

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p

TUC in 'action', Labour Party in conference

Don't let them drag us down!

The TUC 'Day of Action' and the Labour Party 'Special Conference' came and went but the fighting talk sounded more hollow than ever. There was predictable rhetoric from predictable quarters. Labour left MP Eric Heffer compared the TUC's gesture with a massive Chartist demonstration in the 1840s. The Morning Star called it 'A day to remember' and The News Line ventured 'May 14 - First of Many'. But for thousands of militants it was a date they would rather forget and an experience they would rather not repeat. The 'Day of Action' and the Labour Party conference revealed the depth of the crisis that haunts the working class movement.

Letting off steam

THE LABOUR BUREAUCRACY called the 'Day of Action' to head off pressure for large-scale strike action earlier in the year. The steel strike and growing industrial unrest in South Wales forced the TUC to act. The demand from Welsh miners, transport workers and others to strike in support of the steel workers was too hot for Congress House to handle. The TUC moved quickly to cool the situation down: it forced the Welsh TUC to cancel its call for sympathy action on 21 January and promised to organise a day of action sometime in the future.

The TUC knew that 14 May was a good choice. By May major industrial battles would be over and the 'Day of Action' would be a safe event. Just to make doubly sure that things wouldn't get out of hand the TUC issued no clear guidance and left it up to individual unions to decide what form of action they should take. Without any clear direction or purpose the 'Day of Action' inevitably became a fragmented and diffuse protest against the Tories.

Dubbed 'Lenin' Murray in the gutter press and dragged home from his Madeira holiday, the TUC boss was taken aback by the hostility of bourgeois opinion. The TUC believed that the ruling class would understand and even approve of its antics. But the fragility of British capitalism means that even the mildest form of working class protest is seen as a mortal danger by sections of the capitalist class. Nevertheless, the 'Day of Action' served its purpose for the TUC. In the coming months, when workers demand militant action against the Government, the union leaders can point to 14 May and say 'we were ready to fight the Tories, but the workers were not prepared to follow us'.

The quest for consensus

The leadership of the official labour movement - the TUC and the Labour Party - is determined to maintain its hold over the working class. To do this it has to oppose the Tories and put itself at the head of all protests against the Government. To make sure it stays up front the labour bureaucracy has so far staged a series of events - the 28 November demonstration against the cuts, the 9 March protest against the Employment Act, the 14 May 'Day of Action' and the special Labour Party conference. Through these initiatives the bureaucracy has sought to define the form that protest must take and to channel working class anger in a particular direction.

The Labour Party directs the activities of the labour bureaucracy. Even though the recent one day party conference at Wembley had no practical consequences,

it allowed the Labour Party to reassert its claim to be the legitimate political leadership of the working class. The bureaucrats are prepared to protest and even fight the Tories - but always within the framework of Labour Party politics.

What does the bureaucrats' anti-Tory protest amount to? The Labour leaders, even the left wing of the party, have no distinct working class alternative to Thatcher. In fact they explicitly deny that workers have their own class interests. Instead they accuse the Tories of pursuing their narrow sectional goals at the expense of the 'community'.

'There is no answer in confrontation. Solutions for our problems have to be found by agreement. But agreement will only be possible if our people all recognise that we are part of a community of interests. Britain, the country with the longest industrial and trade union tradition can only operate successfully if there is a genuine consensus among our people.' (TUC Economic Review, 1980)

Instead of advancing the cause of workers, the Labour leadership demands that the Tories abandon their pursuit of the interests of the ruling class in the interest of the nation. The Labour Party and TUC want 'genuine consensus' at a time when the price of consensus is the acceptance of unemployment, reductions in social services and wage cuts. They attack the Tory Party for being true to its class and demand that it takes a bit less and gives a bit more.

Labourism stands for a compromise between workers' interests and the capitalist system. But today the capitalist class cannot compromise; it demands an all-out effort to save its system of production. The Labour leaders agree that the economy must be saved and argue that this can only be done through agreement. Every time they lead an action against the Tory Government they limit the objectives of workers to what is compatible with the maintenance of capitalism. Because workers' interests contradict those of the capitalists, saving their system means forcing the working class to make sacrifices.

While bureaucrats busy themselves directing workers down the path of consensus a class war is being fought. Anti-Tory politics draw the battle lines between two capitalist strategies rather than between two classes. The initiatives of the TUC and the Labour Party - their calls for a 'U-turn' in Tory policy and a new Labour government - all turn workers' attentions away from the class struggle into debates over the right policy to save British capitalism.

No more fiascos like May 14

The real problem with May 14 wasn't the TUC and its vacillation. True, its 'lead'

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LABOUR MOVEMENT

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ensured that workers were confused and that the protest was half-hearted and ineffectual. But what was lacking in the 'Day of Action' was a political strategy that offered workers something more than banal rhetoric.

Given the bankruptcy of the TUC and the Labour Party it's no use trying to mobilise workers behind them. Yet this is the project that the International Marxist Group has embarked upon:

'As the general staff of the labour movement, the TUC General Council has to assume its responsibility to get rid of the Tories by preparing to organise a general strike.' (*Socialist Challenge*, 15 May 1980)

The IMG even believes that if the Labour Party organised its supporters in the unions it 'would be a decisive step forward'. But asking the labour bureaucracy to be more aggressive does nothing to advance the interests of workers.

We don't want more 'Days of Action' like May 14. We want to mobilise class conscious workers against the TUC leadership and against the Labour Party. Effective defence of the labour movement requires a fight for policies that directly contradict those of the TUC. The Revolutionary Communist Tendency puts forward policies that can unite workers against the capitalists and their agents in the labour movement.

Transform the unions

Trade unions aim to defend the living standards of the working class. The unions cannot carry out this role if they assume any responsibility for industry, profits or the national economy. Union demands

should be formulated according to what workers need for a decent life. Nothing else — not the company's profits or its competitive position — should be union business. Unions should fight for their members, not sit on state bodies to discuss the economy and other matters which are the concern of capitalists.

Trade unions are not however an end in themselves. If the structure of a union is inadequate for the pursuit of workers' objectives then workers have to take matters into their own hands. At British Steel and British Leyland workers are organised in numerous different unions. This leads to a fragmented response and the bosses are able to play off one section of the workforce against another. The inter-union dispute at the Isle of Grain is a case in point. Effective action requires a single union for each industry and industry-wide strike committees.

Why prop up the Labour Party?

The Labour Party is the creation of the trade unions. However it has consistently attacked the working class. The Labour Party has always denounced class politics as sectional and divisive, as something hostile to the interests of the community. Labour's left wing has often asked workers to take responsibility for the economy; time and again it has urged workers to make sacrifices for the British nation. Labour politics undermine every serious attempt to defend the working class. Trade unionists can expect nothing but bad compromises and betrayals from Labour politicians.

Today every step that workers take to defend their living standards goes against

the capitalist system. Workers' struggles have to be consciously anti-capitalist if they are to succeed. This requires that the unions reject the Labour Party — a party that has made its peace with the system. The political levy trade unionists pay to the Labour Party should be spent on defending the working class, not on an organisation which supports imperialist foreign policy in Ireland, Africa and the Middle East, which defends immigration controls and denounces militants as wreckers. Class conscious workers should fight the Labour Party's political monopoly over the unions.

Fight unemployment not imports!

Workers must oppose all attempts to make employment conditional on the prospects of a particular industry or company. The reformists advance an 'alternative economic strategy' as a solution to workers' problems. They call for import controls, bans on capital exports, withdrawal from the EEC and more planning. But running the capitalist economy is not the concern of the working class. Whether the bosses leave the EEC or stay in and whether they control trade or not is entirely their business. Every attempt to get the labour movement to fight for a particular trade or business strategy diverts workers from the problems of their class.

What is a solution for the bourgeoisie is a problem for workers. Take unemployment. If the capitalist system is to survive then there must be massive redundancies. If the labour movement is to defend its living standards, then it will be at the expense of the bosses. This is the choice and this choice has to be made in every strug-

gle. Workers must oppose all redundancies regardless of the cost to the system. Our jobs are sacred and if a particular boss can't employ us then the capitalist class as a whole must pay our wages. How they find the money is their problem — but we demand a living wage for all.

One class, one fight

To isolate the Labour politicians workers must fight on all issues from the point of view of the working class as a whole. All attempts to divide us along national and sectional lines must be resisted. Workers must defend their interests not merely as trade unionists but as part of an international class.

The reformists try to narrow our attention to immediate and limited questions. Foreign policy, like social and cultural matters, is left for the capitalist class to deal with. If workers have no distinctive policies on all the major questions they will not be able to defend their independent interests on the issues of the day. That's why workers must oppose the oppression of Ireland by British imperialism. That's why the working class must defend blacks from all racist attacks. Our ability to defend the oppressed will determine whether we are strong enough to defeat our class enemies.

These are the policies that we must popularise in the workers' movement. The way forward charted at the Labour Party special conference leads to demoralisation and defeat. The working class movement will only find its way to a society where workers' interests prevail if it destroys road blocks like the Labour Party.

the next step UNDER ATTACK

MOST COPIES of *the next step* are sold on the streets, around council estates, at factory gates and outside dole offices. They aren't always received favourably. Every week sellers are harassed by the police; several have been arrested. Street meetings organised by *the next step* sellers are a favourite target for the police and for fascist thugs.

East End aggravation

In East London we are under constant threat. This is not surprising since *the next step* is actively used to build the RCT's campaign East London Workers Against Racism. Over the past three months seven street meetings have been stopped by the police. On 10 May police broke up a meeting on Ireland at Strat-

ford market. Two sellers were arrested and later charged with 'obstruction'.

East London supporters of *the next step* decided they had had enough. They held a lively picket outside Newham Magistrates Court and launched a defence campaign. The trial was postponed till September. In the meantime we have organised more street meetings to assert the right to spread revolutionary propaganda in East London.

A week after the police attack at Stratford *the next step* sellers returned to their usual Saturday morning spot. This time they found it occupied by 20 fascists selling *National Front News* and *Spearhead*. The fascists were equipped with bulky bags containing assorted weaponry. The police turned up, got the picture and cleared off. This time *the next step* supporters got away with it: we called their bluff, sold for a while and left without injury.

Every Sunday morning we face the combined attentions of the police and the

fascists in Brick Lane. Our comrades are moved on, prevented from selling, harassed and abused. But all the time our numbers and sales are growing.

Liverpool cops

On 17 May we organised a meeting about Ireland on Church Street in the centre of Liverpool. More than 80 people gathered to listen to speeches exposing the role of British imperialism in Ireland. The police moved in swiftly to terminate the meeting. Thanks to the presence of a large crowd no arrests were made.

These attacks are nothing special. They are what any class conscious worker would expect at a time of growing political unrest. As they grow in size and influence, our campaigns against racism and the Irish War inevitably provoke hostility from the state and the forces of the far right. But the recent spate of attacks on *the next step* also takes its toll on our resources. We have to organise larger meetings to ensure security, spend

time attending courts and pay fines too. But *the next step* won't go away. We will continue to sell and build up our presence on the street.

What you can do

- * If you live in an area where *the next step* is sold regularly the best thing you can do is turn out to boost our numbers and help with the sales. This is particularly important in East London. Come to our regular sales there: they take place at 10.30am on Saturdays in Stratford and at 9.30am on Sundays in Brick Lane.
- * If you don't yet have regular sales in your area, start them — help *the next step* get wider support. Order some extra papers and let us know where and when you intend to sell. We can help you get organised.
- * Take out a subscription to *the next step*. It's only £3.20. And send a donation to help us fight against the courts.

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TUC GIVES PRIOR WARNING

The TUC's lobby of Parliament on the day when the Employment Bill is due for its third reading, will be a warning to Employment Minister James Prior that the Tories should let Congress House police strikes, instead of using the courts. We will be out in force to warn of the dangers of this way of resisting the Government's attack on the unions. Join us — and make our warning louder by giving us all the money you can to boost *the next step*, the review that fights the Government and the TUC leadership. Send cheques or postal orders to RCT Association, BM RCT, London WC1V 6XX

PEOPLE ARE CUTTING UP the next step ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

Readers of our review are snipping off the corner of this page and sending it to us from Wales, Scotland and many other places where we don't yet have branches. Help us refresh the parts of the labour movement we can't reach too easily.

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ANTI-TORYISM: THE IDEOLOGICAL CRISIS

MOST RADICAL LEFT organisations distinguish themselves by their inability to put forward a realistic assessment of the present balance of class forces. Hence they advance empty slogans about general strikes and all sorts of militant action at a time when class conscious workers are losing their struggle to preserve shop floor organisation. However Socialist Workers Party leader Tony Cliff does not make this mistake. In his balance sheet of the class struggle after 14 May he noted the 'ideological crisis' of the labour movement:

'Overwhelmingly workers accept the idea of the profit motive – that if the employer has no profit he can't employ us. Even though this is capitalist "common sense" it is accepted.' (Socialist Worker, 17 May 1980)

Cliff's description is right. But it has no consequences for him or the SWP. Nothing is said about the political struggle against this 'ideological crisis' that is necessary; nothing is said about taking up issues like import controls, Ireland and racism to overcome it. The only solution advanced by Cliff is the call for an 'anti-Tory united front'. It never occurs to him that his own brand of anti-Toryism is part of the political crisis of the working class.

The same old solution

For Cliff the main problem facing the working class is the decline in shop floor organisation. This explains what he calls 'the erosion of solidarity in the movement'. From this assessment Cliff concludes that 'the key problem is building the rank and file leadership'.

Cliff begs the question: why has shop floor organisation declined? For us it has declined because the deepening crisis has put a finish to the economic stability on which the role of the post-war shop steward depended. It's a myth that the ideological crisis is something new – it long preceded the erosion of shop floor organisation. The absence of independent class politics meant that, when it came to the crunch, stewards had no arguments against claims that wages caused inflation, that profits were too low or that sacrifices needed to be made.

Cliff's 'erosion of solidarity' also results from the impact of economic

uncertainty and mass unemployment on a politically divided working class. Cliff ignores the political problems and focuses on their organisational consequences.

Cliff can't even answer his own questions. For more than a decade he has been calling for a rank and file leadership. This timeless formula comes, not out of an analysis of today's conditions, but out of Cliff's long memory. Ten years ago Cliff was blind to the ideological crisis because shop floor organisation seemed strong. Today, the fragmentation of shop floor organisation has alerted him to the fact that there may be a political problem. He may have discovered a new problem – but he still wheels out the same old solution.

Glorifying Stalinism

Cliff can't explain the decline of trade union organisation. But he has invented an explanation of sorts. For him the decline of the 'semi-official leadership of the labour movement' is the result of the shift to the right of the Communist Party. The story begins by giving the CP a past to be proud of: 'Even when it was small the CP played a fantastically important role giving militants a focus for their struggle, organising them in the workplace'. However, the tale unfolds, 'With the CP orientating itself on "left-wing" union leaders – and the move to the right of people like Jones and Scanlon – the CP shifted to the right as well. The semi-official trade union leadership has become very much weakened over the last few years'.

Cliff is right about the crucial role of the CP on the shop floor. But the CP's move to the right and its effect on trade union organisation is just another myth. The CP has not become more right-wing during recent years. All that has happened is that the reactionary content of CP politics has become more obvious. Cliff may look with envy at the 'fantastically important role' of the CP but he should not forget the past.

During the Second World War the CP was 'fantastic' in mobilising workers to step up production: it led campaigns against 'Trotskyite saboteurs' – anybody who fought to defend workers' living standards. After the war the Stalinist leader-

ship of the miners' union led a chauvinist campaign against East European immigrant workers in the coal-fields. Between 1945 and 1947 the 'focus' that the CP gave to militants was the call for an incomes policy. This 'fantastic' record was maintained by the CP throughout the post-war years: on the docks, in the motor industry and in engineering, it acted as the militant wing of the trade union bureaucracy, containing workers' struggles within acceptable limits.

The result of the CP's decline in industry is that the politics of militant class collaboration have been superseded by class collaboration pure and simple. Cliff's adulation for the CP of the past shows his inability to see the danger of militant class collaboration today. When Cliff says 'we have to replace the Communist Party by a socialist organisation with roots in the class', we can only wonder how much of the CP's 'fantastically important role' the SWP wants to take over.

The anti-Tory 'united front'

For Cliff the main way to advance the cause of the working class 'is by the building of a united front – a unity in action against the Tories'. This is where Cliff's storybook reaches its reactionary ending.

The political crisis of the labour movement stems from its commitment to the politics of the Labour Party. Many militant workers see no contradiction between, on the one hand, defending their interests and, on the other, accepting responsibility for British industry and the well-being of the nation. The Labour Party attempts to crush every expression of a distinct working class outlook and pushes the all-class national approach to the fore. Labourism makes sure that workers are paralysed against the employers' offensive. If we take the 'ideological crisis' seriously then we have to launch a systematic attack against the Labour leadership and its politics.

Anti-Toryism deepens the ideological crisis. Why? Because all sections of the official labour movement – Callaghan and Murray, Healey and Chapple, Benn and Scargill – are opposed to the Tories. Anti-Toryism questions a particular form of capitalist domination. It leaves the

field wide open for Labour leaders to maintain their pernicious influence. Instead of challenging Labourism the campaign against the Tories accepts the political complexion of the working class as it is. It just wants to make that complexion more pronounced:

'There is real hatred for this Tory government. At the same time this hatred is accompanied by a very widespread impotence. There is a fantastic abyss between the feeling and the action. And to bridge this abyss it is necessary to raise the level of hatred of the Tories to a higher level'.

Cliff can only cheer workers on in their gut reactions against the Tories. He has nothing more to offer than anti-Tory hate sessions.

In pointing the finger at Thatcher, Cliff helps perpetuate the myth that the Tories are the problem. Cliff, as a vocal exponent of anti-Toryism, is part of the problem that class conscious workers face. What unites him with the reformist leadership is more important than any difference between them. That's why the SWP consistently casts aside its own 'principles' for the sake of uniting with Stalinists and reformists against Thatcher.

Group dynamics

So concerned is Cliff about the 'fantastic abyss between the feeling and the action', that his solutions are limited to the use of psychological techniques. Marx tried to change the world through making workers' experiences conscious. Cliff does not have the politics to transform workers' consciousness, so he wants to create a milieu for radical group psychotherapy for militant workers. This is his concept of 'leadership': 'It is finding the militants in the individual workplaces, uniting them, giving them a feeling of collectivity'.

What better medium for building for a 'feeling of collectivity' than an anti-Tory united front? Everybody hates Thatcher and Joseph. No questions asked, everybody link arms against the Tories with no class politics to disturb the harmony of Labourism. This is what Cliff means by leadership! It is nothing but the meanderings of a petit bourgeois patronising the working class.

HELPING OUT THE BUREAUCRATS

Transport workers' leader Moss Evans repeated Cliff's call for an anti-Tory united front at the May special Labour Party conference. 'That', he said, 'is the purpose of the conference'. As a trade union leader, Moss Evans understands the advantages of anti-Toryism. When active workers are mobilised against the Tories they are unlikely to provide much opposition to the labour bureaucracy. No doubt Evans is pleased that this year the SWP's Right to Work Campaign is marching to the Tory Party conference – not to the TUC or Labour Party conference. The anti-Tory focus takes the pressure off the labour bureaucrats and distracts attention from their failure to

defend the unemployed.

The SWP is very useful for the labour leaders. The Labour left is incapable of mobilising active support for its policies in the trade unions. Ironically the most reliable source of support for Labour left initiatives is the radical left. The SWP and the rest can be relied on to do the footwork for any campaign or demonstration – all in the interest of a broad united front.

A clear pattern has emerged. To justify its existence, the Labour left chooses a safe issue – some cause that will not offend the union leadership or anyone else for that matter. Then it launches a campaign: a press conference, some

leaflets and a few articles in *Tribune* and the *Morning Star*. The rest can be left to the radical left. The 22 June demonstration on peace and disarmament is the model for 1980.

While the capitalists pursue a ruthless class war the reformists have decided that injecting a good dose of pacifism into the labour movement is this year's top priority. For good measure they throw in a bit of anti-Americanism: they protest against US cruise missiles, not against the British army, navy and air force. To show its patriotism the Labour Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament group's leaflet even quotes approvingly the old imperialist warrior Lord Louis Mountbatten's words:

'The nuclear arms race has no military purpose'. With Mountbatten out in front, Labour left MPs and trade union leaders fall into line – and the radical left brings up the rear.

Anti-nukes, anti-war, anti-Yanks – the radical left is in its element. The more it gears its work to anti-Tory activity the more it loses sight of any class considerations. It becomes nothing but the accomplice of the Labour left's fight for radical capitalist politics. Moss Evans and Tony Benn should at least write Tony Cliff a thank-you note.

Ireland

On the first of four pages on the Irish War we assess British strategy in the light of the Atkins initiative. In the following pages we review two doomed attempts to build an anti-imperialist movement in Britain – the Troops Out current and the Hands Off Ireland group. Finally we look at the latest developments in the Tameside conspiracy (see the next step No 4) and the pro-imperialist stand of the NUPE leadership against the workers at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast.



New plans for Ireland?

'Ulster is Britain's test of its own will to be a nation. A nation that will not defend its frontiers or recognise the rights of its own people is well on the way to being no nation.'

Enoch Powell
quoted in
The Guardian, 18 February 1980

The war in the Six Counties is a direct threat to the British nation. Official Unionist MP Enoch Powell, an astute representative of the British ruling class, explains why Britain cannot afford to lose. The Six Counties is part of the United Kingdom; a defeat there for the ruling class would mean the break-up of the British nation state. It would imperil capitalist stability in Ireland and in Britain.

The British Government is shortly to announce its new initiative to resolve the stalemate in the Six Counties. Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Humphrey Atkins spent months in conference with politicians in Ireland and in Britain before formulating his proposals. We survey the prospects for a British solution to the war and look at what Atkins' plans mean for the Irish people.

Solutions and problems

In the Six Counties today Britain is paying the price for its past methods of ruling Ireland. Britain's oldest colony has always been administered differently from its other overseas possessions. The result is that it has always been an explosive issue in British politics. The only way Ireland could be subjugated in the nineteenth century was by integrating it into the British nation. The 1801 Act of Union constitutionally fused Ireland into the British state. In 1921, after a period of political upheaval in Ireland and in Britain, the pattern of domination was altered. Six north-eastern counties were incorporated into the United Kingdom and the remaining 26 granted formal independence.

The national liberation movement, after a slow recovery from the defeats of Partition, is once again fighting for Irish independence. Its struggle challenges the whole structure of Britain's domination of Ireland and the integrity of the British state itself. So, even though the War is an acute embarrassment to Britain at home and abroad and a colossal burden on state revenues, every British government in the last 10 years has shown unflinching determination to crush resistance to British rule in Ireland.

The problem with the Partition solution was that it condemned the Catholics in

the Six Counties to unremitting poverty, discrimination and repression. It made the revolt that finally erupted in the late 'sixties inevitable. Unable to satisfy the Catholics' demands for civil rights within the framework of the Stormont regime, Britain had no alternative but to impose direct rule from Westminster. Military occupation and direct political domination were essential to maintain the stability of the United Kingdom.

But direct rule is itself an unstable solution. Westminster is no more able than Stormont to satisfy the aspirations of the Catholics. Direct rule confirms the national oppression of Ireland by Britain. It ensures that the national liberation movement flourishes. For Protestants it is an ever-present reminder that they are no longer masters of their own house. Thus as the War dragged on through the 'seventies Britain has been on a constant quest for an alternative political solution.

There have been as many proposed alternatives to direct rule as there have been Secretaries of State at the Northern Ireland Office. After the Sunningdale talks of 1973 Tory Minister William Whitelaw came up with the 'power-sharing executive'. In 1975 Labour's Merlyn Rees followed with his 'convention' and most recently Roy Mason put forward a five-point plan for a devolved assembly. All these schemes foundered on the rocks of loyalist intransigence and republican resistance. The Protestants would tolerate no concessions to the Catholics from British imperialism, and no let-up in repression. The Catholics were forced to continue their struggle against the army and the paramilitary gangs.

By the late 'seventies it was clear to Westminster that it had no alternative to direct rule. The British moved towards a strategy of containment. The government began to replace the army with the police force on the streets and attempted to restore an air of normality to the cities of the Six Counties by removing road blocks and other military paraphernalia. This was the strategy of 'Ulsterisation' or 'normalisation'. Along with it went a propaganda campaign to label Republicans as criminals: they were treated as such in the prison camps. The War was always referred to euphemistically as 'the troubles'. But two factors undermined this strategy – the recession and the republican movement.

The crisis and the War

As Britain plunges deeper into recession stalemate in the Irish War is no longer good enough. At a time of mounting world

tensions, continued instability in Ireland is becoming less and less tolerable to Britain's allies in the USA and Europe. And Britain has its domestic problems: Southall, Bristol and a winter in which hundreds of workers were arrested on picket lines show growing social unrest. With the certainty of two million on the dole in the next few months, the British ruling class has plenty on its plate at home without having to contend with the menace of the Irish liberation movement.

The crisis also aggravates social strife in the Six Counties. For many years a region of industrial stagnation, high unemployment and bad housing, it now faces cuts, closures and redundancies. Government spending in Northern Ireland was slashed by £65m last year and by a further £14m in the recent budget. The ending of the selective employment premium means job losses of between 10 000 and 37 000. The state-owned shipbuilding firm Harland and Wolff employed 25 000 workers in the 'fifties: now there are 7200 and another 1200 will go down the road this year. Textile giants Courtaulds and ICI are axing 1500 and 600 jobs respectively. Unemployment in the Six Counties, already approaching 12 per cent, is expected to reach 20 per cent by the end of the year.

In comparison with Britain unemployment in the Six Counties is greater, wages are lower, prices higher and housing worse. However, poverty and deprivation have never been evenly distributed in the Six Counties. Although living standards are lower for everybody, there are still important differentials between Catholics and Protestants. Unemployment is more than twice as high in Catholic areas. Catholics are concentrated in unskilled jobs in the public sector where they suffer the worst pay and conditions. Even in housing Catholics fare worse – the proposed new Poleglass estate in Catholic West Belfast was first halved in size and now may not be built at all.

Jealous of their differentials over the Catholics, the Protestants' loyalty to British imperialism (the guarantor of their privileges) has been reaffirmed and strengthened. Their electoral allegiance has shifted away from the traditional Unionists towards the most extreme British Loyalists, Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. And although Protestant trade unionists protested against Tory cuts on the streets of Belfast in March, they had turned out in twice the numbers to call for greater military repression of the Catholics a couple of weeks earlier.

The crisis in Britain drives the government to intensify repression in the Six

Counties. The crisis in Ireland pushes the Protestants into ever more strident demands for firmer 'security measures'. The recent resurgence of sectarian assassinations by Protestant paramilitaries shows that they are ready to take matters into their own hands.

A final solution?

The reorganisation of the IRA into an effective guerrilla force has narrowed the options for British imperialism. After a series of spectacular setbacks – Neave, Mountbatten, Warrenpoint – as well as the mounting death toll of soldiers, policemen and prison officers, British strategy turned from containment to open war. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has repeatedly declared the government's determination to smash the republican movement.

This is the background to the Atkins initiative. His talks with the Catholic Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Protestant Democratic Unionist Party, with Irish Foreign Minister Brian Lenihan and with his Tory Cabinet colleagues are just window-dressing for a continuation and intensification of the War. The Atkins exercise enables Britain to say to the world 'at least we tried'. But as Thatcher said even before his talks began 'a solution could be imposed if the current initiative gets nowhere' (*The Guardian*, 21 November 1979).

Reorganised under a new suprema, the army is restless. One 'world-weary major' recently summed up the strategic debate in military circles to a *Guardian* reporter: 'Some people believe in selective internment. I believe in selective assassination' (19 February 1980). The major understands the Irish War: no British solution will work until the army has defeated the national liberation movement.

If the British ruling class were allowed to get away with any of its initiatives or plans for Ireland it would be a serious setback for the national liberation struggle. The grip of British imperialism in Ireland would be strengthened at the expense of the Irish people – and the British working class. Workers in Britain have every interest in striving for the defeat of the army in the Six Counties and the triumph of the liberation movement over the British state.

That's why we say: No British plans for Ireland. We condemn all appeals for new British initiatives and all those who canvass support for them in the labour movement.

Phil Murphy



Ireland

Open letter to TOM

How to get the troops out

THE TROOPS OUT MOVEMENT supported the RCT's national Smash the PTA demonstration in November 1979. We therefore invited it to sponsor the Smash the PTA Campaign. However, early this year it declined to support SPTAC pending the clarification of political differences (see Yana Mintoff's letter below).

As we share with TOM the aim of ending British rule in Ireland and the task of building a mass anti-imperialist movement in Britain to advance this cause, we welcomed this opportunity to show where we disagree. What follows is the text of an open letter we have sent to the TOM as the basis for a public debate between our two organisations on the way forward for Irish solidarity work in Britain.

Who will get the troops out?

The fundamental difference between TOM and the RCT concerns our different assessment of the social forces which will bring about the sort of troop withdrawal we want to see. TOM puts its faith in the British government acting under the pressure of public opinion. The RCT puts its faith in the working class.

In recent months the stalemate in the War has prompted public debate on the terms of the new British initiative. *Troops Out*, TOM's monthly bulletin, welcomed these discussions as 'pressures for Britain to give up its sterile policy of military repression and take steps which would break the deadlock and lead to eventual Irish reunification' (November 1979). That Britain's Tory Government should withdraw the troops as well as unite Ireland TOM sees as both sensible and inevitable:

'it seems inevitable that British policy will have to shift before long. And there is only one sensible direction in which it can shift - towards withdrawal.' (*Troops Out*, November 1979)

In reality the re-unification of Ireland means the disintegration of the United Kingdom: there is no alternative policy to military repression for British imperialism. The only likely shift in British policy is towards more repression 'to break the deadlock' by smashing the national liberation movement.

TOM always avoids the mortal conflict between the Irish people and the British state. It puts its hopes in the calls for withdrawal from bourgeois politicians and commentators. TOM is taken in by the occasional sentimental response in Britain to the horrors of the War, the dead soldiers and the burden on the British taxpayer. Thatcher, the Young Liberals, the Labour left, the *Daily Mirror*, even the Pope and the Queen would like to get the troops out of Ireland. TOM has consulted the pollsters and found that 'most opinion polls show a majority of people in Britain want to get out of Ireland' (*Troops Out*, May 1979). But does this communal war-weariness, this 'longing to get out' provide the basis for an anti-imperialist movement? No it does not.

In the Irish War two sorts of troop withdrawal are possible. One would follow the defeat of the republican movement: this is the solution the Tories, the Liberals, the Labour Party and the *Daily Mirror* have been actively promoting for the last 10 years. In its 'Bring home the troops' editorial in 1978 the *Daily Mirror* was explicit about its objectives: 'it would not mean defeat BY the gunmen, but it could

lead to defeat OF the gunmen' (14 August 1978).

The only other alternative is troop withdrawal after the defeat of British imperialism: this is what most TOM supporters would like to see. The trouble is that the TOM strategy leads them into an alliance with the pro-imperialist camp. This is the significance of TOM's support for the 12 August 1979 Young Liberal demonstration and its continued backing of the initiatives of the 'withdrawal' campaign.

Why the working class?

The RCT begins from the understanding that no British initiative can be progressive for the Irish people. British imperialism has never brought anything but poverty and oppression to Ireland. The only road to development and political freedom in Ireland lies through the defeat of British imperialism.

There is only one section of British society which has an interest in the defeat of the ruling class and the overthrow of the British state: the working class. The state that oppresses Ireland is also the obstacle to the defence of the working class and the building of socialism in Britain. The RCT aims to win the support of the British working class for the struggle of the Irish people against British domination.

This orientation dictates a strategy different from that of TOM. Whereas TOM adapts to popular prejudices in the hope of winning the support of all concerned individuals, the RCT challenges the prevalent attitudes in the labour movement with the object of winning workers' support for the Irish struggle.

Troops out - when?

TOM and the RCT share the two slogans: 'Troops out now' and 'Self-determination for the Irish people'. But a closer look reveals that we have widely differing interpretations of the meaning and significance of these demands. Why does TOM call for 'Troops out now'?

'If you agree that British troops are prolonging, not stopping the violence, then it makes sense to call for their immediate withdrawal.' (*Troops Out*, August/September 1979)

'We believe that most people who now feel that a solution to the war is urgent will understand why we call for troops out now. Unless there is urgency behind the demand for withdrawal, it could become a debating point for editorial writers.' (*Troops Out*, October 1979)

We are back once again in the realms of British policy-making. TOM believes that what counts in these circles is what 'makes sense' and what 'most people' think. But this debate about the timing of withdrawal is academic because nobody in British policy-making circles has the remotest intention of withdrawing the troops.

For the RCT the difference between 'Troops out' and 'Troops out now' is not one of timing. Every British bourgeois wants the troops out at some time (after

they have accomplished what they were sent in to achieve). We contest the right of British troops to occupy Ireland at any time: yesterday, today or tomorrow.

TOM calls for 'Self-determination for the Irish people' but this is contradicted by the events it supports - from the International Tribunal to the Voices for Withdrawal - which call for *British* initiatives and *British* solutions to determine the future of the Irish people.

The different function of these demands for TOM and the RCT is apparent from the fact that TOM is always ready to drop them in its appeals to a wider audience. From its earliest days TOM has mobilised around slogans such as 'Free speech on Ireland', 'End British involvement', 'End the war', 'Time to go' and 'Britain must withdraw' rather than anti-imperialist slogans. The RCT always puts these demands to the fore as the spearhead of its challenge to the existing outlook of the labour movement on Ireland.

The TOM approach is the classic radical left double act. It has one set of demands (principled) for its own members and supporters and another (opportunistic) for those 'broad' layers it would like to lure behind its banners. But anti-imperialists are not made by stealth and deception. It is only possible to draw people into activities if they are convinced politically that they should participate in them. This means taking up the prejudices that at present tie workers to ruling class strategies in Ireland - not adapting to pro-imperialist sentiments in futile attempts to mobilise the masses.

Smashing the PTA

The RCT launched SPTAC at the end of 1979 partly because of our assessment of the political importance of this issue and partly because there was no active campaign against the PTA. The 'Trade Union Campaign Against the Prevention of Terrorism Act' collapsed in 1978 and the NCCL's work against the PTA was moribund. TOM, despite having a national organisation, has never made a priority of anti-PTA activity, although many of its members and supporters have opposed its use in particular instances.

TOM is in no danger of SPTAC aiming 'to duplicate' its movement. The most striking feature of Irish solidarity activity in Britain over the 10 years is that the TOM approach, which underlies a long series of campaigns, has failed to build an anti-imperialist movement. TOM politics cannot fulfil the aspirations of its members and supporters to advance the cause of Irish freedom. Far from emulating or imitating TOM we have embarked on a different strategy. We are ready to unite in anti-imperialist activity with TOM in the future as we have in the past. But we appeal to TOM members and supporters to join the RCT's campaign to build an anti-imperialist movement on the solid foundation of working class politics.

Kate Marshall

utom

Box UT 2a St Pauls Road London N1

11th February 1980

Dear Comrades,

In reply to your letter of 4 Feb asking the T.O.M. to confirm in writing our support for the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign, we find we are unable to do so until we get some clarification.

You appear to have adopted the two demands Troops Out Now and Self Determination for the Irish People and to be proposing educational discussions around these demands e.g. taking up the bloodbath argument. This indicates that the SPTAC is moving in a direction that is the very same as the Troops Out Movement. If you agree that this deduction is valid, we would expect some recognition of the fact that we have worked for these demands (including smash the PTA and anti-Irish racism and the demand for political status) for many years now and have a national movement. If you are in agreement with our demands, then we would ask you to affiliate to the Troops Out Movement and work with us.

We cannot of course join a campaign such as SPTAC if its aim is to duplicate our own movement.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours,

Yana Mintoff

Yana Mintoff for the steering Committee.

TOM'S PROGRESS

The Troops Out Movement was launched in 1973 with the objective of building popular opposition to the British occupation of Ireland. It has been the main arena for the radical left's Irish activity ever since.

TOM got off to a bad start. The radical left was unable and unwilling to challenge the chauvinist response of the official labour movement to the IRA bombing campaign in 1974. While the TOM leadership tried to make friends in the Labour Party the movement stagnated. In 1977 the International Marxist Group forced a split and set up the United Troops Out Movement which soon prevailed over the old campaign.

UTOM proceeded along the same lines as TOM. Bureaucratic suppression of debate ensured unity at the expense of political clarity. UTOM made the 'International Tribunal on Britain's Presence in Ireland' its 'major national focus' in 1978.

The Tribunal finally flopped in 1979 but UTOM soon found another bandwagon: the Young Liberals' 'withdrawal campaign'. UTOM's 1979 conference voted to drop the 'United' and revert to the old title. Today TOM retains the token support of the SWP, the IMG and the rest, and a core of activists committed to the Irish struggle. But the mass movement that TOM set out to become six years ago still remains to be built.

TROOPS OUT NOW!
SELF DETERMINATION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE AS A WHOLE!

TOM: principled demands - but only on notepaper

Ireland

The Revolutionary Communist Group:

On the backs of the oppressed

When the founding members of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency were expelled from the Revolutionary Communist Group in November 1976 for upholding a revolutionary conception of solidarity work, the issues at stake were unclear to many on the left. The subsequent opportunist degeneration of the Revolutionary Communist Group has confirmed the importance of sticking to a working class approach to the Irish War.

THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS has every interest in supporting the Irish liberation struggle. A defeat for British imperialism in Ireland would be a gain for the labour movement here. But there is more to Irish solidarity work than its ultimate objective: it has an immediate practical significance. The moment the workers' movement speaks with an independent voice on Ireland it will be able to loosen the grip of the capitalists in Britain. That's why Marx argued that the English working class would never be free until it made common cause with the Irish.

The Marxist tradition

Marx saw that without an independent policy on Ireland the working class could not have an independent policy on anything else. Workers' interests would be swamped by nationalist politics and the ruling class would have its way at home and abroad. The same theme was developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They argued that workers had to support the oppressed if they were to free themselves from the influence of the bosses and fight for the interests of their class. Lenin insisted that the early British Communist Party take a stand against Britain's domination of Ireland, not to do the Irish a favour or as an act of kindness, but because this was the only way in which the British labour movement could transform itself into a conscious political force. For Lenin, solidarity with the oppressed was part and parcel of building a revolutionary party through a struggle against chauvinist currents in the working class.

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency has always distinguished itself from other political organisations by its determination to pursue solidarity work on the Irish War from a working class point of view. We have always rejected the approach of the radical left which tries to influence liberal public opinion in favour of the Irish people. We have argued consistently that appeals to war-weariness, pacifism or liberal humanitarianism do not work. Pleading with the government to reform British oppression in Ireland does not challenge imperialist rule. The RCT calls for working class opposition to British imperialism because this will strengthen workers against their class enemies.

The rot sets in

It is not easy to build an anti-imperialist movement in Britain. The anti-Irish prejudices fostered by the labour bureaucracy create many obstacles. The attacks launched by the TUC, the Labour Party and the Communist Party on the RCT over the recent Tameside Trades Council conference on Ireland show the barriers that have to be surmounted.

The RCG was not prepared to face

difficulties like these. Discouraged by its failure to win support among workers, it began to look elsewhere. In late 1976 the RCG decided that its past approach was too uncompromising and that, if it was to make headway, it had to accommodate to the movement as it was. What began as an impatient response to its slow growth evolved into a coherent opportunist orientation. On the Irish issue the RCG made a complete about-turn. Earlier RCG leader David Yaffe had rightly distinguished between solidarity work on Chile and on Ireland. Opposition to Pinochet's regime did not force British workers to challenge their own state – solidarity with the Irish struggle did. This was why Ireland was so important. Yaffe wrote:

'The question of Ireland and the struggle for self-determination could not be separated from the process of developing a revolutionary consciousness in the British working class – it necessarily means a struggle with the British ruling class.' ('Editorial', *Revolutionary Communist*, No 1, second edition, May 1976)

A few years later the RCG decided that Ireland could be separated from the process of developing a revolutionary consciousness in the British working class. Detailing the tactics trade unionists should adopt to get the subject of Ireland discussed at their branches, the RCG's Irish bulletin proclaimed 'whatever way seems possible use it' (*Hands Off Ireland*, No 5, 1979). It now suggested that linking Ireland to Chile was a useful means of getting liberal branches to respond positively.

Appeals to liberalism cannot contribute to the building of an anti-imperialist movement. Liberals might be uneasy about the extremes of imperialist oppression; but because they fear the liberation struggle more than they object to the British state they will never oppose imperialism systematically. The radical left has been trying 'whatever way seems possible' for the last 10 years. It has proved conclusively that it doesn't work; the RCG soon discovered this too. But instead of learning from its lack of success and adopting class politics it gave up on the working class altogether.

Feeding off the oppressed

The RCG now turned towards the oppressed. First, it discovered the obvious: Irish workers living in Britain do not have to be convinced that imperialism is their enemy. So the RCG shifted its activity towards the Irish community. *Hands Off Ireland*, originally designed to address British workers, was increasingly sold in Irish pubs, outside Irish churches and at Gaelic football games. Now, there is nothing wrong in selling propaganda to Irish workers. But there is everything

wrong in abandoning the task of winning the British working class to oppose its state in Ireland.

The RCG's opportunism was noticed by its former allies in the Prisoners Aid Committee. They complained that the 'RCG had obviously decided' that Irish workers were more 'accessible and more generous financially on the question of Ireland than their English counterparts. They have therefore decided to cash in on this' ('PAC statement', *Hands Off Ireland*, No 8).

The RCG later extended this approach from the Irish to another oppressed minority – blacks. It learned that black people suffer racial oppression day in, day out, and have little faith in the fairness of the British state. The RCG has recently begun to publish a magazine *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* to sell to the black community. This enterprise is a lot easier than fighting racism in the working class.

It's not just that the RCG tells Irish and black people what they already know. The real problem is that it separates the struggle against imperialist oppression from the struggles of the working class. It accepts the division between British workers and the oppressed – a division that the imperialists are very happy about – and does nothing to challenge imperialist politics in the labour movement. Recently the RCG has tried to give a theoretical rationale for its opportunist approach.

Instant leadership

The RCG justifies its opportunism by claiming that, because of their oppression, blacks and Irish are the vanguard of the working class: 'the position of black people as an oppressed layer within the working class has led to the emergence of a black vanguard which is a vanguard for the whole working class' (*Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, No 3, emphasis in the original). For the RCT matters are different. Black and Irish revolutionaries have an important role to play in the leadership of the working class – but as revolutionaries, not because they are oppressed. In any case the most oppressed section of society is not necessarily the most revolutionary. If oppression was the criterion which decided the vanguard, Lenin would have turned to the most brutalised group in society – the peasantry – rather than to the workers who led the 1917 Revolution.

The real issue is not the revolutionary role of the oppressed but the building of an anti-imperialist movement. All the RCG's talk about the special qualities of Irish workers simply means that it has no intention of challenging pro-imperialist sentiments in the British labour move-

ment. And yet this is what is necessary to win British workers to the side of the oppressed.

The RCG has nothing to say to the British working class. It argued against voting either Labour or Tory in the 1979 General Election because the 'election offers nothing more than a choice of which set of torturers to oppress the Irish people' (*Hands Off Ireland*, No 5). Not a word on the Labour Party and its betrayal of the working class. The RCG fails to fight the Labour Party by relating the Irish War to the experience of British workers. At the end of the day the RCG simply parrots what the rest of the radical left says. Unable to advance an independent working class point of view on Ireland, it makes calls for solidarity that are simply more appeals to help the Irish.

The survival of the RCG depends on its parasitic relationship to the movements of the oppressed. 'We are right behind you', it says. But the blacks and the Irish do not need radical cheer-leaders. The place to fight oppression is in the working class itself. We can do the blacks, the Irish and every other oppressed minority – and ourselves – a favour by destroying the pro-imperialist leadership of the labour movement. The RCG's moralistic campaigns are a diversion from this vital task in the struggle against British imperialism.

Pat Roberts



Just out!

Revolutionary Communist Pamphlets No 7

IRELAND'S VICTORY MEANS BRITAIN'S DEFEAT

British imperialism is at war in Ireland – a war within the boundaries of the 'United Kingdom' which, particularly in today's recession, it cannot afford to lose. The Irish people are fighting the poverty and oppression caused by British domination: they are determined to defeat imperialism. The British working class could play a decisive role in ensuring Britain's defeat and thus advance the cause of socialism in Ireland and in Britain.

Price 35p (plus 17p postage)

Tameside Trades Council disaffiliation

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

THE TUC has begun the process of setting up an alternative trades council in Tameside, Greater Manchester. Tameside Trades Council was expelled from the TUC in March for persisting with plans to hold a conference on Ireland and the British labour movement around the slogan 'Support the Irish people: bring the War to Britain', (see 'The Tameside Conspiracy', a four page special feature in the next step, No 4).

Speaking at a dayschool organised by the Smash the PTA Campaign on the Tameside affair in Manchester at the beginning of May, Trades Council secretary Dave Hallsworth explained that some local unions were already in the process of nominating delegates to a new trades council. 'There is no way', he said, 'that we can beat the TUC's bureaucratic machine, supported as it is by the Communist Party in the neighbouring trades councils and in the county association of trades councils'. Trade unionists, representatives of other trades councils and students listened to his appeal to use the Tameside issue to challenge the role of the CP, the 'class struggle dampeners' throughout the trade union movement.

During April and May SPTAC concentrated on raising the Tameside Conspiracy in trade union branches and trades councils throughout the country. Our interventions focused on two events: the annual conference of trades councils at the end of May and the recalled Tameside Irish conference on 7 June. We also followed up the response of many left organisations to the events at Tameside.

No bans and proscriptions?

In the past the Communist Party itself has often been the victim of the heavy hand of the TUC bureaucracy. In the late 'forties and early 'fifties several trades councils were disbanded because they

were dominated by the CP, and CP members were barred from office in certain unions. Many of these bans were not rescinded until the 'sixties; some — for example in the EETPU — remain in operation. Indeed the CP has recently published a pamphlet *End the ban*, calling for the removal of the ban on its members.

Bearing in mind this CP tradition, SPTAC wrote to CP general secretary Gordon McLennan and *Morning Star* editor Tony Chater:

'In view of your record of opposition to bans and proscriptions in the labour movement we would like to know your response to the TUC's action over Tameside Trades Council.'

We have yet to receive a reply.

The CP cannot be accused of having an abstract commitment to democracy in the labour movement: it believes only in the removal of bans on its own members. Having secured its own position within the trade union bureaucracy it uses the rule book that was once used against CP members to deal with today's militant trade unionists in Tameside or elsewhere.

NCP backs TUC against RCT

The New Communist Party broke away from the Communist Party in 1977, preferring old-style Stalinism to the reformism of the new British road to socialism. However it sided with King Street on the Tameside issue. According to *The New Worker* the TUC 'predictably and with cause' found the Tameside conference 'merely... provocative' (18 April 1980). *The New Worker's* apology for the TUC's subsequent expulsion of Tameside followed, concluding with this advice to other trades councils: 'give the RCT-inspired protest motion over the Tameside disaffiliation a miss'.

The New Worker did not print our reply. We asked:

'Where does the NCP stand? If it disagrees with the TUC's action then its dismissal of the RCT protest motion is simply sectarian. If it agrees with the TUC then it is lining up with the Manchester National Front, Margaret Thatcher, Tameside Labour Council and the CPGB — all of whom denounced the Tameside conference.'

Censorship in Socialist Challenge

When SPTAC supporter Joe Tierney wrote a short letter to *Socialist Challenge* expressing his support for Tameside he was surprised to find it had become shorter still on the letters page of *Socialist Challenge* (10 April 1980).

His surprise receded when he looked closer and discovered that it was a paragraph approving the slogan 'Bring the War to Britain' that had been chopped by the *Socialist Challenge* censor. The International Marxist Group is always enthusiastic about the latest Labour Party scheme for modifying British oppression in Ireland. It seems it is now ready to remove from its columns anti-imperialist statements which might upset the labour bureaucracy.

Joe Tierney wrote back criticising the censorship of his letter and demanded: 'come on *Socialist Challenge*, stop covering up for the bureaucrats: print the letter in full and give Tameside the sort of support they need'. *Socialist Challenge* is always concerned about media censorship of news and views on the Irish War. But like the CP, the IMG is selective in the application of its democratic principles — Joe Tierney's reply was never published.

Another radical left group that shares the IMG's concern to present 'the facts' about the excesses of British rule in Ireland is the Revolutionary Communist Group. However, unlike the IMG, the RCG could not bring itself to offer even token opposition to the disaffiliation of Tameside — or provide its readers with 'the facts' about its anti-imperialist stand. The RCG

simply found Tameside's slogan 'incomprehensible' (*Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, No 4, May 1980). It is not surprising that an organisation whose guiding strategy is 'Bring the Irish War to the Irish in Britain' finds the RCT's commitment to bring the Irish War into the British labour movement incomprehensible.

One up for the fascists

One organisation which was quite open about its role in the Tameside Conspiracy was the National Front. 'NF action stops IRA rally' crowed *National Front News* (No 22). The NF boasted of its success in pushing the Labour Council into action and giving the affair national notoriety. 'So much for people who say NF marches are "a waste of time" or "not respectable"! concluded the jubilant report.

The NF approved of the TUC's action against Tameside 'as it has been infiltrated by ultra-way-out Marxist revolutionary groups such as the Revolutionary Communist Tendency'. It also correctly identified the origin of the witch-hunt. The Tameside 'set-up', *NF News* observed, was 'not appreciated by the more "orthodox" Labour and Communist Party Marxists within the TUC!'

The NF had cause to congratulate itself over the Tameside affair. It set a steamroller in motion which was eagerly pushed along by the reformists and the Stalinists in an attempt to flatten anti-imperialist politics in the labour movement. Members and supporters of the Labour Party and the CP, and of the radical left groups that covered up and apologised for the TUC, should look closely at the role of their organisations in the Tameside Conspiracy. The victims were Irish people and the working class; the beneficiaries were the National Front and British imperialism.

Mick Kennedy

'Security' at a Belfast hospital

NUPE BOSSES BACK THE BRITS

THE ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL is situated in the republican Falls Road district of West Belfast. As British repression and surveillance of the Catholic community has been stepped up over the last ten years of war, the hospital has been turned into a military fortress.

In April 1200 ancillary workers at the hospital came out on strike. Their protest was provoked by the continued occupation of the hospital by British soldiers. It ended after five days when NUPE officials — in the Six Counties and in Britain — refused to support the action and urged a return to work.

SPTAC hits Eastbourne

The Smash the PTA Campaign made the Royal Victoria Hospital struggle an issue at NUPE's annual conference in Eastbourne. At a SPTAC fringe meeting at the conference NUPE district secretary and strike leader Brian Sullivan gave a vivid account of the conditions suffered by workers at the RVH. He detailed how workers had been harassed by soldiers,

how guns had gone off 'by accident' and described a recent shooting incident in the Intensive Care Unit. 'Brits out', said Sullivan, was the unanimous stand of the hospital workers.

Everybody out

Turning his fire on the NUPE leadership he issued this threat: 'If we don't get satisfaction from the executive's inquiry into the dispute, then I will lead my members out of the union'. The intransigent stand of general secretary Alan Fisher in support of the right of the British army to patrol an Irish hospital, in defiance of its workers' wishes, leaves them with little alternative.

All attempts to raise the RVH issue from the conference floor were quashed by the NUPE bureaucracy. In the Six Counties loyalist official John Coulthard scabbed on the strike. In Eastbourne fellow Loyalist Patricia McEwan took up the attack: she denounced the SPTAC leaflet in support of the RVH protest and condemned the hospital workers and

their strike leader.

Divided loyalties

The NUPE top brass won't support the RVH workers because it approves of Britain's occupation of Ireland. A union that is loyal to the British state will not support its members when they find themselves up against its armed forces in the Six Counties. However the loyalty of the union leaders to the British state has consequences in Britain as well as in Ireland.

Alan Fisher came out at Eastbourne in favour of talks with the Tories and against militant action in defence of wages. A union that puts the concerns of the British state before the welfare of its members will end up accepting cuts, redundancies and falling wages in the national interest. This is the problem in the British trade union movement highlighted by the RVH protest — and by the SPTAC intervention at Eastbourne.

Mary Masters

**get the boss
off your back**



join NUPE today

NUPE National Union of Public Employees

Yes, join it — but don't expect Alan Fisher to get the army off your back

The ANL's carnival is over but Nationalism still paves the way for fascism

After the National Front slumped at the General Election last year the Anti-Nazi League claimed a victory and wound down its activities. Now the fascists are back. How can we explain this resurgence and the collapse of radical anti-fascism — and what are we going to do about it?

ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY of the 1979 General Election, Anti-Nazi League secretary Paul Holborow wrote an obituary for his own organisation and the National Front:

'We were formed to deal with the prospect of a massive Nazi intervention in the General Election. Since then the Front has deteriorated into schisms. We don't want to cry wolf and artificially jack up something that is not as strong as it was two years ago.' (*Time Out*, 2 May 1980)

This seems a reasonable view. Last May the NF got 0.6 per cent of the vote and every candidate lost his deposit. Conflicts within the NF leadership have been widely publicised and a breakaway group — the NF Constitutional Movement — claims the support of 40 per cent of the membership. Membership has, according to a November bulletin, declined to 5500 and several branches have either dissolved or defected to some other far-right group. But Holborow's obituary is premature.

In recent months the fascists have returned to the streets in force. In East London up to 50 members of rival fascist factions assemble at the top of Brick Lane every Sunday morning. Around 20 have appeared at nearby Stratford to harass left-wing paper sellers. Racist attacks provide regular features in local newspapers: the Sikh temple in Barking is only the most recent target of organised fascist violence. Around the country — Oldham, Glasgow, Manchester and Corby — fascists have demonstrated against the Irish republican movement and, in a significant new departure, against redundancies under the slogan 'British jobs for British workers! Ban foreign imports'.

So the NF is back. In fact as far as Britain's blacks are concerned it never went away. It represents a physical threat to ethnic minorities and a rallying point for reactionary and chauvinist politics on every issue. But how did the fascists rise to their present strength in British politics?

The breeding grounds

'Social democracy has prepared all the conditions necessary for the triumph of fascism.' Leon Trotsky, *What next?*, 1932. The NF has grown as its extreme nationalist and racist solutions to the crisis have extended their appeal in British society. It was the Labour Party in government in the late 'seventies that created the right climate for the fascists to grow. It presided over a dramatic fall in working class living standards, doubled unemployment and drummed up popular support for nationalist measures to solve the problems facing British capitalism. The left made chauvinist opposition to imports, the multinationals and the EEC its own great causes. The very same policies hold key positions in the NF programme.

The NF took advantage of the despair resulting from the crisis, especially in the rotten city boroughs ruled by corrupt and reactionary Labour Councils. It pushed the national solutions of the Labour

Party to their logical, racist conclusions. The Labour Party wanted selective import controls — the NF called for a total ban on foreign imports. Labour imposed immigration controls — the NF demanded repatriation. It was Labour's endorsement of racial oppression which provided the most important opening for the NF. Labour's immigration controls made racism respectable. 'Race', declared NF chief Martin Webster shortly after Labour's election victory in 1974, 'is still the big issue' (*Spearhead*, July 1974). Labour Party politics made sure that repatriation remained the NF's most potent recruiting call.

The NF began to gain ground in local elections, usually at the expense of the Labour Party. In Deptford in 1976 the NF and the National Party together polled 44.5 per cent of the vote. In Leicester, Birmingham and Bradford, fascist candidates received substantial support, and two National Party councillors were elected in Blackburn. In the 1977 GLC elections the NF won 119 000 votes.

Alongside the growth in electoral support for fascist parties went a wave of racial violence. This reached a peak in East London in 1978, when a spate of racist murders sparked off angry demonstrations from the Bengali community. Black communities throughout Britain paid a heavy price for the growing confidence of the fascists. But meanwhile the rise of the NF had become a danger to the labour bureaucracy itself. Now the leaders of the official labour movement turned on the organisation whose growth their policies had done much to encourage.

Labour Party against the Nazis

The prospect of losing seats to the NF in local councils — and even in Parliament — terrified the Labour Party. It dealt with the potential danger in two ways. First, it adapted to the racist sentiment that gave the NF its appeal to a section of traditional Labour voters. Second, it set about stealing back the Union Jack from the NF.

Labour's accommodation to racial prejudice took place in both local and national government. One example was the Labour-controlled council in Newham. When it revamped its housing allocation policy in 1975, Housing Committee chairman Bill Watts explained the move like this:

'One of the reasons for the re-think is the influx of Asians. In five years we would have been doing nothing but giving homes to Asians.' (quoted in Martin Walker, *The National Front*) The Labour Party decided that the best way to weaken the NF was to take the ground from under its feet.

Three years later the pressure from the NF was much greater, and national measures were called for. Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees boasted that his immigration controls were as tough as could be devised and proclaimed that they were a device for keeping blacks out. 'I don't think we should hide from it', he

said, 'that's what people are concerned about' (*Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1980). It was certainly what NF voters were concerned about — so what better way to woo them back to the Labour fold than by indulging their racial prejudices? To prove his determination to repress the black community, Rees despatched the full force of the Metropolitan Police to the Notting Hill carnivals and to the Southall anti-NF demonstration in April 1979.

Labour Party propaganda set out to show that Labour supporters were the true patriots and that NF members were traitors to everything decent and British. The key component of this attack was branding the NF as *Nazis* — adherents of an alien, German ideology against which the British, solidly backed by the Labour Party, had fought and won the Second World War.

Labour left Lena Jeger took the lead in the anti-Nazi campaign. Young people, she wrote to *The Times*, 'need to know that the patriotic claims of the National Front are totally spurious'. The British Union of Fascists, she recalled, 'were the most anti-British elements in our land. And their heirs, the National Front, are totally anti-national as far as the democratic and tolerant traditions and future of our nation are concerned' (*The Times*, 15 December 1977). The Militant tendency followed the Labour leaders. It asked: 'How many people who have been conned into voting for these people realise the true nature of such "patriots" and "democrats"?' in the Annual Conference Document of the Labour Party Young Socialists in 1978. Labour, not the National Front, was the truly national party of the true Britons.

Enter the ANL

When the Labour Party embarked upon its attempt to steal the NF's clothes it came up against a problem: it could not itself mobilise large numbers of young people and popularise opposition to the NF. So it called in the radical left to do just that, and the Anti-Nazi League was born. With its Rock Against Racism bands, its colourful insignia and its photos of NF leaders in Nazi uniform, the ANL took the Labour Party's narrow anti-fascist message to a wider public.

The labour bureaucracy liked the ANL (as long as it did not get involved in too much violence) because it gave Labour's politics mass appeal. The Socialist Workers Party, which controlled the ANL, liked the idea because it provided a focus for the activity of a declining membership at a time when the trade unions were relatively quiet. It soon got the message about violent confrontations. It steered its supporters away from direct contact with the NF and disclaimed any intention of physical violence. Widespread repugnance at the NF's authoritarian and racist politics, especially among young people, ensured popular support for the ANL's carnivals.

What was wrong with the anti-fascism

of the Labour Party and the ANL? The fact that it isolated the politics of the NF as something evil which all sections of British society had an interest in opposing. This was why the link with the Second World War was so useful: the NF was like Nazi Germany — an enemy of British democracy which all classes should unite to resist. In reality however the NF simply advanced a more extreme version of a solution to the crisis that was common to both Britain's mainstream parties. The real problem that it revealed was that nationalism and racism were strongly entrenched in the politics of the British labour movement.

Workers were paralysed by the nationalist appeal of Labour's Social Contract in the mid 'seventies. Disillusioned and demoralised Labour voters drifted towards the more extreme nationalist solutions of the NF. But the answer was not to try to use the chauvinist traditions of the labour movement against the extreme chauvinism of the NF as the ANL tried to do. The way to combat fascism was by a fight against nationalism and the politics which allowed the NF to gain some influence over British workers.

This was the position the RCT argued in one of our early pamphlets, *Under a national flag: fascism, racism and the labour movement*, first published in January 1978. The radical left however stayed with its Anti-Nazi League approach to the NF. Ever since May 1979 it has been claiming that ANL propaganda and activity resulted in the demise of the NF. This belief is analogous to the faith of religious mystics — that because events happen at around the same time there must be a causal relationship between them. However this notion is shared by the NF itself, so let's look at it in more detail.

Why did the NF flop?

The electoral decline of the NF has nothing directly to do with the ANL. NF votes come from two main constituencies. The first is the traditional petit-bourgeois base of fascism — small businessmen, professionals and white-collar workers. Now, though some middle class people became disillusioned with the Tory Party under Heath, Thatcher had little difficulty in winning them back. Her more reactionary policies appeal directly to the beleaguered petit bourgeoisie. The growth in middle class support for the Tories shown in the May 1979 election confirms her success in winning the adherence of voters drifting off to the fascist camp.

The other base of NF electoral support was the more backward sections of the working class. Workers suffering the impact of mass unemployment, deteriorating housing and falling living standards were susceptible to NF influence, especially in areas with high immigrant populations. However Labour's accommodation to racial prejudices played an important part in winning back these layers. The drift towards the NF was, anyway, always most marked in local

Fighting the Union Jack rat



In recent weeks the National Front has gone on the offensive. On 5 June a mob of 40 fascists tried to smash up a meeting held by East London Workers Against Racism. On 7 June the Manchester NF threatened a commando-style attack on Tameside Trades Council's conference on Ireland. And as we go to press the NF has called a national demonstration against the people of the Middle East for 15 June.

rather than in *national* elections where traditional allegiances are much more important.

Both the petit bourgeoisie and backward workers are impervious if not hostile to ANL-style politics. The NF flopped because the two major political parties outflanked it. The only possible role the ANL could have played was in building up Labour's anti-racist credentials and thus keeping up the Labour vote among blacks and workers — a dubious contribution to the fight against fascism.

There remains however another important source of active NF support — if not votes: disgruntled working class youth. Recent NF mobilisations have shown the continuing appeal of fascism for unemployed youth. This is not surprising. Young people face a bleak future in the crumbling boroughs of London, Birmingham and Manchester. They are disgusted with the Labour Party, and they are contemptuous of the patronising antics of the ANL and its radical camp followers. Angry and desperate, they are easy prey for the NF and the British Movement.

What now?

The persistence of fascism is a sign of the strong tendencies towards barbarism unleashed by the capitalist crisis in British society. The activities, influence and growth of the NF and the rest can only be curtailed by the development of working class politics. The first priority is to organise the physical defence of black people against racist and fascist attack. This can only be done by challenging the nationalist outlook that at present undermines the struggles of the working class and provides an opening for fascism.

The fascists' turn towards trade union issues and the similarity between their programme and the Labour left's 'alternative economic strategy' is a warning to militant workers. The fight against the NF must begin with opposition to all import controls and immigration controls, and resistance to imperialist foreign policy in Ireland, Africa and the Middle East. Nationalism, not the National Front, is the real evil and the greatest danger to the labour movement today.

V Phillips

Racist rampage in Newham

Racism is rampant in the East London borough of Newham. Recently gangs of racist thugs have stepped up attacks on Asians with bricks, bottles and steel bolts. East London Workers Against Racism (ELWAR) set about organising workers' defence. We canvassed housing estates, ran street meetings and stuck up anti-racist posters throughout Newham. In Canning Town, in the decaying southern part of the borough, blacks, local trade unionists and other ELWAR supporters successfully repulsed attacks on an Asian family.

On 5 June ELWAR held a public meeting at Lawrence Hall near Canning Town to discuss how to build up defence against the current wave of racist violence. Shortly before the meeting started, it came under siege by more than 40 National Front and British Movement supporters. Stewards prevented the fascists from getting in: they congregated outside the hall shouting racist abuse. The caretaker of the hall called the police and tried to close down the meeting. However, the meeting continued for another hour, after which a decision was taken to march through the area in defiance of the National Front.

The audience emerged from the hall — arms linked in a tightly grouped contingent — chanting 'Fascists and racists out' and 'Workers' defence against racist attacks'. The mile-long march to Plaistow tube station was followed by a mob of jeering racists. Stewards successfully fought off attempts to disrupt the demonstration.

The presence of well-organised racists in Newham confirms the urgency of extending anti-racist activity in the area. But others have drawn a different conclusion. At their local meeting the following night, SWP members accused the RCT of provoking the racists. In particular they denounced the anti-racist poster put out by ELWAR, objecting to the design which showed a Union Jack wrapped around a rat. 'You're crazy to hold anti-racist meetings in Canning Town', they protested. Still, some SWP supporters were embarrassed by this outburst.

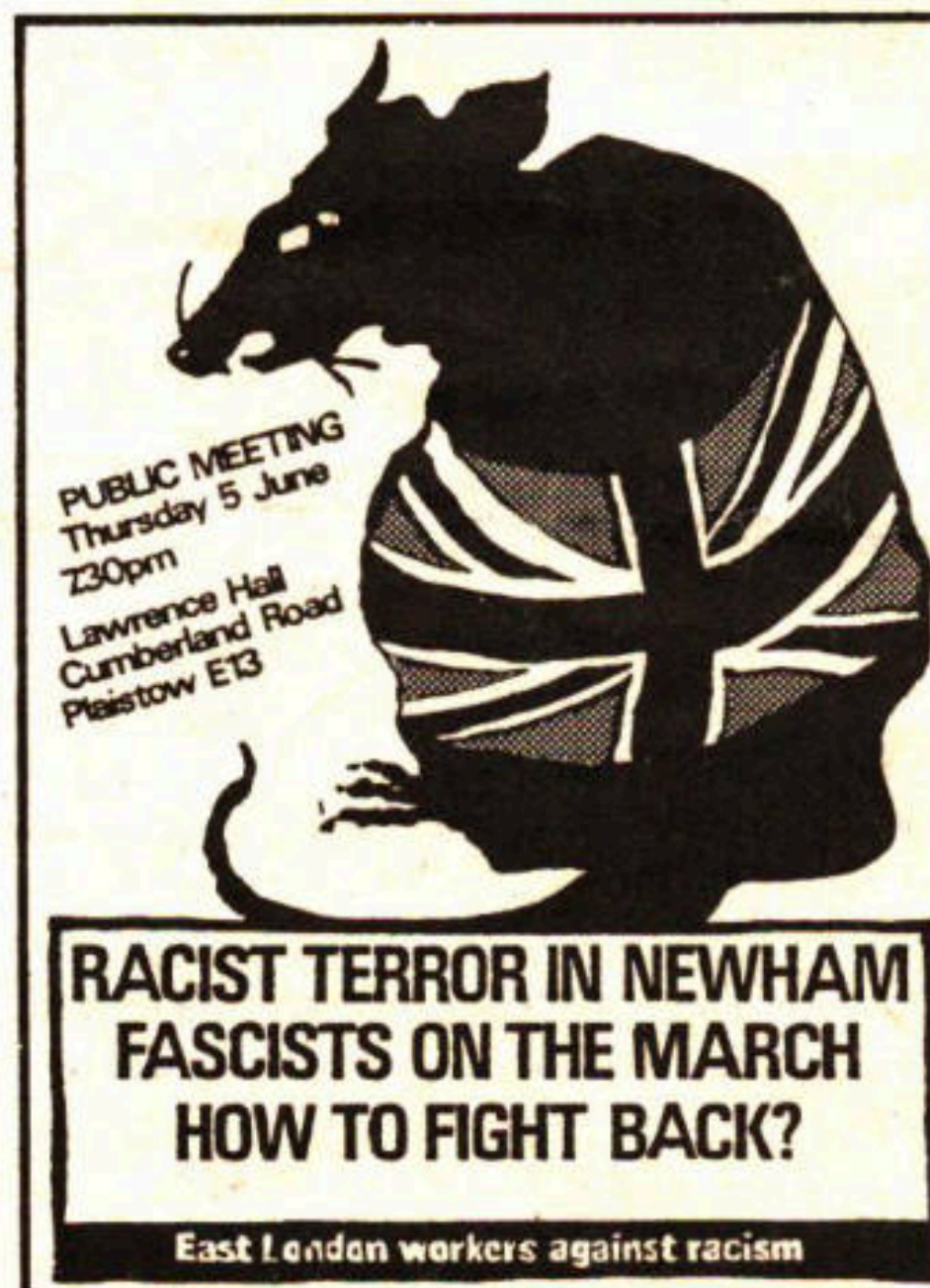
ELWAR is determined to press ahead. While some would like to think that racism can be fought at rock concerts and discos, ELWAR believes in fighting racism where it matters: in communities where racist attacks are a feature of everyday life. Our confrontation with the fascists has convinced a number of workers in the area that there is an important battle to be fought. ELWAR's work has shown that a campaign against racist attacks in Newham must be an urgent priority for the local labour movement.

Fascist squaddies against the Irish

The Manchester NF followed up its campaign against the Irish solidarity work of Tameside Trades Council with a threat to break up its 7 June conference with a hit squad of British army veterans. The fascist leaflet declared 'war with the IRA and their allies'. The RCT and other political groups took immediate steps to ensure that the conference was effectively defended.

More than 80 delegates took part in the conference, while a couple of hundred anti-racists defended the meeting. In this event the fascist commandos were nowhere to be seen. But the Manchester police could not resist the opportunity to charge into a group of anti-racists and arrest five people.

The strength of anti-Irish sentiment in Britain gives the NF great scope for its 'smash the IRA' activities. The Manchester NF has successfully exploited the pro-imperialist outlook of the official labour movement with the result that Tameside Trades Council has been expelled from the TUC over its Irish conference (see 'Bringing it all back home', page 7). The 7 June conference voted in favour of an RCT-backed proposal for a lobby at the TUC in Brighton in September. Our aim is to carry forward the campaign against the chauvinism of the labour movement leadership which gives the NF an opening into the working class for its virulent anti-Irish politics.



The poster that provoked the NF — and upset the SWP. ELWAR's fight against the Union Jack rat continues; see page 11 for details of the reconvened meeting.

Now for the Arabs and Iranians

The relentless racist propaganda churned out by the media against the people of the Middle East has succeeded in making anti-Arab and anti-Persian chauvinism respectable. Now the NF has jumped on the bandwagon to widen its popular appeal. Its first initiative on this issue is a national demonstration at Speakers' Corner on 15 June protesting against Iranians and Libyans living in Britain.

To show our solidarity with the people of the Middle East the RCT decided to mount a counter-demonstration against the fascists. A number of left-wing organisations and student groups undertook to support us. We appeal to the labour movement on the grounds that workers have every interest in making common cause with the people of the Middle East. Workers can assert their political independence by defying nationalist appeals — whether they come from the Tories, the Labour Party or the National Front. A labour movement stand against British patriotism undermines popular support for military interference in Iran — and strengthens the working class for its own battles ahead.

King Rat

The radical left used to like to depict the fascists as rats crawling out of sewers. But the left always avoided the wider problem of nationalism in the labour movement; in fact it indulged British nationalism. The radical left's fascist was decked out in swastikas and jackboots: he wasn't a British rat at all, but a German Nazi rat. No wonder the RCT's Union Jack rat poster upset the SWP!

The Union Jack rat is not a species peculiar to the basements of the NF's Shoreditch headquarters. It infests every street corner in Britain; most seriously it's on the loose in the offices of the trade unions, the Labour Party and the Communist Party. The verminous influence of nationalism paralyses workers' defence of their own jobs and living standards. And it paralyses workers' defence of blacks and foreigners when they come under attack from the government, the police and the fascists.

We are ready to fight the Union Jack rat on the streets of London, Manchester or any other place where fascists attack ethnic minorities, Irish people or socialists. But this battle against the NF is of secondary importance. The central struggle is against chauvinist currents in the labour movement. By dealing with the Union Jack rat there we will isolate and crush the menace of racism and fascism.

Fran Eden

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RCT Activities p11

'In the face of rising white prosperity, unemployed and starving blacks are not easily going to be persuaded it is in their interests that their miserable lot continue in the hope of a distant Nirvana... Indeed, all... procedures that prevent blacks from participating in the economy on an equal basis to whites... must be urgently repealed. Otherwise, the prosperity that a gold bonanza holds out for this country will reach the blacks too late to prevent political upheaval....

'In the past year black labour has started flexing its muscles, and seen that this can pay off.

'There is no going back. It's now up to management and government to ensure that black labour is not forced into militancy in the 'eighties.' (*Financial Mail*, 18 January 1980)

The Johannesburg *Financial Mail* saw the writing on the wall long before Mugabe's victory in Zimbabwe. Now more than ever it appreciates that capitalism in South Africa can only survive if a new layer of 'responsible' blacks is formed and given power to mediate between the masses and imperialism. Today the *Mail* asks 'are there such political creatures as moderate, middle class blacks?' and questions whether they exist in 'sufficient numbers' to ensure stability in South Africa. It wants 'credible leaders' to negotiate 'the kind of deal that needs to be done' (4 March 1980). Prime Minister P W Botha has committed his Government to do away with all 'unnecessary and hurtful' racial discrimination. Announcing last year that South Africa had to 'change or face revolution', he revealed that even the stubborn backwoodsmen of the ultra-conservative Nationalist Party were wondering whether strict apartheid still made good economic sense.

The rise in the world price of gold over the last year has given a major boost to the South African economy. But it has also put pressure on the ruling class to deal with the country's internal problems. Botha needs to make reforms — fast.

Black Bantustans, white privileges

Ever since the Boer War, South African capitalism has only been able to develop on the backs of the black masses. When, at the beginning of this century, the British imperialists established South Africa as the world's leading supplier of gold and diamonds, they built political oppression into the heart of its economy. To force blacks to sell their labour-power they destroyed pre-capitalist African society and erected in its place the Bantu Reserves. That way they could shift some of the burden of maintaining the workforce onto the blacks themselves, because 'Bantu farming' allowed a few subsistence needs to be catered for. *Britain's system of Reserves helped keep wages low and enabled the maximum amount of surplus-value to be extracted.* The imperialists were not concerned that this plunder of South Africa retarded the growth of its productive forces.

Britain imported white workers from home, the USA and Australia to overcome South Africa's shortage of skilled labour. These workers soon formed trade unions to stop their jobs and wages being undercut by the blacks. Eventually, after a number of strikes, they concluded a deal with South African mine-owners known as the Status Quo agreements. Together with the enforcement of a statutory colour bar in industry, these agreements appeared to guarantee white workers a permanently privileged position.

The world recession of the 'twenties, however, upset this deal. Demand for South African gold slumped: 24 of the country's 39 mines faced closure (H Houghton, *The South African economy*, 1976). The mining capitalists were driven to try to alter the Status Quo agreements, introduce black workers into jobs previously reserved for whites and cut wages. The Rand Rebellion of 1922 was the white workers' response.

White workers took up arms to defend

The South African economic miracle Boom for whom?

The bombing of South Africa's major oil refinery in June signals the explosion of the class struggle. Widespread social unrest has erupted at a time when the economy is booming. As the apartheid state rounds up black workers and students in a new wave of repression, we examine Prime Minister P W Botha's recently declared intention of moving the country along the path of peaceful reforms.

themselves — not against capitalism, but against the threat to their privileged status from the blacks. Nevertheless, the Smuts Government of the day did not hesitate to use the army, police and airforce to gun them down in the streets. Why? Because the Rebellion promised to keep the South African state too busy to stamp out black unrest. Black workers were also ready to take militant action to defend their living standards. What 'obsessed' Smuts 'above all things' was the possibility of 'a wild, uncontrollable outbreak among the natives' (R Davies, *Capital, state and white labour 1900-1960*, 1979).

The Rand Rebellion upset capitalist stability throughout Southern Africa. But it provided an important lesson for the British imperialists. From then on they learnt to treat South African white workers with kid gloves. They accepted that demands like 'workers of the world unite to keep South Africa white' and 'keep the colour bar' acted in their interests too. Tighter job protection and the maintenance of the colour bar in industry assured future South African governments of white workers' allegiance. That allegiance has come to be the main pillar of the system of racial oppression that South African capitalism relies on.

The road to independence

During the inter-war years the emergent South African bourgeoisie became more and more resentful of the way the imperialists were stripping the land of its natural wealth. While it joined foreign investors in ruthlessly exploiting South Africa's black population, it also tried to break their commanding hold on the economy by using the state to build up a strong indigenous manufacturing sector. Only in this way could it begin to compete on the world market as Britain's equal.

A government Iron & Steel Corporation (ISCOR) was set up in 1928. Other state enterprises, funded out of taxation on foreign gold mine capitalists, were also established. These moves did speed up industrialisation; but, overall, the existing South African state was too hemmed in by imperialism to prove much help to the national bourgeoisie. Attempts to protect fledgling manufacturers from foreign imports were unsuccessful in helping local capitalists to accumulate.

Like any other bourgeoisie in a backward capitalist nation, the South African ruling class could not escape the clutches of imperialism. But it had two things to help it get out of this situation. First, it had virtually limitless supplies of cheap black labour and rich raw material resources to exploit. Second, it had well organised white trade unions to back the struggle for independence. By 1948 and the advent of a Nationalist Party government, judicious use of these special advantages had put the South African bourgeoisie in a position to ally itself with the imperialists as a partner rather than as a subordinate.

Why apartheid?

The rise of the South African bourgeoisie worked to the advantage of the imperialist powers. It was accompanied by the defeat of the black mineworkers' strike of 1946

and of a number of other stormy struggles which broke out after the Second World War. And it was accompanied, too, by the creation of the apparatus of intensified racial discrimination known as apartheid.

Apartheid has little to do with 'whites only' bars, buses and public benches, as the liberal sections of the British press make out. It has even less to do with irrational prejudices on the part of South Africa's Afrikaner rulers as ideologues of Britain's Communist Party-run Anti-Apartheid Movement present it. *Apartheid is not a moral or psychological question: if it was, a 'democratic' capitalist South Africa would be possible.* Apartheid is the only way South African capitalism can exist. Without the black 'homelands' — even the 'independent' ones; without the million blacks scraping a living in the shantytowns of Soweto; without the controls on the movement of labour imposed by the Pass Laws, without the banning of black trade unions — without all this South Africa would not be the bosses' paradise that it is.

Birth of a new imperialism

So thorough was South Africa's suppression of black workers in the 'fifties and 'sixties that it became an imperialist power in its own right. A number of factors lay behind this development.

First, the rate of profit in South African mines and factories was highly attractive to foreign capital: between 1956 and 1970, total inward investment doubled — and three quarters of this was investment in raw materials and manufacturing (*Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Reserve Bank*, June 1974). This influx of foreign capital helped South Africa consolidate the industrialisation it had begun before the war.

Second, through taxes, foreign capital provided the state with enough revenue to finance industrial projects no private capitalist could take on. For example, the state poured more than three billion Rand into SASOL, a petrol-from-coal extraction process, just to make the nation less dependent on imported oil. Today the state accounts for more than half of gross domestic fixed investment in South Africa. Third, state intervention in South Africa fostered the growth of a substantial private manufacturing sector. And fourth, the fact that the Western capitalist economies went through an unprecedented boom after the war enabled South Africa to export goods as never before.

South Africa's industrialisation has meant that it exhibits all the features characteristic of an imperialist nation. Giant monopolies like Harry Oppenheimer's Anglo-American Corporation dominate the economy. To fund their massive investments they had to construct more and more links with the banks, so that a South African finance capital has emerged. And South Africa exports capital abroad (to Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Botswana, Uganda and elsewhere) in ever increasing quantities. But all these phenomena — the centralisation of capital, the extensive use of credit, the export of capital in search of investment sites more lucrative than those found at home — are only the expression of one under-

lying trend: the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

What South African capitalists saw as their 'rate of return' plummeted from a heady 19 per cent in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies to a much more modest eight per cent in 1976 (*Financial Mail*, 21 January 1977). The more money they spent on new machinery, the more the surplus-value they sweated out of blacks was spread over a larger investment base — and so the more the rate of profit fell. This means that today the South African ruling class must jack up the exploitation of black workers even further. *South African capitalism can only survive by stepping up the oppression of blacks.*

Only solution: revolution

How then do we explain the calls to relax racial discrimination in South Africa? It is true that the recent 'gold boom' has given the South African bourgeoisie a breathing space in which to grant some concessions. Every time gold clocks up another dollar in the City of London and New York, Pretoria's coffers swell by \$13m in tax receipts from the gold mines. Gold mining revenues to the state will increase from R855m in 1979 to no less than R2.5 billion this year. This will put government revenues as a whole up by 14 per cent, shift South Africa's balance of payments current account surplus from R1.5bn in 1978 to a record R3.1bn and raise the rate of growth from last year's 3.75 per cent to six per cent or more. But this is only part of the answer. Indeed, as *The Economist* recently pointed out, gold price rises give South Africa a very superficial kind of stability:

'For a start, there is the problem of inflation, currently running at an annual rate of over 14 per cent. Steep increases in government-controlled prices (especially of staple foods) and higher demand make any big drop unlikely....

'South Africa's business cycles are usually about a year behind America's and Europe's. Already recession in the West is starting to cut into some big export earners, like chrome, steel and even, in the past few weeks, gold. A full-blooded 6 per cent boom could also send imports shooting. The current account surplus could vanish as quickly as it appeared.' (29 March 1980)

The real point is that South Africa's 'gold boom' will only provide enough funds for the ruling class to bribe a very small layer of blacks into support for the system. The vast majority of blacks will face renewed attacks on jobs, wages and working conditions — which is why the nurturing of a brand of home grown, middle class black conciliators is an urgent necessity for Botha and his friends.

In his March 1980 budget Finance Minister Owen Horwood raised the threshold at which blacks would be taxed from R1200 a year to a more 'progressive' R1800. But the *Financial Mail* noted that this would 'benefit middle class blacks only' and would 'entrench the privileged positions of settled urban blacks, at the expense of those without rights, or in unskilled jobs' (28 March 1980). Likewise, though Horwood increased spending on the education of blacks by 32 per cent to R240m, he at the same time raised defence spending from R1.6bn to R2.3bn (*Financial Times*, 27 March 1980).

Botha may want to pacify the increasingly restless black working class with reforms. But he will not be able to. Apart from the economic constraints, too many concessions to South Africa's blacks would alienate the white working class from the Nationalist Party. Apartheid will not be removed until South African capitalism is destroyed.

Moses Dube



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The cuts LAMBETH IN THE RED

Ask a Labour left-winger about the fight against the Tories' cuts in public expenditure and he'll tell you about the heroic struggle of Lambeth Council and its leader Ted Knight. While the labour movement reels under the impact of the cuts — and prepares for a new round later in the year — we find out just how heroic Lambeth and Knight have really been.

TED KNIGHT has drawn the wrath of the bourgeoisie for his rebellious attitude to cuts and for his council's alleged profligacy. His finest hour came with Lambeth's anti-cuts demonstration last November, when thousands of local residents and council and other public sector workers took to the streets. The *South London Press* (SLP) reported Councillor Knight's fighting talk: 'We want to make it quite clear to Mrs Thatcher that we will make no cuts whatever... We are asking all the Labour councils in London to join our campaign and bring the government down' (13 November 1979).

Lambeth's U-turn

But Knight's stand is not as principled as he likes to make out. When the new Tory Government reduced the Rate Support Grant (RSG) by £3m last summer, it forced Knight to choose between a rate increase or a spending cut. Knight was too realistic to stick to his commitment to maintain services at all costs. He had already upped the rates by 40 per cent in April 1979. As he saw it, to ask rate payers to reverse these further cuts by dipping into their own pockets would have meant a supplementary rate in autumn 1979 and a further increase of 45 per cent or more in April 1980. Knight concluded: 'Reluctantly we have decided to reduce our levels of expenditure' (SLP, 13 July 1979). He was careful to maintain his socialist credentials by stressing his 'reluctance', but he was in a difficult situation.

Headlines like 'Lambeth Slashes Council Spending' did not bode well and soon Knight was faced with resistance. NALGO, the local government workers' union, refused to cover unfilled vacancies. A conference of Lambeth's four Constituency Labour Parties rejected the Labour Group's decision on the cuts. Knight had to fall into line. This is how he explained his

new stand:

'The feeling was that we should make no cuts at this stage and challenge the government. Dropping the policy of cuts is certainly an alternative and one which I would not necessarily disagree with.' (SLP, 13 July 1979)

Only 'reluctant' to make the cuts, Knight now responded to pressures from fellow party members worried about their credibility with workers: he declared himself 'not necessarily' opposed to making a complete about-turn.

From this pragmatic beginning Knight led Lambeth to fame as the borough that was prepared to fight the Tories. Apart from defending it against Heseltine and Thatcher, he gave his support to other struggles, such as the campaign of the Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark Area Health Authorities against the cuts in health spending.

Labour Knight takes worker pawn

A career in the Labour Party demands a flexible approach to cutting working class living standards. Three months after his 'no cuts' stand Knight presented 'revised' plans. First, he argued that the £3m shortfall in the RSG should be made up by borrowing on the commercial money market — and by letting the people of Lambeth pay off the interest charges. Second, he contended that cuts be made in anticipation of further reductions in the RSG: he proposed 'real savings, involving rationalisation, greater efficiency and a reduction in overall staffing levels' and the 'postponing of recruitment for non-essential job vacancies and monitoring committees to see whether low priority projects could be shelved' (SLP, 18 September 1979).

Knight could see no escape: 'Lack of direction on our part, leading to massive rate increases... would be playing into Tory hands, would be political suicide for

Labour' (SLP, 18 September 1979). As a left-reformist the only avenues he was willing to explore were cuts or rate increases. Anything else — anything that defended working class interests — would mean 'political suicide for Labour'. And Knight would rather the working class met with fatalities than his own party.

To ensure that it didn't 'play into Tory hands', Lambeth duly approved an increase in council rents. Knight announced this in aggressive style:

'He was well aware of the extra financial burden placed on families and firms in the borough but he warned that Lambeth faced an explosive situation if the social and economic problems were not tackled... The Labour Group remained firmly committed to opposing cuts in the public sector and to maintaining council services and jobs.' (SLP, 28 March 1980)

What he meant was that the Labour Group wanted to 'tackle' Lambeth's problems by getting Lambeth workers to make all the sacrifices that an inner-city borough wracked by the crisis of British capitalism requires.

'Socialist' cuts in practice

Lambeth Council has made its employees toil as never before; it has made working class users of the services it provides pay more for less. Yet Knight still has the nerve to talk about being 'firmly committed' to opposing cuts. Let's go back to the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Area Health Authority affair to see the kind of commitment he and his Labour allies have in mind.

In August 1979 the AHA's officers were dismissed for refusing to make cuts and replaced by the Health Minister's Commissioners. After a prolonged dispute the High Court reinstated the AHA and its chairman Stanley Hardy. This former Labour mayor of Lewisham and leader of the battle against the cuts found little to quarrel with in the record of the Tory Commissioners:

'I have gone through the minutes of their meetings very carefully. The recommendations are not all that different from what the Authority has put forward itself. Obviously the new cash limits will mean a reduction in services to patients, but I'm sure none will die.' (The Sunday Times, 7 April 1980)

'None will die' is the reassuring slogan of this tribune of the people. Now the people of South London can relax while 'socialist' statesmen like Knight and Hardy go ahead and make non-lethal cuts.

Knight errant

The problem does not lie with individual Labour politicians. The problem is the politics they uphold. Knight believes that

the future of the working class lies in radically reforming capitalism into socialism. So preoccupied is he with this project that he fails to see that the survival of the working class and that of the British economy are two different things. Indeed his opposition to the cuts is based on the conviction that they're bad for the country: 'It is against the national interest for the government to drive in on the service provided by local authorities' (SLP, 18 September 1979).

But what is this national interest? It's the interest of the bosses, who ask workers to pay for the crisis. And what happens when the national interest demands more cuts and more unemployment? The realities of capitalist society force out the contradiction inherent in Labourist politics. Labour politicians are forced to choose between those realities and the interests of workers. Their reformist politics ensure that workers' interests don't get picked.

Like every other Labour left-winger, Knight is dangerous because he is such a reluctant realist. Having decided to put the nation first, he tells workers that they have no choice but to take the nasty medicine he dispenses. He is only pressed into action in the first place by Labour's need to retain the loyalty of its working class supporters.

There are others who beat the drum for Knight's cosmetically applied cuts. The Communist Party has nothing but contempt for what it calls the 'Smash the State Brigade' — workers who are opposed to all cuts. Instead it argues that there was 'no alternative but to accept the probability of a substantial increase in the domestic rate in April this year' (Marxism Today, May 1980). Will the CP now issue 'I didn't oppose the cuts' badges to its members?

The RCT refuses to choose between raising rates and cutting services: both are options only for the capitalist class, not for us. We resist all cuts. Our job is not to be 'realistic' but to destroy the reality that can only survive through the systematic brutalisation of the working class.

To fight the cuts we have to fight the Labour Party and all those on the left who put the credibility of this party before our class interests. This will be a tough struggle: many workers will say 'Look, at least Labour councillors are doing their best to cushion the impact of the cuts'. Yet that makes our arguments all the more necessary. Everybody knows what to expect of the Tories. But the Labour left — now fighting, now reluctantly accepting the inevitable — helps the Tories by persuading workers to agree to 'socialist' cuts.

Glyn Cohen

RCT activities in June and July

LONDON

for more information ring (01)274 3951

Series of fortnightly forums on Ireland

Wednesdays, 7.30pm,

University of London Union, Malet Street (tube: Goodge Street/Warren Street)

- 18 June What about the Protestants? Speaker: Andy Clarkson
- 2 July Capitalist crisis in Ireland Speaker: Phil Murphy
- 16 July What is the Republican movement? Speaker: Frank Richards
- 30 July Bring the War to Britain! Speaker: Alex Farrell

Smash the PTA Campaign

for more information write to SPTAC, BM RCT, London WC1V 6XX

- news about and demonstrations against arrests under the Prevention of Terrorism Act

National Dayschool on racial oppression and the labour movement

Saturday 21 June, 10am — 5pm

(social in the evening)

All Nations Club, 4 Martello Street, Hackney E8

(tube: Bethnal Green, British Rail: London Fields, Buses: 106, 253)

● Morning session:

On the dole, up against the police — and no help from the unions.

Speaker: Fran Eden (East London Workers Against Racism)

● Afternoon session:

The strange death of liberal anti-fascism

Speaker: Frank Richards

EAST LONDON

Weekly discussions on the next step

Thursdays, 7.30pm,

Hackney Labour & Trades Union Hall, 96 Dalston Lane, Hackney E8

(British Rail: Dalston Junction, Bus: 277)

East London Workers Against Racism

write to

Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, E8

- political agitation and physical defence against fascist and police attacks on blacks
- resistance against redundancies in the rag trade

Recalled ELWAR meeting

Defend blacks and anti-racists against fascist attacks! Fight nationalism in the labour movement!

Thursday 19 June 7.30 pm

Harold Road Centre, Harold Road, Upton Park, London E13 (near tube)

Weekly street meetings

Saturdays, 10.30am — 12 noon

- Stratford market shopping precinct
- Ridley Road market
- Whitechapel and Watney Street near Whitechapel tube
- Queens Road market, Upton Park

Weekly street sales of the next step

Sundays, 9.30am onwards, Brick Lane (tube: Aldgate East)

MANCHESTER AREA

for more information, write to

RCT, Box 33, 164-66 Corn Exchange Building, Hanging Ditch, Manchester M4 3BD

WARRINGTON

Weekly street sales of the next step

Saturdays, 10am — 12 noon, entrance to the covered shopping centre

Smash the PTA Campaign — North West Committee

for more information write to SPTAC at the box number above

- pickets of Bridewell police station, Liverpool, whenever people arriving in England on the ferry from Ireland are held there under the Prevention of Terrorism Act

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

TORY MP JOHN CORRIE's Bill to tighten up the legal restrictions on abortion met its demise in the House of Commons in March. Anti-Corrie MPs sabotaged its progress using the time-honoured parliamentary tactic of filibustering. TUC women's leader Marie Patterson hailed the news as a 'great victory for women in the whole country' (*Morning Star*, 15 March 1980). But women could be excused for being more cynical about the whole affair: the basic principle of free abortion on demand was never defended in the debates, and cuts continue to decimate the health service and close abortion clinics. Some victory!

It's not only abortion rights that are under attack. The crisis means that employment conditions for working women are steadily worsening. While this may not bother Westminster, it is certainly of concern to the working class. Capitalists have used women's subordinate position in society to boost their profits and strengthen their grip over all workers.

Two-time losers

Today women make up a large proportion of Britain's workforce. Since the late 'fifties their numbers have grown continuously, both absolutely and in relation to male workers. Between 1965 and 1978 female employment rose from 8.1 to 9.1 million while men's jobs dropped from 14.5 to 13.1 million. Women now make up more than 40 per cent of all workers, compared with 33 per cent in 1959. The reactionary motto 'a woman's place is in the home' may now seem only a reminder of the past. But does the rise in female employment mean that equality for women is just round the corner?

A closer look at the figures reveals that things aren't so rosy. Almost 300 000 full-time jobs for women in industry disappeared between 1971 and 1976. The million extra jobs were in traditional areas of 'women's work' — jobs for shop assistants, typists, office clerks, cleaners and school dinner ladies. Almost 600 000 were in the public sector, mainly in health and education, and no less than 820 000 were part-time jobs (*Lloyds Bank Review*, January 1980). This increase in part-time employment is very significant. It shows how the crisis intensifies women's oppression.

Women are oppressed under capitalism because they bear the main burden of domestic work. Cooking, cleaning, looking after the children and the family, the private business of the working class, lies outside social production — and women do most of it. It is because women perform domestic work that the employers are able to get away with giving them dead-end jobs, low pay and lousy conditions. And to justify this they say that women 'only get pregnant and leave work'; that they 'aren't worth training'; that they only work for a bit of 'pin money' to supplement their husband's wages.

Under capitalism women workers always get a specially bad deal. But part-time women workers get an even worse one. Like all working class women they still have to slave away in the home. Like working class women with full-time jobs, they're exploited. But unlike full-timers, they're almost completely powerless to resist their exploitation.

Women's burden

Women have been drawn into employment since the dawn of capitalist industrialisation. Karl Marx made the point in *Capital* that, because it lessened the need for musclepower, the advent of machinery brought the hiring of women and children with it. They were pushed into the most backward sectors of the economy, where capitalists relied on particularly harsh exploitation to keep profits up.

Women workers offered many advan-

Jobs crisis — political crisis

Danger for women at work

Today women are under attack — from government legislation, the cuts and from employers. Below we highlight the fact that more and more women are doing part-time jobs and discuss the way to defend them; on the next page we examine how feminism weakens the struggle against women's oppression.

tages to the capitalist — and they still do today. If the capitalist only employs the husband in a working class household, he has to pay him enough wages to keep both him and his family in shape. But if he employs both husband and wife he can lower his wage rates — and exploit two people at once. He may pay out more for his couple than he did for just the husband, but he can spread the cost of the family's upkeep over two wages. He'll get twice the work for less than double the wage bill.

Yet, despite all the benefits they offer to the capitalists, working class women have no choice but to go out to work. With the onset of the crisis the capitalists cut male workers' wages; women are forced to take jobs to make ends meet. A recent report by the Study Commission on the Family showed that 2.5 million children would be living beneath the official poverty line were it not for the fact that their mothers went out to work (*The Times*, 29 May 1980).

So the capitalists stand to gain a lot from taking on women workers, and working class women need the jobs they offer. But, once in employment, women get less money than men do. Last year average hourly earnings for full-time women were nearly 30 per cent less than those for full-time men (*Department of Employment Gazette*, March 1980). The bourgeoisie is well aware of this. It uses the low wages women get as a threat against male workers.

Instead of seeing women workers as their allies, many male trade unionists see them as cheap labour — as competitors for jobs which are getting scarcer day by day. Most don't take up the fight for equal pay. Most don't fight for free abortion on demand so that women can avoid losing their jobs by having unwanted children. Most don't demand free nurseries so that women can leave their children in care and earn a living. And most are content to leave women workers unorganised or, at best, poorly organised. No wonder women workers are so vulnerable; no wonder they are shunted back

and forth between workplace and the kitchen sink just as capital demands.

The part-time scourge

Right now British capital is demanding more and more women workers. They form a cheap, flexible pool of labour-power — exactly what capitalism in crisis requires. And part-time women workers form the cheapest and most flexible part of that pool.

It's more profitable to employ part-timers. Last year part-time average wage rates were eight per cent less than full-time ones (*Department of Employment Gazette*, March 1980). By taking on part-timers the bosses avoid having to provide for lunch breaks and rest periods; they pay less National Insurance contributions too. Again, part-timers aren't entitled to the holidays full-timers are. And they're also put onto shift work and then laid off with ease. Half of the 1.5 million women in Britain's distributive trades are part-timers, and it's not difficult to see why. In 1976 the government-run Retailing Trades Economic Development Committee observed that 'where trading hours extend beyond the normal working week and different times in the week are a permanent fact of life, the use of part-timers is a key feature of efficient manpower utilisation'.

Part-timers are also easy to fire altogether. Those working less than 21 hours a week cannot claim unfair dismissal or redundancy payments. The Government is quick to take advantage of this: in three months last year Environment Minister Michael Heseltine cut 1700 full-time civil servants' jobs and more than 50 000 part-time ones ('Why we must cut the bureaucrats', *The Sunday Times*, 16 November 1979).

Because the British bourgeoisie has been hit by the recession harder than its foreign rivals, it has become particularly reliant on women part-timers. It makes all sorts of special arrangements to use them. United Biscuits puts young mothers on short-duration daytime shifts; Hellerman Deutsch puts on work for them during

school terms, when children need less looking after, and Barclays Bank gets its 6000 part-timers to work one week and look after each others' children the next (*Industrial relations review and report*, March 1978). Indeed, British bosses put more than 40 per cent of their women workers on part-time work, while West German ones put less than 30 per cent on the same system (*Lloyds Bank Review*, January 1980).

How to hit back

It's vital to defend the interests of women workers in general and women part-timers in particular. The labour movement will never end its oppression at the hands of the employers and their state so long as it tolerates the oppression of women. But the strategies which the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party offer as a means of defending women are useless.

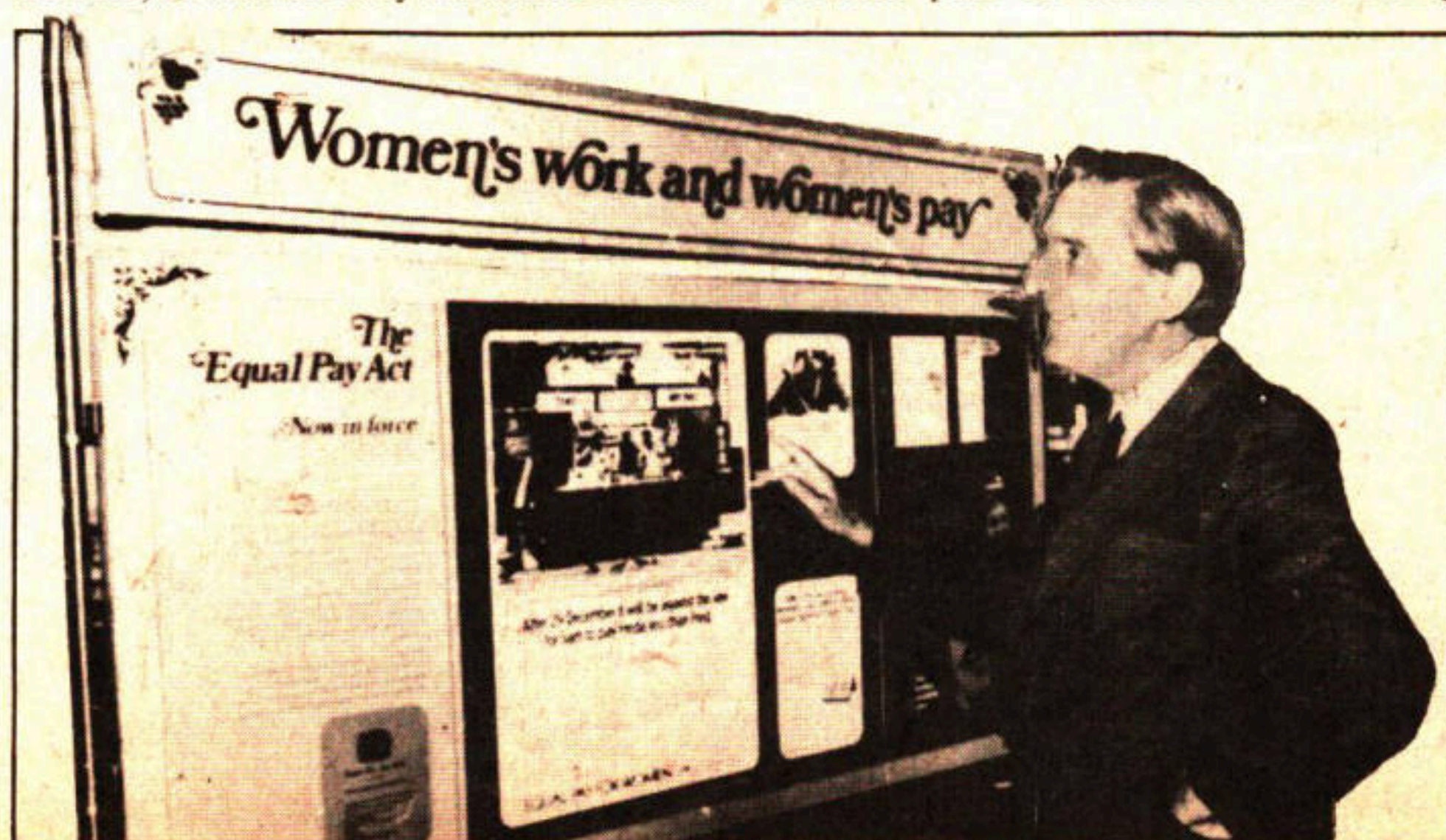
The Stalinists rely on the law to help women. For them, Labour's Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 'though in need of strengthening, contains untapped and untested potential which can assist in breaking down the barrier of rigid sex-segregation which stands between women and equal pay' (*Marxism Today*, January 1980). The CP wants to 'strengthen' an Act which has driven more and more women into 'women's jobs' — the bosses' ruse to avoid female work being compared with male work. The CP wants to use Labour's Equal Pay Act — when equal pay tribunals decide against women so often that the number of women applying to them dropped from 1750 in 1976 to 350 in 1978 (*The Economist*, 15 December 1979), and when wage differentials between men and women are widening all the time.

Laws can't stop the capitalist crisis or insulate women from its effects. Nor can the unionisation of women overcome their oppression, as the SWP believes. Echoing the pleas the TUC bureaucrats make for women to join unions, the SWP argues that 'it is only there that the fight can be won' (*Socialist Review*, February-March 1980). Tell that to Doreen Francis, AUEW shop steward at British Aerospace, Treforest! When, last summer, she and other women tried to get a wage increase large enough to bring them up to something like male rates, the AUEW sabotaged the struggle. It wasn't that the bosses were hard to beat: 'it is our experience', she said, 'that our union's attitude is our biggest obstacle' (*Western Mail*, 7 July 1979). Her experience is only too typical. By their very nature trade unions defend workers on a sectional basis: it is only through class politics that the fight against women's oppression can be won.

When it comes to part-time workers, the best the unions offer is reduced subscription rates. Yes, the RCT supports the unionisation of women — particularly of part-time women, who are only 15 per cent unionised at present. But unionisation will come to nothing unless socialists attack the bureaucrats' approach to women and press the labour movement to fight for women's rights across the board.

Despite the increase in female employment in recent years the burden of domestic work remains the central barrier to equality for women. Only by getting rid of capitalism is it possible to do away with domestic drudgery and bring about real social equality. That's why our fight must not be restricted to campaigns against particular employers or against the Tories but must be broadened into an assault on the capitalist system itself. Only a resolute anti-capitalist struggle can unite workers — women and men — in the fight against the evils of part-time work and all the other features of women's oppression under capitalism.

Alan Harding



Len Murray acclaims the EPA, but union leaders and laws won't defend women's rights today

book reviews

Feminism and the fight for women's rights

LABOUR MOVEMENT IN FRAGMENTS

Review: Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the fragments*, Islington Community Press, 1979.

'Lenin's conception of the party was determined to a very large extent by the historical conditions in Russia. I believe that in Lenin it was one of the conceptions which was determined to the greatest degree by those conditions.' (Manuel Azcarate, 'Leninism - its relevance today', *Marxism Today*, April 1979)

'Lenin's views on organisation, his bending of the stick too far over to centralism, must be considered against the background of conditions in Russia.

'In backward Tsarist Russia, where the working class was a small minority, the idea that the working class alone can liberate itself could very easily be passed over.' (Tony Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 1968)

'How often do we need to say we are not in Russia in the early twentieth century before it becomes a reality? The Tsar is dead!' (*Beyond the fragments*)

The publication of *Beyond the fragments* was a major event for the radical left. It was greeted as an important development in the left's discussion of political organisation. This is surprising, for the book has nothing fresh to say on the subject. The feminist mode of organisation - membership without commitment, activity without centralised direction - already operates on the left. All the same, this 'new' alternative to the Bolshevik tradition of democratic centralism deserves attention.

Coming out of the New Left

Despite its pretensions to originality, the feminist movement is the product of a tradition of radical petit bourgeois politics which in Britain in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties drew together disillusioned Stalinists, liberals and reformists in the 'New Left'. The New Left had no intention of building a revolutionary party to seize state power, as one of its founding fathers, Perry Anderson, explained in 1965:

'The New Left never became a tight, compact intellectual formation, any more than it became a mass political movement. It was a certain political milieu, in which there was an open infiltration of professionals and pre-occupations ranging between the extremes of the theoretical and the pragmatic.' ('The left in the 'fifties', *New Left Review*, January 1965)

The New Left's debating society was a million miles from Bolshevism, but comfortably close to the Labour left.

While its appeal to the working class was zero, the New Left did influence petit-bourgeois women concerned about 'consciousness raising' and 'sexual politics'. For them the most enticing thing about the New Left was its rejection of the Leninist conception of the party. As Rowbotham and her co-authors describe it:

'Democratic centralism was one of the issues raised in 1956 by the men and women who left the Communist Party to form the New Left. They argued that it was inherently undemocratic.' (p37)

This rejection of democratic centralism accorded well with feminist pre-occupations.

Fragments recalls that 'the New Left stressed the possibilities of personal choice within particular contexts'. The feminist approach to organisation begins from the personal needs of individuals, not from the collective interests of the working class.

All the organisational forms of today's women's movement emerged from the New Left. Small groups, single-issue protests and the worship of political autonomy; all these ideas were already an accepted form of left-wing thinking in Britain 20 years ago. However the contemplative existence of the diffuse New Left discussion circles was disrupted by working class militancy in the late 'sixties.

While the New Left itself remained aloof, the vacuum was filled by the International Socialists (now the SWP). Its early appeal in radical circles was that it combined the New Left's rejection of Leninism with a populist image. The IS sought to build a bridge between the individualistic concerns of the radical petit bourgeoisie and the struggles of the working class. This approach attracted a new generation of radicals, as Rowbotham recalls:

'Its attraction to me and to other socialists influenced by the New Left was that it appeared to combine theoretical openness and flexibility with an orientation towards a grass roots working class politics. . . .

'(It) had supported various kinds of community action, a campaign about racism in Islington and the organisation of private tenants in Hackney which contributed to their involvement in the council tenants movement in the late 'sixties.' (p12)

The IS took the politics of the petit bourgeoisie out onto the streets.

The inspiration of Stalinism

While the liberal approach of the New Left and the activism of the IS appealed to feminists, the Stalinist corruption of Marxist theory and politics provided the ideological framework for their movement.

Attacks on historical materialism by Stalinist theoreticians reached a new pitch in the 'sixties. 'New' discoveries about the complex structures within the state were made each year. But the Stalinists' burning interest in the 'relative autonomy' of virtually every aspect of capitalist society from its economic foundation did not emerge from contemporary academic research. It was merely a new synthesis of Stalinist theories that dated back to the 'twenties.

When the Soviet bureaucracy gave up the struggle against international capitalism in favour of peaceful co-existence it sought to blunt Marx's critique of the state and capitalist society. Throughout the turbulent inter-war years, co-existence was preserved through a series of alliances with 'peaceful' imperialist powers. This strategy called for a recognition of 'progressive' and 'reactionary' sections of the bourgeoisie. Tortuous distinctions were formulated between monopolies and

honest capitalists. 'Contradictions' were all the rage. The contradiction that was increasingly left out of this scenario was that between labour and capital.

In response to the post-war boom, peaceful co-existence for the West European communist parties came to mean an accommodation to their own nation states. Theoretical arguments about the 'contradictions' between different institutions of capitalist society continued: they were essential for justifying the communist parties' involvement in a whole variety of state agencies - or at least in those that were 'relatively autonomous' from the undemocratic and repressive ones. But, once they adopted the bourgeois state as their own, the Stalinists were ready to declare a 'new' role for themselves. CPGB National Organiser Dave Cook explained:

'It is no longer possible to have a concept of the party, as geared up for a final assault like an army, whose detachments carry a line into other organisations. . . . Our perspective is not that we ride to power on the ruins of those organisations with which we work, but that they will form an expanding plurality of forces for revolutionary change.' ('The British road to socialism and the Communist Party', *Marxism Today*, December 1978)

Bourgeois pluralism - a plurality of forces and a plurality of interests - became the organisational principle of the Stalinist parties.

The Stalinist analysis of capitalism and its organisational principles have been taken over wholesale by the feminists. The insights into the 'relative autonomy' of capitalist institutions provide all the basic concepts for contemporary feminist theory. They allow feminists to portray the family as the seat of 'patriarchal' domination, to represent housework as a separate mode of production and to argue that sexual divisions are just as, if not more, important than class ones. And over capitalist society they see hovering - autonomously - the spectre of 'sexism'.

The CP also provided feminists with a haven for their democratic sensibilities. As Rowbotham puts it, 'within the Communist Party a strong sense of past crimes (sic) with a tendency for a low key approach to the vanguard Party gave feminists considerable scope' (p58). Feminism flourishes best in conditions where Marxism has been most thoroughly routed.

'Give us a break!'

Despite the occasional harsh words, the left and the women's movement generally get along fine. The left will go to any length to applaud the 'contribution' of the women's movement. To display its feminist credentials the International Marxist Group supported the recent women-only demonstration against the Corrie Bill 'to make it clear that a male dominated parliament was deciding to severely restrict women's rights'. But it 'disagreed' with the women who did not want the press there because it thought that the publicity was useful 'even though the television cameras were held by men'. (*Socialist Challenge*, 24 April 1980)

The left constantly indulges feminist demands for more 'personal politics'. The SWP whimpers that *Fragments* presents an 'incomplete' picture of their party: 'They forget the comrades who listened, argued and were convinced, and who tried with us to change themselves and their organisation' (*Socialist Worker*, 18 August 1979). 'Give us a break!' is all that the radical left can say. The left seems to have had a premonition that the feminists have only drawn out the organisational consequences of its own politics.

Fragments is a cynical attack on the basic principles of working class organisation. It pours scorn on the need for a

party. Having closed their minds to any 'undemocratic' moves like taking state power, its authors display a wholly bourgeois distaste for those who strive to shape themselves for the task:

'The individual militant appears as a lonely character without ties, bereft of domestic emotions, who is hard, erect, self-contained, controlled, without the time or ability to express loving passion.' (p36)

Reiterating the prejudices popularised among earlier generations of their class by the *Readers Digest*, Rowbotham and her colleagues paint revolutionaries as eccentrics and fanatics.

The dogma of political 'autonomy' is the other side of the coin of bourgeois pluralism. *Fragments* is a sentimental tribute to this dogma. Feminist worship of the individual and bitter hatred for the Leninist party is appropriate to a movement which seeks to resolve the problems of women's oppression within the framework of capitalist society. Because the Leninist party aims to overcome women's oppression by destroying capitalism, it struggles against the individual, the better to express the collective will of the working class; its form of organisation is anathema to the bourgeois individual, no matter how radical. That's why the *Fragments* authors see the revolutionary party as a bigger threat to their movement than capitalism itself.

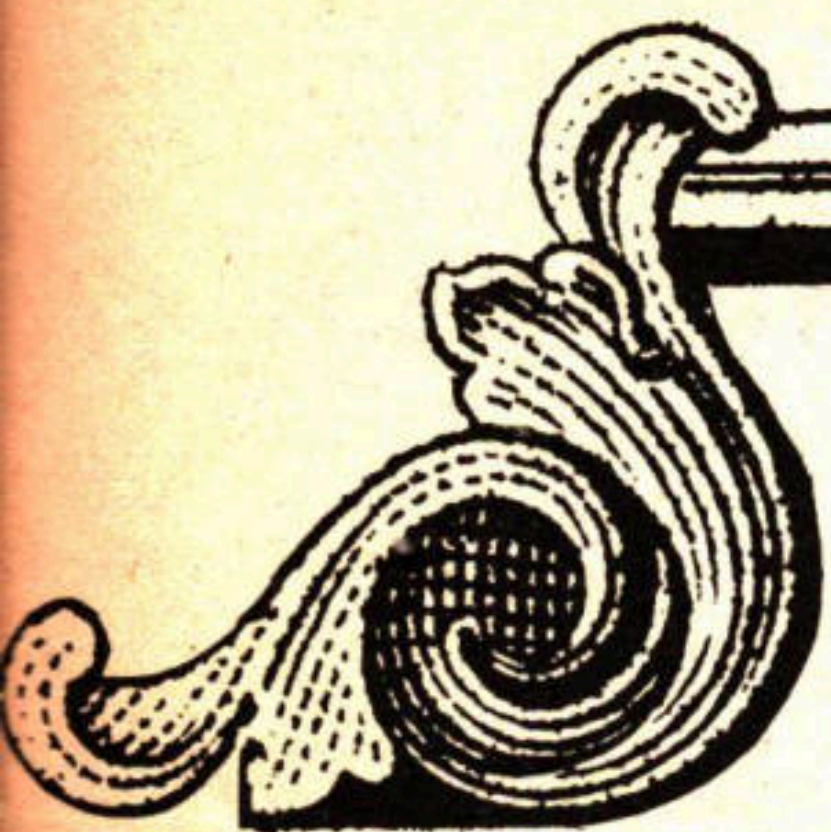
Fragmenting the working class

The only 'contribution' that feminism can make is to deepen divisions within the working class. Feminists take the issue of women's oppression out of the domain of working class politics. In the process, they do the labour bureaucracy a real favour. Labour Party politicians and trade union leaders are happy to give token recognition to women's 'autonomous interests' - it relieves them of the responsibility of doing anything to defend women's rights.

The radical left also leaves the women's question to women. It too pays lip-service to women's interests by allowing them to raise women's issues at its conferences. But the left's discreet cultivation of its own 'autonomous' women's groups allows it to avoid the task of getting male workers to fight for women's rights and thus strengthen the working class as a whole.

Indeed the left likes to pretend that women's oppression is not a problem in the labour movement. Take the steel strike: it showed how divisions between men and women can be exploited by the ruling class. When women in Barnsley and Sheerness demonstrated against the strike, their protests were used by the press and television to put pressure on the strikers and their supporters. This highlighted a more serious problem - the chauvinist attitudes steelworkers often showed towards the women who turned out on picket lines to help them. But what was the left's reaction to all this? It concentrated its attention on patronising small groups of women, mainly in South Yorkshire, who participated actively in the strike. The radical left preferred to ignore the problem of male chauvinism in the steel workers' union; it did nothing to challenge the reactionary outlook that allowed the employers to drive another wedge into the workers' already divided ranks. For the left the steel strike was just a trade union issue - no place for 'sexual politics'.

Beyond the fragments is a self-indulgent and vacuous document. It scoops the dross of decades of petit-bourgeois politics. That such trash is taken seriously by anybody in the labour movement is a true measure of the degeneration of left-wing politics in Britain.



Monetarism NOT WORTH THE PAPER...

Review: Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to choose*, Secker and Warburg, 1980.

Ever since the Tory Government came to power a year ago, 'monetarism' has been all the rage. Thatcher is for it: she proclaims that Britain must have 'sound money'. During the election campaign she took to tearing up pound notes in front of television cameras to show the value of money had halved under Labour. Now he's back in opposition, former Chancellor Denis Healey is against the monetarist doctrine. In a parliamentary debate on the steel strike, he berated Industry Minister Keith Joseph's rigid cash limits on BSC as 'punk monetarism'.

A comprehensive statement of the monetarists' economic and political views by Chicago Professor Milton Friedman — and his wife — gives us the opportunity to assess the Tory Government's 'monetarist' policies.

Crisp as a ten bob note

With all the fuss about Friedman — he had a peak time series on television to propagate his views — you might think he's saying something new. But his book, *Free to choose* — a 'personal statement' — is only a codification of the arguments he's been churning out for years.

What is new is that the international bourgeoisie now needs Friedman's theories. Cast out by Keynesian economists in the 'cheap money' years of the post-war boom, Friedman has at last won fame — and fortune — in the 'tight money' years of the recession. In 1976 his efforts were rewarded with the Nobel Prize for economics.

Monetarist theory brings together all of the reactionary and idiotic notions of the ruling class. The monetarists' central tenet is that a capitalist economy in which free competition rules can provide full employment and rising living standards. They contrast an idealised view of capitalism in its progressive phase with today's stagnant, state-assisted economies. For monetarists, the whole problem is that the state plays too large a part in the economy. State expenditure and taxation, borrowing and lax monetary policies are their explanations for unemployment, inflation and capitalism's slide into ruin. If the state would only cut taxation, slash expenditure and gain control of the money supply, everything would be all right. 'Greedy unions' would find that, when firms cannot find the money to pay, 'excessive' wage demands price workers out of a job. Capitalists, liberated

from the burden of taxation, would have their incentive to invest rekindled. Consumers would be able to exercise the 'freedom to choose' in the market once nationalised industries give way to private capitalist firms.

All very simple. But monetarists get reality back to front. State spending, 'excessive' taxation, borrowing and inflation are *symptoms* of the crisis not its cause. Government intervention in the economy has increased steadily over the years in response to the problems of private capital. The state nationalised industries capitalists could no longer run themselves; it boosted expenditure and provided subsidies and cheap credit. During the post-war period state intervention staved off the risk of recession. However, by the 'seventies these 'Keynesian' policies were no longer working.

The state was confronted with the collapse of profitability. The real rate of profit in British industry fell from more than 12 per cent in the early 'sixties to 3.5 per cent in 1975 (*Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*, June 1979). Private capital was in no position to respond to the government's Keynesian policies. It simply used ready credit and government-stimulated demand to raise prices, in a desperate attempt to restore profitability. Inflation got worse and unemployment rose.

State intervention postponed the crisis: accumulation continued — but profitability fell further. By the mid 'seventies the state that had been trying to bale the capitalists out increasingly seemed to be the cause of all their problems. Inflation and unemployment, all the economic woes of bankrupt capitalism, were put down to government policies. The government sought new inspiration: Keynes gave way to Friedman.

It's only money

How are monetarists going to solve the crisis? Nobody takes seriously Friedman's adulation of Meiji Japan, the eighteenth century England of Adam Smith, the USA of Thomas Jefferson or contemporary Hong Kong as examples of flourishing capitalism which should be copied today. Even Keith Joseph, who shares Friedman's hankering after a lost capitalist golden age, realises that the state must play a substantial role in the economy.

What the bourgeoisie takes seriously about monetarism is its role in restoring 'economic discipline'. If the government can succeed in tightly controlling the supply of money and credit, it can force

down living standards. Monetarist policies mean more public spending cuts and encourage employers to resist wage demands. Tight money helps to rationalise industry. Weaker firms, hit by falling demand and unable to pay their overheads, go bankrupt; the rest are obliged to cut back production and push through redundancies. Monetarism is what's needed to make British capitalism profitable.

Enter Denis the monetarist

Monetarism made its debut under the last Labour Government. It was Healey who implemented the most savage public spending cuts of the post-war period, who first introduced cash limits and targets for the growth of the money supply and the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement. Under Labour, the PSBR became a government fetish and a term familiar to the public.

Labour's policies were successful for the bourgeoisie thanks to the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy in the Social Contract. By 1978 inflation had been brought down and wages and living standards had been reduced with minimal opposition. Public spending and the burden of taxes on the bourgeoisie had been curbed. Labour created a temporary respite for British capitalism — but it did not solve the crisis. Industrial employment continued to fall and investment did not recover. Profitability was still too low, and the improved fortunes of the economy rested on North Sea oil revenues and a slight upturn in world trade.

Labour was not monetarist enough. The worsened climate for capital accumulation in 1979, and Labour's failure to hold workers to its five per cent wage limit, meant that more drastic measures were required.

Over to you, Geoffrey

So in came the Tories — in the middle of the worst crisis since 1975. In the first nine months of the Thatcher regime 500 000 redundancies were announced in industry (*Investors Chronicle*, 22 February 1980). Since September last year, unemployment has risen to record levels. The Department of Industry expects manufacturing investment to fall by up to 10 per cent this year, and the CBI predicts an all-time low for industrial profitability.

But the Tories are under no illusion that monetarism alone — even with record interest rates and drastic public spending cuts — is going to solve their problems. Thatcher's 'first priority is to restore sound money and conquer in-

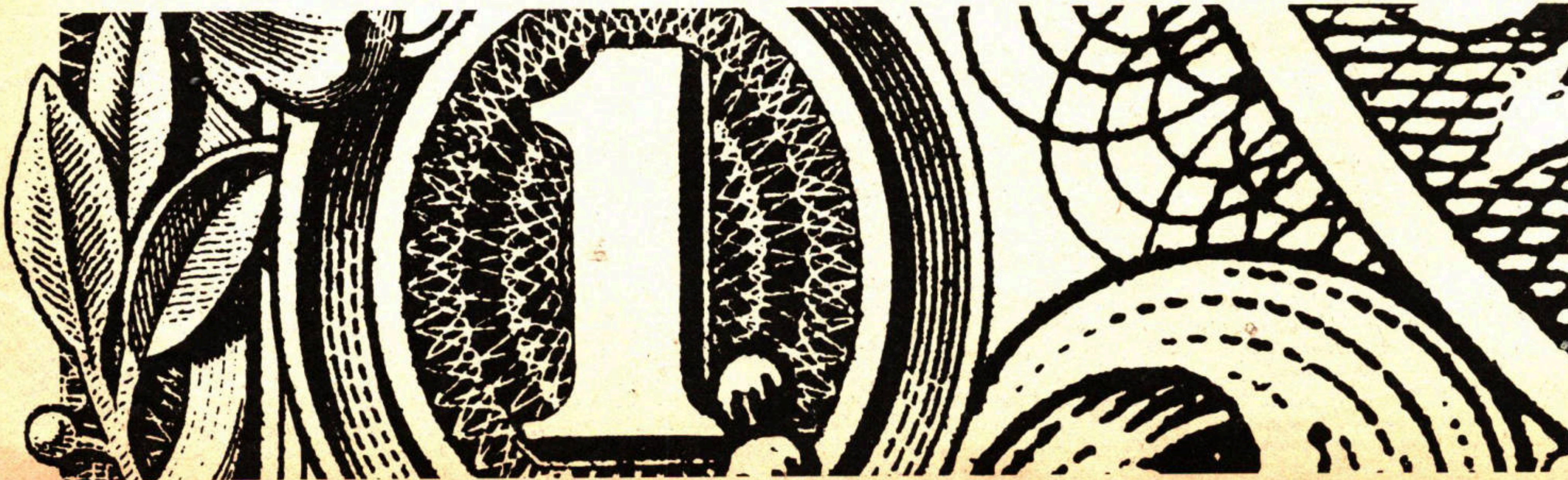
flation' because the competitiveness of British industry has declined by 60 per cent since 1976. However, she adds, 'we do not pretend that this alone will be sufficient to revive our economy, but we know that it is the essential precondition' (*The Guardian*, 29 February 1980). Workers at British Steel and British Leyland know that other preconditions are productivity deals, mass redundancies, cuts in real wages and attacks on trade union rights.

But it's not easy being a Friedmanite in a world recession. Howe's monetarist incantations since taking office could not prevent the money supply growing faster than planned and the PSBR expanding out of control. Private companies, hit by falling profitability, rushed to the banks for money to pay their bills. The Minimum Lending Rate of 17 per cent had barely any effect in cutting their demand for bank loans (*Financial Times*, 18 April 1980). Public sector borrowing shot up to around £9 billion in 1980, reflecting the effects of inflation and higher interest rates.

The Tories have already been forced to make a U-turn. And they have made it over monetary policy. The Bank of England released special deposits to the clearing banks in January and has since doled out £1 billion to ease their cash shortage. The Government dared not go too far in pulling away the prop of credit that supports crisis-ridden capitalist industry. The CBI has already forecast that companies outside the North Sea oil sector will need to borrow £7 billion to stay in business this year. The monetarists' fad reveals the crisis facing the ruling class today. It presides over an economy which it can neither understand nor control. But this doesn't weaken the bourgeoisie's instinctive response: to attack the working class. If it is to restore profitability to British capitalism, the bourgeoisie has no choice but to reduce social security benefits and public sector jobs, to implement redundancies and cut wages.

The monetary crisis is simply the outward manifestation of the crisis of capitalist production. Friedman's claptrap is the packaging for a bourgeois offensive on the working class. Behind all his childish and backward-looking ramblings about the freedom of the individual and the evils of state intervention lies the imperative of solving the crisis at workers' expense.

Tony Allen



Letters

rooting
for
Labour



...united front?



youth



Rooting for Labour

I agree wholeheartedly with the view that the call for a general strike which has been taken up recently by many left groups is premature (*the next step*, No 4, April/May 1980). As your article pointed out, to call for a general strike is really to call for a class insurrection, and the existing bureaucratic, reformist mis-leadership of the labour and trade union movements would be sure to betray the struggle, as happened in 1926.

Therefore to call for a general strike now is to lead the working class towards defeat, not victory.

However, I differ strongly from your view of how the class struggle must develop in order to come to the stage when the slogan for a general strike can be adopted.

You are saying that the reformist leaders of the TUC and Labour Party — which are indeed the main obstacle to the development of revolutionary consciousness — must be bypassed by the building of a vanguard of 'tens of thousands' of revolutionaries which will then take over the leadership of the class.

But this obstacle cannot be bypassed. It must be confronted head-on.

Revolutionaries must be rooted *within* the labour and trade union movements to build mass action to challenge time and time again the betrayals of the bureaucrats and eventually to wrest the leadership of the class from them. Otherwise, the 'tens of thousands' will be totally cut off from the *millions* — who will be left languishing under the spell of the reformists, while the attacks of the ruling class hit harder and harder.

It is through the experience of direct participation in mass struggle — for however limited a demand — that wide layers of workers come to a class struggle perspective and see the need to kick out the bureaucrats — not by being recruited to the 'vanguard' in ones and twos on the sidelines of the battlefield.

There is mounting evidence to support my argument: membership of the Labour Party is now increasing; the London Labour Party has adopted a 'Troops Out' position; the large number of Labour Party and trade union banners at the anti-Corrie and Campaign Against Racist Laws demonstrations last autumn; the Labour Party recall conference at the end of May to build a class fightback against the Tories, Callaghan & Co of course oppose these developments but are increasingly unable to contain the pressure from below.

The conclusion can only be that revolutionaries must struggle within the labour movement for the toppling of the reformist mis-leaders.

Fraternaly
Alan Wilkes
London SE 11

Our correspondent confuses participation in the struggles of the labour movement with membership of the Labour Party. The RCT attacks the labour bureaucrats by challenging the reformist strategies they pursue in strikes and campaigns against cuts and redundancies. The Labour Party contains any and every 'class fightback' within the limits of its national-reformist programme.

Radical Labour Party members like our correspondent only assist 'Callaghan & Co' in staying sensitive to 'pressure from below'. By directing workers' struggles against the Tories they build up Labour's image as a workers' party and help the reformist leaders keep the lid on the class struggle.

On some of the specific points raised in the letter see articles on the Troops Out Movement and the current state of labour movement resistance to the Government in this issue of *the next step*. On CARL — see *the next step*, No 4, April/May 1980.

Youth culture and entertainment*

Culture? It's a holiday, a cheap holiday, a brief tacky carnival, no matter what age, sex or ethnic group its myopic snipers — the high street caterers to all fads, fashions and tastes — have their sights trained on. More or less every shot is a golden one. Youth obviously make the most rewarding target; impressionable, naive, confused, alienated, mobile, they are the easiest one to hit.

Take a walk down the high street and switch your gaze from side to side. Now you're in a circus. The one-dimensional attractions are announced with fanfares, the ringmaster is on the live wire, and the all-purpose fine-mesh safety net is in position and hovering just about one foot from ground level. Just keep walking sipping from that heavy can of malt liquor.

Watch and wonder as the animated fashion accessories flow through the silky gloss pages (this week startlingly and aggressively toned) and reflecting plate glass windows. Perhaps some people were born to be western screen-printed plastic carrier bags — sort of pre-programmed, junk consumer vessels; but I don't think so. The girls still paint their faces. The boys used to paint their faces too, just like fancy rainbows, even brighter than the girls, but they don't any more. It doesn't go down so well at the office.

Of course it's always been a matter of identifying the enemy. And in this context the enemy is entertainment, or at least the entertainment syndrome: mock autonomy, a structureless free for all, sham spontaneity. It's always been with us, always sliding up to our limp elbows at times of stress and mental tightness, always ready with a shimmering spoonful of something nice. It's just that youth culture is supposed to be different somehow; fresh, vibrant, rebellious, a crazy and violent hotch potch of unselfconscious expression. The artfully sculpted rebel always has before him a symmetrical journey. He can make no mistakes on it. But once you erase the sham colour ('rock 'n' roll', 'mods', 'punks', 'ska', 'boogie', and all the rest) with which that fraudulent landscape is painted, once you expose in vivid black and white the base principle it follows (commercial viability), all you're left with is heavy entertainment.

There is no youth culture. The foxy demon that passes for the 'contemporary alternative' constantly fails to illustrate even the most pathetic motions of petulance. Rather than displaying the real open wounds of oppressed youth, vile 'entertainment' chooses to busy itself manufacturing sweet placebos, and romantic visions of the timeless duel between good and evil. They're all administered by proxy; the ringmaster entertains his captive audience by brandishing the lion-tamer's chair.

Youth allows the cosmetic-evangelist puppets to pretend to illuminate their problems, to grotesquely mime their instinctive (but smartly neutered) rebellion. With all the self-deceptive gratitude they can muster they smile beatifically as the rhythmic opium wafts sweetly over the

airwaves, providing all the proof they need that life is easier with the radio on. What was once arrogant, independent, righteous, a renunciation is little more than a lush holiday resort, fully and fruitfully colonised by fatcat businessmen and sharp trendies. And the helpful salesman smiles — it's your choice kids, you pays your money and you takes your choice. That's freedom. And as the young press their noses ever so close to the greasy glass, eyes amazingly wide, staring at the seductively sticky confectionery, their hands reach for their money. They have the freedom to choose, they can be mods or they can have the Clash; they can be punks or they can have the Specials; they can choose to be skins or they can have the Rolling Stones. That is the sum total of the freedom on offer.

(You can of course make a stand. You can rock against racism. You can rock against sexism. But then you can sex against cockism. You can race against rockism. You can join the Army and see the world.)

Even the warped mirror of the mass media shows that the philandering of the cultural dogooders is having little effect where it counts. Neasden, Bristol, Scarborough: manic and fractured reaction against the state sanctioned moral and physical violence that is perpetrated against young people every day of their lives — against unmitigated alienation. How can our good citizens be surprised? This is the prize of entertainment.

John Hamblett
York

*This letter has been shortened.

Time for the United Front?*

Upon reading the latest issue of *the next step* I feel sorrow rather than anger.

The SWP supports the idea of non-racist immigration controls?? This is rubbish: the former is a CP position — I would enclose one of our stickers announcing 'all immigration controls are racist' but I'm afraid that I've used them all on the London Underground! You state that we endorse these positions by taking part in organisations that fall short of the 'maximum' programme, by working with the IWA and CP.

Well comrades, I am afraid that this is evidence of a failure to understand the 'united front' tactic. I quote:

'The problem of the united front — despite the fact that a split is inevitable in this epoch between the various political organisations basing themselves on the working class — grows

out of the urgent need to secure for the working class the possibility of a united front in the struggle against capitalism.

'For those who do not understand this task, the party is only a propaganda society and not an organisation for mass action. . . . (L. Trotsky, *The first five years of the Communist International*, Vol 2)

Let us begin *discussing* and cease *bickering*; and join in building a rank and file movement that can become in due course the foundation of workers' councils.

J Nicholls

Balham and Tooting SWP

*This letter has been shortened.

Helen Swift writes:

Like many on the left our correspondent calls every campaign a united front. For Trotsky however, the united front was not a timeless formula to be applied in all situations: 'The united front is determined by concrete circumstances, for concrete aims' (*Writings of Leon Trotsky*, 1932).

The united front tactic was a particular approach to a particular problem. In the early 'twenties the European communist parties had a substantial working class following. The problem they faced was that of winning the majority of workers away from the old reformist parties and uniting them behind the revolutionary vanguard. Trotsky assumed that the Communists had the support of around a third or a half of the working class. Where they did not have a mass following, different tactics were appropriate: 'In cases where the Communist Party still remains an organisation of a numerically insignificant minority, the question of its conduct of the mass-struggle front does not assume a decisive practical and organisational significance'. ('On the United Front', *The first five years of the Communist International*, Vol 2, 1922).

Today revolutionaries constitute a 'numerically insignificant minority'. We cannot begin to pull the mass of the working class around a revolutionary vanguard, for a strong current of class conscious workers does not yet exist. Our first priority must be to build a vanguard: all our tactics must be directed towards this objective. The united front tactic is therefore inappropriate to current circumstances.

The Campaign Against Racist Laws (CARL) is not a united front. It is a propaganda bloc of radicals, Stalinists and reformists: it is not an instrument for winning workers from reformism. If the SWP opposes all immigration controls why does it take responsibility for CARL, which merely opposes 'racist' controls? What is the practical consequence of the SWP's principles when it goes along with a body that endorses the official labour movement's tacit acceptance of state-imposed limits on immigration?

We need unity in action to achieve particular objectives, but this is not the same as forming a united front. It simply means joining in certain activities with different tendencies in the labour movement to defend workers' interests. In such campaigns revolutionaries must maintain political independence — just as they had to when applying the united front in the past. As Trotsky put it:

'The tactic of the united front demands from the party complete freedom in manoeuvring, flexibility and resoluteness. To make this possible, the party must clearly and specifically declare at every given moment just what its wishes are, just what it is striving for, and it must comment authoritatively, before the eyes of the masses on its own steps and proposals'. (*The first five years of the Communist International*, Vol 2)

The SWP has never distinguished itself from the flabby reformism of CARL. As far as any worker is concerned the SWP and CARL are the same political quantity. Lenin and Trotsky developed the united front to clarify the distinction between class politics and reformism; the SWP invokes it to blur this distinction with the aim of winning support from the Labour Party and the CP.

Opposition to all immigration controls is not a 'maximum programme'. Nothing short of this approach challenges the right of the state to control the movement of immigrants and divide the working class. You can't fight racism by opposing some laws but accepting others that seem less racist. That's why CARL is a diversion from the fight against racism.

the next step, June/July 1980 15



RCT public meeting on Iran

- Khomeini's capitalism
Speaker: Inez Landa
 - The imperialists close in
Speaker: Mike Freeman
- Friday 11 July 7.15pm
Friends House, Euston Road
London (tube: Euston)

JUST OUT

Revolutionary Communist Papers No 6

KHOMEINI'S CAPITALISM: THE IMPERIALISTS CLOSE IN

President Carter has despatched commando units of US marines to the British island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, ready to support an invasion of Iran from the Persian Gulf. The British Government is giving full support to the Western powers' drive to hang on to Iran's markets, its investment potential and its oil. Meanwhile Ayatollah Khomeini rides the tiger of mass unrest he unleashed to drive out the Shah. In his desperate struggle to restore capitalist stability in Iran, he has subjected workers and socialists, women and national minorities to ruthless repression.

Carter and Thatcher both use every aspect of the Iran crisis — from the American hostages in Tehran to the storming of the embassy in London — to drum up popular support for a military intervention in the Middle East. Our job is to mobilise labour movement opposition to the imperialists' war plans. That is the aim of the latest issue of *Revolutionary Communist Papers*.
Price £1 (plus 25p postage)

Imperialism

Chauvinism and the Third World War

THE CAPITALIST CRISIS makes life intolerable for workers in Europe, the USA and Japan. But in Africa, Latin America and Asia the suffering of the masses is greater still. In the backward capitalist regions the survival of the system depends on the intensification of political oppression. The widespread popular revolt in the Third World is the inevitable response of the people to the barbaric social conditions they experience.

The wave of uprisings in the backward capitalist world threatens the imperialist powers. At the very time countries like the United States and Britain desperately need new spheres for investment, new markets and sources of raw materials, they have to contend with mass unrest in their old colonies.

Imperialism cannot rule in the old way. The breakdown of social stability indicates that the system of imperialist alliances no longer works. Iran used to be the bulwark of imperialism in the Middle East. Ever since the Shah's regime collapsed the USA has been searching for a new policeman in the Gulf. But so far it has not succeeded in finding one. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq — all have their own internal problems. Israel is prepared to serve imperialist interests; but too close an identification of the USA with the Zionist state risks exacerbating the wrath of the Arab masses.

The Middle East is only the tip of the iceberg. South Korea and Brazil used to be — like Iran — showpieces of imperialism. But the high growth rates of these economies, paid for by the sweat and blood of the working class, have come to an end. The working class has served notice that it is no longer prepared to accept the slave-labour conditions of the last two decades. In both countries workers are demanding elementary democratic rights and the legalisation of labour movement organisations. In South Korea agitation has erupted into armed conflict.

Carter takes stock

The depth of the capitalist crisis pushes the imperialist nations towards militarism. When diplomatic manoeuvres and trade sanctions fail to get results, armed intervention becomes the only reliable means for safeguarding imperialist interests.

Revolutions and insurrections in Iran, Nicaragua and South Korea show that there is no security for imperialist rule in the recession. As the super-powers face up to the greatest test since the Second World War they stir up nationalist prejudices to recruit popular support for their new plunge into barbarism.

President Carter has special reasons for stepping up his gun-boat diplomacy. Washington can only compensate for economic decline by exerting its political and military might. That's why the USA is in the forefront of the drive towards war.

Carter's war-mongering is the most extreme example of a trend that is common to all imperialist nations: they all view one another with intense suspicion. What is at stake is a new redivision of the world — and nobody wants to lose out.

In this struggle for survival even the most trivial issues can blow up into major international conflicts. English lamb is nearly as big a bourgeois preoccupation as the Moscow Olympics. And Lord Carrington is obliged to make painfully clear his distaste for the film 'The Death of a Princess'.

Evans backs Carrington

When Britain's aristocratic Foreign Secretary has to crawl before the Saudi Arabian monarch it shows that British imperial-

ism needs all the support it can get. Apart from appeasing its foreign allies, the British government must also mobilise the whole of society for the battles ahead. Working class support is critical for the successful resolution of imperialist rivalries. The British bourgeoisie cannot face its overseas competitors while it has class conflict to deal with at home.

The British ruling class uses all its ingenuity to mobilise popular support for the British nation. Every event is examined with a view to exploiting its chauvinist potential. Thatcher's conflicts with EEC chiefs, the Zimbabwe settlement, even the continuing turmoil in Uganda ('ever since we left') — every international issue is used to build up British prestige at home. And the successful SAS assault on the Iranian embassy was turned into an occasion for national celebration.

The TUC leaders and the Labour Party serve imperialism well. They try to quash every expression of working class solidarity with resistance to imperialism and put forward a programme of economic nation-

alism. This programme is not only useless for defending workers. Unless it is fought and defeated it will line British workers up with the capitalist class against workers in other countries.

Take the present campaign for import controls. Tribune MPs such as Les Huckfield and trade union bureaucrats like Moss Evans direct workers' energies against such foreign 'threats' as Japanese cars; others single out South Korean textiles for attack. Their campaign against the EEC is aimed against the dangers that Europe poses for British workers. The Labour leaders will fight *anything* except British capitalism.

The Labour politicians have no distinct foreign policy. Even when the left reformists chant their ritual denunciation of nuclear weapons, they cannot resist the temptation of taking a swipe at 'the Americans'. 'No US army bases on our British soil', they cry. And the Labour leaders stand with Britain against the Irish liberation movement and against Iran.

Flush out the filth!

It's time to break the all-class consensus that backs British imperialism. Our enemy is at home. We have to fight the capitalist class on all issues, from wages to Afghanistan. The present class truce on foreign affairs not only allows imperialism to get out of its difficulties; it also undermines the class struggle in industry. As long as the capitalists can confine conflict to this limited sphere they can maintain their political domination over the labour movement.

A working class that is not anti-imperialist is doomed to defeat. It will be implicated in the oppression of other nations and will act not as an independent class but as the auxiliary force of the bosses.

The recent setbacks suffered by the British working class show that it is urgently necessary to begin the fight against the imperialist war drive. It's not too soon to flush out the chauvinist filth peddled by the reformist leadership of the labour movement. The capitalists are preparing for war today; workers must take the side of the oppressed everywhere and join the battle against imperialism.

Inez Landa

WORKERS AGAINST IMPERIALISM

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency is holding a three-day conference 'Imperialism in the 'eighties' in London in September. Conference organiser Helen Swift spoke to the next step about the thinking behind the venture.

What is 'Imperialism in the 'eighties' all about? 'If you're active in the labour movement today you can't ignore the impact of pro-imperialist views. The Labour leadership is working over-time to make imperialist politics the legitimate point of view. But at the same time there are many workers who are instinctively repelled by this chauvinist propaganda. The conference is designed to arm these workers with an understanding of how imperialism operates — in order to fight it.'

Isn't it obvious what imperialism is doing — why do you need a three-day conference to discuss it? 'Look, what does imperialism mean to militants? For decades, Labour left-wingers have been telling them that imperialism no longer really exists. Even the present leadership of the SWP used to argue that you can't talk about imperialism any more. Many on the left today talk about the Irish War as if it was a case of mistaken policy rather than systematic imperialist oppression.'

'Another problem is that the term "imperialism" has come to be used as a swear-word, and not as a scientific concept. The workers' movement is not really aware of recent developments in the imperialist

world system. We have to understand our enemy if we are to fight it effectively. That's why the conference will discuss the present trends in imperialist competition, the decline of US capitalism and issues like the struggle over the Middle East and Africa.'

Do you see this conference as a forum for RCT politics? 'Obviously we intend to ensure that the revolutionary analysis of imperialism is presented as clearly and coherently as possible. But we also want to use the conference to stimulate discussion and debate on a wide range of subjects. That's why we have invited speakers who have a point of view that is not in accord with RCT politics. We have invited the SWP to debate its theory of the Permanent Arms Economy and its traditional position that imperialism has been superseded by a 'higher stage' of capitalist development. We have even given a revisionist group such as the Spartacist League the opportunity to defend its peculiar analysis of the post-war boom. We expect a number of organisations from Africa and the Middle East to participate in the discussion.'

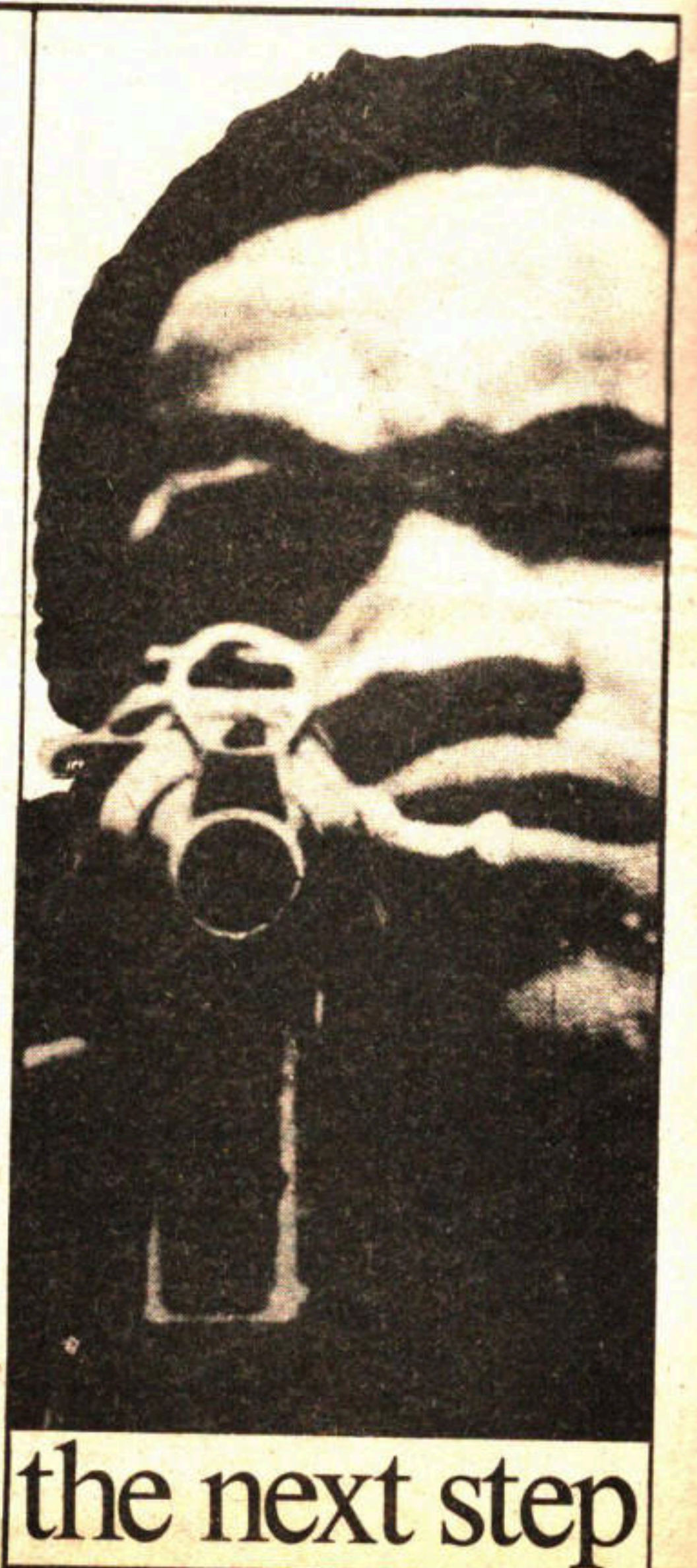
'Finally let me emphasise that we don't

want to debate for the sake of it. We hope that the discussion will answer questions that are on the minds of the next step readers. Above all we want to make sure that the political consequences of discussions are clearly drawn out. Ultimately the conference has only one aim: to strengthen anti-imperialist politics in the working class movement.'

Revolutionary Communist
Tendency
International Conference

IMPERIALISM IN THE 'EIGHTIES
5,6,7 September 1980

For further information, agenda, suggested readings and venue, write to Helen Swift, BM RCT, London WC1V 6XX. Conference fee: £5 pre-paid; £6.50 at the door.



the next step