

# the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p



Steelworkers picket the TUC to stop their strike being sold out

## CAN LABOUR FIGHT THE TORIES?

THE TORIES cannot rule without the assistance of the Labour Party. When Sir Keith Joseph visited steelworkers in South Wales he was showered with eggs and tomatoes; when Michael Foot spoke to strikers there he was greeted with tumultuous applause. Yet Foot said little that was different from the Government. Of course he gave the steelworkers his sympathy. But he told them that he wanted 'industrial and political victory' for all classes in society — 'for our people, our workers and for the whole country' (quoted in *The Times*, 27 January 1980). In other words, he tried to divert the steelworkers' struggle to defend their jobs and living standards into the same struggle that Joseph is engaged in: the struggle to save BSC.

Both Britain's major political parties agree that the economy must be revitalised and the steel industry restructured along more profitable lines. Labour is just as prepared as the Tories to make workers pay the price for a profitable steel industry. That's why the last Labour Government forced thousands of steelworkers onto the dole. Today the Tories are only finishing Labour's job. The difference is this: when Labour was in power the fact

that its politics dominated the working class allowed it to put through reactionary measures without incurring the kind of unpopularity that now confronts the Tories.

Labourist politics still dominate the trade union movement, especially as Labour Party leaders portray themselves as valiant defenders of the working class now they are in opposition. After all, they talk a different language from Margaret Thatcher. While she justifies her attacks on workers in terms which are perfectly frank, pointing out that sacrifices are made necessary by Britain's failure to make ends meet, the reformists pretend that there are other ways to save the system. For every economic ailment they have a sensible, painless cure with which to dissipate workers' militancy.

The role of the Labour Party is to contain class resistance to the capitalist onslaught within acceptable limits. At present Labour and its political supporters in the trade union movement represent the biggest political threat to an effective defence of working class interests. Let's look at the record.

\* **Prior's Employment Bill** Backed by the Labour Party, the TUC has called a demonstration for 9 March to protest against it. That 9 March is a Sunday is no accident. As ever the labour leadership's motto is maximum noise and minimum disruption of production. The TUC's token action is simply designed to let Prior know that he should take Congress House a bit more seriously.

\* **Public Sector Cuts** The Labour Party and its allies put themselves forward as the leadership of the fight against the cuts. They organised a day of action last November to make this point. But that's all. During the last four months they've done nothing except calm down workers' opposition to the cuts.

\* **British Leyland** The Labour Party's friends at the AUEW headquarters moved

swiftly to cool the spontaneous anger that greeted the victimisation of Derek Robinson. Their inquiry dragged on for months. By the time the union concluded that Robinson should be re-instated workers were pre-occupied with other issues. BL's management was able to use the breathing space provided to inflict further blows on the workforce and isolate support for Robinson.

\* **British Steel** The whole trade union bureaucracy went into action to keep the steel strike under control. Putting pressure on the South Wales TUC to scale down its activities and postpone its call for an indefinite general strike until 10 March, Len Murray devoted all his energies to planning a sell-out behind the scenes. For its part the South Wales TUC kept a careful eye on local militants. And, while steelworkers battled for their lives, Labour MPs refused to back their claim to the full, preferring to make cheap Parliamentary points about Tory intransigence, bad management and foreign imports. As for *Tribune*, its front page told steelworkers that theirs was 'a fight for a sane industrial strategy, one that will provide Britain with a sound industrial base for the future' (2 February 1980).

The Labour Party moderates class activity. Labour left-wingers continually smooth over the fundamental conflict between the maintenance of capitalism and the defence of workers' interests. Because they still lead the working class they can still defuse its militant struggles by integrating them into the bourgeoisie's drive to restore British imperialism to its former glory.

Our problem is not Margaret Thatcher, for every worker knows what to expect from her. Our problem is the Labour politicians, from whom most workers continue to expect a helping hand. By all means let's fight the Tories. But let's clean out our own house first.

## Inside Afghanistan

'An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America. And such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.'

President Carter's  
'State of the Union Message'

Carter's message is clear. US imperialism is prepared to go to war to maintain its direct access to oil and other crucial raw materials. Like the taking of American hostages in Teheran last November, the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan has become the pretext for imperialist intervention in the Middle East. Although most of the talk in Washington is about Afghanistan, the major concern of the American ruling class is that the handful of client governments who have catered for American interests in the Middle East are becoming less and less capable of stemming the tide of social upheaval.

The fall of the Shah was a major blow to American imperialism. But the 'seventies he willingly did America's dirty work, dispatching Iranian troops to Oman, Iraq and Pakistan, jet fighters to South Vietnam in 1972 and arms to North Yemen in 1977. Now the Iranian armed forces are in disarray. Today American policy makers are deeply concerned about Saudi Arabia, where the pro-imperialist Khaled regime has recently faced popular opposition; worse still is the situation in North and South Yemen. The fear that the Yemen will be unified under a pro-Soviet govern-

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ment provoked a stern warning from the American financial magazine *Business Week*:

'A unified Yemen under Communist direction, more populous than Saudi Arabia, would dominate Bab al-Mandab, the southern entrance to the Suez oil link through the Red Sea, and threaten neighbouring Saudi oil and the Moslem holy places - just what President Carter in his State of the Union message warned would not be tolerated.' (11 February 1980)

The military intervention Carter threatened in January is becoming more likely every day. That is why the USA has seized on events in Afghanistan with such vigour. They provided the justification for new plans to reintroduce conscription and the deployment of America's military might on a scale unseen since the Vietnam war. Carter has sent top diplomats to Pakistan and China to gain backing for American manoeuvres. His much-vaunted 110 000-strong rapid deployment force has been offered bases in Oman, Somalia and Kenya, and the US Air Force is already engaging in joint operations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

British imperialism has quickly fallen in line. The bourgeoisie has latched onto the resurgence of anti-Soviet hysteria to

isolate trade union militants. Pundits are quick to draw parallels between the violence of the Soviet army and the intimidation caused by 'secondary' pickets. Thatcher's anti-communist diatribes against the 'enemies of the free world' are part of her battle against militants in the British working class.

### The USSR and Afghanistan - a long-standing relationship

The Soviet presence in Afghanistan is nothing new. Since the early 'twenties the two countries have had strong economic and political links. During the reign of the anti-British King Amanullah (1919-29) the USSR became an influential foreign power in Afghanistan. After the Second World War however, US influence increased: until 1953 it enjoyed a monopoly of contacts with Afghanistan. This pro-American policy was then reversed by the newly appointed Prime Minister, Mohammed Daoud. The USSR eagerly complied with Daoud's requests for large infusions of military and economic aid.

The main reason Daoud adopted a more friendly attitude to the USSR was friction between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The key issue was Pakistan's refusal to grant self-determination to the nine million Pushtuns whose homeland straddles the Afghan/Pakistan border. The guerrilla war that broke out sporadically throughout the 'fifties and 'sixties forced Pakistan to close the border on three occasions, leaving Afghanistan with little alternative but to find new trade routes. Trade between Afghanistan and the USSR increased tremendously - from less than 10 per cent of total value of exports and imports in 1950 to some 70 per cent in 1963. The connection was strengthened when the USSR began to provide some of the foreign aid needed by Afghanistan to overcome its economic backwardness. In terms of income per head it became the largest recipient of Soviet aid and the first country outside the Eastern Bloc to receive aid.

For the Soviet Union a friendly Afghanistan provided a measure of security for its

southern borders. In return the Soviet bureaucracy helped prop up the weak central government of Afghanistan in the face of staunch resistance to encroachment from landowners and tribal leaders. Soviet policy aimed to encourage the strengthening of the weak bourgeois state and to speed up the development of capitalist relations in the countryside. The Soviet bureaucracy and the various Afghan governments shared an interest in eliminating any threat to social stability.

The failure of successive regimes to overcome economic stagnation made necessary an intensification of political oppression. This stimulated the development of radical petit-bourgeois political movements. They were strengthened in the mid 'sixties when, after the restoration of the monarchy in 1963, many of the political rights introduced by Daoud were revoked. In this period the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) emerged as the main, if inconsistent, focus of petit-bourgeois opposition. It was later to split into two factions. In 1973, the Parcham wing of the PDPA, under the leadership of Babrak Karmal, co-operated with Daoud in the overthrow of the monarchy.

### Moscow's answer to chaos in Kabul

Back in power, Daoud's corrupt regime adopted increasingly pro-Western policies. The Khalq faction, which had built up a sizeable and well organised following among Afghanistan's small educated elite, became a powerful focus of opposition. Daoud sensed his diminishing power base and moved to eliminate his opponents. The assassination of Amir Akbar Khyber in April 1978, a well-known university professor and the main force behind the reunification of the two wings of the PDPA, led to demonstrations which quickly took on an anti-Western character. In a last, desperate stand Daoud arrested Taraki, Karmal and other PDPA leaders. A day later PDPA members who remained free carried out the coup which toppled Daoud's regime and put Nur Muhammed

Taraki in power.

The coup came as a surprise to the Kremlin. After all, Daoud 'had been given a warm reception by the top Soviet leadership when he visited Moscow' in 1977 (*The Times*, 8 May 1978). Because of this 'close relationship' the Soviet bureaucracy was unsure at first whether to recognise the new regime. It soon became clear though that if the USSR wished to maintain influence, it had to back the new government. Indeed the fact that Taraki swept into power on a wave of radical sentiment created new opportunities for extending Soviet influence.

With Soviet assistance Taraki rigorously set about implementing a programme of petit-bourgeois reforms. But widespread resistance to land reforms in the tribal areas led to bitter wrangling in the ranks of the PDPA. Taraki was killed and replaced by Hafizullah Amin. In the period leading up to the Soviet intervention the party's leadership splintered as different factions struggled for control. Each round of feuding loosened the PDPA's grip over the country. By mid 1979 the situation had deteriorated so much that only Soviet support could guarantee the survival of the regime.

Widespread guerrilla activity against the Afghan government became a major threat to stability. Backed by arms and finance from imperialist countries and strengthened by a spate of mutinies in the army, the rebels caused consternation in the Soviet Union. It could not permit the government to collapse nor could it tolerate constant instability on its southern flank. A rebel takeover would mean Afghanistan following Iran - the USSR would be left with another hostile Moslem state on its borders.

Fearing growing tension in its own Moslem regions, the USSR was forced to act. The Soviet bureaucracy's answer was the massive military intervention which led to Amin's downfall and the installation of the Karmal regime.

Nick Jenkins

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## the next step

No 3 March 1980

### Take it up!

The March 'debate of the decade' between on one side Paul Foot and Tariq Ali and on the other Tony Benn and Stuart Holland will not attract many steelworkers or carworkers, miners or dockers. That's because discussion about whether the Labour Party can introduce socialist policies or how it can be made more democratic is of little interest to workers fighting to save jobs and trade union organisation in industry.

*the next step* focuses on the political issues - in the British labour movement and internationally - that are crucial to the defence of the working class today. Debate and discussion on these questions is vital to the development of revolutionary communist propaganda and activity.

In this issue we print some of the letters we have received - and our replies. We welcome criticism from individuals or organisations. We want our readers to take up the politics of *the next step*. What do you think of it? Remember that shorter contributions are more likely to be printed in their entirety. Send all comments to:

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To do this we need sellers in every town in the country. The dramatic events of the last few weeks show the need for revolutionary politics - and the possibilities for taking *the next step* into the labour movement. The two supporters who sold 100 copies of the review on the January day of action in South Wales showed what can be done. How many could 10 people have sold? And how many more could have been sold if supporters in South Yorkshire, Scotland and the North East had taken bulk orders of *the next step* onto picket lines and demonstrations?

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The second reason for our lack of technical sophistication is that we can't afford it. Our aim is to make *the next step* the best - not just in its politics - but also in its presentation. To do that we need your money. If each of our readers sent in a pound it would be a great start. A fiver would be even better. We aim to raise £1500 in the six weeks before the next issue appears. Then we can begin to buy the equipment we need.

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Published by Junius Publications Ltd  
BCM JPLTD, London WC1V 6XX  
Printed by Anvil Printers Ltd (TU)

## Afghanistan: imperialism is the enemy

ONE OF THE main weaknesses of the British left's position on Afghanistan is that it has been developed merely as a response to the recent upheaval there. In their different ways, the various groups on the left have simply reacted to the terms of discussion established by the ideologues of the bourgeoisie. All they have done is register support or opposition to the Soviet intervention. Yet it is impossible to understand the events in Afghanistan without considering the role of the Soviet Union in the region as a whole.

This alone shows that our assessment of the Soviet intervention cannot be guided by its degree of popularity in Afghanistan. It is clear that the Karmal regime has little popular support; but in nearby Baluchistan, where the people are oppressed by Pakistan, a Soviet invasion would be welcomed. If local hostility or friendliness dictated our attitude to the Kremlin's move we would have to condemn the invasion of Afghanistan and support future intervention in Baluchistan. That is an untenable position.

We oppose the policy of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Baluchistan and elsewhere because it runs counter to the interests of the international working class. Revolutionaries support, without qualification, any regime which represents the historic interests of the proletariat — whatever its degree of popularity. But the Karmal Government is not a progressive force. It cannot fight reaction: on the contrary, it adapts to it. Karmal's recent calls for a 'holy war' in the name of Allah against the enemy sums up the petit-bourgeois political orientation of his regime.

It is an orientation which is only too consistent with the Kremlin's policy of stability at any price. In Syria, Iraq, South Yemen and Kurdistan that same policy has led to the sacrifice of workers' and peasants' interests to the whims of the Soviet bureaucracy. The present situation in Afghanistan is of the Soviet bureaucracy's own making. It bears full responsibility for the consolidation of insurgent pro-imperialist forces in that country today.

### Making the East red

Just before his death, Lenin warned the Soviet working class of the dangers of Great-Russian chauvinism. Czarist Russia had a long record of oppressing national minorities throughout its empire. In 1922, when Stalin began to pursue a similarly chauvinist policy towards the Georgians in the name of internationalism, Lenin wrote: 'It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of the debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its people, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities'. And he continued: 'That is why in this case it is better to overdo rather than underdo the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities' ('Question of nationalities or "autonomisation"', *Collected Works* 36, 1922). The Stalinist bureaucracy ignored Lenin's warning. It trampled on the national minorities and brought the Russian Revolution into utter disrepute in their eyes.

In the long run this bureaucratic oppression could only exacerbate nationalist tensions. Today, more than five decades after Lenin's warning, the national question has an immense political importance in the USSR — from the Ukraine to Turkmenistan. That's why the Soviet bureaucracy is so afraid of the impact of Islamic nationalism on its own Moslem population. That's why it felt compelled to restore political order in Afghanistan.

Today the Soviet Union stands discredited before the masses of the Middle East. The Soviet bureaucracy has consistently subordinated the interests of the working class to those of its own. In the 'forties it withdrew support from the Mahabad and Azerbaijan republics in Iran and allowed reaction to triumph — all in

return for an Iranian promise of oil concessions. It has continued to sabotage the Kurdish struggle for national self-determination. It supported the Shah right up to his overthrow. Today the Stalinist Tudeh Party blindly follows Khomeini's lead.

The Soviet bureaucracy's nationalist course has demoralised and isolated workers all over the Middle East. It has strengthened the forces of imperialism in the area. Its cynical manipulation of workers' struggles and liberation movements continually creates mistrust among the masses and allows the petit bourgeoisie to assume leadership of the anti-imperialist movement. The bureaucracy's policies today result in the rise of Islamic reaction throughout the region.

It is from this perspective that we approach the question of Afghanistan. Revolutionary communists condemn the role of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Afghanistan is only the latest example of Moscow's unstable foreign policy. Whatever happens in Afghanistan will be determined by its short-term interests. The Soviet bureaucracy may decide to come to terms with the landowners and the petit bourgeoisie, or it may decide to speed up the social transformation of the country. But whatever it decides will not be based on a commitment to the interests of Afghan workers and peasants; it will only be based on narrow pragmatic considerations. The Soviet Union cannot be relied on to assist the anti-imperialist struggle in Afghanistan.

The experience of the post-war period has shown that even when Stalinist regimes implement reforms their benefits are transitory. Reforms become expendable as soon as they contradict the bureaucracy's interests. Those radical groups like the United Secretariat of the Fourth International and the international Spartacist tendency which welcomed the Soviet intervention simply gave working class interests in the area a miss.

While we oppose the bureaucracy's activities in Afghanistan, we can give no support to the reactionary insurgents. Led by landlords and the clergy, they can only defend the interests of the most backward layers of society. No wonder imperialism is so eager to provide them with financial and military support. Should they win, Afghanistan will become a colony and imperialism will be bolstered once more. The only positive alternative to the Soviet bureaucracy's troops is the workers and peasants of Afghanistan and the Middle East. They and they alone can settle scores with the Soviet bureaucracy and set the region on the path to socialism.

As far as the relationship between imperialism and the Soviet Union is concerned we unreservedly defend the Soviet Union against imperialist intervention. But we refuse to ignore the interests of the proletariat for the sake of the short-term stability of the Soviet bureaucracy.

### Carter prepares for war

The greatest menace to the people of the Middle East and the international working class is imperialism. The Carter Doctrine is not just a response to Afghanistan; it is the policy that imperialism must pursue if it is to survive as a world system. US capitalism must make recourse to military methods if it is to arrest its long-run decline. The USA can only maintain its privileged position in the Middle East through direct political control. As the American capitalists' favourite journal delicately put it:

'For the US, the need is not only to rebuild

military strength in the area but also to restore the perception of American power to protect its vital oil resources. It also needs a long-term strategy for the support of regimes which, like that of Saudi Arabia, are increasingly incapable of containing the internal "spontaneous combustions"....' (*Business Week*, 10 December 1979)

It is not only US imperialism that is preparing for war. Britain too has vital interests to preserve. Why else is defence expenditure being increased? Why else is there talk in bourgeois circles about the need to reintroduce conscription? The present routine activities of British imperialism — the occupation of the Six Counties of Ireland, the supervision of 'security' in Zimbabwe — will have to be extended. It is enough to observe the way in which Britain has reinforced its ties with South Africa over the past year, to note how it has come to see a stable South Africa as the cornerstone of imperialist strategy in the African continent, to see what it has in store for the world's oppressed.

What is really significant about the events in Afghanistan is the imperialist powers' attitude towards them. They provided the imperialists with the occasion for making their objectives public. Carter has threatened war and more war from here onwards.

### The Cold War: our enemy is at home

The international bourgeoisie has used the Soviet bureaucracy's activities in Afghanistan to make its own military policy appear legitimate. If it hadn't been Afghanistan it would have been something else. But the whipping up of anti-Soviet hysteria doesn't only divert attention from imperialist manoeuvres; it also provides an ideological framework for winning working class support for them.

That support is essential. The ruling class can only pursue its imperialist ambitions abroad if it gains political consensus on its foreign policy at home. Neither Carter nor Thatcher can afford domestic opposition to their colonial adventures. It is for this reason that — interspersed with revelations about espionage and subversion — ceaseless propaganda about the Olympics, Soviet dissidents and American hostages is the order of the day.

Unfortunately anti-Soviet propaganda finds real resonance in all sections of society. For many workers mention of the Soviet Union only brings to mind concentration camps and totalitarianism. In many parts of Europe the Soviet Union is the best advertisement there is for the virtues of the 'free world'. When this reaction is compared to the acclaim with which the European proletariat greeted the 1917 Revolution the turpitude of the Soviet bureaucracy becomes only too clear.

While we have no wish to defend the decadent Soviet bureaucracy, we hold firm against the wave of anti-Soviet hysteria. The imperialists are not concerned about human rights, Soviet workers or oppressed nationalities; they merely seek to extend their oppression throughout the world. They have no moral right to criticise the Soviet Union. It is their system that is at the root of all the oppression on this earth.

For British workers the enemy is at home. It is the tyranny of capitalism that we must focus on.

The smallest concession to anti-Soviet propaganda undermines the struggle for a communist society. To compare Washington with Moscow — as the Socialist

Workers Party does — is to equate imperialism, the main threat to the working class and civilisation, with the Soviet bureaucracy. That can only let the imperialists off the hook and reinforce bourgeois ideology.

Cold War propaganda is not only designed to win labour movement support for imperialist foreign policy. It forms a major part of the employers' general ideological offensive against the working class — an offensive in which 'troublemakers' need only be labelled as 'reds' for them to be made outcasts. It's not Soviet bureaucrats that Thatcher has in mind when she talks about the Soviet intervention as a 'threat to our way of life'. She's thinking about flying pickets, workers occupying factories, blacks standing up for their rights and Irish freedom fighters. It is for this reason that Afghanistan is not far from the shop floor. To defend our class we must turn Cold War propaganda against the bourgeoisie — by a thorough exposure of imperialism.

### Backing British foreign policy — the Labour Party

The Labour lefts, Stalinists and trade union bureaucrats who lead the British labour movement have never wavered in their support for the presence of British troops in Ireland and for controls on the movement of black people. Today these gentlemen uphold British rule in Zimbabwe — indeed the Communist Party has said that it 'insists' on the British government 'fully honouring the Lancaster House agreements' (*Morning Star*, 14 January 1980). But the fact that the Tribune group and the CP have always put their names by the denial of the democratic rights of the oppressed did not prevent them from unambiguously supporting the right of the people of Afghanistan to self-determination.

Tribune MP Eric Heffer is a man of impeccable left-wing credentials. He is also in general a committed democrat. Regularly he takes to the columns of *The Times* to prove the point. Commenting in that paper about the Labour left's attitude to Afghanistan, he proclaimed: 'Many of us feel the Soviet action is against every principle of the right of nations to self-determination and the principle of socialism and democratic development' (*The Times*, 14 January 1980). Because these are fine principles to uphold, comrades of the North West Committee of the RCT's Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign wrote to Eric Heffer to ask him whether they also applied to Ireland. Back — on House of Commons notepaper — came his answer. 'Yes', he replied, he did support Irish freedom. 'However', he went on, 'because of the conflicting advice I have received from socialist and democratic forces in Northern Ireland, I have had reservations about the immediate withdrawal of British troops, but I think they must be phased out as quickly as possible' (28 January 1980). After 10 years of imperialist brutality in Ireland, Eric Heffer is still ill-informed about the situation there. He has 'reservations' about the immediate withdrawal of British troops. Eric Heffer has much better sources of information in Kabul. It took him less than a month to sort out 'conflicting advice' on Afghanistan.

We do not wish to question Eric Heffer's integrity. It's his politics that are the problem. On both Afghanistan and Ireland Heffer is only able to provide a radical echo of British foreign policy.

The politics of reformism perpetuate the imperialist viewpoint in the labour movement. Social-imperialism — socialism in words, imperialism in deeds — remains the central ideological threat to the political independence of the working class. The question of Afghanistan should be seized as an opportunity — an opportunity to wage a relentless struggle against social-imperialism in the labour movement.

# SWP woos CP trade unionists

## UNITY-BEHIND THE BUREAUCRATS

AS THEIR NAMES suggest, both the Communist Party's 'Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions' (LCDTU) and the Socialist Workers Party's 'Rank and File Defend Our Unions Committee' want to defend the trade unions. Ever since the Labour Party lost the General Election last May they have been trying to mobilise resistance against the Tory Government — all with this aim in mind. Will their politics allow them to achieve what they have set out to do?

### The LCDTU: attorney for the TUC

Formed in 1967 to oppose the Wilson Government's new statutory incomes policies, the LCDTU only really got off the ground in 1969. In that year it organised widespread stoppages and mass demonstrations against the proposals to shackle the unions contained in Barbara Castle's White Paper *In place of strife*. In March 1971 it helped bring three million people out on a one-day strike against the Tories' Industrial Relations Bill.

Throughout the period the LCDTU showed that it had no political independence from the bureaucracy that ran Britain's trade unions. Because they aimed merely to find favour with left-wing trade union leaders, the Stalinists made sure that the Liaison Committee only opposed state interference with the unions insofar as it undermined the union bureaucracy's hold over the membership. And within these narrow confines they chalked up some important successes.

One of these was in the AUEW. Backed by the CP's union front organisation, the Broad Left, Hugh Scanlon made the AUEW reverse its support for Castle's measures. The Broad Left agreed with the TUC that curbs on working class unrest were necessary, but that Congress House was the body to impose them — not Whitehall.

This was good enough for the employers. As Wilson later recounted, the union leaders' position on *In place of strife* showed that they had accepted responsibility for dealing with 'unconstitutional strikes' in a situation where the shop floor was becoming 'increasingly militant and determined'. In his view they had 'moved forward forty years in a month' (Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-70*, p833).

Two years after the CP's coup among the engineers the LCDTU helped get the TUC to move against the Industrial Relations Act. But it was the same story: the TUC opposed the Act on the grounds that the use of the courts against the unions would result in 'confrontation' and that the unions should be the ones to police the unruly elements within their ranks. This view became the accepted policy of the labour movement. Well pleased with the way it had won friends and influenced people in the union hierarchy, the CP allowed the Liaison Committee to fade into the background as soon as the TUC began to bring its sense of responsibility to the attention of the capitalist class.

### The Committee goes quiet

The consequences of the CP's romance with the trade union bureaucracy became apparent after Labour's return to office in 1974. Once TGWU chief Jack Jones — another figurehead of the Broad Left in the 'sixties — emerged as the Social Contract's most ardent defender, the LCDTU was put on ice. Since the CP shared Labour's commitment to the regeneration of British industry, it was in no position to resist the measures which that regeneration demanded.

During the five years Labour was in power the LCDTU called the occasional conference but for the most part remained

silent and inactive. Unemployment rose and living standards fell; the Social Contract gave way to the Concordat of early 1979. In this reactionary deal TUC leaders conceded to restrictions on picketing and the closed shop and to other attacks on trade union rights. Yet, still loyal to the TUC top brass, the LCDTU held its peace — no conferences, no strikes, no demonstrations.

### Tories revive LCDTU

Now the Conservatives are back in government and attacking the unions with considerable vigour, the LCDTU is set for a revival. Faced with the legal restrictions on trade unions proposed in Prior's Employment Bill, the union bureaucracy has discovered it could use a bit of militant backing for its manoeuvres with the Tories — backing that the LCDTU is ready to deliver. But the CP has hit a snag: it's not so easy to get the masses on the streets as it was in the early 'seventies.

In the last five years thousands of workers have experienced the effects of the policies of the Labour left that were enthusiastically endorsed by the CP. And they are not impressed. Labour extended public ownership as requested; but at British Shipbuilders nationalisation brought mass redundancies in its wake. The National Enterprise Board, spearhead of the left's 'alternative economic strategy', forced through large-scale sackings and speed-ups at British Leyland. Most of Labour's workers' co-operatives, after operating for a while just like other capitalist companies, finally collapsed.

The CP's alternative plans for the survival of British capitalism now command little popular support. Indeed, the CP has become increasingly isolated in the unions; its industrial membership is dwindling and ageing fast. The result is that it has been obliged to rely on the trade union bureaucracy more than ever before.

### Liaising with the bourgeoisie

This trend was all too vividly confirmed at January's LCDTU conference, called to protest against the Tories' legislative assault on the unions. The conference platform was dominated by senior trade union officials. Of the dozen speeches made in the course of the day, two came from Labour MPs and at least five were issued by trade union bureaucrats.

Behind the repeated assertion of the need to defend trade union rights lay the dominant political theme of the conference. For the platform speakers defending the unions meant saving British industry. This in itself was nothing new. Twelve years ago, at one of its earliest conferences, the LCDTU sent out a plea for 'increased efficiency and productivity' (*Morning Star*, 17 February 1968). The CP is still using the LCDTU to rally support for the national economy. All that was novel about the latest conference was the ferocity of the chauvinism on display. No British patriot could have outdone Tribune MP Les Huckfield in his disgusting outburst against Arabs, Germans and other foreigners afflicting the British economy. The LCDTU is not content with playing lieutenant to the union bureaucracy; it is out to play lieutenant to the capitalist class as well.

### Unity at any price

But what of the SWP? Were the 300 delegates it sent to the 600-strong conference there to challenge the chauvinist calls for class collaboration made by the speakers? Not at all. They had come to beg the LCDTU to unite with the 'Rank and File Defend Our Unions Committee'.

The SWP's overtures were rejected.

When it pressed a vote on its unity proposals the Stalinists closed the conference amid scenes of pandemonium. But just as the spectacle of Stalinist delegates huddling pathetically around the greying trade union dignitaries on the platform said a lot about the CP's current role in the unions, so did the departure of the irate SWP delegates from the conference hall say a lot about the SWP's readiness to challenge the CP.

During the Labour Government's reign the SWP's industrial work fell on hard times, just as the CP's did. Because the militant bravado of *Socialist Worker* gave workers no answers to the Social Contract, the SWP found its 'Rank and File' groups dissolving and its militants drifting away.

The return of the Tories has raised SWP hopes of putting new life into its moribund industrial base. This is testimony to the SWP's inability to combat Labourism and its eagerness to pick an easier target — the Tories. Everybody hates the Tories, and the SWP, acutely aware of its own weakness in industry, needs everybody on its side. That is why it is after unity with the LCDTU.

The SWP wants unity on a definite political basis. The 'Rank and File' *Appeal to all delegates to the Liaison Committee* explained what the basis is:

'WE ALL AGREE on the need for a one day general strike against the Tories called by the TUC. WE ALL AGREE on the need to fight the cuts, to defend jobs, to defend wages and conditions. And above all WE ALL AGREE on the need to defend the closed shop, the right to picket and all basic trade union rights.'

Yes, everybody from the toughest shop floor militant to the most senior trade union bureaucrat agrees that the basic trade union rights should be defended. But this agreement only obscures the conflict between the working class and its present leadership. Every trade union boss is concerned to defend his union, if only because his livelihood depends on it; but every trade union boss identifies defence of the unions with the maintenance of orderly 'industrial relations' — with the maintenance of the capitalist system.

### Defend our unions?

Trade union leaders identify the strength of their institutions with the strength of the economy; they are particularly concerned about the prosperity of the sector in which they recruit and organise. This is why they advocate economic nationalism — all the more stridently in those industries where British capitalists are assailed by foreign competition. They are prepared to collaborate with the employers and with the government with the aim of making British industry profitable again. For the same reason they are ready to sacrifice their members' jobs and living standards, providing that the scale of redundancy does not jeopardise the existence of their unions and that the attacks on workers' wages and conditions are not so severe as to provoke an upsurge of rank and file militancy. And of course they will always fight to defend their organisations against competition from the unemployed, from women and from blacks.

In contrast to the bureaucrats, revolutionaries seek to defend not just the unions, but the whole working class. They distinguish between the interests of the proletariat and those of the employers and the government at all times. They show how the bureaucrats' beloved 'survival of Britain as a manufacturing nation' merely amounts to the restoration of capitalist profitability, and that this in turn demands driving the workers' movement into the ground. And they take up issues like Ireland to build internationalism in the

labour movement and to expose the reactionary politics of the Labour Party and the Stalinists.

The SWP won't have any of this. Despite the fact that the CP is being forced to side more and more with the bureaucracy, the SWP is desperate for unity. What this means is that the SWP is becoming obsequiously 'fraternal' over non-contentious matters like the closed shop, picketing and the Tories, and that it's making more and more concessions to the Stalinists on ones that used to cause differences.

The treatment of import controls — a key demand in the CP's programme — in recent issues of *Socialist Worker* is a good indication of this second trend. In late November 1979 Welsh miners decided to picket Newport docks to stop the entry of American coking coal, fearing it would lead to the closure of six local pits and the loss of 4800 jobs. *Socialist Worker* reported this move entirely uncritically (24 November). On 8 December it printed a letter which attacked attempts to bar imports — but without comment. By the New Year, however, the paper was more ambiguous still: its quizzical caption to a photograph of the Rhondda valley was 'Welsh miners are taking militant action to save their jobs and their communities — can we stand back on the grounds that all import controls are wrong?'. No answer was forthcoming, but the headline above two pro-controls contributions to the letters page (one from the paper's South Wales correspondent) was 'Import controls? In this case... YES!' As long as the workers 'are taking militant action' *Socialist Worker* can support CP principles — in inverted commas, of course.

### 'Dear Kevin'

The SWP's flirtation with the CP proceeds on several fronts. Throughout the months preceding January's LCDTU conference, SWP industrial organiser John Deason sent a series of cringing open letters to LCDTU chairman Kevin Halpin proposing unity and joint discussion. But his advances were snubbed, just as the SWP's conference resolution was dismissed. The SWP retreated from the conference in confusion and disarray, nursing its injured pride, its indecisive leadership bruised and battered. But it was not chastened by the experience; within a week it was crawling back to Halpin. 'Dear Kevin,' wrote Deason, 'WE MUST UNITE'. Prostrate, he begged: 'Once again we appeal to you...at least meet with us and discuss how best to achieve such unity' (*Socialist Worker*, 2 February 1980).

More than anything the conference revealed the inability of the SWP to take on the CP politically. The CP shares the SWP's commitment to trade unionism but situates it in the coherent national reformist strategy advanced by substantial sections of the trade union bureaucracy. With this strategy, the SWP says, 'we have our differences'. But nowhere in all the exhortations *Socialist Worker* made to get its readers along to the LCDTU, in all the SWP's open letters, in its conference leaflet or in the one speech it squeezed in at the conference — nowhere were these differences explained. The SWP is ready to drop its radical demands for the sake of organisational unity.

Needless to say, many individual SWP militants feel unhappy about their organisation's convergence with the CP. But doubts are not enough: gut reaction and class instincts will not by themselves destroy the system of politics peddled by the LCDTU. The LCDTU lines up behind the union bureaucracy. Unity with the LCDTU is only unity with the union bureaucracy at one remove.

Keith Tompson

# THEIR DEMOCRACY



## OUR RIGHTS

DEMOCRACY is like good weather: everyone is in favour of it. Politicians from Keith Joseph to Tariq Ali never cease proclaiming the virtues of democracy. The word is used to describe the most diverse political formations, from the Democratic Party of the USA to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, which recently so seized the attention of that party's leader. When Russia invaded Afghanistan, Western commentators dredged up all the phrases of the Cold War to denounce the threat of Soviet 'totalitarianism' to world peace and stability – and to Western democracy. And, when Thatcher welcomed the miners' pay settlement, the scabbing at Charing Cross hospital and the setbacks inflicted on the workers at British Leyland, she did so with the words 'That's what democracy is all about' (*The Times*, 6 December 1979).

Democracy is also close to the heart of the British labour movement. Ever since the war the left wing of the Labour Party has sought a middle way between 'dictatorial communism' and the unacceptable aspects of capitalism through home-grown British 'democratic socialism'. Meanwhile the extreme right of the Party advances its cause in the 'Social Democratic Alliance'. For the Communist Party, ever embarrassed by its historic ties with the Soviet Union, democracy is an obsession. The CP's programme, *The British road to socialism*, proclaims its commitment to broadening and deepening, extending and enriching democracy on every page. But what is democracy?

### We vote, they rule

Democracy is one form of capitalist rule – the form that capitalists prefer. The bourgeoisie likes to maintain its power through consensus rather than naked force, whenever possible, for Parliamentary bodies enable all classes to participate and assume responsibility for its system. If people believe that their vote counts, that they can influence government policy through their MPs, they are likely to accept the verdict of Parliament. This strengthens social stability because it allows conflicts to be regulated and resolved institutionally. Bourgeois democracy is a cheaper and more durable means of rule than direct repression. It gives legitimacy to decisions taken in the interests of the ruling class.

The possibility of exercising bourgeois class rule through democratic institutions depends on the strength of capitalism. In times of crisis, when accumulation is interrupted and social conflicts intensify, Parliament becomes a luxury. Even the very limited rights the electorate possesses have to be taken away. As soon as the bosses feel seriously threatened by workers they adopt an openly coercive form of class rule. That's why full democratic rights have never been preserved for very long, even in the 'civilised' world.

Universal suffrage had scarcely arrived in Europe when half the Continent descended into fascism. By the mid 'thirties the ruling classes in Eastern Europe, Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain and Portugal had turned to fascist dictatorship to stabilise their rule. Even freedom-loving Britain had to suspend general elections for a decade after 1935 and introduce repressive measures to ensure social peace so that it could fight its imperialist rivals Germany and Japan. Democracy, however, served a useful purpose: it was used to mobilise working class support for the imperialist war effort. Workers fought and died in millions defending bourgeois democracy against fascism. Nor did the consolidation of capitalism which the carnage of the Second World War made possible lead to the immediate restoration of democracy. The war had been over for more than 30 years before Spain, for instance, acquired even a formal democratic constitution.

Only the most advanced capitalist countries can afford bourgeois democracy.

In most parts of the world the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is almost never exercised through representative institutions. While people in Britain and the USA enjoy their House of Commons and Congress debates, savage military dictatorship is the standard form of government in the countries dominated by British and US imperialism. Moreover the existence of bourgeois democracy in the imperialist countries depends on their continued oppression of the backward capitalist nations. As Trotsky observed:

'The democratic regime is the most aristocratic way of ruling. It is possible only to a rich nation. Every British democrat has 9 or 10 slaves working in the colonies.' (*Writings*, 1938-9)

This situation has not been altered one iota by the 'decolonisation' of the post-war period – the substitution of indirect forms of imperialist rule for direct ones. Indeed today the whole trend towards imperialist military intervention in Africa and the Middle East confirms the provisional character of political independence.

### The dangers of democracy

For the bourgeoisie democracy provides an important instrument for defusing class conflict. The existence of representative institutions lend credibility to the strategy of reformism. Reformist parties come into their own during periods of capitalist crisis and social unrest. When Parliament is less and less able to maintain social stability, reformist parties try to lead workers towards the defence of the 'democratic system' and away from the struggle against capitalism. In the 'thirties, Social Democratic and Stalinist parties played a central role in Popular Front governments in France and Spain and en-

bourgeois state do not challenge capitalism. It simply means that strikes are smashed and attacks on working class living standards are made in the name of democracy. At the end of the day, the bourgeoisie always has its armed men to finish the job. To the question 'Could the army pull off a coup in Britain?' *The Times* answers reassuringly 'within minutes' (10 January 1980).

### Fighting for our rights

The fact that bourgeois democracy is a form of capitalist class rule does not prevent us from defending all democratic rights. But why is it necessary to defend democratic rights, when all the gains conceded by capitalism are narrow, meagre and likely to be eliminated at any time?

First, because the political rights wrested from the bourgeoisie create possibilities for developing the movement of the working class by means of organisation, education and political activity: it is easier to organise trade unions and political parties in a democracy than it is under fascism. Second, because in the course of the struggle for democratic rights workers become aware that, ultimately, the only way to guarantee and extend these rights is through the overthrow of capitalism. Lenin argued:

'Marxists know that democracy does not abolish class oppression. It only makes the class struggle more direct, wider, more open and pronounced, and that is what we need... The more democratic the system of government, the clearer will workers see that the root evil is capitalism not lack of rights.' (*A caricature of Marxism and imperialist economism*, 1916) In other words the contradiction between the rights granted by the bourgeoisie and the reality of capitalist domination – the fact that *behind these limited rights lies*

### Democracy is the form of capitalist rule that the capitalists prefer

the unlimited power of capital – becomes increasingly visible the more democratic rights are won. Third, the struggle for democratic rights forces workers to go beyond their immediate experience as wage labourers and acquire a consciousness of their class interests. It replaces the limited struggle between a group of workers and their employer with the conflict between the whole of the working class and the bourgeoisie. In fighting for the democratic rights of the oppressed – women, ethnic minorities and others – the working class acquires the *political independence* necessary for confronting its class enemy.

Reformists campaign for democratic rights by putting pressure on the state. The preamble to the CP's *Charter of democratic rights*, a listing of 70 separate rights, explains the value of legislation in preserving democratic freedoms:

'Despite the obstacles experienced by the working people in making use of the liberties they have won, the existence of these democratic freedoms, often buttressed by legal enactment, has been of great advantage whenever the people have wanted to press their claims.' (p3) In fact legal buttresses prove very insubstantial whenever the ruling class wants to do away with workers' democratic freedoms. The use of the army and their 'Green Goddess' fire-fighters during the

firemen's strike the winter before last was against the law; but the law was simply ignored. The ruling class does not hesitate to cast it aside when its class interests demand this. We must do likewise and not expect the state to look after our interests.

Like the reformists the radical left looks to the state to safeguard democratic rights. In 1978 the IMG and the SWP endorsed state bans on National Front demonstrations. Soon afterwards the working class paid the price when the Labour Government used the same bans to curtail labour movement activities.

### No to secret ballots!

Democracy for us is not an abstract principle that exists above the class struggle. When the ruling class attacks working class interests in the name of 'democracy' we have no hesitation in rejecting it. Thus we oppose Employment Minister James Prior's proposal for the state funding of secret ballots in union elections and strike ballots.

On the face of it this seems very fair and reasonable – very democratic. Many workers look at the secret ballot issue from the point of view of the principles of democracy. Many who reject the rest of Prior's plans to shackle the unions find it difficult to argue against this one. Why then do we oppose secret ballots?

For us the most important question is – whose class interests are served by the introduction of secret ballots today? Advocating them we find the Conservative Party, the Confederation of British Industry and the most right-wing trade union bureaucrats – Frank Chapple of the electricians and Terry Duffy of the engineers (both elected, incidentally, following the introduction of secret ballots). Why do these people like secret ballots? The reasons are simple. The employers and the Tories like them because they want to maximise their influence on union decisions as part of their drive to weaken working class organisation and drive down living standards. The union bureaucrats want them because they can use them to maximise control over their own members.

Both the Government and the union leaders want to minimise the influence of workers actively committed to defending working class interests. Active workers can give a lead to others at mass meetings. Secret ballots allow the bosses to appeal to the more backward sections and weaken the influence of class conscious workers. It is because there are specific class interests behind Prior's democratic proposals that we declare our hostility to them.

Opposition to secret ballots is, however, not an eternal principle. In a police state, for example, we would support secret ballots because they would afford workers some protection from state repression. But in Britain in 1980 we oppose them as an attempt in the guise of democracy to weaken working class politics.

### For the dictatorship of the proletariat!

The present recession has brought to the fore the anti-democratic nature of capitalism. To survive it must deny trade union rights (Prior's Employment Bill), women's rights (Corrie's Abortion Bill), the rights of ethnic minorities (Whitelaw's tough new immigration proposals) and Ireland and Zimbabwe's right to national independence.

The working class has every interest in defending all the rights it has wrung from the bourgeoisie. That's why the fight for democratic rights has to be waged as part of the struggle against the capitalist system. Capitalism curbs the rights it has granted previously and denies their extension to millions of people. The overthrow of the capitalist system, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, will provide the conditions where democratic rights will become a reality for the majority of society.

Mike Freeman

BLAIR PEACH's killing at the hands of the Special Patrol Group in Southall last April concentrated the attention of the British left on the police. Peach's case was not an isolated one; it fell between the murder of Liddle Towers by police officers in the North East and the death of Jimmy Kelly in a Liverpool police station cell. So when the Home Office revealed in the first few days of January this year that 245 people had died in police custody over the previous decade, Labour MPs of all persuasions greeted the news with outrage. Sir Harold Wilson called for an independent investigation into police violence against Kelly; Tribune group chairman Martin Flannery demanded an audit of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions itself.

Yet the brutality that so disturbed the reformists is only a symptom of the state's general build-up of repressive powers. Police numbers have risen steadily and pay has been dramatically improved; overall, spending on the police has more than doubled in the last five years. Policemen and women have been systematically trained in 'crowd control', that is, how to smash demonstrations and pickets with specialised riot equipment and CS gas. Police manoeuvres on protest marches increasingly resemble major military operations. Is the left as firm about the police as the police is about the left?

### Labour, CP, SWP: they'll come quietly

The Labour left only took up the issue of deaths in police custody because it was fearful that they might discredit the boys in blue in the eyes of the public. Tribune MP Michael Meacher, for instance, told William Whitelaw that the Police Complaints Board's failure to recommend disciplinary charges against those officers referred to it strained its credibility 'beyond belief' and that he hoped that the Tory Home Secretary would agree that a radical overhaul of the Board's procedures was 'urgently needed' (*The Guardian*, 8 January 1980). But this friendly concern about the state's image isn't just the property of Labour left-wingers. The Communist Party is anxious too. Rejecting an official inquiry into the Peach affair in favour of 'more democratic control and public accountability' of the police, it says:

'Investigation of the police by the police is an absurdity which can only leave doubts in the minds of the public. That is not good for the police. It is not good for the law. And it is certainly not good for the victims of police brutality.' (*Morning Star*, 4 October 1979)

At least the CP is honest. The first thing it wants to do is dispel doubts in the minds of the public about the role of the police. Its worry about people who have fallen foul of the police is simply that they too will have 'doubts' about the way they were treated — those of them that are still alive, that is. An absurdity indeed!

The Socialist Workers Party appears less interested than the CP in improving the corporate profile of Her Majesty's Police. It was particularly vociferous in denouncing the Metropolitan force after Southall, for example. But in practice it always plays the Stalinists' game of trying to remove the excesses of repression rather than repression itself. The task is to 'force the police to get rid of the thugs in uniforms' and to 'disband the SPG' (*Socialist Worker*, 16 June 1979). Here the SWP reinforces the commonsense, bourgeois view that 'some' coppers — on the occasion of Southall, the SPG — are 'bastards', and that the ones who are not should deal with them. Indeed, SWP leader and *Daily Mirror* star journalist Paul Foot is quite convinced that 'decent-minded policemen, and there are lots of them, are often shocked at the bullying and racialism which is permitted and even encouraged in street patrols' (*Socialist Worker*, 26 May 1979). Just as the SWP appeals to

# POLICE PREPARE FOR CIVIL WAR ...left calls for inquiry

one part of the state to abolish another, so Foot argues that the good old British bobby is no party to the bullying and racialism practiced by his less worthy colleagues. As a consequence he winds up apologising for the racism that is inherent in bourgeois society and its defenders — the police.

### Only doing their job

For Marxists the question of the police is not one of this or that constable, but of their function in the system of social relations that comprises capitalism. The police work for the state — and the state represents the interests of the bourgeoisie. In the nineteenth century the state played a vital role in establishing a basic framework for rapid capital accumulation. A

the police than by the wages system. Workers give their labour-power freely in return for wages. Although their wages are worth less than the value they create, their exploitation is obscured by what appears to be a fair exchange of work for money. Provided their wages are adequate to their needs, the state has no need to step in to keep them in line. As the wage transaction is repeated week in and week out, so their subordination to their employers is reproduced — without the bourgeoisie having to lift a finger.

Because the forces of repression do not usually interfere in relations between workers and employers the state seems to be above class interests. In the same way, the police do not seem to be a weapon of the bourgeoisie. Their business appears to be confined to protecting property,

### The ruling class is rehearsing for a showdown; we should get ready for one too

major component of this framework was a police force. Taking a nostalgic look at the days of Robert Peel, today's Metropolitan Police Commissioner recently spelt out the achievements of the first police force:

'Disorder was brought under control. There was no longer a need for people to carry arms. Elections — local and national — were facilitated and political intimidation eliminated. The peace and stability that was brought about by the presence and activities of the new police created the conditions, which allowed the expansion of industry and commerce...' (David McNee, 'Keeping the Queen's Peace', *Police Review*, 25 January 1980)

Today the police are better organised and more sophisticated than the original 'Peelers', but their job is just as much to assist 'the expansion of industry and commerce' — capitalist industry and commerce — as it ever was.

In general, however, 'peace and stability' under capitalism are brought about less by the use of physical coercion and

controlling traffic and helping old ladies across the road. In Britain, the oldest capitalist country and the one in which the ruling class has had centuries of experience in the subtleties of 'democracy', the fact that the police are unarmed makes them assume a particularly low profile. But now all this is changing.

### Bodies of armed men

Just as Britain's inter-war slump saw the police attack hunger marches and break up demonstrations, so today's recession brings out the class nature of the police. Discreet discussions about the possibility of forming a new paramilitary 'third force' similar to the USA's National Guard were first held in Britain more than 10 years back. But a real clamour for tougher policing only emerged when Heath's 1970-74 Government came up against more and more working class opposition. As one brigadier explained at the time: 'the whole period of the miners' strike made us realise that the present size of the police force is

too small...things have now got to the stage where there are not enough reserves to deal with the increasing numbers who are not prepared to respect the law' (*The Times*, 23 May 1972). Although the idea of riot police was shelved on the grounds that public opinion wasn't yet ready for it, moves went ahead to bolster the existing forces. Soon more than half Britain's police commissioners had their own local units to deal with strikes and demonstrations. Now, roaming in transit vans and equipped with riot shields, smoke grenades and an arsenal of guns, the Special Patrol Groups have become a familiar sight on picket lines. They also spend much of their time backing up the local police in areas with large black or Irish communities, organising random spot checks on passers-by.

The 1200-strong Special Branch was itself formed to deal with the Irish freedom fighters of the nineteenth century — the Fenians. Now, assisted by Scotland Yard's Anti-Terrorist Squad, it leads raids on anti-imperialists under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The Special Branch's activity is explicitly political. It taps phones, photographs demonstrations, keeps the files on political organisations and infiltrates meetings — all to keep tabs on active trade unionists and political groups. It also liaises with the immigration authorities to keep a watchful eye on Britain's black population.

Alongside the growing number of specialised units, the rest of the police force is being strengthened to meet its expanding duties. More police officers are being schooled in unarmed combat and the use of firearms than ever before. It's the ordinary man on the beat, not the SPG, who metes out the violence that blacks experience every day. As Devon Chief Constable Alderson warned, the new police powers and techniques make the force resemble 'an army of occupation'.

### A fair cop?

The ruling class is getting ready for military action, not only against its opponents abroad, but also against its enemies within. That is what the police are being trained and equipped for. The capitalists would like to hang on to the image of the neighbourhood bobby for as long as possible, but they are ready to dispense with it when times get rough. Nor will they be impeded by the law. As McNee's predecessor explained in his autobiography, he and his colleagues fought Britain's Irish war for all they were worth: 'we would not let legal niceties prevent us from dealing with terrorism' (Sir Robert Mark, *In the office of constable*, 1978).

The old myths about the honest cop and the sanctity of law die hard on the left. It still wants to cast out the bad apples of the SPG and bring back the decent policeman of the old days. It still clings to its hopes of public control of the police — even after they have again and again shown their willingness to throw aside all the rules when the class interests of their supreme commanders demand it.

That the ruling class is rehearsing for a showdown should indicate the need for us to begin our own preparations. The first step is to combat workers' illusions in the police and the state — illusions perpetuated by reactionary slogans such as 'Disband the SPG' and by calls for public inquiries. These attempts to persuade the bourgeois state to exercise its rule less aggressively can only disarm workers. The rising toll of deaths at the hands of the police, the use of snatch squads on picket lines and the build-up of repression in inner city areas show all too clearly that the bourgeoisie will stop at nothing to defend its class interests. The bourgeois state will be called to account only by an equally decisive assertion of the interests of the working class.

Georgina Day



No SPG in the 'thirties — but state violence against workers just the same

# Ireland: no more pretence

When the British army invaded Ireland in 1969 the government said it was a peace-keeping force. For a decade Britain played the part of a mediator between hostile factions. But last year all this changed. After a series of spectacular setbacks — Neave, Mountbatten, Warrenpoint — the British Government dropped its neutral charade. When the Government announced its determination to crush 'the terrorists', it openly declared war on the Irish people.

The problem with declaring war is that it forces people to take sides. But fortunately for the British state the only section of society that could seriously upset its war effort in Ireland — the working class — still clings to the old myth that the troops are playing a useful role in preventing communal strife in Ireland. In practice this means that the official labour movement lines up on the side of British imperialism.

Just as this benefits the British state, so it has disastrous consequences for the British working class. Workers' acquiescence to Westminster's rule in Ireland undermines their own struggles against government-imposed cuts and redundancies.

The bourgeoisie has never declared its position on the Irish War so openly as it does today. The working class must take sides with equal determination. The British side stands for poverty, denial of democratic rights and repression. The Irish side stands for national liberation and the possibility of socialism.

We take the side of the Irish people. Partition is the form of British rule in Ireland. The Labour Party acquiesced to Partition in 1921, consolidated it in 1949 and continues to uphold it today. We challenge the reformist tradition which has made the division of Ireland acceptable to the British labour movement — and makes the war tolerable today. We repudiate too the tradition of petit-bourgeois nationalism which has used radical rhetoric to cover its endorsement of Partition and its compromises with imperialism. And we give our unconditional support to those who fight Partition today whether they fight in Ireland or in Britain.

## The Birmingham bombings

The decision by Provisional Sinn Féin to hold this year's Bloody Sunday commemoration march in Birmingham was greeted with customary hysteria by the local media. It was the first time since the 1974 pub bombings that a demonstration against the Irish War had been held in the city. The mob of 200 fascists and off-duty squaddies who turned out to heckle the 1200-strong march showed that the bombings had not been forgotten.

The march was not the only reminder of the bombings: a week before the demonstration, Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls, turned down a request by the six men convicted of the bombings to sue the West Midlands police over beatings received while in police custody. Denning's statement illustrates the determination of the British state to allow no legal niceties to stand in the way of its oppression of the Irish people. With all the cynicism of the British ruling class, he rejected the appeal, saying: 'if they won, it would mean that the police were guilty of perjury; that they were guilty of violence and threats; that the confessions were involuntary and improperly admitted in evidence; and that the convictions were erroneous' (Law Report, *The Times*, 18 January 1980). This was not a risk the judiciary was about to take: Case Dismissed.

On Thursday 21 November 1974 the Mulberry Bush and the Tavern in the Town pubs in the centre of Birmingham were devastated by bombs. In all 21 people, mainly young, were killed. Many more were maimed and over a hundred suffered less severe injuries. The IRA never claimed responsibility, but as this incident followed other bombings in Britain, they got the blame. Six Irishmen were later convicted on charges arising out of the bombings and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

The pub bombings wrought terrible damage to life and limb. Television brought the grisly scenes into every living room in the land. The response of workers in Birmingham and elsewhere was one of shock and horror, sympathy for the dead, injured and bereaved... and anger. The incident brought home to Britain the grim reality of the War in the Six Counties. A *Times* reporter captured this mood in Birmingham:

'Many people said, often with anger only barely held in check, that they now realised what life in Belfast must have been like during the past five years.' (23 November 1974)

Many workers stayed away from work the following day. One of those killed was a foreman at the Rover Tyseley plant. The shop stewards there met and recommended that 'as a mark of sympathy and respect, the whole factory should take the day off' (*Morning Star*, 23 November 1974). At the massive Austin Morris plant at Longbridge 1500 out of the workforce of nearly 20 000 downed tools and walked out of the factory. Stewards at the BLMC tractor and transmission plant at Washwood Heath called on 'the official trade union movement to call a day of mourning in the city' (ibid).

### The media against the Irish

Press reaction was furious and malicious. Newspaper editors combined with bourgeois politicians in an effort to turn people's grief and anger in a chauvinist, anti-Irish direction. The media used the bombings to strengthen the national consensus of support for Britain's war in Ireland and to create a climate favourable for the introduction of draconian 'anti-terrorist' legislation. The *Daily Mirror* condemned the bombings and called for repressive measures from Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins. Its banner headline — 'The measures had better be tough' — was followed by demands that they be 'very tough, and quick and effective' (23 November 1974).

They were. Within a week the Prevention of Terrorism Act was law and the Provisional IRA a proscribed organisation.

### The left's capitulation to chauvinism highlighted the need to turn workers' grief and anger against the British state

Meanwhile the National Front tried to capitalise on the wave of chauvinist hysteria; it called for further strike action and tried to organise a 'Smash the IRA — Hang the terrorists' march through Birmingham.

There was little response from Birmingham's industrial workers to these attempts to whip up anti-Irish sentiments. The NF's demonstration was a flop. The *Birmingham Post* reported that 'a call by the NF organisation for a strike yesterday in protest at the Birmingham bombings went unheeded in the Midlands and there was no repetition of Friday's spontaneous walk-out' (26 November 1974).

Chauvinist reaction to the bombings did come from the more backward sections of the community: in the nearby town of Aldridge there was a march by about a thousand people, some of whom carried placards demanding the death penalty for terrorists, while some Birmingham market porters refused to handle goods from Ireland. There were incidents of intimidation and harassment of Irish people. But workers in the motor and engineering industries, the core of the Midlands labour movement, generally held out against the press campaign. Peter Nicholas, convenor at the Rover Tyseley factory where workers held a day of mourning, said that 'there was no strike or anti-Irish demonstration' (*Morning Star*, 23 November 1974). At Longbridge there was widespread acceptance of a works committee appeal to continue working, although a number of workers organised a petition to the Home Secretary calling for 'tough action'.

### No surrender to British chauvinism!

The Irish War was now being fought on the streets of Birmingham, a fact quickly recognised by the ruling class:

'This is a war which is being waged with great ferocity in Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland, and is now being waged with almost equal ferocity in the rest (sic) of Britain.' (Editorial, *The Times*, 23 November 1974)

With its declarations of resolve to crush the terrorists in Ireland and Britain, the ruling class had made its position clear. What position should the working class have taken?

The Irish War is a war between the oppressed Irish people, who want national independence, and Britain, which cannot entertain the break-up of the United Kingdom and the grave threat to capitalist stability in Ireland and Britain that this would involve. In the Irish War we support the right of the Irish people to national self-determination and their right to conduct their struggle against British imperialism by whatever means they choose. To question a particular act of violence carried out in that struggle is to question the right of the Irish people to fight for this freedom. In war acts of violence against non-combatants are committed by both sides. How we view these acts depends on which side we support. We support the struggle of the Irish people against British imperialism.

The response of the leading organisations of the labour movement to the Birmingham bombings was no different to that of the bourgeoisie. Faced with the violence of the oppressed in the heart of a British city and a deliberate attempt to whip up a chauvinist backlash, the left capitulated. Instead of standing out against the rantings, the newspapers of the reformist and radical left adapted to the chauvinist hysteria of the gutter press. *Tribune*, voice of the Labour left, could have taken its copy from any of the Fleet Street tabloids:

'We do not preach surrender to acts of violence. Those who have been guilty of them must be punished.' (29 November 1974)

*Socialist Worker* was no better; it called on socialists to add their voice to the clamour of condemnation: 'Socialists must condemn these senseless killings.' (30 November 1974)

The newspapers of the labour movement proceeded to blame the republican movement for the reactionary response of the backward sections of British society and for the repressive measures introduced by the state: the *Morning Star* reported the statement of the Communist Party central committee:

'Whoever ordered this act to be done and whoever carried it out, it can only serve the cause of the sinister and reactionary forces in our society.' (23 November 1974)

The Socialist Workers Party echoed the voice of British Stalinism:

'The bombings have hardened the determination of the government to continue its senseless violence in Northern Ireland. They have banned the IRA and extended police powers with a draconian bill which will wipe out political and trade union liberties fought for by our class for more than a century.' (*Socialist Worker*, 30 November 1974)

Thus while many workers initially resisted the pressures of anti-Irish propaganda, the

leading political groups of the labour movement simply reinforced chauvinist trends in British society. This is a true measure of their political bankruptcy: always desperate to connect with the prevailing trends in the labour movement the left ends up echoing the most backward sections. Incapable of standing up in support of the oppressed, the left could provide no lead for workers who spontaneously rejected the chauvinist witchhunt mentality encouraged by the bourgeois press.

### The missing factor: an anti-imperialist movement

If the nationalist sentiments of the British ruling class found a response in the working class after the Birmingham bombings the blame lies largely with the left. The failure of the left to build a solid anti-imperialist movement in Britain in the preceding five years of the Irish War has allowed the ruling class to whip up anti-Irish sentiments among British workers. With such a movement, anti-imperialist workers would have responded to the Birmingham bombings by campaigning with renewed vigour for the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. They would have vociferously demonstrated their support for the right of the Irish people to national self-determination. In the event the left failed to build such a campaign and when the media tried to divert the spontaneous anger of British workers into attacks on the Irish, the left was incapable of directing it against the common enemy of Irish and British workers — the British state.

The modest size of January's demonstration and the hostile response it received in the press shows that there is still a long way to go in building an anti-imperialist movement. But we can be sure that as the war drags on in Ireland there will be more violence in British cities. There were bombs before and after Birmingham 1974 and no doubt there will be bombs again. Such incidents are a test for the labour movement's political organisations. In Birmingham in 1974, the Labour Party, the Communist Party, and the SWP all failed dismally because they lacked the political independence necessary to take up a distinct working class position when faced with an intense barrage of bourgeois propaganda. Now is the time to begin the work so that next time, workers' grief and outrage will be fixed on its proper target — the British state.

The launching of the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign is timely. It comes five years after this law was rushed through by a Labour government in the climate of chauvinist hysteria following the Birmingham bombings. During the past five years the PTA has been used to outlaw domestic opposition to the imperialist oppression of Ireland. The development of this campaign; the organisation of active support for PTA victims; the dissemination of information about the use of the Act; and most importantly the perspective of taking the Irish War into the labour movement are the ways to make sure that pro-imperialist sentiments are destroyed.

Paul Saunders

FOR MOST people the Republic of Ireland is a country of conundrums. It's a land where one third of the population turned out to acclaim the Pope's reactionary appeal for peace only a few weeks after Mountbatten and 18 British soldiers met their deaths at the hands of the IRA. Ireland still has a substantial agricultural sector; yet its rural tranquility is frequently shattered by bank raids and kidnappings. The Irish War is concentrated north of the border — but surveys of public opinion in the Twenty-six Counties show widespread popular support for republican aspirations. Ireland's prosperity was recently celebrated in the glossy pages of *The Sunday Times Magazine*, but the loss of 1.5 million working days through industrial disputes last year makes it one of the most strike-prone countries in Europe.

These are just some of the contradictions that the Republic's new Premier Charles Haughey inherited when he took over from Jack Lynch in December 1979. Haughey has a reputation for republicanism, yet he had hardly assumed office before denouncing the republican movement. He is ready to use no-jury courts, the Gardai and every other means of repression at his disposal to subdue republicans and trade unionists who pose a threat to capitalist stability in Ireland. In fact there is nothing puzzling about the Twenty-six Counties: its economic backwardness, social instability and coercive government merely express the realities of imperialist oppression in a time of deepening world crisis.

### The Southern bubble

In 1977 and 1978 Ireland obtained a temporary respite from that crisis. In those two years it enjoyed one of the highest growth rates in Europe. Although unemployment ran at levels of about 10 per cent, the economy boomed. There were two factors behind this: the EEC and state intervention. Neither could afford Ireland any lasting benefits.

Ireland's post-war industrialisation was founded upon its successful efforts to attract investment from the imperialist world. From 1958 onwards more and more foreign capitalists came in, built factories and began to export a sizeable fraction of their products overseas. The Republic's entry into the EEC in 1973 consolidated this trend: for American, West German and Japanese firms it made the Twenty-six Counties an ideal low-cost manufacturing base from which to reach Continental markets.

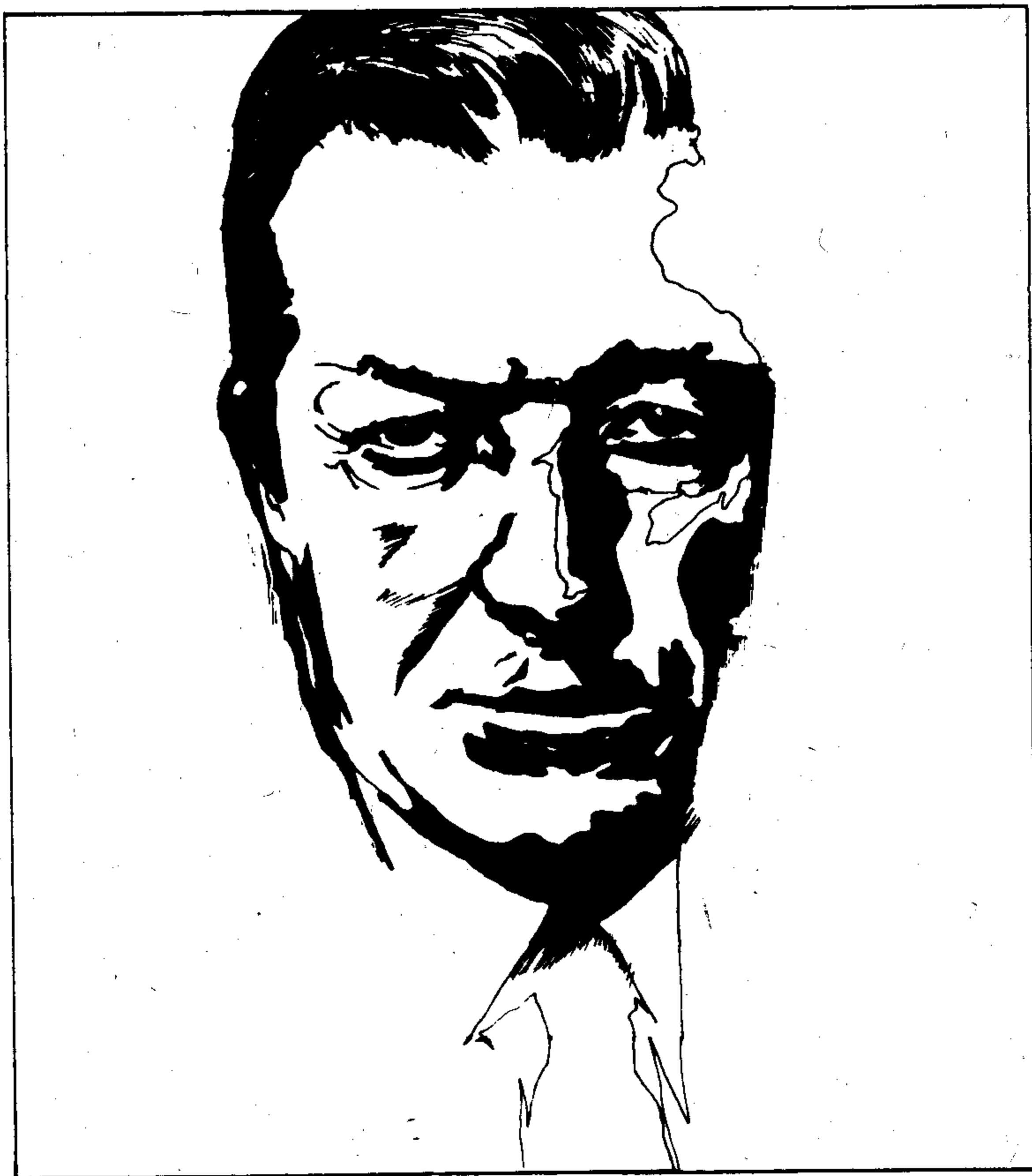
But the influx of foreign investment only masked the underlying problems of the Irish economy. Productivity levels remained well below those of the advanced capitalist countries. And, as export markets have contracted with the recession, so Ireland has found it harder to make ends meet: in 1979, for instance, export volumes rose only 5.5 per cent against a target of 12 per cent, resulting in a record trade deficit of some £760m.

Last year's break from sterling and entry into the European Monetary System confirmed Ireland's growing dependence on European markets and its turn away from British outlets. But the move was followed by renewed pressure on the punt as the country's trade slid still further into the red. Now the Dublin Government has been forced to defend Ireland's currency by squeezing the money supply and jacking up interest rates.

The EEC has also proved a mixed blessing for Ireland's farms. Joining Europe enabled Ireland's agricultural sector to forge ahead, aided by subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy. Now, as economic stringency makes Britain and West Germany try to keep their contributions to the EEC budget to a minimum, Irish farmers are beginning to feel the pinch.

Together with membership of the EEC,

# HAUGHEY: the greener they come...



state expenditure was a major stimulus to capital accumulation in Ireland. Without it the country would not have been able to offer foreign capital the loans and tax exemptions that made investment in Ireland such a lucrative prospect. However, state expenditure has to be paid for: today — through taxation; or tomorrow — by borrowing.

### Ireland's new premier only talks nationalism to make his austerity measures more palatable

The Government has run into difficulties on both fronts. Taxation levels have risen steadily over the past 20 years, and attempts to push them up still further have met with vigorous opposition from farmers and workers. Indeed, working class disgust with Ireland's taxation system has forced the Dublin Trades Council and a reluctant Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) to organise demonstrations against it. In January the country came to a standstill as hundreds of thousands of workers downed tools to march in protest against Ireland's PAYE system.

Meanwhile state indebtedness threatens to plunge Ireland into financial chaos. In 1979 the government borrowing requirement lay at £1000m, equivalent to a colossal 14 per cent of Ireland's Gross National Product. The interest charges on this amount alone absorb a whole year's worth of PAYE tax revenues. At the same time mounting state expenditure has fuelled the expansion of credit, with the result that inflation rates soared to 13 per cent in 1979. A consequence: Irish exports have become less competitive on the world market.

With stagnation spreading throughout the West the Irish bubble is about to burst. Neither the EEC nor the state can rescue Ireland's fragile economy from its difficulties. In fact they compound them.

### Lynch's demise, Haughey's rise

In 1977 Lynch won a landslide victory with his platform of popular nationalism and his commitment to economic expansion. He played on the people's aspirations towards national unity and promised to calm trade union unrest by making a 'dash for growth'. But last year Lynch left office in ignominy. What went wrong?

Rising unemployment and roaring inflation provoked a wave of resentment against Fianna Fail and its leader. In the European Elections in June the party's vote slumped. Prominent independents such as Neil Blaney and T J Maher won seats, leading to speculation that they would form new parties (republican and farmers' respectively) to challenge Fianna Fail in the Dail. A spate of strikes — by postal workers, oil tanker drivers and transport workers — indicated burgeoning working class discontent with the Lynch regime. However, although Ireland's recession dealt Lynch's popularity a severe blow, it was the national question that was the immediate cause of his demise.

For some time Lynch had, under heightening pressure from London, been playing down Fianna Fail's ritual calls for Irish unity and the eventual withdrawal of troops from the Six Counties. After the August bombings the British demanded co-operation from him on cross-border security. They got it.

Lynch faced a storm of protest from within the ranks of Fianna Fail — a storm that grew with each new move he made. He cringed before Thatcher when summoned by her to London. At a speech at Waterville, County Kerry, he condemned Mountbatten's killers but neglected to issue the customary plea for Irish unity. By this time the party faithful had had enough, and Sile de Valera, granddaughter of Fianna Fail's founder, launched a forceful attack on Lynch for his abandonment of the republican tradition. Lynch's subsequent disclosure that British army helicopters had been given the right of 'hot pursuit' of IRA suspects over the border was the occasion for further uproar. Party member Bill Loughnane labelled Lynch a

liar, but Lynch's supporters were in such a weak position that their attempt to have his critic disciplined failed.

The beneficiary of Lynch's fall from favour was Haughey. Haughey had first made a reputation for himself in the late 'sixties by his vocal support for the nationalist population in the Six Counties. He had added to it in 1970, when he was sacked by Lynch for his alleged involvement in gun-running for the IRA (he was later acquitted). Now he stepped forward into the struggle for the leadership of Fianna Fail as the bearer of the party's nationalist heritage.

The celebrations of the centenary of the birth of Padraig Pearse, one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising, allowed Haughey to re-advertise his commitment to a united Ireland. While Lynch was announcing that Pearse's message for today was 'that we must work and live for Ireland, not die, and most certainly not kill for it' (*Hibernia*, 15 November 1979), Haughey was telling a commemoration dinner audience that Partition was 'inconceivable' to Pearse who 'sought freedom by arms only because there was no other way open'. Two massive by-election defeats in Lynch's home base around Cork sealed his fate. He resigned before the party had even met to assess the poll results. Within days, Haughey was elected as new party leader and Taoiseach of the Irish Republic.

### Imperialism's servant

The resurgence of nationalism in Fianna Fail shows that Britain's continuing domination of Ireland remains central to Irish politics. But, like his predecessors de Valera and Lemass, Haughey has taken up the nationalist cause only to betray it. He uses populist rhetoric to build an all-class consensus of support for the austerity measures which Irish capitalism requires.

Since 1970 workers have been hit by 'National Pay Agreements' drawn up by unions and employers. Last year these accords gained formal government backing as the 'National Understanding' — Ireland's Social Contract. Under considerable pressure from the ICTU, the labour movement reluctantly endorsed it last July. But though its terms (a 16 per cent pay rise over 15 months) mean cuts in real wages, they are not enough for the new Government. That is why Haughey needs nationalism: because to push through the savage measures that capital demands he needs the firmest political consensus he can get.

Haughey has pledged that the Government's 1979 current spending deficit of £520m will not be repeated. Yet cuts pose problems. In Britain, Labour's cuts fell most heavily on expenditure on new projects: cancelling construction programmes was the simplest way to save money and minimise public sector workers' wrath. But for Haughey to take this option would be to court disaster. The foreign investment that is so vital to Ireland's economy rests on the continued provision of industrial infrastructure — factory sites, roads, telecommunications and so on — by the state. Ireland cannot cut state expenditure without cutting its own throat.

That the Irish Government is in a quandary was revealed by its January White Paper on the economy. Ostensibly written 'to indicate in a general way the shape of national development in the years immediately ahead', the document was put out with this hastily written preamble attached:

'Since the White Paper was finalised the international outlook and domestic situation have worsened . . . the various assumptions and expectations outlined in the White Paper will need to be reassessed in the light of these developments. This will be one of the main tasks of the Government in the coming months.'

Thus the Government both published and abandoned its perspectives on the same day. But though the seriousness of Ireland's economic plight may throw bourgeois policymakers into confusion, they are clear on one thing — they need to defeat the working class.

It was for this reason that Haughey greeted the 'eighties by going on television to announce that legislation to control the unions was a top priority for his Government. He plans new laws to outlaw the unofficial industrial action that has come to dominate Ireland's strike figures; and he plans new laws to bring in secret ballots too. But the ICTU is unlikely to oppose him: most recent disputes — such as those in the postal service and in electricity supply — have been called against its advice.

The feeble nature of capitalism in Ireland means that its survival depends on an all-out attack on workers' living standards. Reductions in wages and public services are more urgent there than in any other European country. So far, fear of working class resistance has stayed the Government's hand. But as Ireland's economic crisis worsens, the new Taoiseach has made clear that he is prepared to go ahead with the harsh measures needed to stabilise imperialist domination of the Twenty-six Counties.

Should his consensus policies fail, Haughey will not hesitate to resort to force. His sentimental affection for the republican cause has not stopped him from repressing republicans in the past. In 1961, following the IRA's Border Campaign, Haughey — then Minister of Justice — reconstituted Ireland's Special Criminal Court and made sure that the republicans tried by it got lengthy prison sentences. Even after the IRA announced the termination of its campaign in 1962, Haughey declared that Government Ministers would 'continue to use all the powers at their command to see that an end is put to all activities of this kind'. He meant what he said. Today Haughey has confirmed that 'security arrangements already in existence will be maintained'. In Dublin he recently sent the Gardai to round up members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party on trumped-up charges; over cross-border co-operation with the British Army he has agreed to exactly the same 'arrangements' that made Lynch so unpopular.

Just like Lynch, Haughey is completely loyal to British imperialism. His function is to mediate between its interests and those of the Irish people. He will try to contain both the struggle against British domination and the trade union struggle through a combination of phrasemongering about Irish unity and police-state methods. As the *Financial Times* pithily summed up the British imperialist's assessment of his succession to power, 'perhaps the old poacher will yet turn out to be the best gamekeeper'. And the radical nationalists of Fianna Fail, always ready to lard their speeches with republican or socialist slogans, according to their audience, will get him plenty of support in his new job.

Today the recession shakes the political structure of the Twenty-six Counties to its foundations. Haughey will have to satisfy the national aspirations he stirred up in his campaign for the party leadership. He will also have to satisfy the demands of Fianna Fail's worker and farmer supporters who will soon be disenchanted by rising prices and mass unemployment. Most important, he will have to satisfy the imperialists' demands for stable economic and political conditions for capitalist exploitation. Haughey has a big job on his hands: a bigger job than any previous leader of the Irish Republic.

Phil Murphy

## Cabinet papers, 1949:

# How Labour propped up Partition

When Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee introduced the Ireland Act of 1949 he gave the Ulster Unionists what they had always wanted. He promised them that the splitting of Ireland into two regions — the Six Counties and the Twenty-six Counties — that Britain had enforced through Partition in 1921 would last, if they willed it, for ever. The 1921 settlement had given the Unionists a built-in majority with which to guarantee British rule in the Six Counties; the Ireland Act consolidated that rule.

Three decades later Partition still overshadows Irish politics. The new Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of the Twenty-six Counties, Charles Haughey, is more closely identified with the aspirations of the Irish people for a united country than any other Taoiseach since de Valera. In the Six Counties the conference recently convened by British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Humphrey Atkins has been torn between those who insist on 'an Irish dimension' and those who regard the Six Counties as an inviolable part of the United Kingdom. Now the release of the 1949 Labour Government's Cabinet Papers has thrown new light on the forces that led to the strengthening of British domination over Ireland.

Recent statements by Sean MacBride, Minister for External Affairs in the Twenty-six Counties at the time of the Ireland Act, reveal how the Dublin government went about stabilising relations between itself, the Stormont regime and Westminster all the time that it made the most republican noises. But how, given the strength of nationalist sentiment in Ireland, was Britain able to get away with what it did? How, too, was Attlee able to win his party's support for such a gesture of appeasement to the Unionists?

### Coming to terms with Partition

We can answer the first question by looking at the coalition government that Fine Gael chief John Costello formed with the newly created Clann na Poblachta party after the defeat of de Valera's Fianna Fail in the Twenty-six Counties elections of 1948; and by an inspection of the Republic of Ireland Bill that Costello's government rushed through the Dail later that same year.

As leader of Clann na Poblachta, MacBride was the driving force behind the Bill. Son of John MacBride — who had been executed after the Easter Rising of 1916 — and Yeats' heroine Maud Gonne, MacBride had been chief of staff of the IRA in the 'thirties. After leaving that position he had drawn republicans and left-wingers from Fianna Fail and the Irish Labour Party together with former supporters of the radical Saor Eire group to start Clann na Poblachta. This party was committed to the declaration of an Irish Republic and the implementation of far-reaching radical social reforms. After its foundation in 1946, Clann na Poblachta grew rapidly in size and popularity. It took 10 seats in the Dail at the 1948 election; MacBride became number two in the Cabinet hierarchy.

The Republic of Ireland Act fulfilled the hopes of a generation of Twenty-six Counties politicians. It was the climax of a long process of coming to terms with Partition, while at the same time retaining a token adherence to a united Ireland.

The workers and small farmers of Ireland have never given up their objective

of full Irish independence. However, the small capitalists and large farmers who retained *political* control over the successive movements for national liberation have always sought to compromise with British imperialism. Tensions between the aspirations of the masses towards national independence and the tendency of their petit-bourgeois leadership to acquiesce to British domination have dogged every Irish government since 1921. The 1948 Act, however, resolved many of these tensions — for a time. Costello was right when, 20 years after the Republic was established, he described its declaration as his government's greatest achievement.

### From Redmond to de Valera

The propensity of those at the head of the movement for Irish independence to come to an accommodation with imperialism can be traced back to 1913, the date when Irish Parliamentary Party leader John Redmond conceded the principle of Partition to the British. From that year onwards control of the nationalist struggle passed into the hands of the republicans; but they too proved incapable of bringing the fight against British imperialism to victory. In 1921, after the abortive Easter Rising and the bloody Tan War that followed it, they signed the 'Articles of Agreement for a Treaty' drawn up by British Prime Minister Lloyd George, so putting their names to the division of Ireland he



**'It is hereby declared that Northern Ireland remains part of His Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom and it is hereby affirmed that in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be a part of His Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom, without the consent of the parliament of Northern Ireland.'**

### Ireland Act 1949

had agreed with the Unionists back in 1916. Though Lloyd George had carefully drawn the border to ensure a permanent majority in favour of the union with Britain, republican leaders like Michael Collins accepted this. They were convinced that they could hold Britain to its promise that a Boundary Commission would investigate the possibility of redrawing the border at some date in the future.

This acquiescence to the Treaty provoked an immediate division in the republican ranks. However, those who, like de Valera, rejected the Treaty did not contest Partition, regarding it as a side-issue. They focused on the particular terms that the Treatyites had negotiated in London, singling out for attack the oath of allegiance to the Crown that was

required of all members of the Irish parliament.

Civil war broke out between the two factions of the republican movement. It only ended when, with British help, the pro-Treaty forces finally crushed the republicans. Thereafter William Cosgrave established the Twenty-six Counties as the Irish Free State, an artificial creation with the status of a Dominion of the British Commonwealth.

The Free State's constitution tried to present the Treatyites' deal with imperialism as being consistent with the republican ideals that still remained a powerful force in Ireland. All subsequent Dublin governments have abided by the consensus embodied in that constitution, holding high a united Ireland as their ultimate goal whilst in practice endorsing the maintenance of Partition.

In 1925 the Boundary Commission agreed to ratify the existing border arrangements, conferring a degree of stability on what had previously been passed off as a temporary expedient. De Valera's entry into the Dail in 1927 and to the Taoiseach's office in 1932 did not upset this state of affairs. For all his gestures of hostility towards King and Commonwealth de Valera had no intention of doing anything about the border. In 1933 he announced:

'The only policy for abolishing Partition that I can see is for us, in this part of Ireland, to use such freedom as we can secure to get for the people in this part of Ireland such conditions as will make the people in the other part of Ireland wish to belong to this part.'

Clearly de Valera was in no hurry to end British rule. As the years passed Partition came to appear more and more permanent.

### Anti-Partitionists in name only

After the Second World War, Irish nationalists, disillusioned with de Valera, pinned their faith in an independent future on Sean MacBride. They were to be disappointed. While MacBride appealed to the dispossessed with his vision of an independent Ireland, his pro-Treaty partners in Fine Gael were more pragmatic. They sought to make Ireland a republic in order to clarify relations with Britain and the Commonwealth and thus further its economic development.

Costello was determined to shed the legacy of the Civil War by giving the Twenty-six Counties a superficial independence from Britain. By removing Ireland from the Commonwealth, the Republic of Ireland Act achieved his aim. The fact that this ratification of the position of the Twenty-six Counties with the enthusiastic backing of MacBride made the ending of Partition even more remote was scarcely noticed. Indeed, in a grand gesture to the nationalist tradition, the Republic of Ireland was inaugurated on the day of the thirty-third anniversary of the Easter Rising.

Thenceforth the Irish government's approach to British domination proceeded on two levels. On the surface, it continued to proclaim its commitment to a united Ireland — particularly after Britain's 1949 Act. Financed by church gate collections throughout the country, an all-party committee was formed to sponsor propaganda against Partition. At the same time the Anti-Partition League paid for de Valera to tour the USA, Australia and Britain, to bolster traditional republican support for the ideal he had abandoned as Taoiseach. A youthful Conor Cruise O'Brien played a major part in what he later described as 'the cavernous inanities' of anti-Partition propaganda.

But beneath the bombast the Irish government pursued a hard-headed foreign policy. The young and talented MacBride was chosen to formalise relations between the new republic and Britain — and with the Six Counties.

MacBride, now an international trouble-maker

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# ...Partition

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shooter for the United Nations (recent assignments include Namibia and Iran), has disclosed details of his 1949 talks with Tory leader Winston Churchill and with Unionist Premier Basil Brooke, later Lord Brookeborough (*The Guardian*, 5 January 1980). His claim that these talks aimed to advance the cause of Irish unity can be dismissed as an attempt to keep up the anti-Partition cover which cloaked the external affairs of the new republic. Churchill carried a lingering resentment at Ireland's neutrality in the Second World War. He sympathised with the Ulster Unionists — Irish unity would have been the last thing he was prepared to negotiate over. As for Brooke, he was infamous for his declaration that he would not employ a Catholic and his bitter intransigence on the border issue: from 1921 until his death in 1973 he never crossed into the Twenty-six Counties.

MacBride's talks had nothing to do with uniting Ireland. Pre-dating the formal discussions between Dublin Premier Lemass and northern leader O'Neill in 1965 (and contact between Lemass and Wilson) they were an attempt by the Twenty-six Counties coalition to find a rapprochement with its neighbours. MacBride's manoeuvres were a sign that Ireland's relative economic isolation was coming to a close; that the protectionism that de Valera had instituted in the 'thirties had begun to give way to the free movement of capital and commodities between Britain and Ireland — a trend that was consummated at the end of the 'fifties.

MacBride's tirades against Partition were for public consumption only. Privately he had to do business with the British — and Partition was not going to get in the way. MacBride reassured Stormont and Westminster that he was not about to end Britain's hegemony over Ireland. His diplomatic skills were later rewarded with accolades from both the Stalinist and the imperialist camps: he owns both the Order of Lenin and a Nobel Peace Prize.

Thus the erstwhile leader of Irish republicanism came to the aid of the British ruling class in its drive to stabilise Anglo-Irish relations. With the dawning of the Republic Irish national independence was announced as a reality — at least in the major part of the country; the Six Counties became more than ever just another province of the United Kingdom. A fresh generation of leaders of the national liberation struggle had followed the logic of petit-bourgeois nationalism and sold out to imperialism. As a consequence Clann na Poblachta soon disintegrated and the republican movement stagnated for two decades.

## Attlee's pledge

Britain responded to Ireland's break from the Commonwealth by taking the opportunity to reinforce its connection with the Six Counties. The wave of anti-Partition feeling in Ireland and elsewhere at the end of 1948 raised British Cabinet fears of a resurgence of republicanism. Lord Rugby, British representative in Ireland during and after the war, despatched an anxious memo to Westminster:

'It is my view that this rivalry between the parties in an anti-partition crusade will bring the gunman back again. My forecast is that unless a move is made now on our side to anticipate and disperse the forces and influences now gathering we shall have bloodshed in Ireland, a grave state of disorder in the north with world opinion once again only too ready to believe that England is misbehaving herself in Ireland.' (*Cabinet Papers*, 1949)

The Cabinet response was direct: Attlee emphatically declared 'no surrender'. In the circumstances 'the most effective action' he could take was to publish his

Ireland Bill, with its declaration that 'Northern Ireland remains part of His Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom and its affirmation that in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be part of His Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the parliament of Northern Ireland' (ibid). He was also ready to use the British army to suppress the nationalist movement. 'Troops', he argued, 'were present in Northern Ireland... to ensure that the will of the majority was not overridden by pressures from outside the United Kingdom' (ibid).

As for relations with the new republic, the Labour Government dismissed Lord Rugby's grim foreboding and recognised the rhetoric of anti-Partition for what it was — hot air. It was, however, conciliatory on the crucial issues of citizenship and trade. The British government encouraged the free flow of migrant labour from Ireland approved in the 1948 Nationality Act and retained preferential trade arrangements. As British imperialism entered the era of 'decolonisation' it was happy to devolve direct control of the nations it oppressed to local rulers — provided that its interests were safeguarded. For this Attlee knew he could rely on Costello and MacBride.

At the same time Attlee calmed Northern worries, both about the anti-Partition campaign and reports of republican guerrillas training in the border counties. The Ireland Act legitimised the sectarian Six Counties regime. 'As watertight a pledge as any die-hard Unionist could desire', it was 'a remarkable concession from a British Labour Government, some of whose supporters had long looked with a very cold eye on what they regarded as the reactionary character of Northern Ireland politics' (F S L Lyons, *Ireland since the famine*, 1971). Let us now turn to our second question by looking at how those supporters 'opposed' the Ireland Bill as it passed through Parliament.

## Tribune helps John Bull out

The Labour left was unhappy with Attlee's concession to the Ulster Unionists. Apart from the outrages they perpetrated on their own turf, the Unionists had a record of relentless opposition to the radical initiatives of the post-war Labour Government. The left was appalled to see its party leaders in accord with bigoted Orangemen. Tribune MP Hugh Delargy protested that the leadership 'take the Tory and Unionist side against the democratic labour and nationalist side'. He objected to the Bill because he felt it was 'morally wrong to mutilate a nation' (*Hansard*, 3 May 1949).

The left's approach to the Six Counties was laid out in full in a special Tribune pamphlet *John Bull's other Ireland: an exposure of the policies of the Ulster government*. In this, Geoffrey Bing, a leading member of the Labour 'Friends of Ireland' group, indicated the substance of the Labour left's disagreements with the Party leadership. Bing upbraided them for forgetting that it was 'directly in Britain's interests...not only to have a prosperous Six Counties but to have a prosperous Ireland as a whole'. Still, he wasn't too bothered about the Twenty-six Counties breaking off from Britain: 'one may regret the severing of the last of the formal ties which used to bind the countries together but in reality membership of the sterling area is a link far stronger than any formal or historic connection with the crown'. Like the government the left was not going to get sentimental about the Commonwealth or oaths of allegiance — just as long as the rule of capital was secure.

Because the left accepted Britain's right to oppress Ireland, questioning only the form in which control was exercised, it gradually came round to accept the Ireland Bill. It objected to Attlee's pan-

dering to the Unionists, but at the same time looked forward to bringing the civilising influence of British democratic socialism to bear on the undemocratic and barbarous aspects of the existing Six Counties regime. Bing called for a 'frontal attack on bigotry' and for decisive action against gerrymandering: 'if necessary the British government could consider using their overriding authority under the Government of Ireland Act to see that fair electoral conditions are re-established'. As ever the left called on the British state to be 'fair' to the Irish.

Inevitably the Labour left's opposition to what it regarded as the 'immorality' of the Bill gave way to endorsement of the possibilities it opened up for the more humane administration of imperialist oppression in the Six Counties. As Tribune MP JPW Mallalieu described Parliament's final discussion of it,

'the Bill went through virtually unchallenged. Indeed during the short debate on the Third Reading all sides of the House did their best to send it off in an atmosphere of good will. Hugh Delargy, who had been one of its most effective opponents, made a genuinely moving plea for moderation.' (*Tribune*, 20 May 1949)

The left had so thoroughly abandoned any concern to defend the right of the Irish people to national independence that it ended up pleading with Unionist reaction to rule its fiefdom in a less offensive manner. Commissions and inquiries into civil liberties came and went; conditions in the Six Counties remained pretty much the same. At least the Unionists acknowledged what the Labour Party could not — that the repressive and undemocratic features of their regime could not be dispensed with.

What about the Communist Party? The *Daily Worker* covered the Commons debates but deemed the whole issue of British oppression of Ireland of so little importance that it made no editorial comment about it. And what was true of the CP was true for the whole official labour movement in Britain. It let Attlee's pledge to Unionist reaction go by on the nod.

## An unstable solution

The reformist left thus helped British imperialism to establish a new era of stability in Anglo-Irish relations. As far as the Labour leadership was concerned the Six Counties became more than ever just 'another region of the United Kingdom'. It did its best to ensure that Partition remained unquestioned in the British labour movement. Today the Labour Party left never tires of acclaiming the achievements of Attlee's post-war Labour Government. From the point of view of British imperialism the 1949 Ireland Act was indeed one of them.

Westminster's Ireland Act and the Dail's Republic of Ireland Act, plus some discreet diplomacy, papered over the cracks caused by Britain's domination of Ireland. For almost 20 years, during which Ireland was able to reap some of the benefits of the expansion of the world economy, the botched solution thought up by Lloyd George and bolstered by Attlee seemed to work. Then as the world moved into recession things began to fall apart in Ireland.

All the carefully framed constitutional guarantees in the world could no longer preserve stable British rule in Ireland. In went the troops in their thousands, making brutally clear that only the military might of the British state underwrites the fragile patchwork of Partition. All the conflicts submerged for 50 years erupted onto the streets of Derry and Belfast. The present stalemate reveals the impotence of British imperialism; it also shows that the forces fighting to resolve this conflict — in Ireland and in Britain — have a long struggle ahead.

Mike Freeman

# Chix and the GMWU BUBBLE TROUBLE

When black trade unionists fight they fight alone. Dispute after dispute, they find themselves left defenceless by the bureaucrats who lead their unions. The current strike by Asian women at Chix Confectionery, a family firm based at Slough, Berkshire, is the latest example of this.

The sweet business often takes on immigrant women as extras during the pre-Christmas period. It knows that they'll accept low pay and bad conditions. They often don't speak English, usually have no experience in trade unions and can be easily bullied by white supervisors. They often don't present too much trouble when they're sacked.

Chix has been playing this trick for years. Asian women are employed for both routine and seasonal work. Conditions are bad all the time. Work comes in two shifts: from 8 to 5 in the day and from 6 to 10 at night. It's hard, dirty and dangerous, and until six months ago wages were just 95p an hour. You get three minutes to go to the toilet and there's no paper provided because Mr Rose, the manager, says you'd steal it if it was. At the end of your shift you get three minutes to wash off the chewing gum and starch you've got all over you and to clock off. And you get racist remarks all the time.

Two winters ago Chix tried its Christmas number on once too often. From February 1979 onwards, workers there started joining the GMWU. Soon most were members; those who weren't were mainly white and in supervisory positions.

In August the GMWU served notice on Rose that it wanted recognition. He just stalled and stalled. So, since 10 October, 96 Asian women have been out on strike.

## The struggle so far

From the start they've been holding pickets on a rota system from 6.30 every morning. On Wednesdays everybody's out in force. They're determined to stick it out: although a few workers from the day shift have left for other jobs, those who work from 6 to 10 in the evening are still solid.

Chix isn't just part of the confectionery industry; it's part of Slough's enormous trading estate too. Industry covering more than seven million square feet is situated there.

Capitalists on the estate are watching the struggle at Chix with considerable interest. They know that a victory for the management there will help them in their own efforts to tighten up on labour discipline. And make those efforts they must. For, despite Slough's prosperity in the past, the employers are going to have difficult times ahead.



Worth £200 million, close to Heathrow airport and equipped with its own electricity generating station to insulate it from power cuts, Slough's industrial complex is owned by Slough Trading Estate Ltd. STE is a big company. It owns 10 similar estates in other parts of Britain and abroad. Despite the recession, STE's shares have risen from 78p to 180p in the last three years. But that hasn't stopped the effects of Britain's low profitability reaching Slough.

In January registered unemployment in Slough shot up by 12 per cent — the highest increase for a year. Forty workers have lost their jobs at the Faberge perfume factory and more redundancies are on the way: 74 workers are to be given their cards at British Tissues, 50 are coming up for the chop at Lin Plastic Containers, and at Investacast, an engineering company, a protracted struggle is still going on over seven sackings. This is how the local careers office described the situation:

'It looks as if the tide has turned. After enjoying the best employment situation for four years, we in the service must expect increasing problems in helping young people find employment opportunities.' (Slough Express, 25 January 1980)

These are the prospects that workers at Slough face. For the bosses things look different. The more unemployment they can create, the harder they can get the workers who manage to hold on to their jobs to work. But it goes further than that. The scores of small and medium-sized sweet, plastics and light engineering firms that form the backbone of industry in Slough rely for their economic survival on the political oppression of the town's 18 000 blacks. It's in their interest to see that oppression increase.

This is where the capitalist state comes in. Together with local immigration offi-

cials, the police have stepped up the search for 'illegal immigrants', and have enlisted the help of several Asian informers in the process. 'Put up or shut up' is the state's message to the blacks Slough employers make their profits from. That's why the police have attacked pickets, arresting a number of women and a shop steward for abusive language and assault, and why they have brought in reinforcements from Maidenhead to help mini-buses packed with scabs force their way into the factory.

Chix is a test case for capitalists in Slough and workers everywhere. The strikers there must win.

## How the bureaucrats behave

They won't win if the leadership of the GMWU has anything to do with it. When the strike began the union refused strike pay on the grounds that the women hadn't been in the union long enough to qualify. After two months' delay the strikers were allowed a miserable £10.50 a week. As far as the GMWU is concerned, taking dues off newly recruited black workers is OK, but giving them strike pay isn't.

The GMWU bureaucracy isn't just mean. It's all ready to sell the workers out. At one stage, Jerry McMullen, London regional officer of the GMWU, told Rose he would accept redundancies on the night shift and tone down the terms of the

union's recognition claim. But Rose wouldn't have any of it: he wants to scrap the night shift. And he still won't recognise the union.

When it comes to solidarity, the GMWU bureaucracy drags its feet. All its attempts to get recognition have been spent in the London offices of ACAS — a cog in the same state machine that is grinding up the pickets outside Chix every day. Whenever it has to choose between defending blacks and siding with British democracy, it takes the latter course. Now the GMWU blames the labour movement for its own failure to mobilise for the mass pickets.

## The way to win

We're not going to let the GMWU leaders get away with this disgusting performance. The RCT has been sending members and supporters along to the picket line for weeks now. And we've been spreading the struggle too. This is how the right-wing *South London Press* reported our latest initiative:

### BUBBLE TROUBLE

'Industrial trouble at a Berkshire factory is bubbling over into South London.

The far-left Revolutionary Communist Tendency is organising flying pickets of stores which still sell 'Chix' bubble gum.

The group is supporting 96 women who have been on strike at the firm's Slough plant over

recognition of the GMWU and is calling for a boycott of Chix products.

"Ask the shop manager to take Chix bubble gum and chocolate cigarettes from his shelves", it says in a statement. Goldings Newsagents, Wandsworth Road, bowed to this request. "If I didn't take the sweets away I would have got pickets", said the manager.

The latest target was the Peckham Cash Mart in Grove Park where pickets were out in force on Saturday morning.

(12 February 1980)

Picketing and blacking are the ways to spread the action, put pressure on the employers and raise wider support for the strike. It's no good waiting for the GMWU to act. The local officials didn't even know that workers at Brooker Beresford Ltd, Uxbridge — one of Chix' main London wholesalers — were also members of the GMWU.

We back the Chix workers' fight for union recognition all the way. But we know that joining a union isn't enough to fight racism — that in fact the unions are complicit in it. Why else has the GMWU tried to bargain away the Chix workers' jobs? This is what makes the battle in the labour movement against racist immigration controls so important. If we can win that one, we can get the Chix workers the mass union support they so desperately need.

Bob Radcliffe

# letters

## Freedom in question

I took up copy two of the next step; reading it has provided new ideas and made me think about ideas I held. You ask for comments and criticisms, and I'd like to ask a few points about the 'Freedom' article which struck me as a workmanlike attempt at a (for me at least) difficult subject.

1 Attacks on secret ballots and support of mass meetings instead. Why? Don't you trust secret ballots? Can't people be intimidated to vote against action at meetings, especially in the current political climate?

2 The bourgeoisie aren't hold elections over most of the face of the earth. Almost every country claims to hold elections of some sort. Whose then pass your test?

3 Freedom from poverty, physical destruction and appalling conditions. How does a change in the ownership of the means of production and raw materials eliminate these? Surely as long as there is any industry as we know it now these problems will exist to some degree? To what extent have these freedoms already been achieved in the UK?

I'm rather puzzled on these three issues. The rest made sense to me but these will rather devalue the article until I resolve them.

Finally, is the RCT a part of, or affiliated to, any other party, or is it 100 per cent independent? I'd like to know what you think now.

Paul Isaacs  
East London

Mike Freeman writes:

For a discussion of secret ballots and elections see the article *Their democracy, our rights* in this issue of the next step. As for the third point on the relationship between poverty and the ownership of the means of production, our attitude is as follows.

Capitalism cannot abolish poverty because its capacity to develop the productive forces of society is constrained by capitalist production itself — by the pursuit of profit. Capital's drive to expand social production conflicts with the narrow basis on which that expansion takes place, the private ownership of the means of production.

The unemployment now spreading through all the imperialist countries of the world and the starvation that has strangled nations oppressed by imperialism for years starkly reveal capitalism's limitations. Poverty is what industry

as we know it' — that is, capitalist industry — brings and must always bring. Only a different form of industry, socialist industry, will end it. Under socialism the ownership of the means of production will be removed from private hands and put under the control of society as a whole. Instead of being aimed at making profit, production will be directed towards the satisfaction of people's needs.

As for the RCT, we are 100 per cent independent.

## SWP abused?

Dear comrades,

A paper which pretends to a position of complete novelty ('the first working class paper since the 'thirties' ??) must do better than merely sniping at every other group to prove its autonomy.

To start at the front page — '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' (the next step, January 1980). Now it is just not good enough to say that the SWP has ignored the role of the 'national interest' in workers' struggles. I quote Tony Cliff:

'The overwhelming majority of workers have always believed in the "national interest". They always believed that profit was necessary — if the employers cannot make profits the workers cannot have jobs. They have always accepted that an inegalitarian distribution of wealth and income was just and inevitable. These ideas have in no way been able to prevent the class struggle.' (International Socialism, autumn 1979)

To say, as you do, that 'national interest' ideologies are the sole cause of the present working class defeats is to put the absurd position that either (a) 'national interest' ideology is a recent phenomenon; or (b) that there have been no working class victories in the past. The position you are thus cornered into is clearly a-historical.

You compound this with a programme of demands that is pure SWP with one exception — the completely nebulous — 'every action has to be fought from an anti-capitalist perspective'. Try actually READING the demands of rank-and-file papers! Without an anti-capitalist perspective the other demands are meaningless! This is pure pompous verbosity, comrades.

I would like to consider two other major slanders. I would agree that anti-imperialism cannot be instilled in a Sunday afternoon stroll.

The SWP, as you should know, recognises the centrality of the workplace. Which means that every demand is taken thence. Every major article in *Socialist Worker* is followed by the magic words 'take this into your workplace and trade union branch'. And this is not just SAID — just before Christmas, Hammersmith Town Hall bulletin concerned TROOPS OUT NOW: not 'back the Young Liberals'!! This is what I call 'rank and file action'.

Finally, on abortion, it is just not true to state that *Socialist Worker* considers abortion a class issue 'merely because the Tories do'. What crass misrepresentation. Our campaigning against the Corrie Bill has been hinged, from the outset, on class considerations. There is no way that you can repudiate that without extremely selective quotes — like the ones you use throughout the paper.

Some advice — do get a camera. Your layout is daunting to even the hardest cadre.

Fraternally,  
J Nicholls  
Hammersmith SWP

The SWP does indeed proclaim its support for 'Troops out now' and maintain that abortion is 'a class issue'. But for the SWP these are merely general statements of principle — statements of little practical consequence. What are workers to think when, on the same page of *Socialist Worker* they see a call for 'Troops out now', and an appeal for support for a Young Liberal demonstration which requests the withdrawal of troops as part of a British solution to the war? This can only worsen the political confusion about Ireland that already prevails in the labour movement.

We criticise the SWP's positions on Ireland and abortion because it fails to deal with these questions from a working class point of view. The fact that the SWP can take basic demands like 'Troops out now' and 'free abortion on demand' and drop or modify them shows that it regards clear class politics as a luxury.

We quote the publications of the SWP to show its adaptation to backward sentiments in the labour movement. Of course, it always dismisses this type of political criticism as 'sniping'. But such a contemptuous attitude towards polemic only reveals how the SWP rejects the clarification of differences on the left that is so vital to the defence of working class interests. It testifies to the political weakness of the SWP.

You raise the question of the 'national interest'. In recent months, thousands of workers have agreed to closures, redundancies and cuts in real wages. Why? Because they can't see any alternative to the argument that these are the only measures that will ensure the survival of 'their' industry. They can't see any alternative to bourgeois ideas. Cliff's observation that 'these ideas have in no way been able to prevent the class struggle' is facile. The class struggle is the result of capitalist production itself: all the ideas in the world could not prevent it. How

intense it is depends on the progress of capital accumulation. In the 'fifties and 'sixties, when accumulation went forward, class conflict receded. Generally speaking, trade unionism worked. Now that the recession has made the class struggle sharper, it doesn't.

Although the political outlook of the working class does not create the class struggle, it does play a major part in determining its outcome. The SWP has never understood how reformism affects that outlook. During the post-war boom, when support for the 'national interest' had little effect on workers' struggles, Cliff concluded that reformism was a spent force and that militant shop stewards would form the nucleus of the revolutionary party of the future. Today, when reformism has been shown to be a potent force in undermining working class militancy, Cliff talks about 'the downturn' and the need for 'socialist arguments'. He fails to understand that the crisis only brings out the consequences of the reformist consciousness that has dominated the British labour movement for decades.

This is why the SWP is still unable to challenge the politics of the Labour Party. Yet, in or out of office, Labour subordinates workers' interests to the national interest. Labour left-wingers always couple token support for workers' struggles with calls to save British industry. It won't do to condemn our attack on their 'national interest' arguments as 'absurd' when workers' identification with plans to save British Steel, British Leyland and British Shipbuilders has led to thousands joining the dole queues.

The SWP's incessant proclamation of 'elementary trade union principles' won't stop unemployment rising. The set of principles outlined in the article 'Fighting redundancies' on our front page is not 'a programme of demands', nor is it 'pure SWP'. In fact there are no 'demands' on the front page at all. A glance at the SWP's 'Rank and File Code of Practice' shows how far our principles are from being 'pure SWP'. However the criticism of our stress on an anti-capitalist perspective says a lot.

Workers in struggle today rarely see their enemy as capitalism: they focus on the Tories, on incompetent managers or on Labour Party leaders and right-wing trade union bureaucrats. If workers' actions are to be successful such spontaneous expressions of class feeling must be transformed into explicit hostility to the capitalist system. To dismiss this as 'completely nebulous' is quite wrong. It is to let the reformist leadership of the labour movement go unchallenged. The SWP simply echoes workers' anger against Thatcher and Edwardes, or against Callaghan and Duffy. It adapts to reformism in the labour movement and simply tries to add momentum to workers' struggles — whatever their direction. *Socialist Worker* helps workers by drawing up lists of instructions about how to organise picket lines. That, it seems to us, is pompous verbosity.

As for the advice about the camera — we've taken it.

# Militant: what's all the fuss?

First it was Blunt. Then it was Robinson. Now it is Militant. The British bourgeoisie needs every political weapon it can lay its hands on — including anti-communism. But anti-communism demands 'communist' targets to fire at. Afghanistan's Russian guests suffice in the realm of foreign policy; the Labour Party's homegrown entrists will do for domestic affairs. Enter Militant, wheeled on by former Party national agent Lord Underhill.

At first sight Militant appears an unlikely candidate for anti-communist hysteria. An organisation that dismisses the International Marxist Group's community bulletin *Socialist Challenge* as 'ultra-left' is hardly likely to put fear into the hearts of the employers. An outfit that secretly advises its members that 'at a later stage perhaps even youth organisations outside the movement such as the Boys Brigade, Girl Guides, Young Christian Workers etc can provide fertile recruiting ground' (Militant, *Bulletin* [internal], Summer 1979) sounds almost respectable. A privately circulated document that ascribes the Tories' electoral victory to the fact that, in the period before it, many working class women were busying themselves 'in building their nests' and also 'in trying to buy homes' ('British perspectives 1979', in *Bulletin*, Summer 1979) is unlikely to prove much of a threat to the capitalists when times get rough. So why was Militant singled out for a witchhunt?

The reason is simple. Anti-communism is quite consistent with the desire to overhaul the main machinery for reconciling the masses to the needs of capital — the Labour Party. For the ruling class is worried about Labour. Labour's function is to make bourgeois politics palatable in the workers' movement; but it doesn't seem to be carrying it out that well. Thatcher may have succeeded in swinging government policy to the right, but Labour has failed to come up with any alternative with which to capture the middle ground of public opinion. Tory commentator Ronald Butt warns that Labour 'moderates' 'have increasingly little to say that carries conviction'; his colleague Geoffrey Smith says that Labour's right wing 'will not defeat the left if it appears to be no more than anti-left' (*The Times*, 17 & 18 January 1980).

So actually Militant doesn't exercise the bourgeoisie as much as the Labour right. For active workers, however, the reverse should be the case. Though Fleet Street's figures on Militant sales, finances, full-timers and branches have shown that the organisation is patchy, its politics can appear attractive to people angered by the sell-outs of the last Labour Government and unconvinced by Benn. Let's give them some scrutiny.

## How Militant began

When the Soviet Union invaded Eastern Europe after the Second World War a whole series of debates about Stalinism broke out on the British far left. It was in those debates that Militant's leader, Ted Grant, first made a name for himself.

The European working class had suffered more than 20 years of defeats. With Trotsky dead and his followers unprepared for the complex succession of

events that unfolded after 1945, the British far left broke up into two main camps. One declared that the reality of world Stalinism proved Trotsky's estimation of it wrong. The other merely stressed its adherence to Trotsky's ideas and closed its eyes to the changed economic and political relations of the 'forties. One of the chief ideologues of the empiricist trend was Tony Cliff, now leader of the Socialist Workers Party. Grant was a dominant figure in the orthodox trend.

To consolidate his ideas Cliff published a document titled *The nature of Stalinist Russia* in which he developed the unscientific view that the Soviet Union and its new satellites had turned into a new form of capitalism — state capitalism. Grant devoted a pamphlet to it called *The Marxist theory of the state* (1948). Militant still sells that pamphlet today.

In his document Grant attacks what he rightly terms Cliff's 'formalistic method' as applied to the state. Because Cliff naively sees the bureaucratised Soviet state as one giant capitalist enterprise, Grant sets about showing how the bourgeois state is tied to but not the same as the ruling class. In doing so he makes a number of errors — errors which find a coherent expression in the reactionary programme that Militant offers workers today.

## The bourgeois state that isn't

What Grant does is take the apparent autonomy of the capitalist state from capital accumulation for real. Marxists understand that the bourgeois state only appears autonomous from capital accumulation. It can do what individual employers cannot — enforce the interests of capital in general. Only the state can repress the whole working class (through the police) or ensure that the physical condition of the entire national workforce does not deteriorate too much (through unemployment benefit, health care or insurance, etc). But the very enforcement of the interests of capital in general brands the state as capitalist in every respect. Despite this, Grant attacks the 'state capitalist' conception of Russia by observing that 'in the whole of Cliff's material, the fact that the state under given conditions, can and does play a relatively independent role in the struggle between classes, is forgotten' (our emphasis).

Grant goes further. 'For quite a lengthy period', he contends, 'there can be a conflict between the state and the class which that state represents' (his emphasis). Indeed 'a state can be a proletariat (sic) state on the basis of political power, or it can be a proletariat state on the basis of the economy'. For Grant a state is what you make it.

Grant winds up as empiricist as Cliff. As if aware that his 'Marxist theory' of the state is steering him onto the familiar territory of social democracy, he asks himself why the reformists are mistaken in hoping that the working class can lay hold of the bourgeois state and use it for its own ends. He replies that they are wrong 'not for mystical reasons but because of certain very concrete facts'. And those facts are that 'in the modern state all the key positions are in the hands of people who are under the control of the

ruling class, have been specially selected by education, outlook, and conditions of life, to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie'. There the matter ends. For Grant capital exercises its domination through the state not because of its nature as capital, but because of the sociological character of the men and women who staff the state.

On these theoretical foundations Grant built a place and a programme for Militant. We will deal with each of these in turn.

## Where Militant fits in

By 1950 both Cliff and Grant were in the Labour Party, for want of a better forum to work in. But while the rank and file struggles of the 'sixties eventually made Cliff decide to lead his group out of the Party, Grant's commitment to state socialism made him look on Labour as more than a temporary haven.

Privately, many individuals in Militant explain that its continued existence in the Party is merely a tactical decision. But they are wrong. Militant can do nothing else but play a 'relatively independent role' in the Labour Party. Unlike the rest of the radical left, which — in or out of the Party — urges a vote for Labour so it can be 'exposed' in office, Militant winds up doing Labour's legwork because it believes Labour can actually make a socialist revolution. Once elected, Labour can take advantage of the 'conflict between the state and the class which that state represents'. Militant imagines that a workers' government can be established through the existing state machinery. Militant is in the Labour Party to make certain that the right kind of Party gets in.

## The wrongs of the right

Why is the present kind of Party the wrong kind? For Militant it is not the case that Labour politics always integrate the working class into capitalism. The problem is that when Labour gains control of the state machine the Party right blows its chances of using it in the interests of the masses:

'The Labour Government of 1966-70, under pressure of the civil servants and Big Business — their masters, rather than their servants — tried to saw the trunk of the tree on which they were sitting, by restricting the rights of the Unions.' ('Crisis in Britain and prospects for Labour', *Militant International Review*, March 1976)

Here we see the logic of Grant's understanding of the state as 'independent'. Always subject to opposing forces, the state can, backed by the bourgeoisie, 'get on top of' a Labour Party in power. The problem is that the agents of the state — the civil service, the Treasury, etc — gang up with the capitalist class and turn out to be Labour Ministers' 'masters, rather than their servants'. *The wrong people are in charge.*

For Militant the defect of the Labour right is that it loses its nerve when in power. The reason for this is that it lacks political perspective:

'It is because they can see no other course than trying to prop up diseased capitalism that the right-wing reformists behave in this way. Not prepared to "take on" big business they are forced to "take on" the working class.' (*Militant*, 23 February 1979)

That's all Militant has to say. It is enough to single out particular Labour right-wingers (Prentice in the past, Mason and Sandelson today) as targets for critical sociology again — to be vilified for their lifestyles, individual traits and so on — for the picture to be complete.

## Why workers love Labour

If Labour is flawed only by the presence of a band of petit-bourgeois 'trendies', why has Party membership and electoral support declined throughout the post-war

period? For Militant this question doesn't even arise:

'It is our tendency alone that has understood the loyalty that British workers instinctively have towards the Labour Party...Far from workers moving outside and against the Labour Party, history teaches us differently....' (internal document, October 1978, quoted in *The Times*, 14 January 1980)

For Militant workers are committed to Labour 'instinctively'. Darwin replaces Marx; indeed he replaces Lenin too — for if workers are always loyal to Labour and Labour can seize state power there is little need for a revolutionary party at all.

The reference to 'history' is peculiarly dishonest. It might be thought that Militant would justify its embedded position in the Labour Party by invoking Lenin and Trotsky's call to the European revolutionaries of the early 'twenties to join with reformist organisations in a *united front*. But unlike other radical left groups, which always explain their 'critical support' for Labour by this means, Militant doesn't. For the simple reason that a quick glance at Lenin's classic exposition of the united front tactic, *Left-wing communism: an infantile disorder* would reveal a bit of history Militant would rather forget. Namely, that revolutionary working class currents in Britain developed *precisely by moving outside and against the Labour Party*.

If Militant's view of the past is dishonest, the predictions it makes about the future are just ridiculous. Yet it is upon these that Militant bases all its 'tactics'. This is how it saw matters before the Wilson/Callaghan regime — before, it should be remembered, the advent of Labour's Social Contract:

'Right from the outset, the next Labour Government will be faced with radical demands by the working class and pressure from the capitalists that the brake should be applied.

'Past experience has shown that they will choose the latter course. The capitalists will then use the inaction of the Labour Government to smear it as "Socialism" in the eyes of the politically backward workers and prepare the way for splitting the Parliamentary Labour Party to form a National Government.' (Peter Taaffe, 'The British Trade Unions — the giant awakens', *Militant International Review*, autumn 1973)

After three years of Labour in office, Militant had to revise its opinions. 'By a dialectical social paradox', its followers learnt, 'the apparent stability of the government arises from the weakness of the capitalists socially' (*Militant International Review*, February 1977). Today, however, Militant is back in the same old groove. Though 'by a further dialectical contradiction of history...there has actually been a decline in the active membership of the Labour Party', that will change soon enough: 'As under the hammer blow of events the Labour Party moves to a more and more radical position, the masses will stream in their tens and then hundreds of thousands, to active membership of the Labour Party' ('British perspectives, 1979'). Instead of pursuing the Marxist method and grasping the present as a moment in history, Militant invents mythical futures out of an equally mythical past.

## What a Militant government would do

In Militant's scenario a new Labour Party, renovated by a mass influx of workers, will win a general election and push an enabling act through the House of Commons to nationalise 'the commanding heights' of the economy. Workers will then run factories and offices in committees — committees with equal numbers of both TUC appointees and government representatives on them.

Exciting stuff. We have now reached the logical conclusion of Grant's thoroughly reformist 'Marxist theory of the state'. It only requires Militant to add two extra arguments for its parliamentary cretinism to have full force.

The parliamentary road to socialism is



Ted Grant: Labour's friendly mole

also a peaceful road. Militant contends that a non-violent revolution is possible in Britain because Marx said so. It also maintains that soldiers, the military, etc, will pose few problems:

'The Army is composed in the main of unemployed youth from Wales, Scotland and the North of England. They will not be prepared to be used against their brothers and sisters in the working class.' (*British perspectives 1979*)

These homilies are just a joke. Marx did say that a peaceful transition to socialism was possible in Britain — and in America. Militant is not alone in 'noticing' this: once he had turned from Marxism to pro-imperialist politics, the German socialist leader Karl Kautsky made the same discovery way back in 1918. This is how Lenin dismissed it:

'The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is violence against the bourgeoisie; and the necessity of such violence is particularly called for, as Marx and Engels have repeatedly explained in detail (especially in *The civil war in France* and in the preface to it), by the existence of militarism and a bureaucracy. But it is precisely these institutions that were non-existent in Britain and America in the 1870s, when Marx made his observations (they do exist in Britain and America now)!' (Lenin, *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*)

As for the army, Militant conveniently forgets how 'unemployed youth from Wales, Scotland and the North' have been used by a whole succession of post-war governments to break strikes — the most recent one being that of the firemen in 1977.

### The causes of the crisis

More than most radical left organisations, Militant places considerable emphasis on 'economics'. It is the only group to make systematic propaganda against the economic policies of the Labour left. Many of the people Militant recruits are drawn towards it by the coherence of its economic programme, for in the Labour Party milieu questions of national economic policy are taken quite seriously. Let us first take a brief look at the 'economic analysis' presented by Militant before turning to its critique of Tribune.

Militant frequently makes a nod in the direction of Marxist theory by intonations about the falling rate of profit. But in practice these don't amount to much. For Militant the real source of capital's problems is that identified by Keynes: lack of effective demand. In a long and particularly incoherent article, Grant explains 'the contradictions that exist in capitalism' by pointing out that 'Cuts in state expenditure and cuts in the wages of the working class resulted in a cut in the market in Britain, and as a consequence further disinclined the employers to invest' (After the elections: perspectives for Britain', *Militant International Review*, Autumn 1979). He also blames the crisis on the City and its unwillingness to stimulate demand by the provision of cheap money: 'The policies of governments dictated by the capitalists themselves, have resulted in a generally higher rate of interest in Britain than in other countries. As a consequence, it does not pay the British companies to invest' ('After the elections . . .'). We have been here before. Far from resolving the crisis by improving profitability, reductions in

public spending and in pay are 'economic nonsense'. The 'policies of governments', not the accumulation of capital, are responsible for the recession, and so are the evil money-men and speculators centred round the Stock Exchange. Grant's subjective conception of the state triumphs once more.

With this framework it is no accident that Militant has only 'differences' and 'objections' to Tribune. This becomes very clear in Andrew Glyn's booklet *Capitalist crisis: Tribune's 'alternative strategy' or socialist plan* (1979), a 76 page polemic against the Labour left.

### All the National Executive's men

The substance of Glyn's critique of Tribune is that its programme is fine, but that it won't work under capitalism. Tribune MPs are right to call for an expansion of the economy through a massive programme of public works but they 'never face up to the contradictions involved if this is implemented while the economy remains on a capitalist basis'. Bans on the export of capital would not 'have very significant results, in terms of higher investment etc', unless made by a government introducing 'a real socialist plan of production'. 'Every socialist', it appears, 'would support the demand for nationalisation of profitable firms', but Tribune has never explained how it would 'overcome the opposition of the capitalist class to any measure which seriously threatens to erode their position'. And so it goes on.

What then is Glyn's alternative to the Alternative Strategy? He expounds upon it with gusto: 'Only a programme of nationalisation of all the major monopolies would remove from the capitalist class the crucial levers of economic sabotage which are at present concentrated in their hands'. Just as Militant attacks the Labour rights for their 'spinelessness', so it upbraids the lefts for *not going far enough*.

This is all that Militant, 'Labour's Marxist voice', has to distinguish itself from the Party's National Executive Committee. No wonder MPs like Eric Heffer and Michael Meacher have offered a protest or two at the crusade against Militant; their only disagreement with the Grant group is that it goes a little too far.

### Soft on the bureaucrats, hard on the workers

Given that it has no fundamental differences with the Labour Party, Militant has no fundamental differences with the Party's creators — the unions. In fact Militant's industrial work is exclusively directed at the structures of official trade unionism; at what it always trumpets in capital letters as the Labour Movement.

Militant cannot do more than chastise the most reactionary bureaucrats for fear of putting its position in the Labour Party at risk. As a percipient bourgeois report noted recently: 'In industrial disputes it has shown a desire not to outrage the union establishment, which it hopes one day to dominate' (*The Observer*, 20 January 1980). This is how the editorial board of *Militant* defended itself from criticism from its Oxford branch on its coverage of the public sector struggles of 1978/9:

'With Alan Fisher, in particular, we had to be extremely careful. A personal attack on Alan Fisher could have resulted in our tendency being cut off from the left moving activists in NUPE. . .

'We must always be constructive when we distance ourselves from the union leaders. Alan Fisher especially had — and still has — a huge fund of goodwill among NUPE members. . .

'The tone we adopted in relation to Fisher was therefore correct. We said that he was out of touch with the mood of the members. . . (Militant, *Bulletin* (internal), summer 1979)

This is just hilarious. What could be more 'personal' an attack than to tell Fisher that he was 'out of touch' with his membership? Yet this is not an isolated example of Militant sycophancy toward union leaders who have repeatedly led workers to defeat. In its trade union pamphlets Militant prints quotation after quotation from Jack Jones, Moss Evans, and the TUC without comment, just to show that it is 'part of the Labour Movement'. It doesn't stop there either. Replying to another letter — this time from its Greenwich branch — on its treatment of the public sector strike of last winter, the editors of *Militant* argued:

'The abandonment of emergency cover by some ambulance-men was a mistake . . . The press seized upon and eagerly exploited every indiscretion . . . this press coverage had the effect of confirming anti-trade union prejudices and helping to panic the middle class into voting in droves for the Tories in the election.' (Militant, *Bulletin* [internal])

Of course, *nothing* could be worse than a Tory election victory. Just like the trade union bureaucracy, Militant ends up blaming the workers for the troubles visited on them.

### Where Militant winds up

Fixated on the Labour Movement, Militant can only regard the struggles of oppressed nations as beyond the pale. When 10 000 blacks took to the streets in November 1979 to protest against the proposed nationality act, *Militant* reported it; but it didn't see fit to mention the hostile reception Labour left-wingers Tony Benn and Joan Lestor got when they addressed the demonstrators in Trafalgar Square.

When, following a succession of IRA military coups British imperialism began to step up its military activities against the Catholics of the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, Militant just looked the other way. The winter issues of *Militant Irish Monthly* contain not a single mention of the war that is going on in Ireland. Instead, it is the heroic struggles of the 'Labour Movement' of the Six Counties — that is, of the reactionary Loyalist unions — that fill column after column. Militant's reformist view of the state reaches its highest expression: the British army, the concentration camps of Long Kesh and the torture centres of Castlereagh simply do not exist.

To pursue the politics of Militant any further would be fruitless. Our analysis has shown that they are *pro-imperialist through and through and to the core*. They must be fought. The RCT has the politics to fight them.

Rob Knight

## RCT activities

### TROOPS OUT NOW!

#### SMASH THE PTA CAMPAIGN

#### NATIONAL SPEAKING TOUR in March 1980

Meetings have been organised in the following towns:

|            |             |             |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Aberdeen   | Cardiff     | Manchester  |
| Ashford    | Colchester  | Newcastle   |
| Birmingham | Coventry    | Oxford      |
| Bradford   | Dundee      | Sheffield   |
| Brighton   | East London | Southampton |
| Bristol    | Leeds       | Todmorden   |
| Burnley    | Leicester   | Warrington  |
| Canterbury | Liverpool   | York        |

For details please write to SPTAC, BM RCT, London WC1V 6XX, or phone 01 274 3951.

#### PLANNING MEETINGS

##### LONDON SPTAC

Thursday 13 March 1980 7pm  
Wednesday 16 April 1980 7pm

Friends Meeting House, Committee Room  
Euston Road

#### NORTH WEST SPTAC

Every fortnight, Thursdays. Write to RCT, Box 33, 164/166 Corn Exchange Building, Hanging Ditch, Manchester M4 3BD.

#### TAMESIDE TRADES COUNCIL CONFERENCE ON IRELAND

Saturday 1 March 1980  
10.00 — 4.30 Entrance: 50p

There has never been a better time to build support for the Irish liberation struggle. For the last 10 years the British ruling class has concentrated its fire-power on the nationalist population of the Six Counties. Now, as the crisis intensifies, the British state is also directing its attention at the working class in this country. Help us organise the fightback against British imperialism. Come to this important conference.

Venue: West End Community Centre, John Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester

#### MASS PICKET OF ARMAGH GAOL 8 March 1980

In Armagh Gaol in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland 37 women are being held for fighting against British imperialism. They are kept in appalling conditions and subjected to brutal ill-treatment.

Last year a picket organised by Women against Imperialism was held outside the prison. It was broken up by the police who arrested 13 people, and later charged 11 of them with assault or obstruction.

A mass picket has been called on the first anniversary of this vicious attack to protest against the charges and to demand political status for anti-imperialist Prisoners of War.

The RCT has organised transport from London and accommodation in Armagh. If you want further details: write to BM RCT, London WC1V 6XX or telephone 01 274 3951

### WORKERS' DEFENCE

#### EAST LONDON WORKERS AGAINST RACISM (ELWAR)

meeting

Oxford House Derbyshire Street, London E2  
4 March 1980 7.30pm Bethnal Green tube

- \* Organising action against racist attacks
- \* The unions and redundancies among black workers
- \* The politics of workers' defence

march and picket

West Ham police station, 22 March 1980.  
Assemble behind Maryland British Rail Station in Manby Park at 1.00pm.  
Protest against harassment and intimidation of black people in Newham.

# Militant

## REVISIONIST PAPER FOR LABOUR&YOUTH

## Book Review

Review: Duncan Hallas, *Trotsky's Marxism*, Pluto Press, 1979, £2.50. Ernest Mandel, *Trotsky: a study in the dynamic of his thought*, New Left Books, 1979, £2.95.

The centenary of Trotsky's birth has prompted the publication of a number of books about the man. While liberal commentators have focused on his literary skills and on his psychology, left-wing writers have tried to assess the nature of his political genius. This is what Hallas and Mandel are out to do.

To judge the success of their efforts we should from the outset remember that tributes to dead revolutionaries have often served reactionary ends. This is particularly true of those made under the auspices of Stalinism. The Stalinists are always ready to resurrect the scientific socialists of the past in order to bury the world revolution of the present. Pictures of Marx grace military parades in Moscow and likenesses of Lenin are in all the best schoolbooks in Peking. Sometimes the Stalinists portray their heroes as benign, other times as merely cerebral; but the icons of official communism always discredit real communist politics in the eyes of the masses.

Trotsky has so far escaped Marx and Lenin's fate. He has always been anathema to the Stalinist bureaucracies of Russia, China and elsewhere. What, however, he has not escaped is the degradation of his politics at the hands of his followers. The countless splits in the Fourth International after his death bear witness to this.

These two books do too. Duncan Hallas is a longstanding leader of the Socialist Workers Party. Ernest Mandel is chief theoretician of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International and mentor of its British section, the International Marxist Group. What they have to say tells us little about Trotsky, but a lot about the politics of the organisations they represent.

### An academic debate

The striking thing about both books is their academic approach. We are presented with Trotsky as 'theoretician', not Trotsky as revolutionary leader. Yet for Trotsky theoretical analysis was a very practical exercise: theory was a major weapon in the struggle to create a vanguard in the working class — a vanguard that could lead workers to the seizure of state power.

Any serious work on Trotsky would try both to identify the real problems that he addressed, and to show how much his solutions matched up to them. Hallas and Mandel don't even make an attempt to do this. All we get is pretentiousness. Hallas is concerned about 'Trotsky's contribution to Marxist thought' (page 5); Mandel, about the 'dynamic' of his thought. These people, who regularly condemn the Revolutionary Communist Tendency for being 'too theoretical', prove themselves quite happy to compose learned tracts which take Trotsky's greatness to be his 'discovery' of general concepts like 'the law of combined and uneven development'.

Why do Hallas and Mandel miss the point? Simply because they haven't an inkling of what revolutionary leadership is. They debate 'Trotskyism' like professors because they have little practical use for the programmatic conquests Trotsky made: for his characterisations of the Soviet Union, of Stalinism, of Popular Front politics and of fascism — to give just a few examples. For them and their organisations the struggle for socialism has moved further and further into the realm of 'theory'.

Isaac Deutscher's trilogy on Trotsky covered the man's life and times with great thoroughness. The one thing it lacked was a scientific treatment of how Trotsky went about elaborating a revo-

# The Trotsky



## they like

lutionary strategy in his day and of how his method is relevant to the forging of an independent working class leadership now. But Hallas and Mandel don't make up for Deutscher's omission. They just offer a mixture of Marxology, pedantic criticism and — in the case of Mandel — religious adulation.

### The 'Trotsky vs Lenin' game

When it comes to the Russian revolution of 1905, Hallas and Mandel wholeheartedly support Trotsky against Lenin. The debate between Lenin and Trotsky on this issue has so often been obscured that it is worth going into in some detail.

When the Russian Social Democratic Party split in 1903, Trotsky came out on the side of the petit-bourgeois Mensheviks. One year later he wrote a major article against the principle on which Lenin organised the Bolshevik party — that of democratic centralism. Trotsky only joined the Bolsheviks in the revolution of April 1917. These facts were later put to vicious use by the Soviet bureaucracy in its campaign to silence those who upheld the traditions of October 1917 — Trotsky's Left Opposition. But that shouldn't stop us from noting that Trotsky's original position on organisation was not just a 'blunder' but a major political mistake. Trotsky himself later acknowledged as much.

Hallas and Mandel think differently. Though they admit that Trotsky was 'wrong about the party', they don't care to spell out the implications of this: namely, that Trotsky, whatever his subjective intentions, stood for a long time with the Menshevik reformists against Lenin's disciplined organisation of professional revolutionaries.

For Hallas and Mandel being 'wrong about the party' is no more than a slip-up; after all, Trotsky was 'right on the central strategic issue of the Russian revolution' (Hallas, page 19). The story goes like this: Trotsky was the cleverest interpreter of the events of 1905 because he — unlike Lenin, who was a bit unimaginative — understood that the forthcoming revolution would be a socialist rather than a bourgeois one. But by 1917 Lenin came round to Trotsky's view and, lo and behold, the Bolshevik revolution came to pass. 'In effect although not in words', we are informed, Lenin 'adopted the Permanent Revolution perspective', thus allowing Trotsky to be 'brilliantly vindicated' (Hallas, page 18). 'Lenin

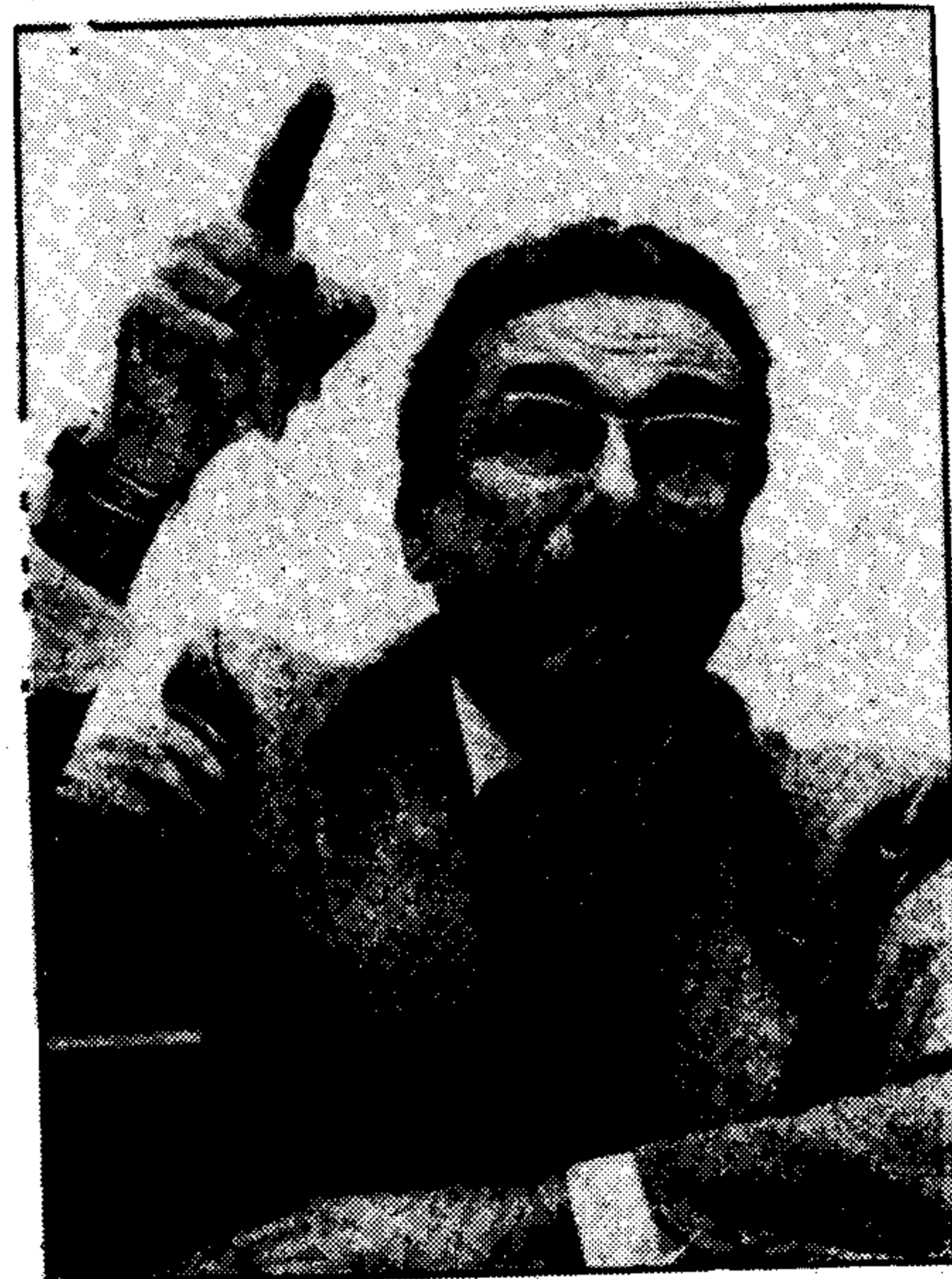
became a "Trotskyist" on the question of the dynamics of the Russian revolution, at the very moment that Trotsky became a "Leninist" on the organisation question' (Mandel, page 20). What a penetrating vision of history!

In 1905 the difficulty confronting the Bolsheviks was how to bring the working class to establish an independent political role for itself. How, when the Russian proletariat was in its infancy — both in size and in ideological strength — could workers' interests be put to the fore? It's no good trying to answer this riddle by counterposing Lenin's slogan of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' to Trotsky's 'permanent revolution' and choosing one against the other. Both Lenin and Trotsky understood that the working class had to play a leading role; the only question was how.

Lenin saw that the proletariat of 1905 was ill placed to rule as a class. If it was to play a dominant part in the struggle against the bourgeoisie it had no choice but to ally itself with the peasantry. At the same time, however, Lenin's pursuit of political leadership enabled him to see the need for using the experiences of 1905 to advance the political independence of the working class. He ruthlessly exposed the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois tendencies that sought to hold back the workers' movement. Lenin provided an immediate alternative to the solutions they proposed — an alternative which directly related to the social and political position of the working class at the time.

Trotsky also tried to advance the political independence of the working class but his failure to take on the task of revolutionary leadership prevented him from outlining a strategy appropriate to the circumstances. Instead he made the general proposition that Russia's social antagonisms could not for any length of time be resolved within a capitalist framework; in other words that, in the epoch of imperialism, the interests of the masses in backward capitalist countries could only be upheld if the gains they won in the bourgeois revolution to come were at once consolidated — that is, if they were made permanent by turning the bourgeois revolution into a socialist one.

Trotsky's concept of permanent revolution afforded useful insights into the logic of 1905. Where he went wrong was



Ernest Mandel: his attempts to play Trotsky off against Lenin mark an abandonment of revolutionary leadership

to suppose that his prognostications amounted to a political strategy. Not only were they incomplete: they diverted the revolutionary movement from the issues to hand. Trotsky asked himself: 'how far can the socialist policy of the working class be applied in the economic conditions of Russia?'. He replied that there was only 'one thing' that could be said 'with certainty': that 'without the direct State support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot remain in power and convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialistic dictatorship'

(*Results and prospects*, 1906). Trotsky's 'socialist policy' could be applied to the economic conditions of Russia only in the most general sense. His answer to the pressing problems facing the Russian masses was to look elsewhere.

### What Trotsky learnt — and what his biographers forget

As Lenin observed, Trotsky's schematic view of 1905 ignored the bourgeois character of the revolution and showed no clear conception of the transition from it to the socialist revolution (*The aim of the proletarian struggle in our revolution*, 1905). Trotsky's inability to chart a path from 1905 to the dictatorship of the proletariat stemmed from his overestimation of the spontaneous struggles of the working class and his underestimation of the political tasks of the moment. It was for this reason that he did not share the Bolsheviks' grasp of the importance of revolutionary leadership. By contrast, all of Lenin's efforts to build a party were designed to transform the consciousness of workers in struggle. He outlined a proletarian attitude to every question: women, oppressed nationalities, land, parliamentarianism and so on.

After 1917 Trotsky realised that his outlook at the time of 1905 had been abstract, that he had neglected the subjective factor in the revolutionary process. In a polemic against the Soviet bureaucracy over the situation in China, he attacked the Stalinists for repeating the phrase 'permanent revolution' instead of indicating a definite way forward for the masses. He ridiculed them for using it as 'a scholastic formula guaranteeing at one blow and for all time a revolutionary situation "for many years"', adding that they were wrong to see the possibility of the revolution becoming permanent as 'a law placing itself above history, independent of the policy of the leadership and of the material development of revolutionary events' (*Problems of the Chinese revolution*, 1926). Once Lenin had won him to Bolshevism, Trotsky appreciated that workers could win nothing 'permanent' for themselves unless they were led by a party to a recognition of their independent interests.

Trotsky's main contribution to the working class movement lay in his ability to give political and organisational continuity to Bolshevism after Lenin's death. It was only because he came over to Lenin's line on the proletarian party in the later part of his life that he had the tenacity to combat imperialist reaction and Stalinist counter-revolution.

Why then do Hallas and Mandel back the Trotsky of 1905 against Trotsky the Bolshevik? Not just because they are fond of generalities, but because *they and their organisations have abdicated from the struggle for revolutionary leadership*. Of course, in each week's *Socialist Worker* there is a box called 'Where we stand' in which, under the heading THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY, the point is made that 'we have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests'. Of course *Socialist Challenge* has a similar box called 'our policies' — in which it proclaims its 'opposition to class-collaborationism in the labour movement'. But what do the SWP and the IMG tell workers to do at elections? To vote for the reformists and class collaborationists in the Labour Party. What profound message do they have for the steel strikers? That Bill Sirs isn't too hot. And so they go on, renouncing revolutionary leadership every time they invoke the happy prospect of a 'rank and file movement' (SWP) or beat their breasts about 'broad based class struggle tendencies' which are 'non-exclusive in character' (IMG).

Hallas and Mandel try to make Trotsky in their own image. Active workers interested in the genuine article will prefer to read him, not them.

Sabena Norton

there have been no major closures, and none of the mass unemployment of other regions. While mines elsewhere have been closed down, South Yorkshire has seen new pits opened up. When Sheffield steelworkers sent flying pickets all over the country they revealed the strong organisation and trade union traditions of the local labour movement.

In South Wales the picture is different. There the prospect of more than 50 000 jobs being lost as a result of cutbacks at Port Talbot and Llanwern has provoked widespread resistance. With a jobless total well above the national average and no chance of alternative employment, Welsh workers were desperate. That is why the Welsh TUC was forced into calling an indefinite general strike for 10 March.

No matter where they were, many pickets were not prepared to compromise on their 20 per cent claim. As a result the bureaucrats were compelled to go much further than they wanted. They found themselves mobilising the whole TUC leadership on their behalf: the result was demonstrations, rallies and a one-day general strike in South Wales. Even arch-reformist union leaders like NUR general secretary Sid Weighell threatened 'A general strike cannot be far off! We are in spitting distance of it. It's a 1926 situation'.

## Rank and file weaknesses

But though the steelworkers got real sympathy from the labour movement they didn't get enough solidarity. In places like South Yorkshire and South Wales many workers outside the steel industry actively supported the strike. But the political strategy of the ISTC prevented divisions among different sections of the labour movement from being overcome. Splits began to emerge within the ranks of the steelworkers themselves. Those employed in the private sector never had much enthusiasm for a dispute which the union leadership told them was not their concern. Workers at one of the largest private steelmakers — Hadfields of Sheffield — were told to come out and go back as if they were a stage army. Soon the nine unions representing the steel industry's 70 000 craftsmen announced that they had reached a settlement with BSC — right in the middle of the strike. Although rank and file delegates, first from the TGWU and then from the other unions, rejected this deal a few days later, the negative consequences of union rivalries had become all too clear.

The divisions that steelworkers met with, like the obstacles to effective strike action they encountered, were the result of the political strategy pursued by the ISTC leadership. The ISTC justified its claim not in relation to its members' needs but in terms of what the Corporation could afford. For that reason it did not come out against all closures and redundancies; it merely beseeched BSC for consultation on these — and for a two year delay before implementation. Murray was overjoyed when the Government finally announced that it was prepared to consult the trade unions about making one in three steelworkers redundant.

Steelworkers had no political alternative to the ISTC leadership. They accepted the labour bureaucracy's argument that they were responsible for the future of the steel industry. And they accepted the Labour Party's argument that their enemy was the Tories — that, through ill-will or bad administration, it was Tory policies which had brought BSC to its knees. Obscuring the real issues, Labourist politics reached down to the picket lines. John Carberry, chairman of the Port Talbot strike committee, said it all when he observed of Joseph: 'The man is largely responsible for the problems we are currently confronted with in steel' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 12 February 1980).

## Who was to blame for the strike?

The cause of the steel strike was the crisis of British capitalism in general and the collapse of profitability of steel in particular (see box). The cause was not the Tories but a system of production which can only survive through wage cuts and massive redundancies. The Tories are mere agents of this system: pointing the finger at them obscures the fact that capitalist industry cannot provide workers with decent standards of living. This approach pushes class interests to the background.

The ISTC's official strike bulletin *Steelworkers' Banner* coupled grovelling pro-imperialist sentiment with anti-Tory rhetoric:

'Steel workers and their industry have made a giant contribution to the national wealth. Will the Tories recognise it by standing up for steel and allowing us to compete on equal terms?'

Grooming himself for a future as leader of the Opposition, Labour industry spokesman John Silkin also jumped on the anti-Tory bandwagon. Addressing the Tory Front Bench in Parliament, he tried to skate over the sordid record of the Labour Government:

'There is only an attempt, and a bad attempt at that, by the Secretary of State to try to pretend he is following the policy of the Labour Government. It is a totally different policy, one of rigid ultimatum and not working together with the industry.'

The more workers' energies were directed against the Tories, the more plausible became a Labour-inspired compromise. Everybody from Murray to Callaghan began to advance conciliatory formulas. For Murray the solution lay in arbitration courts; for Callaghan the steelworkers should have settled for a court of inquiry. Labour left MP Michael Meacher argued for more plans, more public subsidies. All the Labour Party's solutions accepted that redundancies had to take place, that workers' living standards had to be cut. They just wanted the steelworkers to be informed about the sacrifices they would have to make by the right channels. They just wanted the sacrifices to be planned properly.

Like the ISTC, the Communist Party linked defence of British capitalism to denunciations of Margaret Thatcher. The Tories, it argued, 'spoke for a "modern traitor class" which sold Britain to the multinational companies dominating the EEC, for whom nations, regions and industries of Britain were expendable items on international balance sheets' (*Morning Star*, 14 January 1980). The Socialist Workers Party enthusiastically backed anti-Toryism, noting that it was 'the gut hatred of the Tories and all they stand for which is keeping the strike alive' (*Socialist Worker*, 16 February 1980). The SWP put the reformists' superficial view of the dispute in its clearest, most radical form: the Tories had 'deliberately engineered' the strike (19 January 1980).

Given the general consensus that the problem was not capitalism but a particular political party and particular personalities within it the strikers were inevitably led in the wrong direction.

## The figures, the figures

BSC chairman Charles Villiers was clear there were no funds to pay for wage increases. The steel workers would only get more money if they worked harder. *Steelworkers' Banner* refused to accept this. Pointing to the enormous interest charges BSC had incurred through borrowing and the millions the Corporation had wasted on projects that were doomed to failure, it argued that the cash was there to pay its members. It claimed that the steelworkers had made 'impressive' improvements in productivity and issued statistics to show that they were as intensively exploited as their foreign counterparts.

BSC produced some figures; the ISTC countered with others. Thus the union

ensured that the struggle for its members' livelihoods became sidetracked by heated arguments about how the Corporation's books could be balanced. Needless to say the SWP fell into this trap. Blind to the bankrupt state of the steel industry, it argued: 'BSC can afford to pay up — the Tories could easily find money for the industry!' (*Socialist Worker*, 12 January 1980). As the strike continued, the SWP discovered fresh sources of funds: 'how many workers outside steel know that the government has deliberately refused to take up to £70 million offered by the EEC to delay closures?' (9 February 1980).

The enthusiasm with which the left played the money game eventually led it into the great productivity debate. Following the ISTC bureaucracy the SWP declared 'British steel workers produce on average as much steel as their German equivalents' (*Socialist Worker*, 19 January 1980). With polemic like this it was hardly surprising that the bosses continued to dictate the basic political framework of the strike.

## State power

While the ISTC and the left pored over BSC's accounts the bourgeois state was busy at work. By the second week of the strike more than 150 pickets had been arrested. Scores were beaten up by the police; and several sustained injuries sufficient to put them in hospital. But police batons and court injunctions only made the steelworkers extend the scope of their strike action.

Workers' defiance of the law was an important development in the steel strike. It showed their willingness to question bourgeois legality when working class interests were at stake. But the threat to law and order terrified the Labour Party. Issuing a cry for campaigning action to save Britain's steel industry at the general strike rally in Cardiff, Michael Foot reminded the steelworkers that 'all of us in this country have to understand we have to obey the law' (quoted in *The Times*, 29 January 1980). It was the same with the ISTC executive. It acquiesced to Lord Denning's ruling against 'secondary picketing' and called on its private sector members to stay at work. Bill Sirs bowed down before the judiciary:

'We are and have always been a union which obeys not only the letter but the spirit of the law. We accept that the law is paramount because without law there is anarchy.' (Quoted in *The Times*, 3 January 1980)

Only the House of Lords' subsequent decision to overturn Denning's verdict saved Sirs from losing control over his own members.

The labour bureaucracy weathered the storm of illegality because, although the steelworkers were prepared to defy the law, they were not prepared to challenge the state. Workers were ready to break the law if the state interfered with the pursuit of their industrial action. The most militant workers were even ready to challenge and bring down the Tory Government. But the strength of Labourism ensured that the basic legitimacy of the bourgeois state was not questioned. Opposition to the state was restricted to opposition to particular government measures and individuals. If the state was run by a Labour administration, it was held, things would be different.

Thus was the steelworkers' disregard for the law reconciled with the reformists' strategy. That's why left-wing union bureaucrats like Arthur Scargill could call on workers to break the law — to harness militant action to gain transient concessions.

Neglecting the conservative politics that informed even the most aggressive of the steelworkers' actions, the radical left simply called for more action. It raised the slogan of a General Strike. Radical stuff! But not the kind of stuff which can be fought for through union militancy alone.

The call for a General Strike raises the question of political power. If the Tories

are going to be brought down by industrial action what is going to take their place? The collective wisdom of the radical left is that 'councils of action' or a 'workers' government' will. This is meaningless. What the radical left really means is something a bit more familiar — a Labour government.

The irresponsible call for a General Strike avoids the problem of reformist politics in the working class. It goes along with anti-Tory sentiments and seeks to give it a sharper edge. It passes over the immediate barriers that workers must surmount if they are to challenge the state. Unable to give a lead in today's struggles the radical left cannot say who is going to lead the struggle for tomorrow's General Strike. In effect it makes way for Labour politicians. It is just the union bureaucracy's prodigal son — always ready to leave home in disgust, always ready to return home in shame.

## The fight against Labourism

The steelworkers are fighting for their jobs and for the survival of their communities. Apart from reducing employment in steel by a third, BSC's plan threatens tens of thousands of jobs in mining and in transport and service industries. Wales, Scotland and the North East face levels of unemployment not seen in Britain for 40 years. In this strike wages is a side-issue: the full 20 per cent claim would barely keep up with inflation. Mass redundancy is what overshadows the steel strike.

The politics of the Labour Party continually undermined the strike. Yet the left hardly gave them a mention. Indeed, its anti-Tory diatribes were excellent propaganda for the Labour Party. As a result the Labour leadership could muddy over its past record of imposing massive redundancies in steel and present a glowing vision of the future under a Labour government. The credibility of the Labour Party ensured that the dispute was conducted along respectable lines. Had the strike got out of hand, Labour politicians were available to divert workers into some prolonged arbitration procedure.

The politics of Labourism led the strikers away from their class interests. Labour's commitment to the national economy was a millstone round their necks. It meant they could only defend their interests in the context of a viable steel industry. Despite their militancy, the steelworkers were not prepared to come out and say that company finance was not their business — that they would pursue their fight irrespective of its effect on the capitalist economy. Yet unless workers reject any responsibility for the present and future position of 'their' industry they will end up paying the price for the capitalist crisis.

It was for this reason that the strikers' flouting of the law posed little threat to the employers. The dominant position of the labour bureaucracy made it certain that industrial action would not be aimed against the capitalist system itself. The legitimate violence of the steelworkers was not politically directed against the capitalist class. Instead, what was in reality a struggle between the working class and the capitalist class was taken up as an industrial dispute over wages. And so long as this was the case the labour bureaucracy and the bosses could stay on top of the situation.

Many steelworker militants had no faith in their reformist leaders. But nor did they have the political arguments to combat their pernicious influence. This was the problem that revolutionary communists had to address — and did address — on the picket lines. It is a problem that prevails in every strike in Britain today. We write the next step to overcome that problem. We write it to arm active workers in their struggle against Labourism.

Cathy Barrett

# STEEL

# THE DANGERS AHEAD

**THE STEEL STRIKE**, in its eighth week as we go to press, shows the tremendous will and determination of British workers.

It also reveals dangers — for steelworkers and the working class as a whole. Bill Sirs, general secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, called his members out for the first time in 50 years on 2 January 1980. The ISTC concentrated on the wages issue: it ignored BSC's threat of 53 000 redundancies. Seven weeks passed before unofficial strike committees broadened the struggle to include the defence of jobs.

Here we focus on the political obstacles that must be overcome if the steelworkers, and workers throughout industry, are to defend their class interests today.

The militancy of the steelworkers came as a shock to the government — and to the union leaders. The ISTC has always been on the right wing of the British labour movement. Before we examine the forces which have driven the steelworkers into an unprecedented display of industrial strength, let's take a look at the union's record. Moderate Bill Sirs follows a tradition of co-operation with the employers that stretches back to the nineteenth century.

## BSC's company union

Steelworkers' unions were founded by craftsmen who worked to contract. They sub-contracted jobs out to unskilled workers, paying wages out of the lump sum they received from the bosses. They saw production as a co-operative venture and took a real interest in their bosses' prosperity.

Mechanisation spelt the end for the contract system. But class harmony was upheld through the collective bargaining machinery established in the joint wage boards. In one form or another these committees of union, company and government representatives remain the means of negotiation and conciliation in the industry to this day.

The ISTC was formed through the fusion of a number of small steel unions in 1917. Arthur Pugh, the union's founder and general secretary for 20 years, showed where his loyalties lay at the time of the 1926 General Strike. Pugh, by then chairman of the TUC, was reluctant to support the miners' demand for nationalisation as a means of staving off wage cuts. He observed that 'no government, whatever its complexion, could justify the use of public funds to bolster up what was largely an inefficient industry' (Arthur Pugh, *Men of steel*, 1951). Pugh's successor, Lincoln Evans, maintained this commitment to efficiency and class collaboration. 'Industry', he said, 'was not a place where two sides were ranged against each other in a state of permanent hostility, engaged in a ceaseless class struggle, but a joint enterprise where divergent interests could be reconciled by discussion and negotiation against a background of common interest in an efficient thriving and prosperous industry' (ibid).

Both Pugh and Evans were knighted for services rendered to the bourgeoisie. When a third general secretary was similarly honoured the union could hardly contain itself 'it might almost seem that to become a Commander of the British Empire was an achievement associated with the post of general secretary of the ISTC' (ibid). Sirs had better watch out lest his more militant members spoil his chances.

The structure of the ISTC reflects its politics. The union was run in the past by 'first hands', the top men in the steel furnaces and by 'roller bosses', the equivalent in rolling mills. It retains a rigid hier-

archical structure, recruiting 'vertically' from labourers and skilled workers to clerical workers and lower management. Workplace branches cover sections; usually several coexist in the same plant. There is little factory-wide organisation and no network of shop stewards. Much of the ISTC's business revolves around demarcation with the dozen other craft and general unions that also organise in the steel industry.

The ISTC is very undemocratic. All

unions, the ISTC now finds itself fighting a major battle with the Government. What went wrong? True, Sirs justified its first national strike since 1926 with the words 'while we recognise that the Corporation is not making overall profits, it is producing and quite profitably in many plants' (quoted in *The Times*, 8 December 1979), so continuing his predecessors' concern that steelmaking in Britain be lucrative; but something has changed. What?

## The collapse of BSC

**'WE'RE BUST' — David Greives**

**'THE STEEL CORPORATION IS BANKRUPT' — Sir Keith Joseph**

BSC's managing director and chief government backer sum its plight up well. Like much of British manufacturing industry, steel is suffering the effects of declining profitability and obsolete plant. Its future depends on the success of the major offensive BSC management has unleashed on the jobs, conditions and wages of its workforce.

### NATIONALISATION FORCES A SHAKE-OUT

In 1967 a Labour government nationalised Britain's 14 largest private steel firms to assist the modernisation of the industry. In 1973 BSC drew up a 10 year plan providing for the concentration of capital investment in a handful of efficient steelmaking centres (Ravenscraig, Scunthorpe, Port Talbot and Llanwern) and for the run-down or winding up of other, outdated sites. At the same time management went all out to win the co-operation of the trade unions. It appointed worker directors to help with 'overmanning' and 'restrictive practices' and so increase the exploitation of their mates.

Since nationalisation 100 000 steelworkers' jobs have disappeared, mainly through voluntary redundancy.

### TOWARDS A DOWNFALL

In the mid 'seventies the world plunged into recession. Demand for steel was millions of tons below what BSC had optimistically predicted in its decennial plan. World overcapacity and fierce competition from new producing nations like South Korea and Brazil brought BSC nearer and nearer the brink of disaster. Despite extensive re-equipment and shedding of jobs BSC's productivity was much less than that of countries like Japan. By 1975 the Corporation was losing £1m a day.

Figures like this suggested that major surgery was required. For steelworkers the appointment of Sir Charles Villiers in 1976 heralded a new round of sackings, as well as a turn from 'industrial democracy' to a tougher management regime. Announcing a further 40 000 redundancies early in 1976, chief executive Bob Scholey explained: 'the unions know as well as we do that you come to a point at which voluntary redundancy is not going to produce all the results you need' (*The Times*, 24 January 1976). From then on BSC could only stay afloat through closures and compulsory redundancies.

### LABOUR'S ASSAULT

In December 1977 the steel bosses of Europe met to find a way round the dumping, higher tariff barriers and tougher quotas that promised to engulf the industry in a trade war of unprecedented viciousness. At the proposal of EEC Industry Commissioner Viscomte Davignon, each producer state agreed to a plan to restrain production and peg prices. Consensus was reached that, in the longer term, only further rationalisations and more closures would assure the survival of the European steel industry.

But the Labour Government couldn't wait for the longer term. It sent Lanarkshire, Clyde Iron, Ebbw Vale, Hartlepool, East Moors, Shelton, Irlam and Bilston to the wall right away. And it wasn't satisfied simply shutting down antique openhearth furnaces either. Soon investment was slashed at two of BSC's most advanced factories — Teeside and Port Talbot.

### SLAMMING THE GATES

By 1979 BSC was on its last legs. Domestic demand from industries like mechanical engineering, construction and motor vehicles had fallen steadily and showed no signs of an upturn. Exports had been hit by the buoyancy of the pound. Despite using the spectre of unemployment to keep its workers' wages low, the Corporation had lost £1 billion in the previous four years. The Tories had no choice but to accelerate the ruthless cutbacks that their Labour predecessors had begun.

In July Joseph announced cash limits governing every aspect of BSC's expenditures. Then came the Corporation's message: another 50 000 jobs were for the chop. One way or another, the capitalist class was out to make Britain's steelworkers bear the burden of BSC's crisis — bear it with their livelihoods.

union officers are appointed, the general secretary for life. The union only began to have annual conferences four years ago — but these remain powerless to make policy. While most union conferences invite leading Labour Party politicians to address delegates, the ISTC invites luminaries like Prince Charles. Yet though it spends most of its energies policing its own members and squabbling with other

## Why Sirs woke up

The Confederation leaders were forced to act both by the nature of the 'survival plan' that BSC management drew up before Christmas and by the explosion from rank and file steelworkers that the plan promised to let loose. BSC's proposed 53 000 redundancies meant that they would find themselves heading a union ravaged by

membership losses. BSC's intention to move towards locally negotiated productivity deals spelt an end to their jurisdiction over wages and conditions. From the other side, BSC's offer of a two per cent pay rise presaged an uncontrollable outburst of militancy from every steel plant in Britain.

But it wouldn't just be wages that ISTC members would be up in arms about. It would above all be jobs. The prospect of their leaders agreeing to yet another batch of redundancies was likely to prove the last straw.

The fate of the trade union bureaucracy depends on the survival of its institutions and on its capacity to mediate between employers and workers. The bureaucrats' past betrayals had weakened their position significantly. Last year, when they tried to launch a small, symbolic protest against sackings at Shotton and Corby, the workers there told them to stuff it; demoralised by a succession of closures, many opted for redundancy money rather than an effectual struggle. By the closing weeks of 1979 Sirs and his partners knew that they themselves would be out of a job if they didn't call a strike. So they did.

## More in sorrow than in anger

The executive's reluctance to call for industrial action was clear from the start. It gave BSC managers several weeks' notice in which to build up stocks and begged then to make a deal, deliberately pushing the issue of redundancies to the background and pleading for a mere 15 per cent. Negotiations broke down when BSC refused to budge from a final offer of 12 per cent — plus all the onerous conditions it had laid down in its original survival plan. Unable to accept the 'strings', the ISTC leadership had to turn and fight.

The ISTC chiefs hoped for a short dispute. But once the steelworkers were out the initiative passed to them. 'Twenty per cent and no strings' was the cry from picket lines throughout the country. Grass-roots pressure forced Sirs to take a tough stand and refuse further formal negotiations until he saw 'money on the table'.

## Rank and file strengths

Still, after a backdoor agreement with BSC, senior Confederation officials rushed to quell militant picketing and to delay the extension of the strike to the private sector. As a worried Bill Sirs reassured the ruling class:

'We are trying to make sure there is discipline on the picket lines and we have firm control because this is in the interests of the labour movement and our union. Where people have stopped independent steelmakers we have managed to release their hold'. (*The Times*, 10 January 1980)

But he was bluffing: in Wales, South Yorkshire, the West Midlands and Scotland militant picketing continued.

Despite having had little experience of industrial action in the past the steelworkers' strike was solid from the start: pickets rapidly covered private steelworks, steel stockholders, large-scale consumers and docks and transport depots. The most militant centres were South Yorkshire and South Wales.

Steel plants around Sheffield are more specialised and more closely integrated with neighbouring engineering and machine tool industries than others. Redundancies in the area have largely been voluntary;

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