short-term benefits. If capitalism is to continue in Iran imperialist influence over the economy must be limited, not expunged.

A few months after the overthrow of the Shah, Khomeini's regime began nationalising sections of banking, insurance and industry. Needless to say, the radical left both here and in Iran interpreted this as a move towards 'socialist' objectives. The reaction of Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat of the Fourth International was typical. 'The Iranian revolution', it argued, 'dealt another major blow to US imperialism when the Khomeini-Bazargan government declared a sweeping nationalisation of major industry and enterprises' (*Intercontinental Press/Inprecor*, 23 July 1979). A 'major blow to US imperialism' indeed! Let's hear what the international ruling class had to say when the Khomeini regime announced its 'sweeping' measures:

'In fact a number of bankers in London felt that the nationalisation of the banks was an encouraging sign since it indicated that the government is taking overt responsibility for a banking system which is in a terrible mess....Chase Manhattan said it expected full compensation for the loss of its assets but added: "This will have no material impact on 1979 earnings".' (*Financial Times*, 9 June 1979)

The aim of Khomeini's economic policy is to regenerate Iranian capitalism. That means making concessions to imperialism. Although he has cancelled many of the Shah's most prestigious projects, Khomeini has not been slow to encourage foreign investment — so long as Iran's share in it has been substantial. Last summer the *Financial Times* reported Moinefar enthusing about 'the huge Iran-Japan petrochemical company joint venture in which a Mitsui-led Japanese consortium has a 50 per cent stake. Original investment was set at 2 billion US dollars, but this is now up to 3.3 billion' (16 July 1979). While he was about it Moinefar also agreed to meet all foreign debt commitments and to give foreign shareholders in nationalised banks full compensation.

Khomeini's deals with the imperialists have however done little to boost Iran's flagging economy. He has only kept its

revenues up by restricting oil output and by raising the price of oil exports. Iranian capitalism is living on borrowed time.

Nationalism: a must

Tensions within Iran's ruling circles, the resignations of successive Ministers and eventually of Premier Bazargan himself, the friction between Khomeini and the liberal Ayatollah Shariatmadari — all indicate that the Iranian bourgeoisie is too weak to rule on its own. To survive, Khomeini and his colleagues must be seen to be acting in the interest of all classes. Coercion alone is not enough to neutralise workers and the poorer section of the petit bourgeoisie.

Whether it is directed against the Kurds or against left-wing 'enemies of Islam', Iranian nationalism is vital to the maintenance of broad support. More important still is the need to give way to anti-imperialist sentiment in the Iranian working class. That's why Khomeini gave his backing to the occupation of the US embassy: to draw the Tehran masses behind his reactionary Islamic republic — the same republic that is doing deal after deal with imperialist enterprise.

Khomeini's degradation of the struggle against imperialism can only work against workers' interests. Iranian nationalism props up a system whose long-term survival depends on smashing the working class and selling out to imperialism. Yet the worst part of it is that sections of the left, particularly the Stalinist Tudeh Party, are building up Khomeini's anti-imperialist credentials: according to Nouredin Kianouri, secretary general of the pro-Moscow Tudeh Party, socialist goals can only be achieved under an 'Islamic umbrella'.

The demonstrations orchestrated by Khomeini and his supporters have no anti-imperialist content. Of course, for the International Marxist Group any march involving workers must be good: Khomeini's mobilisations 'can only assist' workers' 'class combativity' (*Socialist Challenge*, 6 December 1979). Iranian socialists must not be misled by petit-bourgeois sociology like this. Instead, they must give anti-imperialist feeling among the masses a clear political form — by waging a relentless struggle against Khomeini and his 'left-wing' allies. Otherwise, the sentiment whipped up against American imperialism today will tomorrow be directed against any section of Iranian society which opposes the regime.

Fight imperialism!

Trotsky's assessment of the threat of imperialist intervention in Brazil in the 'thirties suggests what our attitude should be to the present Iranian crisis.

'In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally — in this case I will be on the side of "fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil.' (*Writings of Leon Trotsky*, 1938-39, p34)

The international proletariat can have nothing but hatred for the Khomeini regime. The longer he remains in power the easier it will be for imperialism to impose its will. But whatever our view of this regime Iran must be defended against imperialist intervention — American, British or any other.

Nick Jenkins

Revolutionary Communist Papers No 6

What is going on in Iran? What can we in Britain do to support the Iranian people in their fight against the stranglehold of imperialism and the reaction of Khomeini? RCP 6 examines the development of capitalism in Iran, the events which led to the collapse of the Shah's regime and the continuing instability which today prompts military interference by the world's superpowers.

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