No 8 November/December 1980

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p



HANDS OFF IRELAND!

The hunger strike of Irish prisoners of war underlines the urgency of building solidarity action in Britain. The British ruling class is determined to break the back of the Irish liberation movement. It is also committed to maintaining its oppression of Ireland no matter what the cost.

THE DECISIVENESS of the capitalist class puts to shame the evasive, vacillating and often downright reactionary politics which presently dominate the labour movement's approach to the Irish question. *the next step* insists on taking up the Irish War from a working class point of view. We argue that Britain is conducting a war of oppression against the Irish people, that this oppression is *necessary* for the maintenance of the capitalist state. Britain has incorporated the Six Counties of 'Northern Ireland' into its system of class domination. For the imperialists Ireland must remain divided.

Workers against imperialism

The issue is imperialist oppression. Will workers support imperialism, or will they support the struggle for national liberation? Unfortunately the British left refuses to present this choice to the labour movement. Instead it moralises about the lack of 'democracy' or 'human rights'. But why does Britain deny the Irish people basic democratic rights? Because it is necessary to maintain its control in Ireland. The Six Counties cannot be reformed for its very existence requires oppression.

To sell its reformist proposals the left treats imperialist oppression as an accident or a matter of no importance. The SWP depicts the oppression of Ireland as Britain's colonial hangover:

> 'The army do not represent us. They do represent an idea that should have died out a hundred years ago – that Britain should hang on to her colonies until they have been bled dry by British businessmen. Northern Ireland is one of Britain's last colonies, and the army still cling on as though it were 1879, not 1979.' (*Socialist Worker*, 1 September 1979)

For *Socialist Worker* imperialist oppression is a thing of the past. If the Partition of Ireland and army brutality are so irrational then, of course, a strategy of reforming the Six Counties makes sense. This is an option which *Socialist Worker* suggests the capitalist class could well find convincing. An article on the Government's Irish policy concludes:

> 'Thatcher is even reputed to have begun Cabinet discussions with the searching question "Why are we in Northern Ireland anyway?"
>
> 'With continuing loyalist intransigence and mounting pressure for a settlement that can end the war, convincing answers to that question will be increasingly difficult to find.' ('Are Tory withdrawal symptoms growing?', *Socialist Worker*, 26 April 1980)

The SWP may have genuine difficulty in finding 'convincing answers' to questions about Ireland. The British ruling class certainly has no such problem. It knows its class interests and is determined to crush the Irish people.

Know your enemy

Reformist politics leave imperialism in peace. They divert attention from the role of the British state in Ireland. This reformist approach is summed up well by the mobilising slogan for the 15 November demonstration of the Committee for Withdrawal from Ireland (CWI): 'No to Tory Policies on Ireland'.

The choice of this slogan by the radical left, Labour Party and Liberal Party supporters of the CWI at first sight seems curious. What are these Tory policies on Ireland? What have the Tories ever done on Ireland that the Liberals and the Labour Party didn't back? What is so distinctive about *Tory* policy on Ireland?

Radical liberals may not like it, but it was their darling, Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who in 1916 promised the Unionist Sir Edward Carson the permanent exclusion of six of the nine counties of Ulster from the rest of Ireland. The same party led by the same leader presided over the Partition of Ireland in 1921.

The Labour Party had its day in the 'sixties and 'seventies. It was the Labour Government which sent British troops to occupy the Six Counties and defend Partition in 1969. Later in the 'seventies a Labour government introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act, abolished special status for Irish prisoners of war and establised the disgusting H-Blocks. It is a matter of public record that the Tory, Labour and Liberal parties have always taken a united stand against the Irish liberation struggle.

But for the radical left organisations the slogan 'No to Tory Policies on Ireland' makes sense. Attacks on the Tory Government endow the opposition parties with credibility. Although only anti-imperialists have an interest in supporting the national liberation movement and attacking the British state, the most varied forces have an interest in attacking the Tories. The CWI is in reality an appendage of the electoral machine of the opposition parties.

Which side are you on?

The CWI wants British workers to choose Labour policies rather than Tory policies on Ireland. In reality this is no choice at all. The labour bureaucrats would rather that Irish prisoners of war died than see the British state defeated. That's why the Labour and Communist parties ganged up with the TUC to victimise Tameside Trades Council. As soon as Tameside expressed its support for the Irish liberation struggle it was disaffiliated from the TUC. Now Labour politicians are doing the same with Todmorden Trades Council (see page 2). Labour bureaucrats may not like the Tories but they hate and fear the Irish liberation struggle even more.

It is because we want workers to choose the struggle against British imperialism that we oppose the politics of the CWI. We want to see British imperialism defeated and thrown out of Ireland for good.

To realise this objective we appeal to British workers' class interests. Appeals to 'human rights' only cloud the issue. Our job is to expose the role of imperialism and to show that Britain's defeat in Ireland means the defeat of the bosses and a victory for the working class.

Because the liberation of Ireland constitutes such a grave threat to British capitalism, only the working class has an interest in imperialism's defeat. That's why the anti-imperialist movement has to be based in the working class. The next step towards building this movement is to rid the labour movement of pro-imperialist politics. We must also expose the opportunists who try to obscure the issue with their talk about 'civil rights'. To do this the RCT will be campaigning in the trade unions to throw out the TUC's pro-imperialist policy on Ireland. We want the organised sections of the working class to open up a second front in the Irish War in Britain.

We too will be on the demonstration on 15 November. But not to oppose 'Tory policies'. We will be there to win support against the policy of the TUC and Labour Party on Ireland. We will be there to argue for solidarity with the Irish struggle for national liberation. Join our contingent and help take the Irish War into the heart of the British labour movement.

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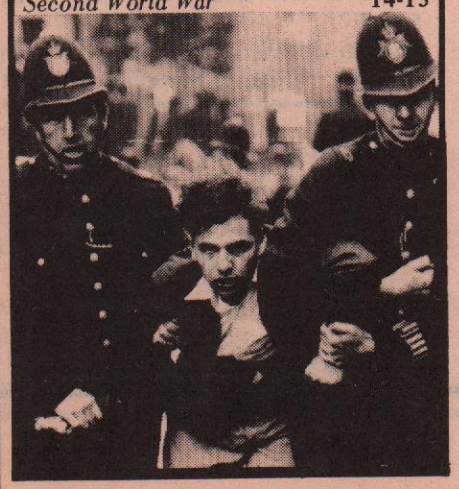
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RCT takes on the CP at Dagenham

HOW TO FIGHT HENRY FORD

Since our article on Ford in the last issue of the next step, management has stepped up pressure on the Dagenham workforce. More than 1000 new redundancies have been announced. Government aid has allowed Ford to postpone the sackings – and impose a 25 per cent pay cut on the threatened workers. Meanwhile the unions' annual wage claim is before the Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee. At the same time two distinct approaches to the fight with the company have emerged in the local labour movement – one from Ford Communist Party, the other from East London RCT.

THE UNION SIDE of the NJNC has asked for a 20 per cent wage rise, shorter hours, longer holidays and improved benefits. In its *Ford Bulletin*, the Communist Party gives these demands enthusiastic support, claiming a 'share in Ford success'.

The dividends of Stalinism

Last year Ford UK made a profit; so, just as if it represented a group of company shareholders, the CP is arguing that Ford workers ought to have some money coming to them. Ford 'has the ability to pay', the *Bulletin* says, because 'they have a new model out and the market is highly competitive'. The trouble is, Ford management understands the world of business better than the CP. Last year Ford UK was profitable; but, worldwide, Ford made more than $1 billion worth of losses (and since then its Japanese rivals have begun to press it harder than ever). By tying workers' wages to the fortunes of the employers, the CP is in effect agreeing to take a share in these losses. It's optimistic about the motor industry. But the reality of the recession gripping carmakers everywhere is such that, unless there is resistance from the shop floor, the union side on the NJNC will probably settle for a wage rise well below the rate of inflation.

The CP puts forward a string of spurious arguments that can only weaken opposition to management. One of its old favourites is that 'the nation needs high wage increases'. Why? Because 'low wages mean low demand for goods' (*Bulletin*). But 'the nation' (in other words, British capitalism) is in crisis not because of 'low demand', but because profits are too low for the capital invested. One way out of this for the capitalists is to cut wages, not increase them. This is why employers resist pay claims so vigorously today.

The CP pushes its patriotic pay claim along with more demands for import controls and union participation in the bosses' investment schemes. 'Ford's future', according to Ford CP, 'depends on convenors, stewards and workforce controlling Ford's imports and forcing new investment'. Henry Ford's British team recently calculated that, if it introduced new technology along Japanese lines, it could reduce manning levels from 76 000 to 30 000. The CP wants to share in building this great future for Ford – but it's not much of a future for the workers!

Let Ford look after Ford

At a recent East London RCT public meeting 'Stop the sell-out at Ford', workers from the Dagenham plant discussed a fighting alternative to the CP. Shop stewards, rank and file Ford workers and local trade unionists debated different ways of combatting redundancy, speed-up, short-time working and wage cuts.

Speaking for the RCT Mike Freeman argued that the NJNC wage claim must be rejected because it can't defend living standards. Even if met in full, it wouldn't compensate for inflation. As for the demands for shorter hours and longer holidays, they're just one more example of how the trade union bureaucrats sidestep the real problems facing workers. Many Ford workers are on short-time and thousands were temporarily laid off after the summer break: so what purpose does talk about longer holidays serve? What is needed from management is a guarantee that everybody will get full pay – whether there's work for them or not.

The most important defect of the claim, however, is that it *completely avoids the issue of redundancies*. Workers shouldn't be concerned about Ford's profit levels at all. *Their* interests must come first, not the company's. And if Ford can't deliver then it's up to the capitalist state to do so instead.

An Asian shop steward from Dagenham's foundry plant told the meeting of the difficulties faced in mobilising opposition to management plans. Many workers, he said, see no answer to the view that they should only accept what the company can afford. But, despite that, they still want to fight and will eagerly listen to an alternative to the Stalinist politics that permeate the trade union hierarchy at Ford.

We have made a start. CP supporters circulating a petition for import controls got short shrift from the foundry's predominantly black workforce. The activities of East London Workers Against Racism have given the RCT a real hearing among a section of Ford workers. Now RCT supporters are taking the arguments for rejection of the wage claim, for industrial action to defend jobs and for opposition to import controls to the whole workforce. Our first objective has to be to destroy the influence of the CP. We can only beat Ford management if we break the hold of Stalinist politics that tie workers' livelihoods to Henry Ford's profit margins.

TUC mole in Todmorden

WHEN ON 11 OCTOBER Todmorden Trades Council organised a one day conference, 'The crisis and you', and included the Irish War in its agenda, the labour bureaucracy blew its cool. Prominent Labour Party dignitaries including the President of the Trades Council Jim Connolly simply boycotted the conference. But they didn't just sit idly on the sidelines.

The conference passed a number of motions put forward by supporters of *the next step*. The motion that really infuriated the local dignitaries was one that called for full support for the Irish national liberation struggle. To make matters worse for these hacks, the conference was addressed by Dave Hallsworth, secretary of Tameside Trades Council – the trades council that was recently disaffiliated from the TUC for its stand on Ireland.

The local bureaucrats went into action as soon as the conference was finished. Leading the attack was would-be councillor Jim Connolly. As a first step he resigned from the trades council arguing that this body did not represent the people of Todmorden. No doubt he was referring to the fact that the trades council has adopted a policy of opposition to the sale of council houses. This policy certainly did not represent people like Connolly who has stated his intention to buy one.

Connolly then went on to reveal to the local press that he has sent a full dossier on Todmorden Trades Council to the TUC. He stated that the TUC would be very 'interested' in the preceedings and would want to inquire into the matter further. Stool pigeons like Connolly provide a useful service for the TUC which is always ready to crush opponents of its pro-imperialist policies on Ireland. Already there is talk of a TUC special inquiry into the affairs of Todmorden Trades Council.

Don't let the bureaucrats victimise another trade union body.

the next step

Supporters take on the bosses

'WHILE THE LEFT SLOGANISES *the next step* POLITICISES' said a UCATT shop steward at a recent public meeting of the South London Revolutionary Communist Tendency. The editorial of the local paper, *South London Press*, repeated this point: it noted that supporters of *the next step* are leading the fight against Labour-left controlled Lambeth Council. Not only are workers living on South London council estates reading *the next step*, but they're also beginning to involve themselves in the struggle.

the next step doesn't offer ready made solutions. But it does give you the arguments necessary to fight the bosses and their allies in the labour movement. That is why in recent months our supporters have started publishing workplace bulletins in their factories. Our supporters in the Manchester area now meet regularly to discuss the response our bulletins get and to plan new initiatives. A *the next step* conference on trade union work is being planned for early 1981.

However, the expansion of communist work in industry depends on increasing the print run and frequency of the publication of *the next step*. You will have to do your bit to make this possible. First of all we have to transform our readers into sellers. Write to us if you are prepared to sell *the next step*. Second, we need money. To put it bluntly we need ONE THOUSAND pounds every month. This money will allow us to go monthly and increase our circulation. It will allow us to print more factory bulletins and extend our readership in industry.

During the last two months the police have arrested EIGHT *the next step* sellers on several spurious charges. This will cost us at least £1000 in fines! We do not ask you to get arrested but we have every right to expect a generous financial donation from our readers and supporters.

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It's almost a year since the first issue of the RCT's review. Since December 1979 we've been bringing *the next step* out every six weeks; we've increased its size from 12 to 16 pages; we've improved the format and layout; and we've increased our circulation to a steady 5000.

At a time when many left-wing papers are facing a steady decline in sales by turning into broadsheets for the Labour Party's cynical pacifist campaigns we are ready to expand our output of working class propaganda.

In the new year *the next step* will carry on fighting the *real* battles in the labour movement – against unemployment and wage cuts, against racism, against the Irish War and against British imperialism everywhere. A *monthly* RCT review is a cause worth backing. Send the cut-off corner to:

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the next step

WHO NEEDS A BAROMETER?

THIS YEAR's Labour Party conference has prompted the British left to reach new heights of self-deception. 'An irreversible change', noted *Militant*. 'A resounding victory for democracy and for securing a new type of Labour government' said the *Morning Star*. 'There can hardly have been a socialist in the country who did not feel warmth and solidarity for Tony Benn when he spoke' enthused *Socialist Worker*. All in all, Blackpool proved an occasion for joyful optimism.

The breezy satisfaction exuded by the left even extended as far as the TUC conference. This shows just how shortsighted people can be. Neither the TUC nor the Labour Party were prepared to discuss the problems facing the working class, still less do anything about them. No strategy for defending jobs and living conditions emerged from either conference; instead the TUC passed two mutually contradictory motions on incomes policy – one in favour, one against – and, not to be outdone, the Labour Party passed *three*. Composite 15 declared incomes policy a 'euphemism for lower wages'. But composite 16 rejected what it called the 'incomes and prices free-for-all inherent in the nature of collective bargaining'. Composite 19? It called for an incomes policy in 'the context of a national and economic plan'. At the end of the day the industrial and political wings of the official labour movement had nothing more to offer the working class than another social contract.

Tilting at new windmills

The Labour left has been unable to respond to the bosses' offensive. Instead it has been busy inventing fresh enemies to castigate. Tony Benn is the most skilful practitioner of this art. According to him, Britain has been left with 'a colonial-type administration led by an establishment which is itself defeatist', one which has 'handed over the keys of power to others outside this country to govern us' ('How Benn would liberate Britain, the last colony', *The Guardian*, 29 September 1980). So Britain, an imperialist nation with a record of oppression second to none, has become a poor little colony. Aliens 'outside this country' are to blame for the ills of British capitalism – a novel discovery, indeed.

Yet it is such discoveries that were the cause of the elation at Blackpool. After a series of emotional speeches against foreign capitalists and foreign goods, the conference agreed to withdraw from the EEC. During the debate on nuclear disarmament the Labour left had a good old patriotic time. They pompously declared that they were not prepared to die for Thatcher nor would they allow poor Britain to become a nuclear target.

The Common Market and 'peace' are nice and safe issues; as *Tribune* observed, they 'could be Labour's election winners' (10 October 1980). And then there was party democracy – the burning question of the day. Left and right vied for the unions' bloc votes to make the party more representative. As it turned out, a few absent delegates and the surprise wave of an AUEW arm meant that the conference came out in favour of some of the left's proposals. What a triumph for democracy: now the party will be more representative when the next Labour government gets round to imposing its traditional wage freezes.

The politics of despair

The realities of the class struggle in 1980 are very different from the mirages of Blackpool. Over the past year the labour movement has suffered one setback after another. The employers have got away with mass redundancies, speed-up and cuts in real wages averaging some 10 per cent. Many unions are losing members and, as the furore over the Isle of Grain dispute has shown, inter-union rivalries are now worse than they have been in years. Restrictions on the right to picket have gone unopposed by the TUC.

The leaders of the labour movement have no strategy for the present situation. They accept the present state of affairs, manoeuvre to assure their own survival and hope that the working class will make their bogus causes its own. When workers are desperately looking for answers, the reformists declare that the solution is a good dose of radical nationalism to be administered by a more representative Labour government. But matters go further. The left outside the Labour Party simply repeats what the left inside says. The radical left sees Benn & Co as the hope of the future.

Socialist Challenge does not object to Benn's politics; it merely questions the speed with which they are being put into practice: 'the main point', it tells us, 'is to force the Labour left to apply socialist policies in the class struggle now' (9 October 1980). The SWP is also impatient: '*We can't wait for socialists to take over the Labour Party*. The Tories are battering the hell out of us now' (*Socialist Worker*, 4 October 1980). The radical left imagines that the Labour lefts have got socialist politics to 'apply' or to 'take over' the party with. Its only real dispute with them is over their sluggishness.

The convergence of the radical left and the Labour left is based on common despair about the working class: each projects its own paralysis on the working class to justify its refusal to do anything. But there can be no doubt that the radical left is moving rightward faster than the Labour left is coming to meet it. In a remarkable article, SWP star Paul Foot recently took Tony Benn to task . . . for being too unrealistic! This is what he wrote:

'When Tony Benn complains that Labour's manifesto in 1979 was re-written by Callaghan to exclude such commitments as the abolition of the House of Lords, does he really believe that if that commitment had been in, Labour would have got a single extra vote?

'On the contrary, such was (and is) the right-wing mood in the country that the *more* left-wing the manifesto had been, the *less* votes Labour would have got.' (*Socialist Worker*, 11 October 1980)

Left-wing policies won't get a hearing, says Foot. But with 'socialists' like him and Benn delineating them, that's hardly a surprise. The SWP's manifesto, like Labour's, has never once upheld undiluted anti-capitalist policies. Instead, the Labour Party and the SWP have proclaimed a socialism which can be more properly defined as a deathly mixture of trade unionism, nationalism and pacifism. So if things *are* in a mess, if there really *is* a 'right-wing mood', who is it that is to blame? Is it the working class? Or is it the Labour lefts and their radical allies, who call for support for one reactionary Labour government after another?

We're in the mood

The problem is not the 'mood' of the workers. The problem is the politics of the Labour Party.

Today the leadership of the working class is in a state of limbo and the institutions of the official labour movement are beginning to disintegrate. Thousands of workers – some demoralised, some searching for answers – are disenchanted with the unions and the Labour Party. Yet, despite the erosion of union power and the striking vacillations of the Labour leaders, reformist politics still dominate the working class. There are two reasons for this.

First, behind reformist politics stand decades of tradition. It is not easy for workers to reject the institutions which they created through bitter struggle and which seemed to have worked in the past. Behind reformist politics also stand capitalist common sense and a labour bureaucracy whose continued existence depends on reconciling workers to the 'realities'.

But reformist politics *can* be budged. The second reason why it remains so nfluential is because nobody has ever tried to do this at all systematically. Very simply, the labour leadership has had no real political competition. The Communist Party and the radical left have been little more than pressure groups on the Labour Party. Sometimes their criticisms of particular betrayals have been severe; but at the end of the day they have always declared their preference for Labour over Tory.

The radical left has noble intentions. But, again and again, it has adapted its politics to suit the mood of the masses. Since the mood of the masses has been moulded by Labourism, it has followed that a direct challenge to the Labour Party has been out of the question. Anti-capitalist politics have been too 'out of touch' with that mood, so trade union militancy has had to suffice in their place.

The whole difference between the little Labour Parties and the big one consists in the amount of militancy advocated. This has had important consequences. The big Labour Party has had a clear field. Its politics have never been tested because the little Parties haven't offered an alternative. Instead, they've run symbolic candidates in seats where Labour has been safe and told their supporters to vote for it where it hasn't.

the next step is out to change this state of affairs. We don't despair about the mood of the masses, but try to present a genuine alternative to reformist politics. We don't believe there are any magical solutions: building a revolutionary alternative in the very serious circumstances that surround us is an uphill struggle. Yet build we must.

At present the left is nothing but a barometer of the mood of the working class (even this job it does badly). But the working class doesn't need a barometer; it needs revolutionary politics. *the next step* has shown that there is an audience in the working class for such politics – that many workers follow the reformists simply because they have never heard the case for communism before. *the next step* has shown that a different sort of realism to that held up by the capitalists, working class realism, does exist and can be fought for with success.

As the recession impinges itself on every aspect of social life our anti-capitalist message will become more and more realistic. We have to take advantage of this to convince workers that there is an alternative to the Labour Party. Is it so difficult to show that this party has nothing to offer the working class? We think not. How serious is an organisation that, at a time of unprecedented attacks on the working class, spends its energy debating its constitution? How serious is an organisation that hopes that the longest-standing imperialist power in the world will unilaterally rid itself of nuclear weapons? And how serious is an organisation that can depict imperialist Britain as a colony while it acquiesces to Britain's oppression of Ireland?

We believe that jobs can more realistically be defended by breaking from the Labour Party than by expecting help from it. Our realism is based on what workers can do today to defend their class tomorrow. The realism of the radical left is the realism of the labour bureaucrats. It is one that looks for voluntary redundancies, shallower cuts and a fairer, less dogmatic government. When we say that this is not good enough, we are confident that workers will start saying the same before long.

Mass public sector redundancies on the way

Cut yesterday, sack today

Unemployment has already begun to sweep through South London's private sector. Now it's about to envelop the public sector too. Until now it's been services, future plans and new projects that got the axe – but today they can't be trimmed back much further, so it's jobs that are due for the chop. Below, we look at how the Labour Party has softened workers up for the blows to come.

INDUSTRY IN SOUTH LONDON is shaking out jobs by the thousand.

* beermakers Courage and Whitbread are to close their bottling plants in the area. Some 700 drivers, production workers, packers and drivers, most of them in the TGWU, are to lose their jobs at the Courage plant as a result of the company's move to rationalise its operations. Whitbread in Lewisham are expected to sack 100 workers by spring 1982

* LRC Products, makers of Coal Tar soap, Gumption and other household items, are to close Sanitas House, their factory at Stockwell, Lambeth, in December. Two hundred unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers – half of them West Indian women – are to get the sack; a further 100 administrative staff will have to move to LRC's headquarters in Essex if they are to avoid the same fate

* more than 30 clerical and sales staff working for Redifon Telecom, Wandsworth, are being given their cards, and 30 workers at the Bowater Corporation container factory in Tooting are joining the ranks of the unemployed

* Racal Electronics has closed its small boat radar systems factory in Battersea and made 200 redundant. It has also got rid of 150 workers at its New Malden plant (see *the next step*, No 7, October 1980). In addition, 80 staff at Decca House, on the South Bank, have lost their posts

* United Glass has shut down one of its two furnaces at New Cross, putting 260 men on the streets.

Which firm's next? It could be glucose manufacturers Garton & Son, Battersea. They have ruefully admitted it 'no secret' that industry in Wandsworth is doing badly (*South London Press*, 1 August 1980). It could be Freemans Mail Order, on Clapham Road, Lambeth. The mail order business has seen a number of major crashes this year and Freemans is being forced to substitute computers for workers to stay ahead of the game. Or it could be British Vinegars in Lambeth, Metal Box in Bermondsey or any one of the big depots and factories just south of Vauxhall Bridge. . . .

In *Southwark* more than 10 000 people are out of work. Some 3000 men and women have been made redundant this year, taking the borough's official unemployment rate to 10.3 per cent – two per cent higher than the national average. *Lambeth* has another 10 000 on the dole: in September no less than 2000 school leavers were after 140 jobs. In *Wandsworth* unemployment has topped 8000 while vacancies total 400, and in *Lewisham* the figure is even higher, with rates of 14 per cent being chalked up in Deptford.

With numbers like these unemployed, South London is edging towards major upheavals. Crime, violence, poverty and homelessness are all on the increase – and local councils are worried that stability will prove hard to maintain. Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth council and self-styled 'Marxist', is well aware of the problem: 'There's always a risk in Brixton', he observed this summer, 'of race riots' (*SLP*, 22 July 1980).

What Knight followed this remark with is especially revealing. Referring to the 'risk' he'd just invoked, he said: 'What's so terrible is that people have been working so hard to avoid it'. And he's right. For the last 10 years, every council in South London has tried to alleviate social unrest in the area – by creating jobs.

The shifts in the 'seventies

Throughout the 'seventies industrial employment in South London contracted. And throughout the 'seventies local councils moved in to take up the slack in the job market. Firms relocated out in Crawley, Croydon and elsewhere, areas where profits could be made more easily than in tired old South London, with its congested roads and expensive property values. Meanwhile, public sector jobs multiplied, particularly in services essential to the prevention of unrest – in social work, in housing, in DHSS offices and so on. In Lambeth in 1971, one in four workers were employed in manufacturing and construction and only 16 per cent were in 'public administration'; by the late 'seventies the proportions had been reversed. Lambeth was not exceptional either. Between 1971 and 1980 employment in manufacturing and distributive trades (including warehousing and transport) in Southwark dropped from 30 000 to 15 000, while that in public administration and 'service industries' rose from 30 000 to 45 000 (*SLP*, 30 September 1980).

This process of creating council jobs to absorb unemployment has gone on up until quite recently. This June, for instance, Lambeth had 8240 full time employees, 450 more than in last. But now Lambeth, like its neighbour boroughs, has reached the end of the line. *The public sector redundancies that South London will see this winter will make this summer's industrial sackings seem tiny in comparison*. So far, unemployment has only really ravaged private firms in the area; but now it's about to take hold of town halls, dole offices and social services departments as never before. And, given the size of the public sector workforce in South London, that will mean joblessness on an unprecedented scale.

Nothing else to cut but jobs

South London's public sector has been cut before, of course. But, like the public sector nationally, it's mainly been 'capital' rather than 'current' expenditure that has suffered – new building programmes rather than jobs. Nationally, 'capital' public expenditure has dropped from £15 billion to £7.8 billion in the last six years, while 'current' spending has risen from £55 billion to £62 billion over the same period; locally, South London has borne more than its share of cancelled schools, hospitals and, above all, council housing. So today new cuts will be imposed on new targets. As David Blake, economics editor of *The Times*, noted in an article (24 September) entitled 'Is there anything left for the Government to axe?', that means that the state must 'try to do something about its pay bill'. *And the best way to save on wages and salaries is to cut jobs.*

South London's councils will have to

Bureaucrats 'protest' police attacks

Enemies in blue, enemies in grey

On the face of it, South London seems an unlikely ground for fierce class struggle. The area can't claim a long tradition of militancy in the way that East London could before the Second World War, or that South Wales and Scotland still can. But in the last few months South London workers have shown they can be as combative as any. The events surrounding the victimisation of two CPSA workers at Brixton Unemployment Benefit Office and the closure of St Benedict Hospital, Tooting, highlight this. They also highlight the very different conduct of the labour bureaucracy.

IN SOUTH LONDON the bourgeoisie plays rough. When workers at Racal/Decca, Battersea, came to pick up their belongings from the site after it had been closed down, they found the lockers containing their personal effects dumped, unceremoniously, in the road outside and the factory gates locked. Public sector employers are no different. CPSA members at Brixton dole had only to take a couple of days off earlier this year to demonstrate against the Corrie anti-abortion bill and to lobby their National Executive Committee on pay, plus take an advertisement for the Anti-Nazi League in the *South London Press*, for their bosses to act swiftly and with determination.

In June they went ahead, sacking Phil Cordell and Richard Cleverley – branch secretary and branch organiser respectively and known SWP members too. By July they found something they hadn't bargained for: an indefinite strike. Soon pickets were thrown up around the Benefit Office and the police were called in.

The strikers began to be hit on all sides. The strikebreakers – many of them previously unemployed youngsters freshly recruited by management in a calculated, cynical move – ignored their pleas not to go in and work. The *Daily Mail* began to give the dispute prominent and ever more hysterical coverage. And, worst of all, the strikers had to contend with attacks from the bureaucrats at the head of their union.

The NEC refused to make the strike official; only two of its 26 members gave any hint of support. Early on, general secretary Ken Thomas sent CPSA branches a circular on the strike so reactionary that the management at Brixton re-issued it to impress upon the strikers that their struggle was in vain. Local official Terry Ainsworth called for the scabs to be allowed to vote at strike meetings. Throughout, the CPSA leadership insisted that Cordell and Cleverley put their faith in the Civil Service Appeals Board – a state-backed court which finds in favour of management nine times out of ten.

That Cordell and Cleverley did not lose their job in the end said very little about the 'impartiality' of the CSAB and a lot more about the strikers' refusal to rely on that body's good offices. But the CPSA bureaucracy was not the only force that extolled the virtues of bourgeois justice during the dispute. The Labour Party had its say too.

Labour calls for law and order

Both management and the police went all-out to win. As the picket lines swelled from tens to well over a hundred, including a number of RCT members and supporters, the cops grew more aggressive. On 13 August, emboldened by earlier TUC failures to oppose Employment Minister James Prior's voluntary 'Code of Practice' on trade union rights, they limited the number of pickets at the Office to six, forced the rest of the line right away from it and warned everybody that shouting 'scab' would be treated as threatening behaviour. Furthermore, they singled out Cordell and Cleverley for arrest and were jubilant when it was later made a condition of Cleverley's bail that he did not return to the picket line.

'Left' Labour MPs Stuart Holland and Reg Race were on the picket line when most of the arrests were made. But they didn't draw the conclusion that the pickets should match the police in the firmness of their tactics. Instead, they tried to use the police attacks as an excuse for a vote-catching gesture against the Tories, accusing the cops of anticipating Prior's legislation and going beyond their statutory powers. While the police had no hesitation in acting – to the best of their ability – in the interests of the ruling class, Holland and Race could do no such thing for the working class. Holland's objection to the arrests was, as he told the press, that there was 'no basis in law for this', while Race whined that the issues had 'never been discussed by Parliament' (*Evening News*, 13 August). So much for their 'solidarity'!

The Brixton UBO strike was the longest unofficial action in the history of the CPSA. The Office has a record of militancy in the past; the DoE undoubtedly picked it as a useful nut to crack before embarking on the redundancies and cuts in real wages that the Government has planned for the civil service this winter. So it was an event of some significance for Cordell and Cleverley eventually to be 'reinstated' by the CSAB in mid-August.

However matters did not end there. Together with five more strikers, both Cordell and Cleverley were moved to other DoE Benefit Offices where they were met with familiar threats from unfamiliar management faces. The after-


JOBS AXED IN FACTORY CLOSURE

RESCUE BID TO SAVE 690 JOBS

More South London jobs

380 WORKERS FACE THE AXE

announced that it will sell Sanitas House in Stockwell. Agents for the sale expect offers in the region of £4 million.

Closure of the factory in Stockwell-green, with the loss of 300 jobs, was

don Rubber Company.

The building received a Civic Trust design award in 1964, soon after it was built.

Sanitas produced household goods at the factory, including Woodward's

The figures soa

UP, up, goes the unemployme South London boroughs. The over recent months are:

attempt this. British capitalism is now so bankrupt that all spending on services unproductive of profit will have to be viciously curtailed. Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine has made the first move: in September, he announced he would withhold £200m of rate support grant to local authorities, and singled out Lambeth and Lewisham – along with 12 other councils – for special penalties for 'profligacy'. That means cuts in jobs, cuts which Labour councils, no matter what their political complexion, will be powerless to resist. Why? *Because they can't go on raising the rates.*

'Socialism on the rates'

Knight himself admitted as much in a speech he made to the Labour Party conference in Blackpool. To pay for the extra jobs he's created over the last year he's had to put Lambeth's rates up by nearly 50 per cent. Again, Lewisham has seen a similar increase since 1979, and a further 25 per cent jump is planned. Rises like these just can't continue. Lewisham ratepayers already have to cough up 104p for every pound the borough values their properties at, and in Lambeth the figure is an extortionate 125p.

Politically these two Labour councils are caught in a vice. Cutting expenditure means cutting jobs, which means that workers won't vote Labour at the next local government polls. But, equally raising rates means enraging the middle classes, already beleaguered by the recession and always the determining factor in elections. It also means taxing working class families harder. The only way out appears to be. . .to 'fight the cuts'.

Down Wandsworth way

That's what Knight and other South London Labour Party radicals have pledged to do. Not, let it be noted, to defend workers' jobs, but to make sure they get back into their town halls in May1982.

Knight's 'National Labour and Trade Union Conference 1980', held on 1 November, was called to 'prevent the destruction of local government' (circulated letter, 11 August 1980). Knight blamed his council's 'very serious' situation on Thatcher and Heseltine. For us, however, the problem is different. *The very serious situation facing council workers in Lambeth is Knight's responsibility. Lambeth has already implemented important cuts in services and, along with Lewisham and Southwark, will soon follow Wandsworth and put through cuts in jobs too.*

The cuts in services may have been furtive, but they've been no less harsh for that. Lambeth has already turfed more than 300 of the area's homeless out of council bed-and-breakfast hostels into squalid 'short-life' housing (*SLP*, 21 October 1980). It's considering freezing recruitment and not filling vacancies as they occur (minutes). Most recently, it's made cuts totalling £300 000 on care for the under-fives, a new daycentre for the mentally ill, and on placements in homes for children, the old and the mentally ill ('Rebel council cuts back', *SLP*, 8 August 1980).

Ted Knight is, however, nothing if not subtle. He doesn't just blame the Tories for his actions: he blames the unions. He has repeatedly gone on the record as saying he is willing to fight the cuts if the unions give a lead. But the unions, dominated as they are by the reformist politics of Knight's party, will not give a lead. It's only a matter of time before Knight throws up his hands in despair and takes them on. He tried to do so with NALGO last year; he's about to have another go. Thirty direct labour bricklayers and carpenters' jobs are under threat.

Wandsworth, a Tory council which was elected after just the kind of ratepayers' revolt Knight dreads, shows what could happen. It has left scores of posts in libraries and recreation centres unfilled. It has sacked 28 out of the area's 61 social work aides. And, most important of all, it has said that 255 direct labour construction workers and a large number of direct labour maintenance staff must be phased out too.

This is the kind of treatment trade unionists in South London are beginning to face more and more. How are their leaders responding to it?

Their realism and ours

They're not. When *the next step* phoned round local union officials to find out their reactions to the current wave of redundancies we were answered with a mixture of resignation and pig-headedness. What the South London office of the TGWU said about the LRC Products sackings was typical. It enthused about the stay-of-execution 'running down' scheme it had agreed with management and was overjoyed that long-serving workers had qualified for serverance pay higher than that laid down by the state. In other words: 'You've got to be realistic'.

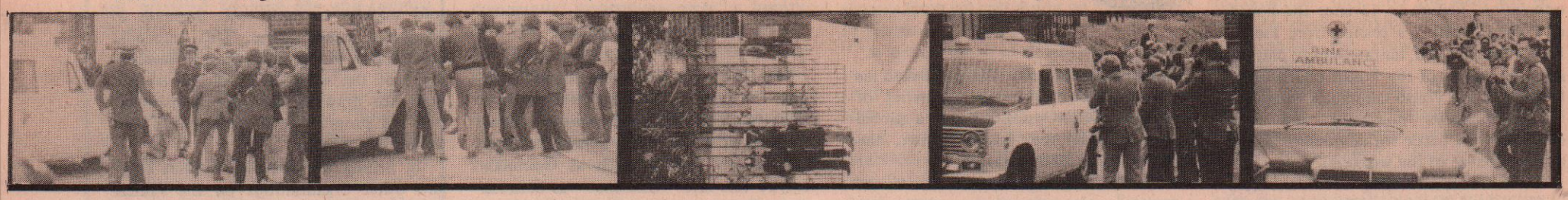
This is the realism of the bourgeoisie. It is a realism that suggests that cuts are acceptable if they don't involve schemes begun this year (Lambeth NALGO assistant branch secretary Brian Martin, *SLP*, 8 August 1980). It is a realism that tells Lambeth building workers to do charity stunts to create new jobs or that looks to more tiny 'workers' co-operatives' (Lambeth), new but ever-fraudulent Manpower Services Commission 'Special Programmes' (Wandsworth, Southwark) and council-built industrial estates (Southwark Trades Council secretary Rod Robertson, *SLP*, 30 September 1980) to do the same.

It is a realism that workers must reject if they are to defend their interests. We have to fight *every* cut and *every* sacking – which means we have to spell out the disastrous consequences of Labour politics, whether they apply to local councils or to the unions. In South London, workers must fight

- against natural wastage and understaffing
- against voluntary redundancy. No discussions of severance pay. Every job lost makes the next one harder to keep
- for public/private sector unity. Sympathy action when any factory or council department is threatened with job losses
- against rent and rate rises, building programme cancellations and any 'hidden' cuts. Build links between tenants and workers. No council house sales – reject Lambeth's concession on this. For unity between public sector employees and the workers they provide services to
- for a working class alternative to left-Labour sell-outs. Take union money out of the bosses' Labour Party and put it into strike funds instead. For revolutionary candidates in the next local elections. Expose the conciliators for what they are.

This, not the utopian schemes and furtive meddling of the labour bureaucracy, is the only *realistic* policy for South London workers to adopt. The sooner revolutionaries take it into the local working class movement, the better.

Anita Lloyd



math has not been pleasant either: the CPSA branch chairman at Brixton lost his job on 'medical' grounds and the NEC has been asking the scabs to tell them exactly who 'brought the union into disrepute' on the picket line. More than ever before, South London civil servants will have to fight on two fronts: not just against the cuts, but against stabs in the back too.

Ten months and no help

At St Benedict's the bosses were just as ruthless as at Brixton. On the union side there was the same pattern too: rank and file fortitude and bureaucratic evasions.

In October 1979 it was leaked that Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Area Health Authority intended to shut down the 230-patient long-stay geriatric hospital 'temporarily'. There followed an all-day demonstration by staff and patients. Then came the news that facilities were to be closed permanently. At 9am on 16 November, a work-in began to prevent this.

On the same day the hospital's rehabilitation ward was closed. From December no new patients were admitted. Management put pressure on the staff to find jobs at other hospitals – pressure which many among the largely immigrant workforce, fearful of losing their work permits, found irresistible. The bosses also sent out letters to the patients' relatives, telling them to take their charges elsewhere. And, of course, they summoned the police.

The work-in, organised by members of NUPE and COHSE, held out for month after month. But the pickets were not enough to prevent the management having its way. It sent in scab private ambulances to snatch away the patients, who were taken off to hospitals they had never seen – often wrapped in nothing more than blankets, their health worsening visibly. When the pickets resourcefully erected a barricade of steel cabinets, piping, an overturned car and concrete blocks to bar the way, management removed it; when they padlocked the gate to the hospital it had no hesitation in using an oxy-acetylene torch to break in.

As for the police, they arrested 23 pickets (including two members of the RCT), got injunctions against eight people to prevent them from picketing or entering hospital property, and, as at Brixton, rejoiced when the local magistrate granted bail to those arrested on condition that they kept out of trouble. The police had the upper hand, dragging off pickets and knocking them about whenever they could. Male nurse Ray Vale, for instance, had to go to hospital with leg and head bruises.

For their part the pickets were heroic. They thumped on the scab ambulances, threw bricks at them, sat down in front of them. And there was solidarity with the strike too: NHS ambulancemen refused to cross the picket lines, as did a TGWU lorry driver bringing equipment to the hospital. Nearby, 400 workers at St George's hospital staged a half-day sympathy stoppage. On the 200-strong picket line were firemen, railwayworkers and workers from other hospitals – one of whom (Andrea Campbell from COHSE at Atkinson Morley's, Tooting) was suspended by management for her pains.

The pickets' tenaciousness, however, stood in complete contrast to the attitude of the trade union bureaucracy. The work-in lasted *ten months* before NUPE general secretary Alan Fisher got round to doing anything about it. His action? He visited the hospital on 17 September and accepting defeat as inevitable, advised workers to campaign for the hospital to be re-opened – a capitulation to the authorities at the height of the battle for closure. As for COHSE's Albert Spanswick, he didn't even bother to pay a visit. And about the police, all NUPE area official Ian Scott could bring himself to say was that they had been around in 'excessive' strength (*Morning Star*, 20 September 1980). No wonder the strikers emerged from the dispute thoroughly resentful of their leaders' behaviour.

Eventually the last remaining patients at St Benedict's were removed and the hospital closed. Scott announced that there had been a 'moral victory' (*The Times*, 20 September 1980) – a transparently dishonest claim. Now South London healthworkers face a bleak winter: more cuts, more closures, and, if St Benedict's is anything to go by, more betrayals. They will only avoid this if they turn their anger with the labour bureaucracy into a real political alternative to the class collaboration it preaches.

The Labour police

In South London the bosses are preparing for war. A 150-strong contingent of the Special Patrol Group was to stay, at the ready, in Lambeth 'for an unspecified period' (*South London Press*, 22 August 1980). Offended by this, Ted Knight himself has called for more ordinary, 'community' policemen to be put on the beat – even though South Londoners can hardly go anywhere without being frisked by bobbies loitering with intent or seeing police cars racing in for the kill.

The struggles at Brixton and St Benedict's offer us a very clear lesson. In any confrontation, the labour bureaucracy always sides with the state; the state as employer, and the state as the concentrated violence of the police. For socialists in South London the task is to drive home this lesson relentlessly and to resist all those who continue to apologise for the Labour Party. It is to this task that the RCT's South London branch will be addressing itself in the coming months.

Russell Osborne

THE LONG ROAD TO GDANSK

There aren't many workers who follow their leaders' negotiations with management on loudspeakers and tapes. Yet, despite the creative tactics employed in August and September, the Polish working class remains strongly affected by nationalism and Catholicism. As for the Communist Party, it has no less than three million members, but is held in complete contempt by the masses – another paradox. The history of Stalinism in Poland explains how this state of affairs has come about.



POLISH NATIONALISM isn't strong for nothing. The country has a long and bitter experience of national oppression. In 1772 it was partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria; and, ever since then, regimes based in Moscow, Berlin and Vienna have divided and redivided it. The Poles believe in Poland because they have rarely had it for themselves.

In August 1939 Stalin signed an infamous pact with Hitler to get him to 'agree' not to invade the Soviet Union. Part of the price the Kremlin was prepared to pay for this was yet another carve-up of Poland – this time by the Nazis. Stalin got eastern Poland, but the Polish workers got nothing. Then, in September 1939, began six years of war in which one in every five Poles lost his life. The memory of that period – of the Red Army atrocities like that at Katyn, of Stalin's complicity in the suppression of the Warsaw Rising – still lives on in Poland today.

The Soviet Union's eventual liberation of Poland from fascist tyranny could have ended the distrust its people felt for the USSR. But the Kremlin merely transformed Poland into a vassal state. Ever since 1945 the threat of a repeated Soviet invasion has given powerful impetus to the development of Polish nationalism.

The rise of Polish communism

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Polish nationalism was such a striking phenomenon that Marx, Engels and Lenin all wrote about it at length. They argued that the Polish working class had a duty to lead the struggle for the right to national independence. In his important pamphlet *The right of nations to self-determination* (1914), Lenin took issue with the Polish revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg for underestimating the significance of fighting against national oppression. Failure to advance the slogan of Poland's right to secession from Tsarist Russia was, he said, tantamount to playing into the hands of the Polish bourgeoisie. It allowed the Polish capitalists to isolate the communists politically and take control of the battle for democratic rights at the expense of the workers.

Unfortunately Polish revolutionaries ignored Lenin's advice. They contended that the national question was a diversion and that the pernicious effects of bourgeois nationalism on the working class could only be avoided by Poland's incorporation into Russia or Germany. In practice they ensured that the national grievances workers felt were not directed against the capitalist system.

The errors of the Polish Marxists became particularly apparent in the years immediately following the First World War. Despite a surge of working class militancy in the post-war slump, the newly-formed Communist Workers Party of Poland (CWPP) was unable to grow – precisely because it neglected the national question. As a result the reformist and patriotic Polish Socialist Party became the dominant force in the labour movement.

Between 1921 and 1923, however, Polish communism came of age. Under the guidance of Lenin, Trotsky and the Third International, the CWPP went over to the Leninist approach to self-determination, formally adopting it – after a series of debates – at its 1923 congress. By 1924 it was, though still forced to work underground, poised to become the leading political tendency in the working class.

A revolution betrayed

Victory eluded the CWPP. With the ascendancy of Stalin the Communist International was turned into a tool of the Soviet bureaucracy. Stalin pursued his vendetta against the revolutionaries of Trotsky's Left Opposition on a global scale. Outside the Soviet Union, the CWPP became his first target.

The CWPP strongly opposed the Soviet bureaucracy's attempts to expel Trotsky from the Bolshevik party. In December 1923, its Central Committee sent a letter to Moscow denouncing Stalin's manoeuvres in no uncertain terms:

'For our party, nay for the whole Comintern, for the whole revolutionary world proletariat the name of Comrade Trotsky is insolubly connected with the victory of the Soviet Revolution, with the Red Army, with communism. We refuse to admit the possibility of Comrade Trotsky being put outside the ranks of the leaders of the Russian Communist Party and those of the Communist International.' (cited in M K Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, 1976)

Such a forthright show of political independence was something the Soviet bureaucracy could not stomach. Stalin moved fast; the CWPP was anyway vulnerable because repression in Poland had forced many of its leaders into exile in Russia. At the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in 1924 he was able personally to supervise the removal of the majority of the CWPP's Central Committee – without consulting the Polish party's congress.

That did not prove to be the end of the revolutionary CWPP. Stalin was forced to purge its leaders in 1925 and again in 1928. As the application of Stalin's line to Poland led to disaster after disaster under the Pilsudski dictatorship, new opposition currents emerged in 1930. In 1932 there were renewed expulsions.

The CWPP was finally destroyed in the Great Purge of 1937-38. Nearly every Polish Marxist living in Russia was either executed or sentenced to penal servitude. Only a few leaders such as Gomulka escaped this fate – and that was because they were languishing in Polish prisons at the time. In 1938 the Executive Committee of the Communist International quietly dissolved the CWPP altogether on the pretext that it had been infiltrated by 'enemy agents'. Friends and associates of Lenin like Adolph Warski-Warszawski and Maria Koszucka and Julian Lenski-Leszczinski disappeared without trace. The CWPP was no more.

The workers, the state and the church

Stalinism has ensured that, for Polish workers, 'communism' means Soviet tanks and Soviet firing squads. Stalinism has not only been responsible for the elimination of the vanguard of the Polish working class; it has strengthened reaction in every quarter.

To give their regimes some semblance of legitimacy Poland's Stalinist rulers have wooed the Catholic church for more than three decades. Their only worry has been that popular support for Catholicism might get out of hand. In 1945 they gave Boleslaw Piasecki, leader of the fascist and strongly anti-semitic Falanga party before the war, official sanction to establish Pax, a body dubbed as a 'progressive' Catholic movement. No wonder Polish workers have found it hard to see how 'communism' represents their interests as a class.

The Polish bureaucracy has tried everything to win itself sympathy among the masses – the anti-Jewish campaigns of 1956 and 1967-8 being only the most lurid examples. Every one of its efforts has been unsuccessful; every one has merely bolstered Polish nationalism and the church. Today only Brezhnev's troops stand between the workers and the overthrow of Kania's government.

The Polish proletariat has no illusions in the state. It hates the system that oppresses it. At the same time Stalinism has wiped out the communist traditions of the working class. The only choice seems to be between the Warsaw bureaucrats on the one hand and nationalism and the church on the other. At the moment there can be no doubt that workers will opt for the latter.

Polish workers will not take on the church and pro-capitalist forces so long as the bureaucracy survives. While the Stalinists remain in power nationalist politicians and reactionary bishops will go on claiming to speak on the workers' behalf. Very simply, widespread loathing for the bureaucracy puts class divisions in the background.

Trade unions are not enough!

Polish militants cannot hope to shrug off the effects of Stalinism without a relentless struggle. They will have to combat the influence of nationalism and the church; but it will be their fight against the bureaucracy that will best allow them to do this. Every blow they inflict on the bureaucrats will allow them to highlight the divergence of interest between the working class and the church. Both strands of reaction – the bureaucracy and the church – must be opposed simultaneously.

The main barrier to this today consists in the narrow trade union politics of the KOR, the so-called 'workers' defence' committees. The KOR has consistently told workers to limit their demands to economic issues alone. This reformist prescription stunts the political development of the workers. If the proletariat does not draw up its own, independent political programme it will uphold that of another class.

In Britain the Socialist Workers Party and other organisations on the radical left have said that trade unionism, pure and simple, will suffice for Polish workers. For the SWP any strike in Poland, 'whether for higher wages or against price increases', is 'necessarily political' (*Socialist Review*, 18 September 1980). In one sense, of course, the SWP is right – any trade union demand is political. But the question is: what is the *class content* of the Polish workers' demands? Do they focus on granting the church access to the media, or do they begin to challenge 'the leading role of the Communist Party'? Do they aid reaction or lead to the emancipation of the working class?

Trade union politics hinder the emergence of a revolutionary party in Poland. That is why Poland's rulers have shown the toleration they have done towards the new unions that have been set up. It is also why the church has applauded the initiative. For this reason a fierce ideological struggle against the politics of the KOR is the task of the hour.

Fifty years of Stalinist manipulation have left their mark on the Polish workers. It will be some more years before Polish labour accepts the leadership of revolutionaries. For that to happen at all, for the gains of this summer to be held on to, Polish militants will have to declare war on every backward trend in the working class. Time is precious; the Polish revolutionary movement of the 'eighties has yet to be built.

James Wood

RCT International Conference

IMPERIALISM IN THE 'EIGHTIES



The coming world war was a central theme in the US presidential election. The recession is shaking world capitalism and forcing rival capitalist powers to fight for survival. In September more than 250 people gathered in London to discuss the political problems facing the labour movement in the crisis of imperialism.

Stagnation and decay

For Marxists the features of imperialism today are the result of the inherent tendency of the capitalist economy towards breakdown. This was the central theme of Frank Richards' introduction to the first plenary session of the conference. Burgeoning trade and diplomatic conflicts among leading capitalist nations, the trend towards military conflict and growing financial instability: all these diverse phenomena are the inevitable outcome of the stagnation of capital accumulation. Imperialism is not simply a policy option for the bourgeoisie – it is inseparable from bourgeois society itself.

In recent years radical theoreticians have thrown out the Leninist approach to imperialism. Many people in the Labour Party and the Communist Party think that when Britain lost its Empire it ceased to be an imperialist country. Tony Benn believes Britain to be the victim of 'EEC imperialism'; others hold that 'we' are oppressed by the USA. In the 'sixties the SWP argued that imperialism had been superceded. However, on the night nobody was prepared to take the anti-Leninist conner.

Introduced by *Critique* editor Hillel Ticktin, the Saturday morning plenary provided an opportunity to discuss the relations between the Soviet Union and imperialism. Ticktin cogently dismissed the 'state capitalist' and 'orthodox Trotskyist' schemas as vacuous and useless for understanding Soviet society. Floor speakers from the SWP, Workers Power and the Spartacist League reasserted their positions – but singularly failed to substantiate them.

The conference included two major debates: one between the RCT and the Platform Group (India) on reformism and revolutionary strategy, and one on Iran involving the RCT, the Organisation of Iranian Fedayii Guerrillas and some British groups. Other discussions centred on Ireland, Europe, the Middle East, and on theories of imperialism (finance-capital and the 'multinationals').

The enemy at home

One theme ran through all the sessions at 'Imperialism in the 'eighties'. The conference was not a weekend talking shop for intellectuals. Its clear objective was to fashion anti-imperialist politics into a weapon for the struggles of the working class. This point was spelt out by Mike Freeman in the closing plenary, when he showed how the genuine anti-imperialist traditions of the working class had become overshadowed by the pro-imperialist attitudes of the labour bureaucracy. Freeman argued that this necessitated a struggle not only against the British state, but also against its patriotic defenders in the official labour movement. That was the central message of the conference; it remains the central message of the RCT.

Military takeover in Turkey

In the early hours of 12 September the Turkish army seized power in a coup d'etat. Tanks drove into working class districts, while the new military regime extended martial law across the entire country and rounded up the leaders of all the major political parties. In the West the bourgeois press presented it as an uneventful operation. Pushing aside worries about 'democracy' the ruling class was clearly more concerned that General Evren's new government move quickly to restore law and order.

Turkey is deep in debt to the West. Moreover it plays a key role in the NATO alliance. Both good reasons for the imperialists to sacrifice 'human rights' for the sake of economic recovery and political stability.

THE COUP came as no surprise. On six occasions in the last few months Turkey's military leaders warned the two leading bourgeois politicians, Ecevit and Demirel, that if they didn't stop squabbling and deal with the country's escalating crisis the army would take power. The politicians were helpless. Despite harsh Government austerity measures implemented last January, things only grew worse for Turkish capitalism. Parliament was paralysed, totally unable to decide upon even day-to-day matters let alone act with the decisiveness needed to force through major political changes. The economic crisis found its clearest expression in mounting political violence: over the past two years there have been 5700 killings, 200 of them during this August alone. It all added up to one thing: the Turkish bourgeoisie could not maintain capitalist stability. So in stepped the army.

Collapse of bourgeois democracy

The purpose of the state is to enforce class rule. The bourgeois state can take many forms, from parliamentary democracy to brutal dictatorship, but its essential aim is to secure the conditions for profitable capitalist production. When this comes under threat, then democracy gives way to more overt forms of oppression as the working class has to be exploited more ruthlessly for capitalism to survive.

For Turkey's backward economy democratic institutions were a luxury that the bourgeoisie could barely afford. The September coup was the third time since the war that the army had intervened directly in political life. Two-thirds of the country has been under martial law since January this year. The right to strike was already subject to military approval; working class districts were heavily patrolled and many left-wing organisations had been banned.

Rule by the army, rather than by vacillating, incompetent politicians, became necessary once more as Turkey's fragile economy plunged into crisis. The state, which economically as well as politically has played a central role in Turkey's development, is bankrupt. It cannot afford to pay public sector workers their wages. Before the coup over seven million Turkish lira were still owed from outstanding wage settlements. Inflation is now around 100 per cent per year, and unemployment around 30 per cent. Meanwhile, Turkey owes a massive $16 billion to foreign bankers: $17 billion of the recent $92 million loan negotiated with the IMF will be spent on paying off debts.

The extremists

Economic chaos brought with it political instability. Turkish society became polarised between left and right as traditional bourgeois leaders became increasingly discredited. But the main threat was not from the left. Forced underground by the martial law, fragmented, and – despite widespread sympathy for its ideals – divorced from the working class, the left presented few problems for the government of Justice Party leader Suleyman Demirel.

Nor did the unions. The state had been able to smash the militant but isolated struggles at the Taris factory in Izmir and had swept the left out of its control of Fatsa with little opposition from the trade unions. The leaders of Disk, the Stalinist-dominated trade union confederation, directed working class struggles along economic lines, responding to the wave of violence with routine denunciations of the extreme right as Nazis and fascists. Under increasing physical attack from the extreme right Bulent Ecevit, leader of the social-democratic Republican People's Party, was driven to plead that 'the working class should get down from the grandstand and join the match' (*Milliyet*, 9 September 1980).

The main source of instability was the right. To maintain his parliamentary majority, Demirel had to rely on the neo-fascist Nationalist Action Party (NAP) led by Turkes. He had no inclination to confront it. Right-wing groups had also managed to gain some influence in the army. It was widely rumoured at the time of the coup that, in the Eastern provinces, the army supported the NAP.

What started to worry military chiefs like General Evren, however, was that the organisations of the extreme right were beginning to challenge the authority of the existing bourgeois state. They controlled several provinces, preventing the exercise of central state power. And, despite some imprisonment of right-wing commandos, their frequent and easy escapes from jail cast doubt on the loyalty of the state's forces.

A further threat to stability came from the populist National Salvation Party (NSP). Led by Necmettin Erbakan, the NSP had always taken a militant Islamic stand, and had, encouraged by the establishment of Khomeini's regime in Iran, become more vocal since 1979. This development, challenging the Western pro-NATO policies of the Turkish bourgeoisie, accelerated the country's political disintegration. An NSP march in Konya during August confirmed fears in ruling circles: the marchers carried banners in Arabic script (illegal in Turkey), shouted for the return of the Seriat (the Islamic law) and refused to stand for the national anthem.

After another intense round of political killings in early September, the army decided it had had enough.

Turkish capitalism – military style

The army in Turkey is popularly identified as a neutral force, safeguarding and unifying the nation in the traditions of its founder, Kemal Ataturk. Its reputation rests upon the contrast it presents to the weakness of the Turkish bourgeoisie, whose parliamentary representatives have been distinguished by their corruption and complete inability to carry through a decisive policy. General Evren, a Korean War artillery regiment commander, considers himself a professional soldier, standing above the ideological squabbles. His aim is to institute a 'neutral' technocratic government designed to solve the country's difficulties. But a soldier's uniform cannot conceal a bourgeois programme.

The army commanders have set out their six goals as follows: to preserve national unity; to fight terror; to assert state authority; to secure social peace; to instal civilian adminstration. In the context of Turkery's crisis, these objectives mean one thing – intensified repression on all sides. Preserving national unity means smashing the resistance of the eight million-strong Kurdish minority fighting for national rights in the eastern provinces. Creating a 'secular state' means eliminating the NSP. To see what the generals have in store for the working class, let us look at how they propose to deal with the economic crisis.

The military government's economic stategy formulated by Korkut Ozal (previously Demirel's economic adviser) has three main elements: increase productivity and exports, cut public spending and attract foreign capital. But to implement these measures and so make Turkish capitalism more viable requires a concerted attack on the working class. Given the weakness of the bourgeoisie such an attack can only be carried through by the army.

One of the first things the army did after it took power was to order strikers to return to work. A 70 per cent wage rise was granted, but given the rate of inflation this meant a cut of at least 30 per cent. In fact, wages have anyway been reduced by 15-20 per cent each year since 1978 (OECD, *Turkey*, April 1980). To raise productivity and exports will require further sacrifices by workers. Increasing productivity, for example, will mean mass redundancies. Inevitably the army will be used to quell working class opposition and subdue the growing numbers of unemployed.

The same goes for cuts in public expenditure. State spending has grown in response to the stagnation in private capital accumulation – both in the form of aid to industry and agriculture and as subsidies to unprofitable state enterprises. The latter, known as KIT, have provided just about the only new source of jobs. But just as the Turkish bourgeoisie can no longer afford democratic rule, so can it no longer afford to avoid direct efforts to rationalise production and restore private profits. January's austerity measures cut industrial aid and agricultural support prices and began to sell off some of the KIT to the private sector. With the army in power, the state is now in a better position to carry through this policy. As for the drive to attract foreign capital, that is another signal of the Turkish bourgeoisie's weakness and inability to compete on the world market: only by encouraging foreign investment can it hope to build up Turkey's shattered economy. But to do this the working class will again have to be pacified – a task which the army will take on with gusto.

General Evren talks of being 'neutral'. But in the capitalist crisis 'social peace' is a euphemism for destroying any working class resistance to the bourgeoisie's attempts to restore profitability. That is what the army has to do today. The Turkish ruling class will not allow the restoration of 'democracy' or permit the army to hand power back to the parliamentary politicians until the army has done its bloody work.

Adnan Tekin

BRITISH WORKERS AND IRISH PRISONERS

On 24 October more than 200 people marched through Brixton on a demonstration organised by the RCT to commemorate the death of Terence MacSwiney in Brixton gaol 60 years ago. At a moment when 400 prisoners were about to begin a hunger strike in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh, MacSwiney's anniversary was a timely reminder that the barbarous oppression of the Irish people by Britain has changed little – at least in its brutality – this century.

As our article on page 9 shows, the position of the official labour movement hasn't changed much either. In 1920 the TUC wouldn't offend the Government by acting to save MacSwiney. The last thing anyone expects today is a TUC statement of support for the Blanketmen calling for industrial action to force the Government to grant their demand for political status. Yet that is what the men in the H-Blocks need: below we review TUC policy on the Irish War and our campaign to change it and mobilise working class solidarity for the struggle of the Irish people.

Also on this page we look at a campaign that won't help the prisoners – Charter 80. On page 10 we examine a different aspect of the conflict in the Six Counties – the Protestant workers at Harland & Wolff and their relations with the British government. And we conclude the Irish coverage in this issue of the next step with our statement of support for the prisoners and how we intend to go about advancing their cause.

THROW OUT TUC POLICY ON IRELAND!

Trade unionists could be excused for not knowing that the TUC has a policy on Ireland. Ireland is an issue that the bureaucracy prefers to ignore. But behind the scenes the TUC manoeuvres to make sure that the resources of the British labour movement are fully behind the imperialist war. When necessary the TUC makes its position very clear. When Tameside Trades Council organised a conference in support of the Irish liberation movement Len Murray did not bother to go through the ponderous bureaucratic channels. Tameside Trades Council was disaffiliated from the TUC in a matter of weeks.

Imperialist to the core

The TUC has always supported the imperialist oppression of Ireland. Of course it has never passed a motion stating 'this conference wholeheartedly supports the oppression of the Irish people by British imperialism'. The TUC doesn't work that way. Instead it has evolved a policy which would make imperialist oppression more palatable to the Irish people and less offensive in the eyes of the British working class.

The TUC wants the British Parliament to introduce a Bill of Rights in the Six Counties. In this way British imperialism would ensure that the democratic rights of Irish people are observed. This is surely one of the most hypocritical propositions ever made by the trade union bureaucracy. The Bill of Rights ignores the Irish people's right to determine their future. It ignores the aspirations of the Irish to unify their country. Instead it asks Westminster – which has applied systematic terror in Ireland for the last eleven years – to pass a Bill of Rights. It is like asking a murderer to respect his victim's last wishes.

In 1976 the TUC went one step further. This time it gave its support to the Better Life for All Campaign. The campaign's aim was to improve the image of British imperialism through the introduction of economic and social reforms in the Six Counties. During the discussion of this campaign the intention behind these reforms was made absolutely clear: 'The six-point people's declaration contained within the Better Life for All Campaign is the trade unions' answer to the gunmen' (*TUC annual conference report*, 1976). A 'better life for all' means imperialist reforms to make oppression more acceptable and to help the army isolate Irish freedom fighters from popular support.

It is obvious that the TUC has never meant to put its imperialist policies into practice. Reforming the Six Counties is out of the question. The very existence of a divided Ireland represents the denial of the most fundamental democratic right of all – the right of a nation to self-determination. In the Six Counties reforms are impossible. This artificial statelet was founded on the maintenance of Loyalist privilege and the oppression of the Catholic population.

Imperialism's first line of defence

If the Bill of Rights and the Better Life for All Campaign are so unlikely to have any practical consequences why bother with them at all? Although the TUC doesn't go around drumming up support for the Bill of Rights this policy is important. Like the British state the TUC tries to keep the Irish War out of the public eye. But just in case workers begin to react against the imperialist war – as they did after the Bloody Sunday murders in 1972 – the TUC is well prepared.

The Bill of Rights and the Better Life for All Campaign divert any anti-imperialist sentiment in the working class into support for British imperialism. The TUC policy reduces imperialist oppression to a question of civil liberties and social reform. It directs workers to look to the British state for a solution to the Irish War.

That is why the TUC's policy on Ireland is so dangerous. It purports to help the Irish but in fact provides a public relations job for British imperialism. Because it has not been challenged since its inception this policy has acquired the status of the labour movement's answer to the 'Irish troubles'. Both the Labour Party and the Communist Party are fully behind it.

The TUC's policy on Ireland cannot be ignored. Any attempt to build an anti-imperialist movement in the British working class immediately comes up against it. Many trade union militants believe that this is what's best for the Irish. Nor is it simply a question of fighting reactionary arguments. As Tameside Trades Council found out, the TUC bureaucracy will be ruthless when anti-imperialists challenge its Irish policy.

Fight the Bill of Rights!

The Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign is committed to build a working class anti-imperialist movement. That is why we raise the demand to throw out the TUC's Irish policy. We want trade union activists to force the TUC to change sides in the Irish War. Workers have every interest in making their organisations support the Irish people and not British imperialism.

The left has ignored the TUC's record on Ireland for too long. Recently the radical left has established an alliance with supporters of the Bill of Rights in the Communist Party, the Labour Party and the trade unions. Charter 80 and the Campaign for Withdrawal from Ireland unite those who, like the Socialist Workers Party, formally recognise the right of the Irish people to self-determination with those who in practice deny it. This kind of united bloc can only give credibility to pro-imperialist views in the labour movement. Those who are prepared to bargain about the democratic rights of the Irish people sustain the imperialist attack of the TUC.

We call upon active workers to fight against imperialist policies in the labour movement. Follow the example of Tameside Trades Council! Make the Irish War an issue in your union branch or trades council. Organise discussions and a conference in your area. Make sure that it's not another one of those empty debates which the labour bureaucrats love so much, but a discussion about how best to assist the struggle of the Irish people.

The Smash the PTA Campaign has established a committee to co-ordinate this kind of work in the unions. We want you to take part in this campaign to throw out TUC policy on Ireland. Put the following resolution to your union body and keep us informed of all developments.

This union/trades council recognises the sordid record of the TUC on the Irish War. During the last ten years the TUC has done nothing but denounce the Irish liberation struggle. It has ignored imperialist violence against the Irish people and denied the right of the Irish people to determine their future. TUC policy, as expressed in its support for a Westminster-sponsored Bill of Rights and the Better Life for All Campaign, relies upon British imperialism to implement reforms when clearly it has no progressive role to play whatsoever.

This union/trades council demands that these policies are thrown out. Instead the TUC should:

1 Recognise that British imperialism has no positive role to play in Ireland

2 Demand the immediate withdrawal of troops

3 Support the right of the Irish people to determine their future

4 Demand the abolition of the Prevention of Terrorism Act

5 Support the struggle of Irish freedom fighters for prisoner of war status

6 Demand that the TUC organise a campaign of solidarity with the Irish liberation movement.

CHARTER 80

Polite applause greets new campaign

On 27 September the opportunist left met at Conway Hall in Central London to launch its most recent campaign on Ireland, Charter 80. On the platform were the usual campaign-launchers – Pat Arrowsmith (veteran pacifist) and Jerry Fitzpatrick (SWP, Anti-Nazi League, Rock Against Repression and national organiser of Charter 80). In the audience was Gery Lawless, founding member of the Troops Out Movement and campaign impresario.

Three years ago the same people had organised the now defunct International Tribunal on Britain's Presence in Ireland; last year they launched the Committee for Withdrawal from Ireland. So there was plenty of scope for the speakers to swap stories and exchange reminiscences about past campaigns.

Despite a small audience the campaign was officially launched. Of course, the speakers very diplomatically avoided talking about the real issues – British imperialism and the need to support the national liberation struggle were hardly mentioned. Events reached a climax when Steve Dawes of the Young Liberals spoke. He rejected support for political status for Charter 80's 'dissidents' because 'all prisoners were political'. Although Dawes is relatively new to Irish activities this clever side-stepping of the issue won the admiration of the more seasoned campaigners.

The only embarrassing moment to this otherwise predictable affair was the speech of an African missionary, Bishop Winters. He argued for unconditional support for the struggle of the Irish liberation movement. After a few nervous coughs on the platform he too was politely applauded. A few more speeches, a few more rounds of applause and the meeting was closed. The veterans got together in the bar afterwards. We hear they are laying plans for a new, even broader campaign.

Sixtieth anniversary of a republican's death

Terence MacSwiney —Prisoner of War

Sixty years ago last month, Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork, died in Brixton gaol. A republican prisoner of war, he had been on hunger strike for 74 days against the British state's treatment of him as a common criminal. Before he perished, tumultuous rallies were held nightly outside the prison: 'THE BATTLE OF BRIXTON — charged by mounted police' headlined the Daily Herald (28 August 1920), reporting 'wild scenes'. How did he come to die? How, when Irish prisoners of war have today commenced hunger strikes against British rule, can we ensure that they do not meet the same fate?

TERENCE MACSWINEY was arrested in Cork on 12 August 1920, at the height of Britain's notorious Tan War against those struggling for independence. The charge: possession of 'seditious documents' and a code book belonging to the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). For MacSwiney his capture was nothing new. As an active member of the Irish Volunteers (forerunner of the IRA), he had already been apprehended on four occasions since the Easter Rising of 1916.

In the 1918 elections he had been voted Sinn Fein representative for mid Cork while languishing in an English prison. The arrest was a deliberate move by the British. Earlier in 1920 he had become Mayor of the whole city, replacing Tomas MacCurtain, himself shot dead by the RIC. MacSwiney was therefore leading a strongly republican area against its British occupiers and the imperialists had to deal with him. The charges laid against the man were a joke: his 'seditious documents' merely consisted of Cork Council's declaration of allegiance to Dail Eireann, the free Irish government, and of notes for his election speech. Nevertheless, though both the declaration and the speech had been widely reported in the press, the British state had no compunction in using them to brand MacSwiney as a subversive.

MacSwiney's response was uncompromising from the start. He refused to recognise the British court in Cork on the grounds that it was 'illegal under the laws of the Irish Republic' (*Daily Herald*, 19 August 1920). As a prisoner he used the only means of protest open to him, going on hunger strike from day one. He was deported to Brixton prison.

MacSwiney was not alone in his fight. First, hundreds of republicans had been imprisoned by the British in the previous four years, and more than 60 were in English gaols when he arrived in South London. Of those incarcerated in England, many were from Cork and had, like him, refused to wear prison clothing. They too had embarked on a hunger strike. Second, the plight faced by Irish freedom fighters attracted mass sympathy from British workers. Reports of the atrocities committed in Ireland by Britain's Black and Tan soldiers were met with outrage. Many trade unionists, fed up with the privations they had suffered in the First World War, took the side of the Irish people against the British government. Seventy of the 400 Councils of Action that militant British workers set up to oppose imperialist manoeuvres against the Russian Revolution also declared their support for Irish self-determination (see '1920: How Labour rode out the storm', *the next step*, No 7, October 1980).

Thousands demonstrated for MacSwiney's release during his bitter struggle: trade unionists, local councillors, churchmen, MPs like Labour Party leader George Lansbury. The Hands Off Ireland Committee and the Irish Self-determination League played an active role in winning labour movement bodies all over the country to protest against his imprisonment. Messages of support for MacSwiney's stand flooded into the *Daily Herald* from the USA, Europe and all over Britain. Furious telegrams demanding his freedom went out to Prime Minister Lloyd George's holiday address in Switzerland.

The forces backing MacSwiney seemed irresistable. But they confronted an immovable object: the British state. As far as the imperialists were concerned, the Irish people's rebellion threatened Britain's stability and had to be crushed. There could be no concessions. If the Government made any, 'a complete breakdown of the whole machinery of law and government in Ireland would inevitably follow', Lloyd George warned his Cabinet (quoted in the *Daily Herald*, 26 August 1920). Indeed Bonar Law, the Lord Privy Seal, recommended that MacSwiney be shot at once (*Daily Herald*, 4 September 1920).

Between British workers and the British state something had to give. It was the labour bureaucracy that made sure that it did — and that the state emerged victorious.

For MacSwiney, but for the Kingdom too

The Labour Party leadership and the TUC failed to give effective solidarity to British imperialism's opponents. Instead they acted to dampen down working class opposition to Britain's Irish war. When the mass demonstrations calling for MacSwiney's release reached their height, the Labour Party leaders had no choice but to step in and add their support. Yet they failed to demand MacSwiney's release on the grounds of supporting Irish self-determination; their main anxiety was to 'avoid a political explosion in England'. The telegram Labour leaders sent to the king warned that MacSwiney's death 'would add enormously to the dangers' facing Britain. The fears of the labour bureaucracy were summed up by Labour MP L G Redmond: 'If MacSwiney dies a Ministry may be saved, but a Kingdom lost' (*Daily Herald*, 8 September 1920).

'Shall MacSwiney die? London Labour answers "No!" ', began an article in the *Daily Herald* calling for a Labour Party rally. But, signed by Ernest Bevin, Herbert Morrison and other Labour leaders, its message was 'save this brave individual', not save him by joining the struggle against British imperialism. Simple human decency and a distaste for unnecessary excesses — these were the sentiments invoked to prevent 'an indelible stain on British honour' (*Daily Herald*, 25 August 1920).

Locked out by the TUC

The Labour Party leadership twisted support for MacSwiney into fear about the survival of the nation. Its partners in the TUC used a less subtle method, refusing to discuss MacSwiney altogether. When, a week after the Labour Party held its rally, Mary MacSwiney went to Portsmouth to put her brother's case to the TUC annual conference, she found the doors barred.

The TUC leaders were terrified. They knew that Mary MacSwiney would not confine her appeal to humanitarian arguments. She had been addressing meetings all over the country with one purpose and one purpose alone: to mobilise active support for her brother's cause — the fight for Irish freedom. Pleas that she persuade her brother to give up his hunger strike had failed. Her response was always the same: 'One wonders what the English people would have thought of any woman in the recent war if she had urged her brother in the face of his enemy to throw down his arms and so save his life' (*Daily Herald*, 10 September 1920). Nor would she beg for mercy:

> 'The Lord Mayor has absolutely no notion of appealing for mercy. But we are going to have justice, if we have to buy it at the price of my brother's life. The Irish Government, that is the Republican Government, will hold everyone responsible.' (*Daily Herald*, 23 August 1920)

The TUC leaders would only support actions to defend MacSwiney so long as they didn't threaten British imperialism. At the Congress they bureaucratically refused to allow time to discuss MacSwiney's case. To add insult to injury, they said Mary MacSwiney was 'too upset' to address the delegates. Her verdict on the TUC appeared in the *Daily Herald* the following day:

> 'Mr Thomas [Jimmy Thomas, TUC general secretary and leader of the NUR] and his colleagues did not want the plain truth spoken to them for five minutes though the occasion was only one of life and death. And they had not the courage to say so, but they camouflaged their refusal under pretended concern for my feelings.' (11 September 1920)

To siphon off working class unrest, the trade union bureaucrats diverted the Congress to pass a resolution expressing 'horror and indignation' at the Government's decision to let the Lord Mayor of Cork die. This was a complete abdication from the struggle. No wonder the aldermen of Cork telegrammed the TUC with the unequivocal message 'TALK NOW USELESS. ACT'.

Remember MacSwiney!

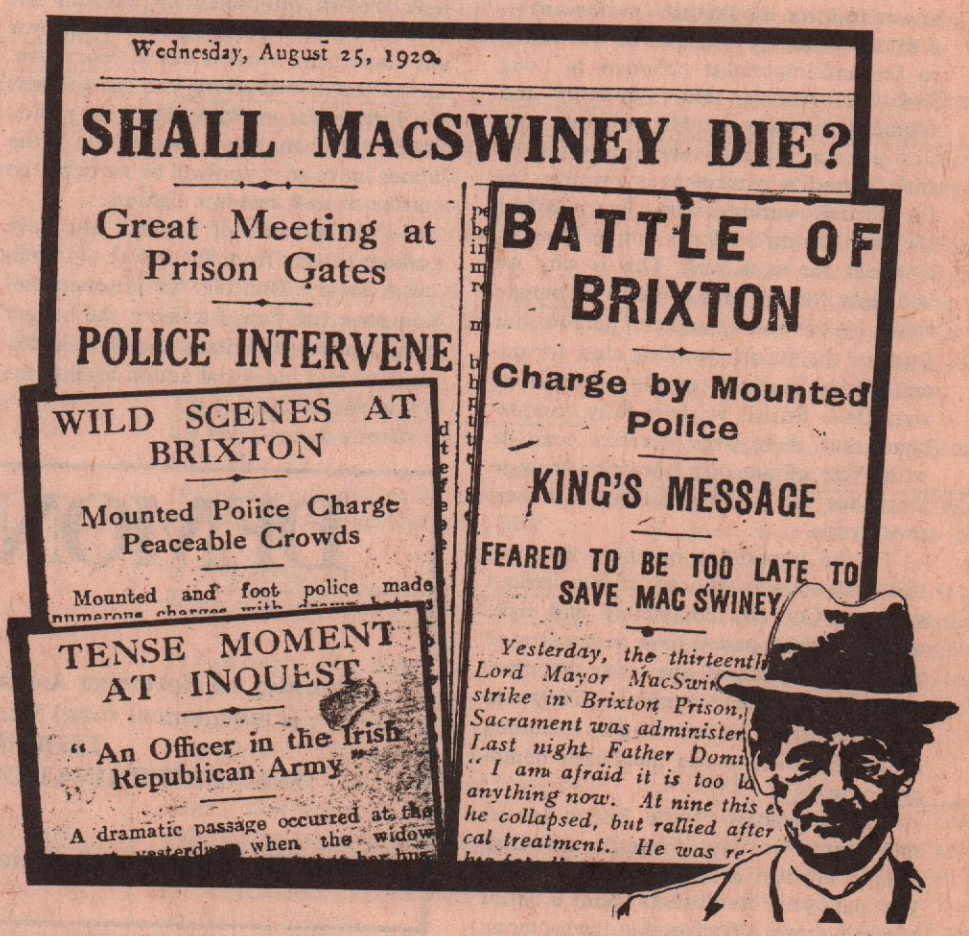
When the TUC locked out Mary MacSwiney the bourgeoisie breathed a sigh of relief. It could brush aside the numerous workers' demonstrations calling for MacSwiney's release. The tremendous potential evident in the support for MacSwiney and his cause was squandered.

Terence MacSwiney died in prison on 25 October 1920. Too weak to resist, he had been unable to counter the brutal attempts by prison doctors to force-feed him. Twenty thousand people filed past his coffin as it lay in state in Southwark Cathedral. But only in Belfast were there riots at his death; in London the labour bureaucracy had calmed things down by calling a funeral procession. The anger expressed by the massive crowds outside the prison gates had been contained as much by the official labour movement's inaction as by the batons of the mounted police.

MacSwiney's death was not just a defeat for the Irish people. It marked a serious setback for British workers. No decisive alternative to the politics of the labour bureaucracy was shaped in the militancy of the post-war years. The Irish War presented a crucial issue over which to separate the interests of the working class from those of British imperialism. The opportunity to build an alternative was lost and the bureaucracy prevailed.

The legacy of decades of reformist politics in the labour movement is still with us today. On Ireland as on every other issue workers have been tied down by the labour bureaucracy. In 1980, when scores of Irish prisoners of war are once again on hunger strike, we must remember Terence MacSwiney and argue that compassion is not enough. Support for the men in H-Block and the women in Armagh must be *political* support, anti-imperialist support. By giving such support we can save them, deliver a severe blow to the British state, and help workers deal with the agents of that state in the labour movement.

Jannie Frost


Wednesday, August 25, 1920.

SHALL MacSWINEY DIE?

Great Meeting at Prison Gates

POLICE INTERVENE

WILD SCENES AT BRIXTON

Mounted Police Charge Peaceable Crowds

Mounted and foot police made

TENSE MOMENT AT INQUEST

"An Officer in the Irish Republican Army"

A dramatic passage occurred at the

BATTLE OF BRIXTON

Charge by Mounted Police

KING'S MESSAGE

FEARED TO BE TOO LATE TO SAVE MAC SWINEY

Yesterday, the thirteenth
Lord Mayor MacSwi
strike in Brixton Prison,
Sacrament was administer
Last night Father Domi
"I am afraid it is too l
anything now. At nine this e
he collapsed, but rallied after
cal treatment. He was re

Harland & Wolff

HER MAJESTY'S SHIPYARD

Talk about industry in Northern Ireland, and you're talking about Harland & Wolff, Belfast's 7000-employee shipbuilding firm. This summer Thatcher agreed to dole out a total of £66m to help the ailing company survive. Meanwhile the workforce there – Protestant almost to a man – has seen 3000 redundancies pushed through in the last three years, with the prospect of more to come. We ask: why are the Tories making such generous payments to such an obvious 'lame duck'? And will Protestant shipworkers be driven to unite with the Catholics of the Six Counties as the recession bites deeper?

HARLAND & WOLFF has been sinking for a long time. It has made a loss nearly every year since 1966. Nevertheless, since 1972 and the imposition of Direct Rule by Westminster, both Labour and Tory governments have spared no expense to save it. They've backed the shipyard to the tune of more than £250m – half the total subsidy granted to all of British Shipbuilders. Thatcher's latest package was, as *The Times* observed, 'simply the latest instalment of state cash which is being poured into the shipyard to keep it afloat' (2 July 1980). This despite the fact that productivity at H&W had actually declined over the previous 12 months.

H&W is clearly a 'special case'. It's received more money from the British state than any other yard. The reason is simple. To win the War in the Six Counties British imperialism needs the backing of the Loyalist community. Money on the table for Protestant jobs at H&W is one of the best ways to win this backing.

Britain needs the Loyalists to help smash the Irish national liberation struggle. The Loyalists are quite willing to do this – but only if their privileges in employment, housing and political representation are maintained. That, they know, will only happen if Britain stays put in the Six Counties. So they demand that Westminster shells out millions for H&W to show its commitment to the Partition of Ireland and to the Protestant supremacy that Partition enshrines. And, Labour or Tory, Westminster is bound to oblige. As one bourgeois commentator has noted:

'There has been a considerable degree of continuity of policy of governments of both political parties in providing aid to Harland and Wolff. . . .particularly since 1972, continuing government support for Harland and Wolff has been necessary to allay fears of an economic withdrawal from the province which many in Northern Ireland fear would be the prelude to a political withdrawal.' (B W Hogwood, *Government and shipbuilding*, 1979)

Even the Thatcher Government, which trumpets the defects of state intervention in the economy whenever it can, is prepared to go along with this. It understands that the preservation of the 'United Kingdom' is at stake.

Nationalisation, Unionist-style

The Loyalists haven't just demanded money either. They've demanded direct state control of H&W as a further pledge of British support. The nationalisation of H&W illustrates this.

In 1976 the British Government was forced to set up British Shipbuilders (BS) to salvage an industry devastated by the decline in world trade. It didn't, however, include H&W in the new enterprise. H&W's future was guaranteed: it was already getting special treatment and the Government didn't want BS workers on the Clyde and elsewhere demanding the same for themselves. But H&W's exclusion from BS provoked wrath from all sections of the Protestants. They wanted it taken into state hands. Ulster Unionist MPs, hardly the staunchest advocates of nationalisation, voted against Government plans for nationalisation because they did not include H&W. Meanwhile Loyalist trade union leaders and shop stewards mounted a major campaign for nationalisation, saying they would refuse to co-operate in management restructuring plans and 'workers' participation' unless H&W was brought into BS. Eventually H&W was taken into full public ownership, but left to the Northern Ireland Office's Department of Commerce.

Accepting the axe

Naturally the British state feels its handouts to H&W as a burden – especially in today's recession. *The Economist*, indeed, is quite tetchy about them:

'The present subsidy to Harland and Wolff is exactly the sort that should be discontinued. It is almost entirely a subsidy to militant Protestant workers in an industry that is anyway bound to die.' (26 July 1980)

But the funds will keep on flowing. Britain relies on the Protestants to police the Six Counties. The most it has done and will ever do is try to cut its costs at H&W.

Redundancies have helped. Back in 1973, the workforce at H&W broke the Tories' 'Phase Three' on pay. In 1976 a total of 10 000 man-hours were lost in stoppages – an average of one hour per worker! But since then even this low figure has fallen. Thousands of sackings have taken the sting out of Loyalist 'militancy'. In the first eight months of 1979 a mere 270 man-hours were lost in strikes.

Cutting the number of jobs from 10 000 to 7000 in three years wasn't bad going for a Labour government. For their part, the Protestants were willing to make the necessary sacrifices. Stepping up the war against the nationalist population was all they really cared about. A brief look at the history of collaboration at H&W since British troops were despatched to the Six Counties in August 1969 reveals this.

Sectarian past, sectarian present

When the troops went in Sandy Scott, a leading shop steward at H&W, called on a mass meeting not to expel the 500 Catholics still employed at the yards. He did so in the name of 'non-sectarianism', that is, ignoring the war of liberation. He had previously told the Protestants to 'forget history' (*The Times*, 1 January 1970). This was the most 'positive' attitude that any Loyalist at H&W has ever shown to the liberation struggle in Ireland.

Scott soon won an MBE (Member of the British *Empire*) for his services to British imperialism. Ten months after his 'non-sectarian' appeal, when the war intensified, the Catholics were kicked out.

In March 1971, 4000 H&W Protestants marched through Belfast demanding the re-introduction of internment for Irish freedom fighters. In May 1974, 9800 out of 10 000 backed the Ulster Workers Council strike against Protestant/Catholic 'power-sharing'.

Today the workforce at H&W forms a key element in the forces of repression in the Six Counties. The example of H&W shows the absurdity of calls for trade union unity between Protestants and Catholics. Partition divided the workers in Ireland and, so long as Britain rules that country, divided they will stay. The fight for self-determination for Ireland threatens both British rule *and* Protestant privilege. The crisis serves to strengthen the bonds between the imperialists and the Loyalists. Only through kicking out British troops from the Six Counties and so resolving the national question can those bonds be broken.

Andrew Clarkson

Hunger strike in the H-Blocks

VICTORY TO THE BLANKETMEN!

WE RESOLVE to do everything in our power to force the British Government to grant immediately prisoner of war status to the anti-imperialist prisoners in Long Kesh and Armagh. Our sympathy and solidarity is sincerely felt and our political goals are clear. Every victory for the Irish liberation movement is a victory for the British working class. Every defeat the Irish people suffer is unquestionably a defeat for us as well. This is why we will fight for the lives of those on hunger strike by continuing and stepping up our fight in the British working class for unconditional support for the prisoners of war. Once British workers fully comprehend that their own interests coincide with those of the Irish liberation struggle then they will be able to throw off their own chains.

To the imperialist butchers who run this country and who try to run Ireland we say: Get out completely and right now! The Irish people have demonstrated through 11 years of open war that they want Ireland for themselves. They are prepared to go to any length, including a hunger strike, to win their basic democratic rights.

To the leaders of the British labour movement we say: Haven't the Irish people already suffered enough? While you pass your resolutions about a better life and dream of reforming the sectarian state, Irish prisoners will be dying. You have thrown anti-imperialist motions out of your conferences and you have thrown anti-imperialist workers out of your movement. You do everything you can to assist the British war machine. Until the policy which you champion is thrown out of the labour movement you will be party to the murder of Irish freedom fighters.

To the workers of England who have nothing to lose from the defeat of imperialism we say: Don't let the prisoners die! You have the power to avert the hunger strike and to get Britain out. Strikes, disruptions and industrial action against the War are necessary.

What you can do:

* Support every action on the prisoners called in your area. The RCT has already organised three successful demonstrations in Brixton, Hackney and Manchester. We have joined with other organisations to leaflet, picket and protest. We urge you to do the same.
* Get a motion through your trade union branch in support of the prisoners. If you contact us we will help you formulate one and provide a speaker too if this will help get the motion passed. The motion should argue for industrial action before the first prisoner dies.
* Attend our labour movement rally on 5 December in London. Trade union speakers will contribute on the struggle to win support for the Irish War and pledge their support for the prisoners. Phone or write for details.
* Reproduce the statement printed above on leaflets and distribute them at work, on dole queues or on the street. Get the money to produce them from your organisation, friends and supporters. We can provide cheap printing and duplicating facilities if you cannot organise this yourself.
* March on the 15 November demonstration advertised in this issue of *the next step*. Begin to build support for the 7 December demonstration in London on the prisoners.
* Put up posters or paint walls with the following slogans:

Don't let the Irish political prisoners die!
PoW status now!
Victory to the Blanketmen!

Phone us to get the names of the prisoners on hunger strike. These should be prominent in the slogans.

* Write to MPs asking them to raise the issue in a parliamentary question. If they support the prisoners ask them to disrupt parliamentary business until the prisoners' demands have been granted.
* Send us money to help pay for the demonstrations we have organised and more propaganda backing the prisoners' cause.

DEMONSTRATE!

Saturday 15 November Assemble Embankment, London, 1 pm (Embankment tube) March with the RCT contingent!
TROOPS OUT NOW!
SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE!

'Support Tameside' social, Enterprise Pub, Chalk Farm Road, 6pm

Letters

Transitional demands?

CHARTER 80

King Henry's

A demand for demands

Dear comrades,
I thought the articles on unemployment in the last issue of *the next step* weren't bad. But none of them said what workers should *do* about redundancies! There wasn't even a single reformist demand in any of them, let alone a transitional one. What about a concrete programme of action, comrades, instead of clever analysis?

Yours fraternally,
J Pollard
Lambeth

James Wood writes:

The reason we don't stick a list of demands on the end of all our articles is that it's the *perspective that informs each demand* that's important, not the demand itself. Obviously comrade Pollard would agree with the demand 'No redundancies'. But what does it mean? Does it mean simple defiance of management sackings, or does it mean a political exposure of the labour bureaucracy's call to 'save our industry' as well? The left isn't short of demands; it's anti-Labour Party politics it's short on.

As the editorial in our penultimate issue argued ('The fight for jobs', *the next step*, No 6), there's nothing wrong with many of the demands Trotsky elaborated – after more than 20 years' experience of the Bolshevik movement, let's not forget – in his 1938 Transitional Programme. But demands like 'work or full pay' are useless if they are taken up without a fight against the trade union bureaucracy. By this we mean fighting against the widely held view that workers should make sacrifices now so that Britain's temporary crisis can be reversed. That idea is very strong; why else do so many workers opt for voluntary redundancy, if not because they think that their severance pay will see them through till the recession is over? To talk about 'work or full pay' when thousands of workers demonstrate their conversion to this way of thinking daily is to skip over a stage of education which cannot be skipped.

We mention 'ideas' not because they determine everything but because the left neglects them so much. The left will always say that the Labour Party has no will to fight, but it never consistently exposes the nationalism, pacifism, etc, of the Labour Party (on the contrary, it takes up the Labour Party's calls for withdrawal from the EEC and for 'disarmament' with remarkable alacrity). What it offers instead of Labour is merely higher wage claims and more aggressive trade union tactics. In other words, it makes the same error Lenin castigated the Russian Economists for in his *What is to be done?* (1902): it underestimates the importance of ideological struggle and the influence of bourgeois ideas in the workers' movement, preferring to remain entranced (and, indeed rather surprised) by every spontaneous expression of working class anger that breaks out. Thus its infatuation with quick-and-easy slogans for the workers to take on board. Lenin had some advice for today's radical left. Putting on an 'Economist' tone, he sarcastically remarked of the revolutionary newspapers *Iskra* and *Zarya*: 'Their articles contained – oh horror! – *not a single*, can you imagine it? – not a single "concrete demand"....!' (*What is to be done?*). For Lenin demand-mongering was not just wrong, it was patronising too. And patronising workers has no place in revolutionary politics.

The politics of experience

So Charter 80 is 'a bad British joke' and a 'reactionary charade' according to *the next step* No 7. Nothing testifies better to the RCT's total isolation from the real world than this. From what you say it's obvious that none of your supporters has ever had any experience of raising the Irish question among rank and file workers. If you had you'd realise why something like Charter 80 is necessary.

Charter 80 is a first step to involving people in support for workers in Ireland. You can't expect instant conversions. Workers won't make a clean break from their existing outlook to that of revolutionary socialists. Charter 80 and the analogy with dissidents in Russia is a good means of making the connection. It's also a way of forcing the trade union leaders to act: for years they've been silent on the Irish – now they've got to support them. Surely that proves Charter 80's success.

Yours,
N D
North London

Pat Roberts writes:

Our correspondent should ask himself why it is that trade union leaders can put their signatures to an SWP initiative like Charter 80. The only reason is that Charter 80's appeal for 'human rights' remains 100 per cent within the framework of the TUC's Better Life for All Campaign. The TUC is ready to go along with any campaign for improved conditions so long as it equivocates on the central issues – demand for prisoner of war status and support for the Irish liberation struggle. Charter 80 is not 'a first step' between the working class and anti-imperialist politics. It's a first step between the working class and the pro-imperialist policy of the TUC.

Nobody in the RCT expects 'instant conversions'. But the record of the last 12 years shows there will be no conversions at all, never mind instant ones, if the radical left has its way. If you don't raise anti-imperialist politics (which Charter 80 doesn't) we can guarantee you won't convince anybody.

The difference between a principled and an opportunist method of campaigning on Ireland is best shown if you compare our work around Tameside Trades Council with Charter 80. We've managed to convince dozens of union branches and trades councils of the need to give wholehearted support to the Irish people. So far the SWP has managed a re-union of liberals and veteran campaigners in Central London. No doubt this is yet another example of the RCT's 'total isolation' from the working class.

To the editor of *the next step*

Dear colleague,

Recognition dispute, King Henry Meat Products, Levenshulme

On behalf of the strike committee, the Bakers, Food & Allied Workers Union and myself, may I thank your organisation for the support you have given to the strikers at King Henry over the last weeks.

I would also like, through the medium of your paper, to thank all the demonstrators on the Brighton demo on unemployment for the way they contributed to the collection of £96 for our strike fund.

It is in disputes like our present one that we really need such support, particularly when fighting a reactionary management such as we have at King Henry.

Once again, thank you most sincerely for your support.

Yours fraternally,

W Harrison
Manchester district secretary
Bakers, Food & Allied Workers Union
No 4 Region

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RCT Activities in November & December

LONDON
for more information ring 01-274 3951

CENTRAL LONDON
Join the RCT contingent on Committee for Withdrawal from Ireland **demonstration** on **15 November**. Assemble **1pm** Embankment tube
6pm: SPTAC benefit in support of Tameside Trades Council (disaffiliated from TUC for supporting the Irish liberation movement). Enterprise pub, Chalk Farm Rd, Chalk Farm tube

Activities on Ireland
Public meeting
26 November Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act – sixth anniversary of the introduction of the PTA by the Labour Government
Speaker: David Douglas
University of London Union, Malet St, WCI. **7.30pm**

29 November Don't let the Labour Party forget the PTA – **picket** of LP headquarters, 144-52 Walworth Rd, SE17. **12 – 2pm**
5 December Labour movement rally in support of the Irish prisoners on hunger strike
Victory to the Irish Prisoners of War!
Labour movement speakers:

Dave Hallsworth, AUEW
Alex Fraser, UCATT
Vera Sheiff, NUT
Bob Montgomery, sheet metal workers (others invited)
John Marshall Hall,
27 Blackfriars Rd, SE1.
Near Blackfriars BR station. **7.30pm**

7 December **Demonstration** in support of the hunger strikers. Phone for details

Public meeting
12 December Trade unions and the fight for jobs
Speaker: Keith Tompson
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1
7.30pm

SOUTH LONDON
Public forums
6 November Brixton in the front line – resist state attacks on blacks
Speaker: Russell Osborne
19 November At home, at work – the bosses' attack on women
Speaker: Inez Landa
3 December The cuts – Lambeth in the red
Speaker: Tony Allen
17 December The Irish War – film and discussion
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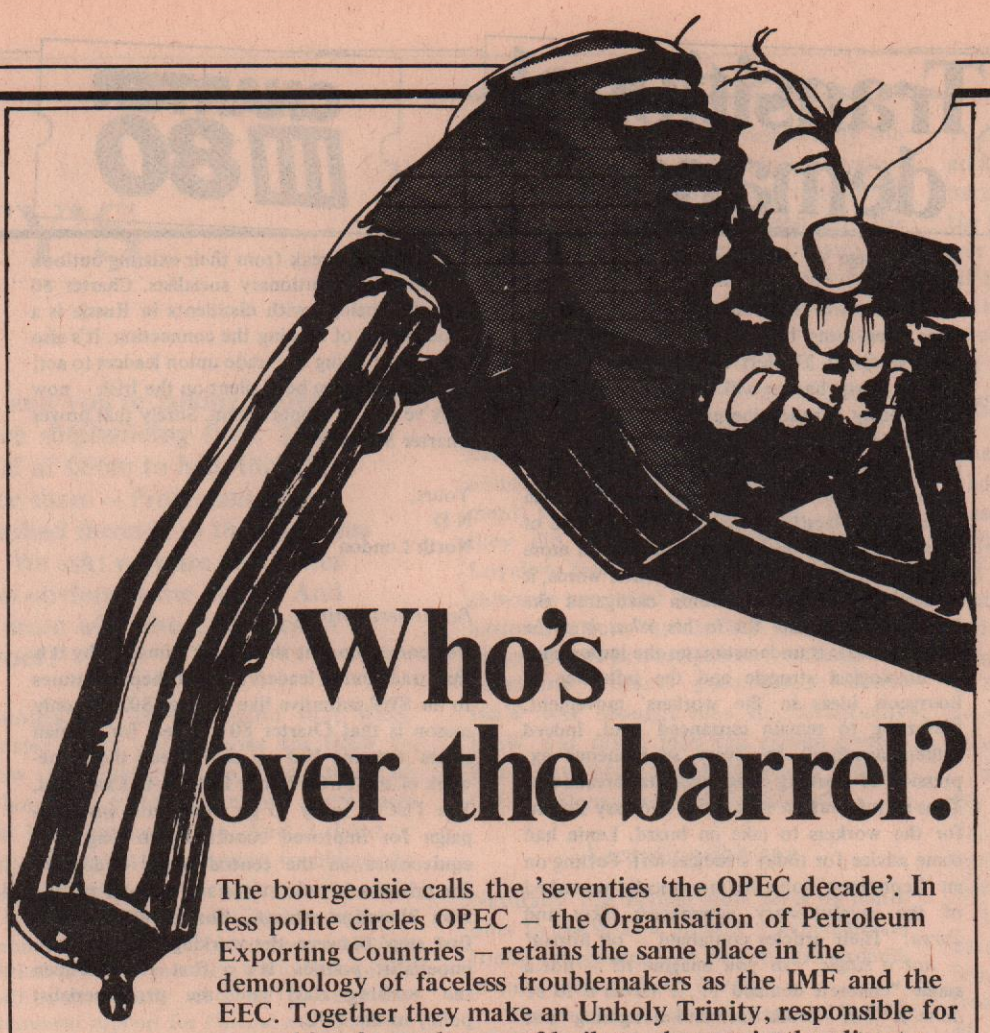
21 November The fight for national independence – what is important about this kind of struggle?
4 December British rule in Ireland – Partition, Direct Rule, Devolved Government – how do we judge them?
Future forums on Protestant/Catholic unity, Republicanism. . .
All at Manchester Polytechnic, Aytoun St, **7.30pm**

Regular sales
dole offices:
Aytoun St, Thursday **10 – 12**
Stretford, Brunswick St, Wednesday and Thursday **10 – 12**
street sales:
Piccadilly Gdns, Friday **4.45 – 5.30pm**
Stretford, Arndale Centre, Saturday **10 – 12**
Warrington, entrance to shopping precinct, Saturday **10.30 – 12**

Week of Action on Ireland, Manchester Polytechnic
10 – 14 November – to mobilise for 15 November London demonstration
Activities include:
films (Patriot Game; Prisoner of War)
cultural events (Belt & Braces Roadshow; an Irish Republican group)
major rally (Friday 14 November)
Details from RCT bookstall, Aytoun St Bldg, Wednesday **12 – 2pm**

Demonstration and picket 10 December, 10am
King Henry Pies, Gardners' Diesel Engines: unite and fight for jobs, defend union rights!
Assemble Mancunian Way, Oxford Rd, Manchester. March to Magistrates Court where King Henry pickets will be appearing. Called by King Henry Pies workers; supported by Gardners' workers

LIVERPOOL
29 November Join the RCT contingent on the TUC demonstration against unemployment. For details of transport and assembly point contact our Manchester and London offices



Who's over the barrel?

The bourgeoisie calls the 'seventies 'the OPEC decade'. In less polite circles OPEC – the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries – retains the same place in the demonology of faceless troublemakers as the IMF and the EEC. Together they make an Unholy Trinity, responsible for everything from plagues of boils to changes in the climate.

Hardly a week goes by without OPEC making headlines. No less than a third of the world's total energy supplies comes from its 13 members. In 20 years it has risen from a motley group of impoverished nations to a central focus of world politics. What lies behind OPEC's rise and what are its problems today? Did OPEC cause the crisis or must we look elsewhere?

IRAQ, IRAN, KUWAIT, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela formed the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries in 1960. For years these five backward capitalist nations had had their oil plundered by imperialism. The oil 'majors' – Standard Oil of New Jersey (now Exxon), Anglo-Iranian (now BP), Shell, Gulf, Standard Oil of California, Mobil and Texaco – had made billions of dollars at their expense, controlling their oil revenues and severely hampering their plans for development. This, and the fact that in 1959 and 1960 oil prices fell, spurred them into forming OPEC, a cartel which aimed to maintain prices and keep revenues up.

In fact they largely failed. Between 1950 and 1969, the price of a barrel of oil from the Persian Gulf rose less than 10 cents (P Nore & T Turner, editors, *Oil and class struggle*, Zed Press, 1980). Drawing other oil producers into the cartel didn't help much either. Although Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Libya, Algeria and Indonesia all joined in the 'sixties and Nigeria entered in 1971, OPEC could not secure a significant price increase until 1973.

What the 1973 energy crisis was all about

Over the winter of 1973 OPEC upped the price of oil from $3 to nearly $12 a barrel. To understand why, we have to look at the changing economic position of the imperialist nations. We also have to recall the stage hostilities in the Middle East had reached.

Throughout the 'sixties the rate of profit in the advanced capitalist economies had been falling. To keep up investment in the 'seventies, each imperialist state was forced to expand credit and public expenditure. The result was an unprecedented spurt of growth in 1972-73 (Britain experienced this as the 'speculative boom' of those two years). Demand for oil soared and market prices considerably outstripped OPEC's official ones. Some kind of readjustment of the latter was bound to occur, particularly as OPEC countries received their revenues in dollars. Because of the decline of US imperialism, dollars were worth less and less as each month passed and the dollar devalued.

At the same time, the oil companies themselves were hit by falling profit rates. They needed a price rise to finance their diversification into coal, nuclear power and other energy sources. Furthermore, President Nixon knew that dearer oil would hurt Western Europe and Japan more than the USA: it meant that Texan and Alaskan wells would be more competitive, and that America's oil-less rivals would be taken down a peg.

OPEC wanted a rise. The 'majors' wanted one too. Israel's defeat of Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur war of October 1973 provided OPEC with a good pretext for taking action.

The imperialist powers had established Israel in 1948 so that they could have a client state in the Middle East to police their enormous interests there. As the world economy began to drift into crisis in the late 'sixties, Israel was forced to consolidate its precarious position. In 1967 it occupied the West Bank and other former Arab territories in Sinai, the Golan Heights and the Gaza Strip. Further land was taken after the 1973 war. OPEC tolerated the first bout of Israeli aggression; it had to be seen to present some opposition to the second. Why? Because if it didn't, the petit-bourgeois nationalist regimes which comprised its Arab members risked popular revolts and Palestinian outrage. It had no choice in the matter.

Soon the West found itself faced with quadrupled oil prices. In addition, OPEC made Israel's most obvious imperialist backers the target of an oil embargo. The 'energy crisis' had begun – not only for the West, but for OPEC too.

OPEC: drowning in oil

Realising that foreign control over revenues would bar the road to independent capitalist development, each of the Arab OPEC states intensified its efforts to gain power over its oil from the marauding Western companies. They were only partially successful. For example: Saudi Arabia, a traditional ally of US imperialism and an anti-communist stronghold, nationalised the American multinational Aramco. But Aramco still kept its grip by controlling refining technology and sales outlets.

OPEC's Arab members weren't just frustrated over oil. Their efforts to bring their economies into the twentieth century proved unsuccessful too. Raising oil prices made them even more dependent on oil for survival: in 1979, all but one per cent of the export earnings accrued by Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Qatar came from oil (International Monetary Fund, *International Financial Statistics*, August 1980). On the other hand, their import bills shot up. Total OPEC imports jumped from $21 to $103 billion between 1973 and 1978 (OECD, *Economic Outlook*, July 1980).

OPEC nations couldn't set up industries to compete with the West. Airports, motorways and similar infrastructure, yes; viable steel mills, car factories and productive capital, no. Otherwise, all the ruling classes of OPEC could do with their billions was spend them on luxuries or, more important, send them abroad.

Today OPEC countries have more than $270 billion of investments overseas (*The Times*, 2 June 1980). But this reflects OPEC's subordinate position in the world economy rather than any strength: 75 per cent of OPEC's foreign assets consist of short-term deposits in Western banks and only a negligible amount has gone into productive investment. So OPEC couldn't put its money to work; but imperialism could – and did.

The West: living on borrowed time

The 1973 price rises unbalanced the capitalist world in a big way. Hit by dearer oil imports, many imperialist powers went into the red. All-out protectionism loomed round the corner. Western banks resolved to mobilise OPEC's cash to help out.

What they did was re-lend it to countries running large trade deficits. Like the imperialist powers, the backward capitalist countries had been thrown into disarray – both by higher oil prices and by the contraction of markets in the West. They needed to borrow desperately. Imperialism was ready with the funds: it needed stability in Africa, Asia and Latin America to step up the export of capital and commodities there – something the recession demanded. So it was that OPEC's 'petrodollars' (the dollar revenues from oil sales) were first 'recycled'.

This operation did have some effect in the years 1975-78. But the international extension of credit which recycling involved could only delay the day of reckoning for the West. By 1979 many of the backward capitalist countries which had borrowed money could barely meet the interest charges and repayments on their debts. For Brazil and Mexico, two important markets for imperialism, the burden of debt servicing doubled between 1970 and 1978 to 28 per cent and 60 per cent of export earnings respectively (World Bank, *World Development Report*, August 1980).

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran in early 1979 precipitated another round of price increases. The 'spot price' of oil (the price on the open market) shot above OPEC's official price as a result of panic buying and stockpiling. Pressure grew from the oil producers to bring their prices into line with spot prices: OPEC's prices had already been falling in real terms since 1975. Eventually, prices rose – by as much as 130 per cent by mid 1980. And so did revenues: in 1978 OPEC's surplus revenues had fallen to a mere $5 billion, but today they are expected to be $120 billion.

This time recycling is not such an easy option. Those backward capitalist countries which had previously received loans from Western banks are now in a much more unstable situation. Their oil import bill alone rose by $35 billion last year. At the same time their bankers are in a dilemma. Should they continue to lend and risk throwing good money after bad? Or should they refuse to lend any more and thereby risk a default? The debt problems of these countries, and the problems capitalism faces in the 'South', gave ulcers to the pro-imperialist diplomats of the Brandt Commission earlier this year.

Of course, what all the imperialists are really worried about is maintaining a trouble-free market for their exports of commodities and capital. This is imperative if they are to try and counter the effects of declining profitability at home. OPEC's price increases do not help them out, and even OPEC is a victim of the recession.

OPEC in Vienna

The Vienna conference of the 13 OPEC states in September marked an attempt by the main oil producers to bring some order to the chaotic market. The conference had two main goals: to solve the problem of the indebted backward capitalist countries through aid programmes, and to index oil prices to prevent a decline in the real value of OPEC oil exports. But the conference broke up in disarray over the 'pricing formula'. OPEC was split: Saudi Arabia and Iraq led a moderate group of 10 against Iran, Libya and Algeria each of which advocated a high-price policy.

The material basis for this division of opinion is clear enough. Saudi Arabia has a third of the world's oil reserves, a third of OPEC's current output and only a tiny population. It can afford to accommodate to imperialism. Iraq, intent on becoming imperialism's main ally in the Arab world, is also bound to play the sycophant. By contrast, Iran is broke and both Algeria and Libya have to contend with ever-dwindling stocks of oil, stagnant economies and mounting internal opposition. Still, Saudi Arabia's commanding role in OPEC, backed by Iraq, is not without its disadvantages. The Saudi regime itself is faced with domestic unrest and is forced to make anti-Israel noises more and more frequently. Too open an allegiance to imperialism will threaten the regime's stability still further.

Hands off the Middle East!

The oil price rises of 1973 were a consequence of the crisis of capitalism in the West, not its cause. Long before OPEC raised prices the imperialist nations were sliding into recession. Between 1970 and 1972, unemployment in Britain and France had reached record post-war levels. Inflation too was significantly higher than at any time during the 'sixties. It was the decision to break the US dollar from its link with gold in 1971 – forced on by the USA's decline – that began the chaos in the international monetary system.

The signs were there for all to see. Needless to say, however, the bourgeoisie and the leaders of the labour movement chose not to see them. Instead, both pointed the finger at OPEC and 'the Arabs' – at anything, in fact, but capitalism itself.

Workers must resist attempts to blame the problems of British capitalism on foreigners. To make out that OPEC is the main enemy is to line workers up behind the imperialists' foreign policy. At a time when the bourgeoisie is preparing the ground for military and political intervention in the Middle East, the labour movement needs a distinct, independent policy, one which identifies our interests with the workers and peasants of the Middle East. We can make no concessions to the imperialists when they cast OPEC as the root of all evil. Hands off the Middle East!

Tony Allen

Immigration controls are racist

GETTING THE MESSAGE THROUGH

Throughout the capitalist world immigrant and migrant workers are under attack. Racism has become legal and respectable. In France the bosses try to comfort unemployed French workers by attacking immigrants. In October Lionel Stoleru, the Minister in charge of immigration, stated that there is 'no question of France accepting one more foreigner while more than 1.4 million people are unemployed' (The Times, 17 October 1980).

Immigration controls, however, are not just about keeping people out of the country. As the next step has argued on numerous occasions, they are also a means of exercising internal control of immigrant workers – isolating them and making them vulnerable to state attacks. This is what is happening in France today. Stoleru has warned Moroccan miners on strike for higher pay that if their labour contracts are not renewed they will be deported.

English lessons for Stoleru

STOLERU HAS LEARNT WELL from his British colleagues. Immigration controls in Britain have been perfected into a veritable science of oppression. The Home Office uses immigration legislation to harass ethnic minorities in all aspects of their lives. At the dole office immigrants are scrutinised and treated with suspicion. Immigration officials have access to hospital files, and numerous black patients are asked to produce passports before getting treatment.

Two schoolgirls aged nine and twelve were taken away from their school in Nelson, Lancashire, by police recently. They now await deportation to Pakistan. The two sisters were put in separate local authority homes and did not see each other, nor any member of their family, for six days after their removal from school. In its typically brutal manner the Home Office has made its point, black people can never feel safe; they are always open to state harassment.

These racist attacks are directed at the labour movement. The British state chooses its victims carefully. The impending deportation of yet more Filipino workers is a warning to all immigrants: 'Keep your head down or you'll be next'. During recent months the police have started tracking down 'illegal' Columbian workers. Hotels and restaurants have become hunting grounds for illegal immigrants.

State terror against immigrants has met with little opposition until now. The leadership of the official labour movement supports immigration controls. Rather than defend black people under attack the labour leaders see immigrants as a threat to 'British jobs'. They'll make their usual speeches about 'racial harmony' but their action speaks louder than words. At best, they ignore the racist threat. At worst, union bureaucrats – as in the hotel and catering industry – help the police to hunt down 'overstayers' and 'illegals'.

Smash all immigration controls!

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency has come under heavy criticism for our uncompromising stand against all immigration controls during the past year. The Communist Party has denounced our view that all immigration controls are racist as 'fatally defeatist' (see 'All immigration controls are racist', *the next step*, No 2). Members of the International Marxist Group and the Socialist Workers Party, which united with the CP in the Campaign Against Racist Laws (CARL) have called us 'unrealistic' for not restricting our opposition to the 1971 Immigration Act.

Our reply remains the same: racism cannot be reduced to the consequences of one particular piece of legislation. What is at stake is the right of the state to control immigration – the right of the ruling class to control the movement of workers. Once you acquiesce to immigration control you are forced to accept the right of the state to discriminate against one section of society.

The radical left, more interested in legal niceties than in fighting racism, has ridiculed our stand. Reality, however, has had the final say. In October, the SWP has finally brought itself to state that 'immigration controls are racialist'. Why? Because a civil servant has said so – officially. In a court case instigated by the Commission for Racial Equality against the immigration service, Peter Scott QC, on behalf of the Home Office, argued: 'The immigration service is concerned with discriminating against people on racial grounds' (see *Socialist Worker*, 11 October 1980).

Peter Scott has finally shown the SWP the light. Will the SWP now draw the lessons and begin to fight against all immigration controls? Will the SWP tell its partners in CARL that there's no point in campaigning against a 'Tory' piece of legislation when all immigration laws are racist? Not a chance! Fighting all immigration controls means making a break with the narrow trade union outlook of radical left politics. But the SWP is too much into the ways of the official labour movement to rock the boat.

The RCT has no time for legal cretinism. In propaganda and in action, we have shown that it is possible to fight racism from the point of view of a working class revolutionary, not a liberal lawyer.

Judith Harrison

East London Workers Against Racism

SKINS, STONES AND GROANS

ELWAR's work has expanded over the past three months – and necessarily so! As the SKIN programme so graphically showed – racism is on the up in East London. Here, we report on an ELWAR public meeting on 16 October. It illustrates the size of the problem anti-racists in East London face.

FRAN EDEN (RCT/ELWAR) chaired the meeting which was addressed by Anwer Ali (Bengali Youth Movement and victim of racist attacks in Mile End, East London), Maggie Pearson (ELWAR) and Max Levitas (president of Tower Hamlets Trades Council and Communist Party). The audience: representatives of the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party, Labour Party, Workers Revolutionary Party, Newham Youth Movement, Newham Citizens Welfare Association, East End Link, City Polytechnic Students Union and Hackney Community Relations Council. Workers from Ford Dagenham and Mile End Bengali families and friends, victims of the latest spate of racist attacks, were also present.

Anwer Ali's speech clearly depicted the scale of the racist offensive. He described how up to 100 skinheads attack Bengali families in the Mile End area. Using airguns, paving stones and broken bottles they have forced Bengali families to barricade their doors and windows. The advice of the police to the Bengali families has been: 'go to sleep in the bathroom'. Anwer Ali showed the complicity of the police in these racist attacks. After a recent riot the police did not arrest any racist. Anwer Ali was himself attacked by a gang of racists in Bow. Despite his knife wounds, the police refused to take the matter up unless he could identify his attackers.

Anwer Ali went on to show the deteriorating situation in Brick Lane where restaurants and sweat shops have been wrecked again recently. He outlined how ELWAR – along with a number of Bengali families – is organising a defence campaign in the Lane. And when violence erupts, he said, 'ELWAR can get to Mile End from all over in 10 minutes. The Bow police take two hours!'.

British nationalism must be fought!

Maggie Pearson of ELWAR hit a controversial note when she pointed to the less inspiring record of Tower Hamlets Trades Council. She noted how organisations like the Communist and Labour parties were unable to counter the nationalist/racist arguments prevalent in the area because they themselves were pursuing a nationalist strategy. She argued that 'if you put British industry and the British economy first, then you will not be able to challenge the fascists who demand "British jobs for British workers"'.

Maggie Pearson demonstrated that effective defence against racism requires a systematic exposure of chauvinism in the labour movement. ELWAR was not just concerned with physical defence work but establishing the basis for an anti-racist movement in the working class.

The last speaker, Max Levitas of the Tower Hamlets Trades Council, exploded in anger against Maggie Pearson's contribution. He defended his record by pointing to his anti-fascist role in the 'thirties. He argued that the role of the official labour movement was fine and pointed to the publication of half a million leaflets in four languages by the South East Regional TUC as his evidence. He concluded that ELWAR's political criticism was splitting the movement.

The lively discussion that followed showed the correctness of ELWAR's insistence that political differences should be aired in the open. A number of Asian workers backed up ELWAR's assertion that the official labour movement had done nothing in practice to defend victims of racist attacks. This point was well illustrated by Hussain from Barking bus garage. He was attacked by a white racist conductor but his union, the TGWU, did nothing to help him. No doubt the T&G bureaucrats were too busy worrying about the British economy and foreign imports.

The meeting ended with an agreement to establish a trade union based defence network to counter the racist attacks.

For more information about ELWAR, speakers on the politics and practicalities of workers' defence and showings of a video of the recent TV programme, write to: **ELWAR**
Box 22
136 Kingsland High Street
London E8

Filipino deportations

OVER OUR DEAD BODIES

SUPPORTERS of *the next step* are fighting against the impending deportation of Filipino workers. And in good time too. For the Home Office has stepped up its attacks. Until now the state has concentrated its fire on workers who did not 'disclose' the fact that they had children back in the Philippines. However, it has recently invented a new category of 'illegal' immigrants. The Home Office has been going through its files looking for 'false references' in the applications submitted by Filipino workers. Anyone with 'false references' will now be deported. The British Embassy in Manila has hired Filipino detectives to collect ammunition against any worker it decides to define as 'illegal' in the future. And British police have been surveying Filipino waiters and waitresses in hotel and catering. They are the next in line.

As we predicted, all the appeals and the petitions to the Home Office have been rejected. The time has come for all supporters of the cause of Filipino workers to organise resistance against the deportations. To make this resistance effective we have to mobilise trade union support. This is the message which *the next step* supporters have been taking to their union branches. The initial response has been encouraging. Manchester NUPE district committee, Hackney NUPE, UCATT (University College Hospital), East London Teachers Association, CPSA London Broad Left Conference, Bethnal Green ASTMS, Lambeth TGWU and Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Battersea and Wandsworth trades councils have so far passed motions in support of the Filipino workers. A resolution supporting this struggle was also passed by the North West TUC conference on racism.

This is just the first step. The Manchester area district health committee of NUPE has committed itself to organise a public meeting against all deportations. Similar action is planned for London in November. But at the end of the day we need more than just motions and demonstrations. Every deportation order must be resisted. If the bosses get away with victimising one group of workers the whole labour movement will become more vulnerable to attacks. Every time workers thwart the deportation of a Home Office victim a blow will be struck in the interest of our class.

Eppi Nachi



THE WAR AND THE WORKING CLASS

The Second World War was a momentous event for all sections of British society. For British capitalists the War brought the resolution of long-standing rivalries among imperialist powers; it allowed a major restructuring of industry and it cleared the way for a prolonged period of economic boom and stability. For the working class the mass slaughter and intensified exploitation of the War was the culmination of two decades of defeat.

In this issue of the next step we begin an eight-part series on The War and the working class with Frank Richards' assessment of the reverses that followed the First World War. The setbacks suffered by the labour movement in the early 'twenties were decisive in determining the response of workers to the long years of depression that followed and to the build-up to the Second World War. The series will continue with articles by James Wood and Sabena Norton which will focus on the experience of the working class in the 'thirties and 'forties.

Victory and defeat

After the Second World War British capitalism emerged from more than 20 years of slump into a boom of unprecedented duration. State intervention was reorganised and extended: by 1950 it embraced steel, coal and transport as well as education, housing, health services and welfare benefits. The government played a major part in transforming a period of mass joblessness and social instability into an era of virtually full employment and unparalleled class harmony. But though Britain had conquered Germany, it had lost its empire: on the world stage the War confirmed the subordination of Britain to the USA.

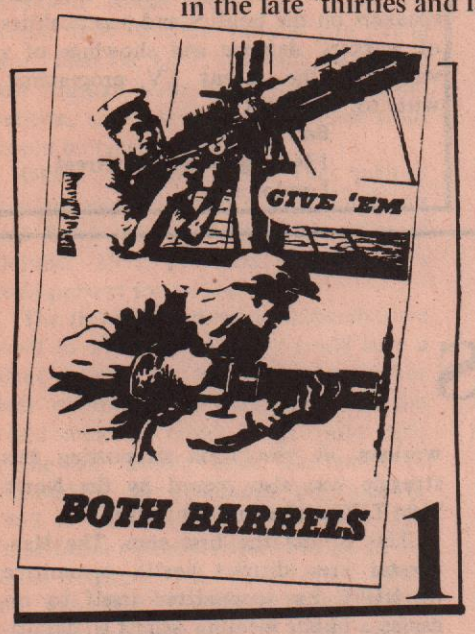
Not surprisingly the British ruling class looks back on the War as a great triumph. The problem is that most workers tend to see it in this light too. It marked a transition: from a time when millions lived through the grinding poverty of the dole, to the'fifties and 'sixties, when most workers could get jobs and were assured of a much higher standard of living. Yet this improvement was bought at terrible cost. Hundreds of thousands died or were injured, and millions worked like slaves in a relentless drive for higher productivity that began in the late 'thirties and lasted for nearly a decade.

One section of the labour movement prospered: the leaders of the unions and the Labour Party. When the Government needed working class co-operation in the war effort it found the labour bureaucrats willing partners. Wartime full employment strengthened the trade unions after years in which wage cuts, lock-outs and organised strike-breaking had steadily reduced union membership and union muscle. As workers' militancy and organisation grew, the bourgeoisie drew the union leaders in close to participate in the wartime allocation and exploitation of labour. Propagating its radical nationalist outlook throughout the working class, the labour leadership (ably assisted by the Communist Party) succeeded in containing every revolt against the privations of war. It directed workers into making terrible sacrifices, in the factories at home and in the battlefields abroad.

Never again!

Today the memories and traditions of the 'thirties and 'forties are a potent force in the British labour movement. Labour's older generation leaders can scarcely make a speech without reference to the harsh conditions of the 'thirties; Tony Benn frequently invokes the comradeship of wartime and what he calls the 'democratic' struggle of the British people against fascism. The chant 'No return to the 'thirties' is raised throughout the labour movement – from the SWP's Right to Work Campaign to the TUC's Campaign for Social and Economic Advance.

In the next eight issues of the next step we will look at different aspects of the period that has had such an influence on the ideology and institutions of the labour movement. Articles will take up particular issues – the crisis of British imperialism, the development of the 'welfare state' and the attempts by the state to overcome the opposition of the working class. The series will concentrate on the relationship between the labour bureaucracy and rank and file workers. It will show how the Labour and trade union leaders mediated between the working class and the bourgeois state. Our objective is simple. The last world crisis resulted in the consolidation of today's labour bureaucracy. We examine the 'thirties to help us make sure that the present world crisis leads to the destruction of the influence of that parasitic body.



Prelude to the slump

THE DEFEATS OF THE TWENTIES

During the first 20 years of this century the working class movement emerged as a powerful force in British society. The shop stewards' movement of the First World War united working class militants and gave expression to rising anti-capitalist feeling in the labour movement. Alongside this political radicalisation grew organised strength. By 1920 more than half of Britain's male workers were in trade unions.

At the close of the First World War the working class erupted. Strikes for higher pay and a 40-hour week shook British industry. This working class unity, and in particular the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers, was a threat the employers could not ignore.

The greatest challenge facing the capitalists was the rising class consciousness of the movement. The 1917 Russian Revolution and the left-wing shift of the European proletariat had a profound impact on British workers. Many activists in the shop stewards' movement became influenced by communist politics. These militants joined with the British Socialist Party, the Scottish Socialist Labour Party and other smaller socialist groups to form the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in January 1921. Never had the organisations of the labour movement seemed so strong.

Yet all these gains were soon reversed. When the post-war boom turned to slump in 1921, the trade unions proved unable to defend their members' living standards. Workers were pushed on the defensive: the bosses launched an attack on the working class and the victories of 1917-20 disappeared almost overnight. Under pressure from the employers, the Triple Alliance crumbled in March 1921. The miners were left on their own to battle against the bosses and were defeated after a three-month struggle. In June 1921, 500 000 cotton workers were locked out and forced to accept a major reduction in their wages. The most important defeat of all took place in engineering, the sector of industry where the shop stewards' movement was strongest. Here a 14-week lock-out led to wage cuts and the imposition of tough new working conditions. Weakened by the lock-out and rising unemployment, the AEU lost a quarter of its members.

The employers' offensive compelled the working class to retreat. Workers fought a losing battle against redundancies and wage cuts. By 1923 trade union membership had fallen to little more than 4½ million – 2½ million down on its 1920 peak. Further defeats climaxed with the collapse of the 1926 General Strike.

Why the day was lost

The British working class lost because its militant sections failed to develop a coherent communist programme. The dominant influence among militants was syndicalism – a point of view which was suspicious of 'politics' and which sought to defend labour by uniting workers along industrial lines.

Between 1918 and 1920 this form of radical trade unionism was seriously challenged by the Bolsheviks. They pointed out the limitations of the shop



stewards' movement and held up the newly formed CPGB as the future leadership of the working class. However the CPGB itself reflected the political weakness of the British labour movement. It was ill-equipped to transform a militant trade union outlook into revolutionary consciousness.

Although the labour bureaucracy was threatened by rank and file unrest, the absence of a political challenge to its position gave it considerable room for manoeuvre. The antagonism between the labour leadership and the shop stewards' movement did not become a conflict between reformism and revolutionary politics; it remained a conflict between *militant* and *moderate* trade unionists. The militants only criticised the leadership of the TUC and the Labour Party on the grounds that it underestimated the class struggle and was not prepared to push militant action far enough. They did not challenge the bureaucrats' *political* direction of the labour movement.

The British ruling class had a much more accurate assessment of the labour bureaucracy. It understood that Labourism restricted the horizons of the class struggle and integrated the working class into the capitalist system. In the upheavals at the end of the First World War, trade union leaders became key figures in maintaining social stability. During the railway clerks' strike in February 1919, Winston Churchill noted:

'Trade union organisation was very important, and the more moderate its officials were, the less representative it was; but it was the only organisation with which the Government could deal. The curse of trade unionism was that *there was not enough of it*, and it was not highly enough developed to make its branch secretaries fall into line with the head office. With a powerful trade union, either peace or war could be made.' (Quoted in K Middlemas, *Politics in industrial society*, 1979)

Conservative Party leader Bonar Law put it even more bluntly: 'Trade union organisation was the only thing between us and anarchy'.

The official trade union movement played this reactionary role not because it was weak-willed, but because it propagated a coherent reformist outlook in the working class. It directed workers' energies away from challenging the capitalist system of exploitation and towards limited short-term objectives. The very organisations which workers created to defend their interests had become a means of social control. The shop stewards' movement's response was to upbraid the labour leadership for not living up to trade union principles. The militants failed to recognise that, if the unions were to become effective weapons for the working class, they would have to be politically transformed.

The CPGB – never a threat to Labour

Lenin and the Communist International urged British workers to wage a sharp political struggle against the Labour leadership. The international communist movement played a key role in encouraging militants to establish the CPGB. But British revolutionaries carried the burden of a long tradition of narrow trade unionism. They downplayed the ideological struggle and failed to see the political threat posed by the Labour Party. British revolutionaries' instinctive mistrust of the Labour leadership led them to write off the Labour Party, the dominant political force in the working class.

Lenin knew that the Labour Party was thoroughly bankrupt and could never be reformed. However, he argued that communists had to do everything in their power to win the majority of the working class away from the Labour Party. He urged the CPGB not to isolate itself from the supporters of the Labour Party, but to unite with them. He proposed that the CPGB seek affiliation to the Labour Party and support it electorally. This was an application of what is known as the 'united front tactic'.

Lenin proposed this because he felt that it would be in the best interests of the working class to get Labour into government. Workers could then experience Labour politics in action. Communists could use their experience to demonstrate the reactionary consequences of Labour politics and win the mass of the working class to the banner of revolution.

The international communist movement advised the CPGB to couple its electoral support for the Labour Party with a ruthless exposure of its politics. This was essential if the working class was to learn from its experience of reformism in action. However the success of the united front tactic depended on the CPGB's ability to provide a political alternative to the Labour Party. This is where it fell down.

The CPGB did not provide a political alternative. Instead, it became a left-wing appendage of the Labour Party. In the early 'twenties it tried to push the Labour Party leftwards, implying that this social democratic party could be reformed. Thus Tom Bell, a leading member of the CPGB, argued in 1923:

'The immediate problem which the Communist Party must face is how best we can fight down those elements of Menshevism which deny the class struggle as the basis of our Labour Movement and how we can give the Labour Party and the Trade Union Movement as a whole a definite class character with the definite class purpose of achieving political control of the State for the workers.' (*Communist Review*, October 1923)

The CPGB wanted to give the Labour Party a 'class character' when it already had one. Lenin characterised it as a *bourgeois party* with a working class base. The CPGB could not expose the Labour Party's programme. Its objections were to some of the consequences of that reactionary programme – the Labour Party's conservatism and its compromises.

Whereas Lenin saw the Labour Party as a vehicle for carrying bourgeois politics into the working class, the CPGB could not establish the party's basic political identity. Rising young CP theoretician Palme Dutt put it like this:

'The real rise of the Labour Party derives from a pure trade union issue – the Taff Vale case, the actual achievements of the Labour Party are entirely in the trade union sphere. . . . and in general politics the Labour Party in Parliament still shows a complete lack of political outlook which is the despair of their ardent theoretical supporters in this country.' (*Labour Monthly*, July–December 1922)

Here we can see the consequences of the CPGB's strong trade unionist traditions. The CPGB could not comprehend that the apparent absence of a Labour Party political outlook really represented the absence of political independence from the bourgeoisie. *This did not mean the absence of politics. It meant bourgeois politics presented in a trade unionist form.*

In effect the Labour Party relegated workers' interests to industrial issues. It did not need its own policy on the economy, the empire and foreign affairs: on these questions it adopted a bourgeois outlook, considering them of no special interest to the working class. And the CPGB? Steeped in narrow trade unionism, it restricted its attention to the reactionary consequences of Labourism in the industrial sphere, ignoring the bourgeois character of the entire Labour Party programme.

Labourism consolidated

During the 1923 election campaign the Labour Party's platform was virtually identical to that of the Liberal Party. Yet it had nothing to fear from militant workers. The CPGB was one of the Labour Party's most ardent backers:

'Wise tactic demands that that we should do our utmost to return the Labour Party to power. Nobody knows the shortcomings of the Labour Party better than we, but we must be prepared to temporarily overlook those shortcomings and establish the political United Front. The Labour Party returned to power means a distinct break with the political past of this country: it means that the organised working class movement can have much influence on future legislation.' (*All power*, November 1922)

The CPGB forgot that a united front was not meant to be a peace pact. It neglected the Communist International's instruction to expose the reformist politicians. Indeed, it greeted the election of a new group of Labour left MPs in 1923 with joy. Palme Dutt remarked of them:

'For the first time they have introduced politics in the Labour Party. For the first time they raised the standard of Socialism in the Labour Party.' (*Labour Monthly*, January 1923)

When the first Labour Government was formed in 1924, the CPGB proved incapable of drawing out the lessons of reformism in action. It merely implored the Labour Government to be more radical:

'Let the Labour Government – if it really is a Labour Government – show a little courage, and in all cases of industrial dispute where the employers are guilty of managerial incompetence, perverse greediness and wilful opposition to the vital interests of the people take the industries out of the hands of the employers, and Governmentally run them.' (*All power*, April 1924)

With only pleas like this confronting it, the Labour Party had no difficulty consolidating its politics in the working class. It was never tested, for there was no leadership able to turn workers' experience of it into conscious lessons.

The leadership of the TUC and Labour Party became the main pillars of social stability. They helped to contain industrial disputes and ultimately led the General Strike to defeat. In these years of acute class tension, the Labour Party was invaluable for the bosses. In 1924 and 1929 it was called into government to co-ordinate savage attacks on the working class.

Trade unionism: no refuge

The succession of working class defeats in the industrial sphere revealed the limits of union militancy. In consequence, many workers began to look for political answers to their problems. Engineers' historian J B Jeffries notes that, after the 1923 lock-out, workers began to place greater emphasis on winning support for Labour: 'The apparent failure of industrial action encouraged the belief that the working class could not beat the employing class until it had obtained a majority in Parliament' (*The story of the engineers*, 1947). In fact the AEU executive committee issued a circular to all branches urging support for the Labour Party.

At a time when the working class was looking for political answers, the CPGB merely reiterated the primacy of trade unionism. Its main agitational slogan in 1926 was 'All power to the General Council' – placing the united strength of the working class in the hands of the TUC leadership. This narrow proposal only gave the Labour Party a monopoly on political solutions.

So it was that, paradoxically, the Labour Party emerged as a party of government at a time when the working class was reeling from one blow after another. In desperation, workers rushed to Labour, enabling it to use its position to reconcile them to the realities of capitalism.

The dimensions of the defeat

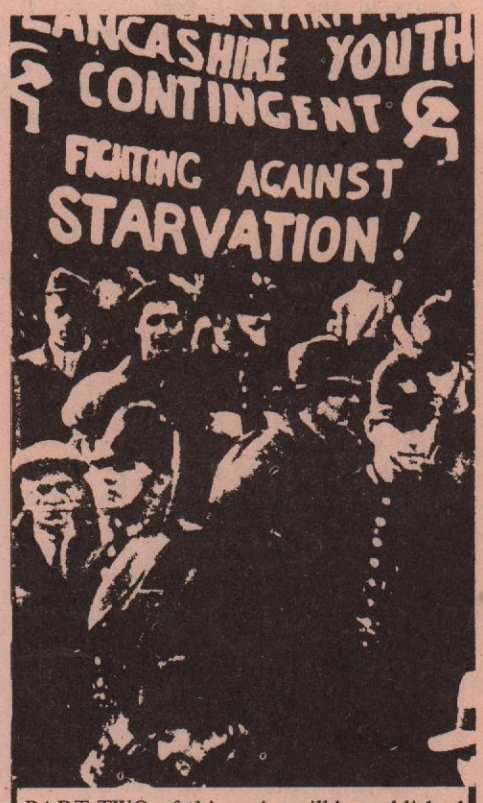
The immediate effects of the employers' offensive were unemployment, wage reductions and deteriorating conditions at work. Shop floor organisation also suffered heavily and union membership slumped. But the long-term effect of the bosses' triumph was graver still: the demise of anti-capitalist politics in the labour movement.

The promising rise of communist politics that had led to the formation of the CPGB was halted. The labour leadership was able to purge communists from many unions and isolate class-conscious workers. The defeat of the 1926 General Strike reinforced this process. As one perceptive bourgeois commentator notes:

'The General Strike only completed a work begun long before, in which the leadership of the whole labour movement detached itself from the persuasive doctrines of the shop stewards movement and the Communist Party.' (Middlemas, *Politics. . .*)

The CPGB was ill-prepared to fight for the leadership of the workers' movement The errors that at first only expressed the immaturity of a young revolutionary party multiplied over the years. The CPGB's 'pressure politics' attitude towards the Labour Party became standard fare for the whole left. It remains the diet for today's radical left too.

To understand how we were defeated is to learn a little more about how we can win. For revolutionary communists, breaking away from the setbacks of yesterday means breaking away from the politics of the left today.



PART TWO of this series will be published in the next issue of *the next step*.

The Labour bureaucracy on the road to war will show how the leadership of the labour movement responded to the capitalist crisis of the inter-war period.

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Behind the Gulf War



Kurdistan Film Collective

Kurds are fighting in Iraq and Iran for their independence. It is a cause the working class should support

IRAQ'S ATTACK on Iran is only the bloody culmination of shifts in the former country's foreign policy that began two years ago. Two central developments in the Middle East brought it closer: the decision of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat to embark, along with Israel and the USA, on the Camp David trail. and the overthrow of the Shah of Iran early in 1979.

Once Sadat had made his notorious 'peace' visit to Jerusalem in 1977 it became clearer and clearer that Egypt could no longer maintain its leadership of Arab politics. Iraq's Ba'ath-dominated regime was quick to seize an obvious opportunity. Previously friendly with the Soviet Union, it began the process of changing allies at the Arab summit held in Baghdad in November 1978, mending fences with ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia and beginning unity discussions with Syria. By doing so it began to move to fill a political vacuum in the Gulf – one that had been left by Egypt's outright capitulation to Israeli and imperialist interests.

The fall of the Shah enlarged Iraq's ambitions still further, for it meant that imperialism was left without a policeman in the Gulf. Iraq alone could hope to replace the Pahlavi dynasty in this. With its comparatively large (13 million) population, $20 billion annual oil revenues and well-equipped, ¼ million-strong armed forces, it was more powerful than any other pretender to Iran's position. The stage was set for it to act.

First, Ba'ath leader Saddam Hussein dealt with his domestic opponents. In March 1979 he threw the Communist Party out of Iraq's governing alliance; four months later he made himself President and executed 26 pro-Syrian government officials (including the Vice-President) soon after. Second, he completed the realignment in foreign policy that had been begun in Baghdad. In June he welcomed Lord Carrington and ended a year-long boycott against British goods; in July he feted French Premier Raymond Barre, agreeing to raise oil supplies to France by 25 per cent in exchange for arms and nuclear technology. On the other hand he denounced Russia for manipulating Ethiopia and Somalia and backed North Yemen against a Soviet-assisted attack by South Yemen. In other words, he made his earlier pro-Western stance as explicit as he could. As *Le Monde* remarked: 'paradoxically, Iraq, which is the only Middle East country aligned with the USSR by a treaty of Friendship and Co-operation – "Marxist" South Yemen apart – is also the Arab regime which has done the most in the course of the last two years to combat Soviet influence in the region' (22 September 1980).

Iraq was now firmly set on its new direction.

Iraq's new role

With the collapse of stability in Iran, Iraq has become the second largest oil producer in the Gulf. In the last six years oil revenues have quadrupled from $5.7 billion in 1974 to an estimated $23.4 billion in 1979. This made possible a programme of investment in roads, rail, communications and in petrochemicals. Government spending is now running at $17 billion a year.

Oil revenues have also provided the money to pay for new military equipment, bought mainly from European countries. This has further reduced Iraq's dependence on the USSR. In November 1979 the Iraqi Government gave notice of plans to double the size of its navy, a vital force for any nation with aspirations in the Gulf, ordering frigates, fast attack craft, torpedo boats and tank landing craft from France, Britain, Italy and Spain. In January this year Iraq's airforce received a similar boost. It ordered 24 French Mirage F-1 fighter bombers (for $300m), took an option on the Mirage 2000 combat aircraft and began negotiating the purchase of the French Crotale missile defence system. As for the army, it bought 100 AMX-30 medium tanks, dozens of Panhard armoured cars and a number of helicopters. All sophisticated hardware – though only the helicopters were delivered in time for the war this September.

Thus fortified economically and militarily, Hussein proposed a 'national charter' governing relationships between the Arab states in February this year. Its first and most important principle was the rejection of the presence of 'any' foreign forces on Arab soil; but its implication was that the Soviet Union was a greater threat to the Gulf than the USA. Jordan and Kuwait, both partly dependent on Iraq for their own stability, signed it quickly.

The Charter codified Iraq's attitude to the West. Iraq was to be 'non-aligned, but gendarme of the Gulf' (*Le Monde*). Iraq could not openly declare its support for the USA, but it could declare where its sympathies lay. Indeed, Hussein's launching of the Charter was accompanied by a vicious tirade against the Iraqi CP, which was described as a 'rotten, renegade, atheistic storm'.

Acting in the USA's interests

Although it initially underestimated Iraq's ability to replace Sadat, the USA went on to give a cautious welcome to Hussein's manoeuvres. In the past the Palestinian question had always (formally at least) kept Iraq and the USA at loggerheads; now relations between the two became warmer month by month. President Carter's Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski said in April this year that the USA did not see any 'fundamental incompatibility of interests' between Washington and Baghdad (*Le Monde*, 22 September 1980). In July the State Department authorised the sale of eight frigate turbine engines to Iraq, justifying the move to critics in the Senate by saying it was 'in the interests of American foreign policy' – that is, it made Iraq's ships more of a match for Iran's than they had been (Iran's navy is largely unaffected by post-Shah purges).

Iraq's rapprochement with imperialism exposes Ba'ath 'socialism' for what it is. Ever since 1968, when the Ba'ath Party took full control of Iraq, it has meant the killing of socialists and communists, mass deportation and genocide of the Kurds in the north of the country, and active betrayal of the Palestinian cause. The Ba'ath regime was complicit in the 'Black September' attacks against Palestinian guerrillas in Jordan in 1970. Ba'athism is merely a form of Arab nationalism used by the ruling class to mobilise popular support behind its own class interests.

The USA has recognised that Iraq can be its agent in the Gulf, even if this cannot be acknowledged openly. Carter might prefer a direct presence in the area, but the instability of many of the regimes makes this impossible. The present arrangement suits both the USA and Iraq well. Iraq's offensive against Iran shows why: it is directly in the interests of American imperialism.

Saddam flexes his muscles

Rivalry between Iraq and Iran is not new. It has continued on and off for many years. The previous period of hostility ended in 1975 when the Shah forced Iraq to concede control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway to Iran in exchange for ceasing to support Iraqi Kurds in their war against Baghdad. With the removal of the Shah incidents began to occur again.

In April 1980 Iranians were blamed for a grenade attack on Iraqi Vice President Tariq Aziz. A few days later Iraq announced that only the delay in receiving new gunboats was stopping it enacting a plan to seize control of the strategically crucial Tumbs islands in the straits of Hormuz at the mouth of the Gulf. At about the same time Iraq began deporting the first of 35 000 'Iranians' from Iraq. In July it admitted that Ayatollah Mohamed Bakr-Sadr, a close friend of Khomeini, had been hanged in Baghdad. Most importantly, it accused Iran of supporting the Kurds in their struggle for self-determination (an accusation which Iran itself has made of Iraq).

By August border incidents were being reported almost daily; but it was the recent OPEC conference in Vienna that almost certainly prompted Iraq to strike against Iran. Because of its desperate financial position Iran could not afford to settle for the small price increases that Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the more moderate OPEC nations felt sufficient. This was the last straw for Hussein.

Anxious to take advantage of what it believed to be a demoralised and disorganised Iranian army and airforce, and with Saudi Arabia's blessing, Iraq launched its attack only a few days after the Vienna sessions broke up. Hussein proclaimed his aims as control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway, a small amount of territory close by and return of the Tumbs islands to the United Arab Emirates. Limited objectives, but objectives which if fulfilled would be enough to allow Iraq to claim the mantle of leading power in the Gulf. He also hoped the war would enable the Ba'athists to consolidate their hold over Iraq which, in common with other Middle Eastern countries, is riven with internal opposition.

Where do we stand?

Imperialism and its agents in the Middle East hope that the Iraqi invasion will strike a decisive blow against the masses of Iran. They have a common interest in restoring capitalist stability there. Despite the reactionary Khomeini regime, the Iranian mass movement is still a threat to capitalist interests in the Middle East, for the puppet regimes of the area fear that their subjects may follow its example. For this reason revolutionary communists cannot remain indifferent to the outcome of the war. We have every interest in seeing the imperialist-inspired Iraqi invasion defeated.

It is the Iranian workers and peasants who have attempted to break free from the grip of imperialism and who are under attack by the Iraqi invasion. They represent the only force which has a clear interest in opposing the invasion. Revolutionaries in Iran cannot rely on the Khomeini regime to fight Iraq and its imperialist allies. They must organise separately and pursue military action of a revolutionary character.

Unfortunately two of the largest left-wing organisations in Iran – the Fedayeen 'majority' and the Peoples' Mujaheddin – have rallied under the banner of the Khomeini regime. In some cases they have gone so far as to join the so-called Revolutionary Guards, the very force which until recently was indiscriminately attacking them. In effect they have placed the future of the anti-imperialist struggle in the hands of Khomeini. By doing so, they have strengthened the position of the Iranian state and weakened that of the working class and peasantry. In fact they have united in the fight against Iraq on the terms of the reactionaries.

By contrast, Marxists should seek to unite the Iranian people on an anti-imperialist platform. They should form their own independent military units to fight the invading forces. And, if imperialism is really to be defeated, they must at the same time warn the Iranian masses that the time will come to turn their guns against the enemy at home.

Nick Jenkins