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the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p

LABOUR MOVEMENT at the CROSSROADS

The trade union leaders need to reorganise and readjust strategy to survive the recession. So do we – but in a different direction. Page 3.

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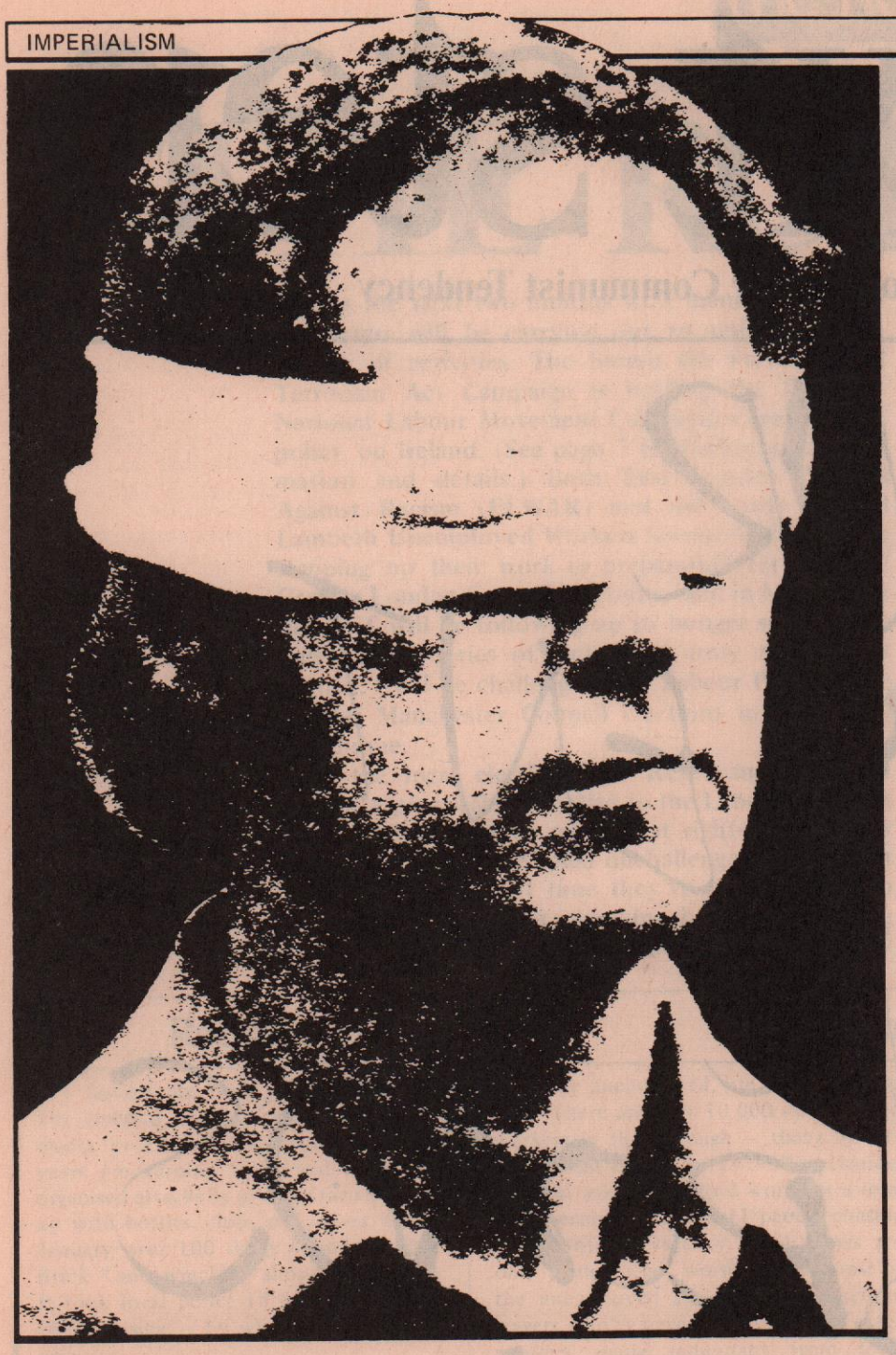
Slump socialism
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The hostages go home

Khomeini comes to terms with 'the Great Satan'

The return of the 52 American hostages reveals the general drift of Iranian politics. Khomeini has not succeeded in restoring order in Iran. Since he came to power he has been engaged in a fine balancing act, mediating between the aspirations of the masses and the interests of capital. His regime's true character has been clearly revealed during the past six months. Simply, Khomeini fears the masses more than he fears imperialism. Two years of upheaval have taught the Imam an important lesson – that the restoration of social stability requires a compromise with imperialism.

Anti-imperialist charade

The seizure of the American embassy was a response to the radicalisation of the Iranian masses. Nobody dared criticise this step lest their radical credentials be questioned. But the main beneficiary of the capture of the embassy was the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), which today holds 70 seats in the 228-seat Majlis, and can rely on another 70 members to follow its line. This party, the radical wing of a petit bourgeoisie threatened by the further development of capitalism in Iran, used the hostages to good effect. The seizure of the hostages allowed the IRP to force the bourgeois-liberal Bazargan regime out of government and win a majority in the Majlis elections in early 1980.

The IRP has neither a clear political programme nor a stable base of support. However its radical rhetoric and close identification with Khomeini won it considerable popularity among the urban poor. Many entrepreneurs and petit bourgeois have benefited from the trade blockade imposed by the West in response to the embassy occupation: they see the IRP as their party. Lack of agricultural imports has stimulated a small-scale boom on the land and the US boycott has helped small domestic capital to expand.

The IRP's survival depends on its mass appeal. It used the hostage affair to reduce the influence of conciliatory elements such as former Foreign Minister Sadegh Qotbzadegh and President Bani-Sadr. The IRP has made every effort to consolidate its position and has sought to force all sections of society to adhere to the new radical Islamic state. The civil service and the armed forces have accordingly been purged and the universities closed down so that they could be 'Islamicised'. This latter move was directed both at the middle class supporters of Bani-Sadr and the leftist groups who used the universities as their base.

That's far enough

The trouble was that the radical Islamic aims of the IRP caused constant friction with the President. Conflict between Bani-Sadr and the Majlis became an obstacle to the restoration of social order; some kind of *modus vivendi* with imperialism had to be established. The IRP knew that the hostage issue had to be settled and a compromise reached. From mid 1980 onwards it tried to find a settlement with America. To do this it had first to silence its left critics.

Ayatollah Khalkhali – the so-called 'hanging judge'–showed the new attitude of IRP supporters to the hostages. Formerly a hardliner, Khalkhali began urging a deal with the USA in October and went on to praise Ronald Reagan as 'a man of the people, just like ourselves'. Kalkhali argued that the USA would probably support a militant, anti-communist Islamic Republic provided the hostages were released.

To put Kalkhali's words into action the IRP mounted a major campaign against the left, even stopping the Stalinists of the Tudeh Party from publishing their newpaper, despite its almost uncritical attitude towards the IRP. The most severe repression was directed against the Peoples' Mujaheddin Organisation of Iran, which, being both Muslim and militant, posed the greatest threat to the IRP. PMOI papers have been closed down and their members arrested and imprisoned.

The war with Iraq has given further impetus to pro-imperialist trends in Iran. It also weakened the position of the IRP. As Commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Bani-Sadr has moved to strengthen the more secular capitalist forces in the state machinery. The more the IRP has proved unable to fight the war without the help of the armed forces, the more support for the President has grown. Indeed, following one of the last debates in the Majlis on the hostages, the *Financial Times* reported that the 'liberal camp' of the regime 'had suddenly found new converts among the ranks of the fundamentalists' (15 January 1981).

Bani-Sadr has recently received acclamation from Khomeini, and indeed the Ayatollah has banned IRP demonstrations called against him. This, however, does not mean that Khomeini has abandoned his former allies; for the time being he will play both cards. Bani-Sadr and his army will be used to consolidate the state machinery and restore law and order, while the IRP will be allowed to continue its populist activities to ensure that the regime does not become isolated from the masses.

The coming showdown

The deal with the USA over the hostages shows the way the wind is blowing. But anti-imperialist sentiments are still strong among the masses and the Khomeini regime will not be able to abandon its anti-imperialist rhetoric for some time to come. For the present it will restrict itself to stepping up repression of the left and of Iran's national minorities.

The class struggle in Iran has reached a critical point. The showdown between the ruling class and the masses cannot be postponed indefinitely. The reconstruction of the armed forces and the resolution of the hostage issue has given Khomeini a breathing space; and the war against Iraq has also boosted the power of the Iranian state. But the left in Iran has grown in numbers over the past two years, even though it remains politically immature and ideologically captive to Khomeini. The struggle against all wings of the bourgeoisie and the radical petit-bourgeois parties is long overdue. Nothing less than the future of the Iranian people is at stake.

Nick Jenkins

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the next step

LABOUR MOVEMENT AT THE CROSSROADS

IT'S BEEN a grim winter for the British working class. Official statistics put the number on the dole at 2.5 million; the real total is way above 3 million. Workers in a whole series of industries have been forced to settle for wage rises well below the rate of inflation: British Leyland employees got 6.8 per cent, engineers 8.2 per cent, Ford workers 9.5 per cent. Even the miners won only 13 per cent, and steelworkers got nothing. While Margaret Thatcher rejoices over the new spirit of 'realism' in the unions, Employment Minister James Prior has followed up his recent anti-trade union legislation with a Green Paper which threatens to restrict workers' rights even further. Strikes have hit a 40-year low.

Times are bad too for trade union leaders. Increasingly irrelevant to their own members, they are treated with contempt by the Tory Government. The crisis has brought the labour movement to a crossroads. The survival of the bureaucracy depends on how it can adjust itself to the present attacks on the working class. It has to find new terms on which it can collaborate with employers like BL's Edwardes, BSC's MacGregor and the CBI's Beckett – as well as with the Government. At the same time the trade union leaders have to try to turn the Labour Party into a vehicle capable of moving back into office and carrying them back into the corridors of power.

The immediate interests of the working class however demand a rejection of the bureaucrats' approach. We need to move in a different direction, beyond the narrow 'realism' that binds Len Murray to Margaret Thatcher, to challenge the decaying capitalist system that their realism defends.

Balancing act

The trade union bureaucracy mediates between the government and the working class. Now its position is under threat from both sides. The Tories have consistently refused to take TUC leaders into their confidence. They have rejected their economic advice and refused requests for more consultation and a more conciliatory approach to industrial relations. Major employers no longer treat the Congress House chiefs with the respect they feel they deserve. When the TUC recently drew up a 'joint' TUC/CBI statement on new technology, the CBI haughtily refused to endorse it – even though the trade union leaders were prepared to trade jobs for more consultation.

On the other hand mass unemployment is eroding the unions' base in the working class. After 30 years of steady growth, trade union membership is now falling. Last year Britain's two biggest unions – the TGWU and the AUEW – each lost more than 100 000 members. Some manual workers' unions face extinction unless they merge into larger federations.

The trade union leaders have responded to their loss of status and security with a strategy designed to restore this mediating role. They use every dispute to push themselves forward, ready to consult and negotiate between workers on one side and employers and the government on the other. As far as they are concerned everything is negotiable so long as they are consulted. The trade union bureaucrats also put themselves forward as the most sensible spokesmen for industry. Today there is little talk of bold schemes of state intervention and 'socialist' planning. Instead the bureaucrats talk the language of the small capitalist and demand lower interest rates, a weaker pound, import controls and reflation. Many union leaders have abandoned the fight for jobs and living standards in favour of a campaign to save industry. In industry after industry the bureaucrats have sought a bloc with the employers to press for more state assistance and higher investment. The 'triple alliance' of steel, coal and rail unions has been formed for this purpose. Concern for the survival of industry has led the bureaucrats to abandon opposition to the drastic measures required to make declining sectors competitive.

The recession has severely shaken the TUC. It recently published a consultative document entitled *The organisation, structure and services of the TUC* which proposes a major reorganisation at a time when 'trade unionism is under the strongest attack for a generation'. TUC membership, while declining, has changed in its composition. Around 40 per cent of TUC members are now non-manual workers and approximately one third are women. Half of all British trade unionists work in the public sector. The proportion of TUC members affiliated to the Labour Party – almost 70 per cent in the late 'fifties – is now around 50 per cent.

These changes produce complex tensions and conflicts within the trade union movement. The TUC consultative document identifies a two-fold challenge facing the unions:

> 'The first is to campaign for the TUC's alternative policies to ensure economic and social advance. . . .The other is to ensure that the Movement is ready to enter into discussions with any Government that puts full employment and rising living standards at the top of its agenda.' (p9)

In other words the TUC wants to continue pleading with the Tories to make a U-turn, while preparing the way for the return of a Labour government committed to rescuing the trade union bureaucrats. Some union leaders place more faith in making deals with the present Government, whilst others are more anxious to put Labour back in power. These differences are reflected in debates in the Labour Party.

Shadow boxing at Wembley

All the manoeuvring at the recent Labour Party special conference at Wembley had one simple result: the extension of trade union influence over the party. But for all the outrage of the right and the jubilation of the left, the conference decision to set up an electoral college (including 40 per cent union representation) to elect the party leader only made explicit a long-standing party tradition. The union leaders have always been the kingmakers in the Labour Party. In the 'thirties Bevin despatched Lansbury and nominated Attlee, in the 'fifties Deakin crushed Bevan and by-passed Morrison to put Gaitskell on top; in the 'sixties Cousins eased Wilson past his fellow trade unionist Brown and recently Evans and the rest ditched Healey to give pride of place at Wembley to Foot. So what's new?

What's new is the left's assessment of what constitutes a victory. Whoever won at Wembley did so, not by political argument, but by manipulation of bloc votes, by the sort of schoolboy cunning that trade union bureaucrats take for political intelligence. This time the left showed its political integrity by boasting about its clever tactics. It's worth recalling the last occasion the left claimed a victory – at the Blackpool conference in October. This conference ignored the need to fight for working class living standards but committed a future Labour government to another incomes policy. 'Victories' like these save the trade union leaders from answering embarrassing questions about their acceptance of mass redundancies and wage cuts.

The left serves a useful function for the labour bureaucracy. Furious battles over party democracy hold out the promise of future change without making any programmatic concessions to militant workers. This ensures that the Labour Party remains responsive to radical pressures. Even the exit of the Gang of Three plays its part. 'All the more need to close ranks', say the labour bureaucrats. And the left can point out that the departure of right-wing politicians confirms that the party is moving in a left-wing direction.

Heading for a crash

The labour movement as it is now constituted cannot survive the employers' offensive. The bureaucrats realise that their position is under threat – that's why they are busy trying to revamp their strategy and organisation. The official institutions of the labour movement are an obstacle to the defence of working class interests too. But at a time when the bureaucrats are making plans for the future – and when revolutionaries should be doing the same – the left clings on to outdated institutions and traditions. The left's blinkered approach takes the pressure off the bureaucrats who are left unhindered to consolidate their position.

Take the fight against unemployment. Last year the SWP organised a few hundred young people on the dole in the Right to Work Campaign. Now Campaign secretary John Deason tells us that 'we should not make a fetish about "unofficial" organisation'. He claims that experience has shown that it is possible 'to pressurise the TUC to make a more principled stand on organising the unemployed' (*Socialist Worker*, 17 January 1981). More 'principled' talk perhaps, but the action we have yet to see. The TUC will never organise the unemployed – except to the extent necessary to take pressure of employed workers and to pre-empt left-wing movements. Deason has moved beyond last year's appeals to the lower levels of the bureaucracy in the Communist Party to a direct approach to Murray & Co. The only possible outcome is to push the young unemployed into the arms of the trade union leaders.

The SWP shows the same deference to the Labour Party. Michael Foot has only to call a demonstration and the radical left will dutifully do the footwork for it. When the 'Gang of Three' attacks the party *Socialist Worker* steps forward to declare 'we unreservedly support the Labour Party against attempts to set up any "social democratic" auxiliary to the Tory Party' (23 January). The radical left has become the most consistent defender of the old labour movement. That's why it is now the most dangerous obstacle to workers who want to shake off the dead weight of the bureaucrats.

Breaking out

For many people, especially the young and the unemployed, the irrelevance of the official labour movement is only too clear. The danger is that disillusionment with the Labour Party and the trade union leaders will lead to cynicism and demoralisation. This danger will persist until workers are presented with a political alternative to the Labour Party.

Until now the bureaucrats have made all the running. They have contained rank and file unrest and isolated militant workers. The victimisation of shop stewards at BL's Longbridge plant shows how the bureaucrats can work hand in glove with management. In industry after industry management and union leaders have been able to use sectional divisions, fear of unemployment and the pressure of public opinion to crush rank and file resistance. These setbacks will continue until workers' discontent takes on a *political form*.

As long as workers' resistance remains restricted within the narrow sphere of immediate trade union issues the labour bureaucrats can stay in control. However, the higher workers raise the stakes above elementary economic questions, the more the labour bureaucracy is forced to line up with the bosses against the interests of their members.

The bureaucrats' economic and industrial policy, for example, reflects the interests of the capitalist class. Monetary policy: the Tories want bourgeois deflation, the Labour Party wants bourgeois reflation. Trade policy: Labour's insistence on protectionism makes it more chauvinist than the traditional party of the British empire. And they all want to rationalise British industry – even though it means more attacks on workers' livelihoods.

If we raise the political stakes and expose the pro-capitalist position of the trade union leaders, we can undermine their hold over the rank and file. We have no choice but to do this. To defend the working class we have to break out of the straightjacket of the official labour movement. We need a workers' alternative to the capitalist policies of the employers and their supporters in the labour movement. One issue stands out above all others in the vital campaign to change the direction of the working class movement: Ireland.

The labour movement conference on Ireland called by the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign in Coventry on 14 March will be an important stage in extending a working class outlook on the Irish War in Britain. On no other question is the proletarian position – unconditional support for the republican movement – so sharply counterposed to the bourgeois view. Workers who come to Coventry and take up this stand will find themselves in sharp confrontation with the Tories, the Labour Party and the TUC. And that's exactly the same antagonistic position they're in when they want to defend jobs, wages, or any other aspect of working class living standards.

Ford The fatal flaw

The acceptance of a wage rise of 9.5 per cent in December finished a grim year for Ford workers. It began with short-time working and carried on with a long summer lay-off followed by 2300 redundancies. Management contemptuously rejected the unions' 20 per cent pay claim in the autumn and finally by-passed the negotiators to win overwhelming acceptance of a wage rise barely half the rate of inflation. A new disciplinary code added insult to injury: now the smallest stoppage can result in a worker losing pay for a whole shift.

These setbacks reveal a serious weakness in a traditionally militant section of the working class. Throughout the post-war years Ford workers have identified their interests with the viability of the company. While Ford prospered this seemed to have little consequence; in today's crisis it leads to disaster.

Ford's allies

One of the key factors in Ford management's success has been the collaboration of trade union representatives on the company's National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC). Last year union officials worked with management to make greater use of machinery and to minimise labour costs during periods of short-time working. The announcement of 2000 redundancies in June led union leaders to complain feebly about inadequate consultation, but then settle down to negotiate the terms of severance pay. Then, when Ford's autumn productivity drive provoked shopfloor resistance at Halewood, local TGWU official Bill Broadhead lectured the workforce like a Ford production manager:

> 'When you have a grievance, instead of stopping work, which has a direct effect on our ability to make the quantity of cars we require, you request your shop stewards and keep working whilst the problem is discussed and resolved.' (*Financial Times*, 12 November 1980)

In the negotiations over the 1980 pay claim the union officials on the NJNC tried to trade their willingness to promote greater efficiency and discipline for more money. Chief TGWU negotiator Ron Todd told Ford he was ready to police unofficial strikes (*The Guardian*, 11 December 1980). Workers ended up with a stringent disciplinary code – and a wage cut.

Ford Motor Company is in deep trouble. The world recession, falling demand and Japanese competition have almost wiped out its profit margins. To survive it has to raise productivity and restore profitability. Here's what Ron Todd thinks about it:

> 'Our goal is the same as the company's but we strongly disagree on the road to that goal. You cannot do it by imposition but by conviction. You've got to talk to the lads up there, not use a big stick.' (*Financial Times*, 7 November 1980)

But Todd's industrial relations techniques have been overtaken by the recession. Ford bosses need a big stick to beat the workforce into accepting the redundancies, the relentless speed-ups and the wage cuts necessary to pull the company through. Soft-talking Todd helps them out.

Many Ford workers are disgusted with the record of the trade union side on the NJNC. A series of unofficial stoppages shows they are ready to fight to defend living standards. But the bosses and the bureaucrats have kept the upper hand in the propaganda war – and they've won most of the battles on the shopfloor too. Ford and the NJNC have scored the political points because most militants tend to take on the immediate practical problems and leave the political arguments aside. Last year passed with many angry shop stewards fighting management, as they have done for years, over bonus schemes, productivity deals, manning levels, line speeds, relief time, etc. But by just taking up these tasks workers have allowed the bureaucrats to dictate the permissible limits of the struggle.

The weakness of the rank and file at Ford goes back a long way. It runs through the militancy of the 'fifties and the 'sixties when shop stewards were well organised and seemed to be confident and powerful. Many veterans today call for a revival of these traditions. But a closer look shows how the politics of the shop stewards in the past have led to the subordination of the rank and file to the pernicious influence of the NJNC today.

The booming 'fifties

After the Second World War workers throughout the British motor industry built up strong workplace organisations. Shop stewards' activity centred around haggling over wage rates – especially over the piece-work rates that became a major feature of the car factories. They also carried out day-to-day negotiations with supervisors over line speeds, work rates, safety, conditions and facilities, and often controlled particular aspects of work organisation. This was especially important at Ford where wage rates were fixed centrally between the company and the union officials, leaving shop stewards no formal role in pay bargaining.

By the early 'fifties shop stewards at Ford's Dagenham plant had a solid organisation. Many trade union activists were members of the Communist Party: the *Daily Worker* was widely distributed at the plant alongside the shop stewards' bulletin. The militants led literally hundreds of strikes every year – usually short and localised, always unofficial – in a constant battle with management. And at Ford, as throughout British manufacturing industry, wages rose and conditions improved.

Rising wages however hid intensified exploitation. Production expanded rapidly in the 'fifties: between 1948 and 1959 the output of the motor industry increased by 180 per cent. In the decade after 1946 the number of cars built soared from 400 000 to 1 400 000. This enormous growth in productivity was achieved by a workforce which increased by only 18 per cent. Wage increases were more than matched by higher productivity. Workers became better off while Henry Ford heaped up millions. However as long as business boomed and wages rose workers paid little attention to the widening gulf between themselves and the capitalist class. The CP militants certainly never pointed it out.

The problems began when Ford faltered. Even a short-lived drop in demand, such as followed the Suez affair in 1956, showed the weakness at the heart of the shop stewards' movement. Ford's response to the crisis was to sack 1700 workers. The shop stewards did nothing and the workers went out the gate with scarcely a whimper from their workmates.

The shop stewards could deal with the supervisors on the production line; but when it came to an attack on the workforce as a whole in the cause of company viability they were impotent. Virtually every time Ford went on the attack on a broader front than could be countered with the narrow focus of shopfloor organisation, resistance floundered.

The inability of the CP militants to bring a broader conception of working class politics to Ford workers left them vulnerable to victimisation. In 1957 and again in 1963 its leading activists were sacked. Despite being witch-hunted as communists, they did not fight their expulsion as political opponents of capitalism. Apologetic about their affiliations, they posed as pure trade unionists. But this defensive posture inevitably failed to mobilise other Ford workers to prevent the victimisations. In both instances CP leaders deferred to government inquiries and trade union leaders. Having defused the situation, the inquiries proceeded to endorse the company's stand.

The rot sets in

In the 'sixties Ford embarked on a vast capital investment programme in Europe. At Dagenham it brought speed-ups and tighter discipline, and it strengthened sectionalism among the workforce. The shop stewards carried on in the same old way and were unable to meet the challenge.

For example, representatives of skilled workers in Dagenham's Foundry and Body plant wanted higher differentials over unskilled labour. They transformed Ford's 'merit money' for 'good workers' into a collective bonus scheme: by 1965 differentials had increased markedly. This local topping-up system was popular with those who could take advantage of it.

But the merit money system was less popular with those who could expect no management bonus. So the system gave rise to suspicion and hostility among workers in different plants and sections. And instead of developing a common shopfloor response to the renewed drive for higher productivity, each section became more engrossed in its own particular grievance. The Dagenham shop stewards' committee became a joint body in name only.

The NJNC exploited sectional conflicts and took advantage of the commitment of many shop stewards to continuous and efficient production to isolate the activists. This was particularly effective in resolving the 1963 dispute when the NJNC persuaded a majority on the shop stewards' committee to vote for a return to work and end the protest against the victimisation of 17 militants.

Strikes nevertheless continued. As the recession loomed ahead Ford and the NJNC tried a different strategy. The company increasingly sought to draw convenors and senior stewards into detailed consultations over company investment plans, sales and profits. It tried to make Ford's problems the workers' problems.

The shop stewards' earlier unquestioning commitment to productivity made them susceptible to this approach. Union leaders like Jones and Scanlon, talking the radical language of industrial democracy and shop steward power, positively encouraged this trend towards the integration of workers with management. The CP, its prestige badly damaged by its inability to defend its own militants, jumped on the bandwagon. Its future salvation lay with the trade union bureaucracy. This was the background to the 'Broad Left', the electoral machine staffed by supporters of the Communist Party and the Labour left, that controlled the two big motor unions (TGWU and AUEW) in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies.

The Broad Left was the response of the militants of the 'fifties to the first signs of crisis. The consequences of the Broad Left's class collaboration became apparent in the deteriorating economic climate of the 'seventies. As Jones and Scanlon promoted the wage-cutting Social Contract on the national stage, their colleagues on Ford's NJNC were preparing to sacrifice Ford workers' living standards to the demands of the company. They were hiring experts to discover what the company could 'afford' to pay in wages. The answer was – less and less.

We can't go on like this

Over the last 10 years all major strikes at Ford have focused on the annual wage claim. The NJNC has extended rank and file involvement in these discussions by incorporating shop steward representatives. One theme runs through the negotiations: the stewards justify their wage demands on the grounds that Ford's profits were rising.

In 1969 the Halewood joint shop stewards' committee declared that 'we are all willing to fight and fight hard to obtain our fair share of the company's improved profits'. Again in 1978 they explained that:

> 'The claim was researched by the TGWU and Ruskin College. It is based on the profitability of the Ford Motor Company.'

The problems of the 'eighties follow directly from this approach. What happens when Ford's profits fall? Union representatives who base their claims on company viability rather than on the needs of the working class are obliged to accept a wage cut.

But management wants more than wage cuts. To make the company profitable, Ford needs to smash shopfloor organisation in the plants. That's where the disciplinary code comes in. Ever since 1969 Ford has attempted to exchange wage rises for harsher disciplinary procedures. Initially it met with little success; but today its attack on trade union rights is really producing results.

To turn the tide of defeat at Ford's, workers will have to go beyond the traditional boundaries of trade unionism and challenge the arguments of management and union leaders. Further layoffs, redundancies and disciplinary measures are certain this year as Ford faces a stagnant market. Activists at Dagenham and Halewood will have to explain loud and clear that maintaining workers' living standards is incompatible with restoring Ford profit levels. Only then can they win the support of other workers for a stand against redundancies or wage cuts, victimisations or even plant closures. When Ford's explicit bourgeois offensive on its workforce is met with an equally decisive working class response then we'll be on the way to victory.

Mary Masters

Agreement and conditions of employment 1958 (Blue book) Clause 15

'The Trade Unions and the Company agree on the need:
1 To achieve efficient production by all reasonable means.
2 For the introduction of labour-saving machines and methods.
3 For the company to transfer employees from one job or department to another as may be desirable having in mind continuity of employment and flow of production.'

This statement of the common commitment of workers and employers to the welfare of the company was called 'a resounding victory' in the shop stewards' paper, the *Voice of Ford Workers*, August/September 1958.

French Stalinists launch pogrom against immigrants

Patriotic Communism

For France's four-million strong immigrant population racist violence is nothing new. What's new is that during the last year attacks on blacks have been organised by the Parti Communiste Francais (PCF). Matters came to a head in the Paris suburb of Vitry on Christmas eve, when communist mayor Paul Mercieca and his fellow Stalinist councillors led a racist gang on a rampage through the town to a hostel for migrant workers. Here we examine the events of Vitry and explain why the PCF has decided to launch an assault on blacks just two months before the French presidential elections.



The PCF's 'welcome' to immigrant workers

ON 22 DECEMBER the French authorities transferred 300 immigrants (from the French ex-colony Mali) from St Maur, a Gaullist-run suburb of Paris, to a hostel in the communist-controlled, working class area of Vitry. It was this action that provoked the communist-led mob to march to the new home of the African migrants. As it happened the hostel was empty when the hanging party arrived. Unperturbed, the demonstrators proceeded to wreck the gates, cut off the water, gas and electricity supplies and thus render the hostel uninhabitable.

French public opinion was outraged. Immigrant organisations, trade unionists, left-wing and radical groups from the Friends of the Earth through the Socialist Party to the Anarchist Federation – and many liberals – condemned the raid. The pages of *Le Monde* were filled with letters and articles calling the communists racist. The PCF's mouthpiece *L'Humanité* maintained an embarrassed silence. The Communist Party of Great Britain however spoke out – in support of the PCF. Extending its international greetings of solidarity, the British party sided with the PCF against what it called a campaign of anti-communist 'smears' (*Morning Star*, 14 January 1981).

In France pressure mounted from all sides. One commentator after another demanded: was this the action only of M Mercieca and his colleagues in Vitry? Or would the PCF leadership endorse it? They didn't have to wait long for an answer.

Marchais joins the mob

The PCF's attitude was soon revealed – through a statement from its central committee, through the words and actions of General Secretary (and Presidential candidate) Georges Marchais, and through the actions of Stalinists throughout France.

On 14 January the PCF central committee condemned the Giscard regime for continuing to allow an influx of immigrants – despite many promises to stem the flow. Why? Because this policy 'worsens community relations, increases the social burden on the community, reduces educational standards, and aggravates the problem of unemployment' (*Le Monde*, 15 January 1981). And the PCF's solution? A *total ban* on all new immigration into France and 'Eight communist proposals to put an end to the madness of immigrant distribution' (*Le Monde*, 7 January 1981). The PCF demanded a further tightening of France's already stringent immigration controls and a new system of administering the housing of migrants which would allow communist councillors the right to veto plans to hostel blacks in their areas.

Marchais did more than approve 'sans reserve' the actions of his comrades in Vitry. On 10 January he marched with local communists and 10 000 supporters, many sporting tricolour scarves, through the town to show approval for the attack on the hostel. The aim, he explained, was to 'speed up the rehousing of Malian workers in decent conditions, *in Saint Maur*' (*Le Monde*, 9 January 1981).

Other French Stalinists followed suit. In the Brittany town of Rennes the communist group on the local council launched a campaign against the building of a new mosque and Islamic cultural centre. Local residents' associations had objected, saying that the money should be spent on car parking and the preservation of green spaces instead. The PCF naturally provided more sophisticated reasons. Local party secretary Michel Collet explained that if the state provided money for a mosque 'this would not conform to the republican tradition of the separation of Church and State nor to the social and cultural interests of French or immigrant workers' (*Le Monde*, 12 January 1981). National Front campaigns in Britain against cultural facilities for ethnic minorities can't produce such convoluted justifications, but the racist content is the same.

Nothing to lose but your votes

The PCF's stand over Vitry is only the latest and most despicable twist in a long shameful story. French Stalinists have always advocated tight immigration controls. In the 'thirties the Popular Front governments deported thousands of migrants from crisis-ridden France. The tradition lives on. In November 1980 M Berthelot, communist mayor of Saint Denis, set 50 thugs recruited from the municipal workforce on a delegation of migrants who came to him begging for housing after the police had kicked them out of their accommodation. His assistant M Lanoz told them simply, 'go back to your country'.

But why has the PCF decided to launch such an explicit racist campaign against blacks now? The explanation lies in the party's crisis of membership and declining electoral support. Since the Second World War the PCF has moved steadily closer to the political outlook of a national, reformist party. In the mid 'seventies it embraced the strategy of 'unity of the Left' with the Socialist Party. But by following through the logic of its rightward shift the PCF moved towards its own dissolution. Reformists and liberals might just as well be in the Socialist Party – at least it stood a better chance of gaining power. Those of a more radical persuasion had a whole range of groups on the left to choose from. As a result the PCF's members trickled away and its vote dwindled.

Since 1978 the party leadership has done everything it can to assert an independent identity for the PCF. First, it made a clearer organisational break with the Socialists, ending the official election pact in 1978. Second, it reasserted the pro-Moscow stance that traditionally marks off Stalinism from social democracy – the PCF supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Third, PCF members on the shopfloor were instructed to take on working class struggles in a more aggressive way. French Communists wanted to be known as militants. Finally, and most importantly, the PCF has tried to build up public support by putting forward an aggressive populist and nationalist approach on key issues in French politics. It was this approach that led the mayor of Vitry to the Malian hostel on Christmas eve.

PCF demands to stop all future immigration and kick migrants out of their homes will obviously have a certain appeal at a time when France has two million unemployed. Marchais' position is as straightforward as that of British fascists. He told an enthusiastic audience in Paris early in January that it was 'inadmissible to allow immigrant workers into France at a time when we have two million French and immigrant people on the dole' (*The Times*, 12 January 1981). The PCF's anti-immigrant campaign is directed at French workers, many of whom live in the same slum suburbs of Paris as African migrants. In these areas support for the Stalinists has fallen by more than 20 per cent in the last two years. To regain popularity the PCF has decided to blame French workers' problems on 'too many blacks'. In electoral terms it has nothing to lose – migrant workers in France don't have a vote. Marchais has calculated that attacking migrants will pull French workers' votes back to the PCF.

The Moscow shuffle

Marchais' explicit anti-immigrant move does however cause problems for the PCF. A party which has courted social democracy for 50 years inevitably develops a sizeable liberal wing. A division has emerged between party hardliners who see above all the electoral gains to be made out of outright chauvinism, and the liberals who favour tight immigration controls, but think that smashing up hostels is going too far. In fact the liberal wing of the party which controls *L'Humanite* was so upset by the Vitry affair that the party's daily paper refused to report it. Marchais was obliged to write a half page letter to explain his position. The new openly racist stance has speeded up the exit of the liberal Stalinists from the PCF. More of the party's academics and the remaining children of May '68 leave every day. A few have decided to stay in the hope that they can rally opposition to Marchais and the central committee and revive their strategy of unity with the Socialists.

Neither wing of the PCF represents anything in the least progressive. They are simply two trends within Stalinism. Since the War all the European communist parties have moved closer and closer to national-reformist social democracy. Apart from the fact that there already exist traditional social democratic parties in most countries, this road leads to communist participation in 'social contract'-style attacks on working class living standards. All the Eurocommunist parties – including the PCF – have lost support through their compromises with bourgeois counter-crisis programmes in the 'seventies. The other trend within the official communist movement is again coming to the fore: it is to maintain a distinct identity and justify an independent existence by reasserting the parties' connection with the Soviet Union and its traditions. This is the conflict within the PCF today – between new and old-style Stalinism.

The record

The Vitry events and Marchais' racist election campaign are a dramatic example of the pernicious consequences of nationalism in the labour movement. They vividly confirm the vital importance of basing the defence of ethnic minorities on a challenge to nationalist ideas in the working class.

Many individuals who are actively opposed to racism support the Communist Party, in France and in Britain. But the politics of Stalinism lead them to put the interests of France and Britain first. In the beginning this helps to isolate blacks from the labour movement; it ends up with 'communists' launching pogroms.

The British CP has yet to organise systematic attacks on black people (although in Brixton, Birmingham and elsewhere it has encouraged and co-operated in 'community policing', which amounts to the same thing). But the key point is that the outlook of the CPGB is every bit as nationalist as that of the PCF. It is thus just as dangerous to immigrants (and to workers) as its French colleagues.

It is no use pretending that the CPGB is any better than the PCF. Yet this was how *Socialist Worker* appealed in an open letter to the CP's daily paper over the Vitry affair: 'We hope that the *Morning Star*, in line with your record of consistent opposition to racialism and fascism, will make clear your disapproval of the French CP's disgusting conduct' (3 January 1981). But the *Morning Star* and the CP haven't got a record of 'consistent opposition to racialism and fascism'. In the 'thirties the CP pursued either a sectarian abstention from fighting the fascists or opportunist campaigns against them. Today the CP wants the Government to outlaw racism and ban fascists while approving state controls on immigration. The CP however has a consistent record in chauvinism, second only to the patriotic record of the PCF. It is not surprising therefore that the *Morning Star* has yet to 'make clear' its 'disapproval of the French CP's disgusting conduct'.

The only way to oppose actions like that of the PCF at Vitry is by fighting the politics of Stalinism, and particularly its role in spreading the influence of nationalism which divides and weakens the international working class movement.

Kevin Green

STATE ATTACK

The state is preparing a legislative onslaught on black people in Britain. On 8 January the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure recommended a whole series of wider powers for the police. They will soon be able to stop and search at will, to enter and search people's homes without a warrant, to arrest and detain suspects without charge for days on end, to fingerprint indiscriminately and to submit statements made under duress as evidence. Intended to replace the notorious 'sus' law and to operate alongside intensified 'community policing', the new proposals are particularly aimed at young blacks.

A week later the Government published its British Nationality Bill, which creates three new categories of citizenship. British citizenship, the only one conferring the right to live in Britain, is to be restricted to British people – and their children, born mainly in countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Citizenship of British Dependent Territories will allow people who live in Hong Kong, Belize, Bermuda, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar or the Cayman Isles, the right to stay in these colonies – but no right to come to Britain. British Overseas citizenship covers anybody now living in the UK or its colonies who does not fit in to the other two categories. It gives no rights at all. This category is intended to push many blacks in Britain, especially those from the Indian subcontinent, into permanent, second class citizenship as migrant workers.

Here we look at two aspects of ELWAR's activity against state racism. Vaughan Phillips reports on our encounters with 'community policing' in East London, and Cathy Barratt reviews our differences with the Campaign Against Racist Laws on how to fight the Nationality Bill.

Labour's community policing

Asian families on Bow Bridge estate at Bromley-by-Bow in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets have been victims of a sustained campaign of violence and intimidation from local racists and fascists (see *the next step*, No 9, January 1981). After ELWAR arrived on the scene and began to organise resistance – so scaring off the racists – the police and the neighbourhood race relations industry soon moved in.

A decent cop?

The police stepped up their car patrols around the estate, and sent their friendly Community Liaison Officer around to visit the besieged families. 'Tell me about your problems' PC Jock said 'and maybe we can set up a joint police/residents committee to deal with all the vandalism'. The peculiar feature of the 'vandalism' around Bow Bridge is that it's directed mainly at the black residents. But since the police are not prepared to do anything about racial violence, denying its existence comes naturally.

Apart from 'the vandals' blacks have problems with the police too. The Bow Bridge bobby was trying to be a nice guy – but force of habit meant he still wanted to see the passports and work permits of black families he visited. And when Isak Ali went down to the police station to report that he'd been mugged, he ended up being charged with threatening behaviour himself.

The police have also been trying to stir up hostility to ELWAR on the estate. But to no avail: the community's initial response to the suggestion of a police representative on their committee was a clear 'no thanks'.

Enter PC Mikardo

'Most policemen, most of the time, are part of the community', Paul Foot, *Socialist Worker*, 26 May 1980.

'Community policing' is popular in the Labour Party and among its supporters. Local Labour MP Ian Mikardo, his aspiring successor Dan Jones and radical Bishop of Stepney Jim Johnson are keen on sending community policemen into Bow Bridge. They are backing a new community relations organisation in Tower Hamlets to promote what their Hackney colleagues recently called 'a fair non-racist police force that has the consent of all communities'. In practice this approach endorses more police harassment, more passport raids and more repression of anybody who fights back against racist attacks.

At the end of January Mikardo made a visit to Bow Bridge. His purpose? Firstly, he informed people that ELWAR was run by communists. As readers of *the next step*, many of the residents were well aware of this. Secondly, he encouraged Asian families to participate in 'joint consultations' with the police. The Labour Party has done nothing to combat racist violence in East London. Now it wants to undermine workers' defence and help the police patrol black people.

Vote ELWAR!

ELWAR rejects the police, whether they come with their truncheons out or whether they send their race relations specialists around to clear up the mess afterwards. On 8 January we organised a large and noisy picket outside the court when Isak Ali's case came up; we will be back for his next appearance. And we are still arranging for the physical defence of families on the Bow Bridge estate. A meeting attended by more than 50 local residents and ELWAR activists in Bethnal Green on 27 January discussed the way forward for defence work at Bow Bridge and in the Brick Lane area.

What really upsets Mikardo and his local supporters is that ELWAR candidates are standing in the May GLC elections against the Labour Party and every other party that sustains racial oppression in East London. As Dan Jones said recently 'fine work is being done, but I wish it was by someone else'.

Fighting immigration controls

The Tories' Nationality Bill has outraged liberal opinion in Britain. Under the leadership of Roy Hattersley the Labour Party has united in opposition to the Government's proposals. It's not that Hattersley and Co disapprove of the redefinition of British citizenship to make it more exclusive: the whole idea was initiated and developed by the Labour Party. Nor do the Labour leaders oppose tightening up immigration controls in general: the last government followed earlier Labour adminstrations in making it more and more difficult for blacks to get into Britain. No, the Shadow Cabinet decided to oppose the Bill 'on the grounds that it contains elements of racial and sexual discrimination' (*The Times*, 15 January 1981).

Labour gives a 'lead'

The problem is that there are more than 'elements' of Tory racial discrimination in the new Bill. It is based on a whole framework of racial discrimination built up by past Tory and Labour Governments. Labour's posturing against the Tory Bill aims to give the impression that if people vote Labour next time they might get a non-racist, non-sexist nationality act. But black people know that it will be racial discrimination just the same.

Radical anti-racists followed Labour's lead. They did not oppose the Nationality Bill because they defend the right of workers to move across national boundaries without any state interference. They did not reject *all* immigration controls. They criticised the Tory proposals because, well, they are *so complicated*. Secretary of the National Council of Civil Liberties Patricia Hewitt found the Bill 'a nightmare of bureaucratic complications'. Oh dear... And Anne Dummett of the Action Group on Immigration and Nationality was worried that blacks 'were going to be very scared because they would not know where they stood'. In the real world many blacks were very angry because they knew exactly where they stood – stateless, without rights and having to put up with patronising nonsense from British liberals.

CARL meets ELWAR

The Campaign Against Racist Laws is the radical left's answer to state racism. Set up after the Tory victory in the last General Election, it is supported by Labour MPs, the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party among others. Its response to the Nationality Bill was to call, at its recent Birmingham conference, for the return of a Labour government committed to repealing the 1971 Immigration Act. Like Roy Hattersley it invokes the phantom of non-racist immigration regulations being implemented by a Labour government of the future.

ELWAR supporters at the conference challenged the platform with an amendment proposing a fight to win the official labour movement to oppose all immigration controls. But CP and SWP supporters backed up TUC conference chairman Maurice Styles in bureaucratically manipulating proceedings, stifling debate and ensuring that the Labour Party's 'non-racist' pretensions were not exposed. They went so far as to refuse support to Evangelina King, a Filipino worker threatened with deportation, because her case has been fought by ELWAR!

ELWAR's answer

We fight the Tory Nationality Bill from the perspective of our opposition to all government attempts to divide the working class along national lines. In addition to opposing all immigration controls we argued at the CARL conference for the wider application of the sort of workers' defence networks we have been setting up in East London. And we proposed that trade unions whose foreign members are being rounded up and deported should be prepared to take industrial action to prevent the Government's actions. This is the approach that ELWAR has been pursuing to defend Filipinos and other immigrant workers.

The best recommendation for ELWAR action is that it works. After a series of pickets of the Home Office by ELWAR supporters and COHSE workers from Springfield Hospital, where Evangelina King works, her deportation was postponed indefinitely. And she no longer has to sign on at the Home Office every week, as the authorities had previously insisted. The threat of deportation however still remains, for Evangelina and thousands like her who may have concealed information about their marital status, their children or their work experience in order to get a work permit.

To fight immigration controls you have a choice. There's the Labour Party/CARL way of dreaming about 'non-racist' immigration controls in the future. And there's the ELWAR way of fighting all immigration controls and their apologists, in the here and now.



the next step

Evangelina King and fellow hospital workers on the ELWAR picket of the Home Office.

The Irish War

Which side are you on?

The ending of the hunger strike has caused confusion and uncertainty in Ireland and in Britain. Two things however are clear.

● The British army continues its occupation of Ireland. Northern Ireland Minister Humphrey Atkins has no political solution. The top priority for the British Government remains to defeat the republican movement.

● The IRA fights on. On 26 January it simultaneously bombed six town centres and blew up the Dublin-Belfast railway in the biggest single operation for many months.

The question facing socialists in Britain is straightforward. Which side are you on? Since the bombing campaigns began (in Britain as well as in Ireland) many British socialists have given the wrong answer. After doing virtually nothing to organise solidarity for the hunger strikers in Britain, *Socialist Worker* had the cheek to 'call into question the wisdom of the hunger strike as a tactic' (3 January 1981). And as the republican movement faced up to a more intensified conflict with one of the world's most brutal military machines *Socialist Worker* advised it to deploy 'mass political action' instead of 'a return to isolated military acts'. Later the Socialist Workers Party condemned IRA bombings in Britain. This group of British socialists has refused to give its support to the Irish people at this critical period in their struggle against Britain.

When the National Front called a counter-demonstration against the Bloody Sunday Commemoration march called by Sinn Fein in Cardiff on 25 January, the SWP-sponsored Anti-Nazi League and the Militant-controlled Labour Party Young Socialists organised a *separate* demonstration. Their object was, not to declare support for the Irish struggle, but to oppose the fascists. This manoeuvre depleted the numbers on the Bloody Sunday march, further encouraged attempts by local Labour and Tory councillors to have the march banned, and generally helped the NF in its aim of disrupting the Sinn Fein demonstration. Whilst the NF is not afraid to take sides in the Irish War, the SWP and Militant are not prepared to take an unequivocal stand for the victory of the Irish people and the defeat of Britain.

In this four-page special feature on Ireland we take the side of the Irish people against the British state. On pages 8 and 9 we explain why we take the very unpopular position of giving unconditional support to the republican movement. On page 10 we examine the enemy's strategy and on this page we talk to trade unionists – in Ireland and in Britain – who support our drive to change TUC policy on Ireland, beginning at the labour movement conference in Coventry on 14 March.

TUC HANDS OFF IRELAND!

DAVE HALLSWORTH is a member of the AUEW and secretary of Tameside Trades Council. He talked to Mick Kennedy about Tameside, the TUC and Coventry.

'We were kicked out of the TUC on 26 March 1980 and to date there is no recognised trades council in Tameside. The TUC expelled us because we refused to back down on our plans to hold a conference around the slogan "Support the Irish people: bring the war to Britain". When they heard that we were going to have republican speakers on the platform the local NF called a demonstration and pressed the local Labour council into banning the meeting. The Communist Party then pushed the TUC into expelling Tameside.

'The continuing disaffiliation of Tameside is the result of the TUC's policy on Ireland in which it joins in the outright denial of the rights of the Irish to self-determination and defends the right of the British state to maintain armed troops in Northern Ireland.

'Until this policy is broken and thrown out, the trade union movement is tied to imperialist rule in Ireland. The failure of most of the labour movement to support Irish prisoners follows naturally from its failure to support Tameside against the TUC last year and its acceptance of the Bill of Rights and the Better Life For All Campaign, year in year out. There'll be no real movement on Ireland until we get this changed.

'The Coventry conference has been called by SPTAC with a view to drive the class collaboration policy out of the TUC. At Tameside we've stuck to our position of 'Troops out now' and 'Self-determination for the Irish people'; we support the violence of the oppressed against the violence of the employing class. This year we want to spread the word through the British trade union movement. We can begin at Coventry with a view to making our position the TUC's position at Brighton this summer.'

GERRY MACLOCHLAINN is a member of Sinn Fein and the National Union of Teachers. He is currently on bail awaiting trial under charges of conspiracy to cause explosions after spending six weeks in solitary confinement under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He organised this year's Bloody Sunday march in Cardiff. Kevin Green talked to him about his experiences and his views on solidarity work in Britain.

Ireland and the British labour movement

'We welcome the support of people in Britain for the Irish liberation struggle. We see the struggle of the working class people of Britain as being the same as the anti-imperialist struggle of the Irish people. We don't see any division in that. We see Irish solidarity work as important, not only in the support it gives to our movement, but also because it will assist the struggle that British workers will have to wage against the British state. The British working class has a lot to learn from the consistent revolutionary struggle waged by the republican movement over the past 11 years.

The decisive factor that allowed the British Government to extricate itself from the hunger strike without conceding political status was the fact that it came under very little pressure in Britain itself. The labour movement, which could have forced the Government to back down, for the most part remained silent. The silence of the trade union movement was guaranteed by its long-standing official policy on Ireland.

The Better Life For All Campaign calls on the British government to bring 'peace, jobs and progress' to the Six Counties, through a programme of legislation, administrative reform and increased public spending. This seems harmless enough – until you recall that there's a war going on in Ireland. The TUC seems to have nothing to say about this. But behind the BLFAC lies the presumption that the *British* government should pass new laws for Ireland, that the *British* civil service should improve housing and employment and that the *British* treasury should spend more in Ireland.

Leave aside the obvious fact that the British Government can't provide jobs or any other kind of 'better life' in Britain, never mind in Ireland. The more important point is that Britain can only maintain its government machinery in the Six Counties by crushing the resistance of all those Irish people who want to run their own country free from British interference. The TUC's vain hopes for progressive policies in Ireland in practice mean its endorsement of British repression. Its visions of fair government agencies dispensing jobs, houses and justice conceal its approval of the real agencies of British rule: the UDR, the RUC, the Diplock courts, the interrogation centres and the H-Blocks.

The British labour movement can't support the struggle for political status *and* the BLFAC. You can't support the Irish people *and* the British state. It has to be one side or the other – and, when under pressure, the TUC has shown that it sides with Britain. It expelled Tameside Trades Council last year because it challenged the TUC's pro-British policy. This year we're going to carry forward Tameside's challenge at the 'TUC HANDS OFF IRELAND' conference in Coventry.



The RCT's 'Smash H-Block' banner on this year's Bloody Sunday march in Cardiff.

Bloody Sunday

'The Bloody Sunday march got quite a lot of support in South Wales – notably from the Llanwern Steel Action Group and the Welsh republican socialists. We regretted the decision of the Cardiff ANL to call a separate march – it undermined our attempts to draw people out on the Sinn Fein march. We were pressing the Cardiff Trades Council and the Communist Party to join our march. But when the ANL called the counter-demonstration their members supported that – which neatly got them off the hook on Ireland. I would have thought that the best way to answer the NF, who were attempting to unite as many facets of opinion as they could against the Sinn Fein march, would be to support the march they were going to attack.

Prison pickets

'The pickets organised by British left groups outside the prison had a major effect on our treatment. The screws were quite definitely frightened by the regular weekly pickets and our treatment dramatically improved once they started.'

BOB MONTGOMERY is a member of the Sheet Metal Workers union and Tower Hamlets Trades Council. He recently resigned from the Labour Party after 30 years' membership. He is supporting East London Workers Against Racism in the forthcoming GLC elections.

'I'm supporting the ELWAR candidate in Tower Hamlets because I've seen the build-up of violent attacks on blacks around here, and I've seen how the Labour Party's done nothing to fight it. I've also seen the way Labour governments have dealt with Ireland.

'We're having a Trades Council conference on Ireland in February where we'll be very critical of the failure of the TUC and the Labour Party to come to the aid of the hunger strikers against the vicious Tory Government. But that's their whole record on Ireland – I hope that this conference in Coventry can begin to change it.'

BRIAN SULLIVAN is District Secretary of the National Union of Public Employees at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast and a member of the Trade Union Sub-committee of the National H-Blocks Committee. He played a leading role in industrial action last year against the presence of British troops in the RVH which is situated in the Catholic Falls Road area of Belfast. He spoke to Mary Masters.

Tameside

'We were very impressed by the stand Tameside Trades Council took last year against the TUC. It was an inspiration to the British labour movement. I support any attempt to raise the question of Ireland in the British trade unions – especially when, like NUPE, they have members in Northern Ireland.'

SPTAC

'The Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign supported Tameside – and it helped to raise some of the issues arising out of the military occupation of the RVH at last year's NUPE conference at Eastbourne. I hope the Coventry conference helps to carry all this work forward.'

JIM MONAGHAN is on the North East Lancashire District Committee of the Furniture, Timber and Allied Trades Union and a member of Todmorden Trades Council. He spoke to Keith Tompson.

'In the past Todmorden Trades Council has passed motions of support for political status for Irish prisoners-of-war. We believe in national self-determination for the Irish people. Britain should get out.

'TUC policy on Ireland is useless. It does about as much good for Irish people as the TUC's policy does in general for the British working class – no good at all.

'Capitalism is in crisis and we need clear politics that can defend workers. All TUC campaigns are steeped in nationalism. This disarms workers. Discussion of Ireland helps workers to see the need to support all struggles against the British employers. That's why I'm going to the conference called by SPTAC.'

Motion

Motion in support of Coventry labour movement conference:

● This branch/union/trades council deplores the failure of the official labour movement to support the demands for political status of republican prisoners-of-war in the Six Counties of Ireland.

● It rejects TUC interference in the affairs of the Irish people through the Better Life For All Campaign and the Bill of Rights Policy which are simply a cover for its complicity in British repression throughout the Irish War.

● It gives its support to the labour movement conference 'TUC HANDS OFF IRELAND!' organised by the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign in Coventry on 14 March and will send two delegates.

● It supports the campaign to change TUC policy in 1981 to support for the national liberation struggle against British rule.

The Irish Repub

Why we give unco

Had the left-wingers at London University nominated Seán MacStiofáin instead of Nelson Mandela for the honorary post of Chancellor they would have been met with outrage. This may seem strange. Both men have made names for themselves as leaders of anti-imperialist movements: MacStiofáin was Chief of Staff of the Irish Republican Army while Mandela was the driving force behind the African National Congress. Both have devoted their lives to the cause of the liberation of oppressed peoples, both have suffered long imprisonment, and both have come close to death in the struggle against imperialism. Yet while Mandela enjoys the prestige of a statesman in wide sections of British society – not least in the labour movement – MacStiofáin remains unrecognised if not despised.

British socialists have always been critical of 'colonialism'. They have generally given their approval to national liberation movements such as the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe or SWAPO in Namibia. But to the extent that such movements have threatened British interests, that approval has always been qualified. Thus, while Vietnam's war against the USA drew massive support from the British left, earlier resistance to British imperialism in Egypt, India and East Africa prompted only sympathy.

One national liberation struggle, however, has obtained virtually no

Why support national liberation?

It seems paradoxical that socialists should identify their aims with those of nationalists. The nation is a bourgeois institution and nationalism is, essentially, a bourgeois outlook. But there is more to it than this.

The formation of stable nation-states was a crucial phase in the development of capitalist society. During the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie of every advanced country took control of the state and established fixed national boundaries. Capitalism emerged as an international system from bases defined by the borders of the most powerful nation-states. Then, at the turn of the century, came the rise of imperialism and of systematic national oppression. It was this oppression that socialists had a duty to attack.

Imperialism meant that a handful of the most advanced capitalist states carved up the rest of the world. The peoples of a few rich countries came to enjoy a certain amount of liberty, with universal suffrage, a free press, political parties and trade unions. But the scores of nations where capitalist production remained backward stayed poor and were run by dictatorial regimes. They were governed by the relations of imperialism: relations of *economic domination* and *political oppression*.

At the centre of the political oppression of backward capitalist countries lies the denial of their right to national self-determination. This can take different forms, from annexation and colonial rule to the provisional independence of many Asian, African and Latin American countries today. Recent French invasions of the Central African Republic and Zaire show how fragile the claims of these countries to genuine national freedom are. The absence of free elections, real political parties or trade unions and the climate of repression common to virtually all backward capitalist countries follow from their domination by imperialism.

Our attitude to nationalism follows from this analysis. The nationalism of the imperialist countries is the outlook of a capitalist class that cannot develop the productive forces of the world, except to the limited degree allowed by periodic war and the impoverishment of millions of people. This sort of nationalism provides a means of enlisting domestic support for barbarism. It is an entirely reactionary ideology which socialists must combat at every opportunity.

The nationalism of countries oppressed by imperialism is however something different. This often provides the unifying force for the struggle of an oppressed people for democratic rights. The fight for national freedom in backward capitalist countries is a fight against the oppression that is fundamental to imperialist rule. Because there can be no social progress without the defeat of imperialism, the nationalism of oppressed countries has a basic progressive content. This is why socialists have to give their full support to national liberation movements.

What is unconditional support?

'Unconditional support' means that we give our backing for national liberation movements without qualification: it means we do not make that backing dependent on the adoption or renunciation of any particular strategy or tactics. We endorse any struggle against imperialism, whatever the nature of its leadership, the style of its political campaign or the type of military tactics it deploys. Our stance is not affected by the location of the struggle: whether it takes place in the oppressed country or on the streets of the imperialist metropolis, our obligation to support it is unaltered. Nor are we entitled to withdraw our support if non-combatants are killed or injured. That is always regrettable but it is an unavoidable part of war.

'Unconditional support' means that socialists in an imperialist country have no right to dictate the terms on which they will support a national liberation struggle. The oppressed are entitled to fight to relieve their oppression by any means necessary. The lethal weapons the imperialist powers use to preserve their rule ensures that all anti-imperialist struggles are bitter and bloody.

Those on the British left who support the ANC, SWAPO and the PLO justify their refusal to support the IRA because of its particular political programme ('bourgeois-nationalist'), its style of organisation ('elitist'), the religious convictions of its supporters ('sectarian') and, most importantly, because of its military tactics ('individual terror'). But this is just dishonest. The real thing the British left doesn't like about the IRA is its particular tendency to attack the British state. Nothing else distinguishes the IRA significantly from many other national liberation armies around the world. Other armies have similar programmes, similar organisational structures and similar religious affiliations. Most strike at 'non-military' as well as military targets – that is what modern warfare is all about. All are accused of terrorism and indiscriminate killings by their enemies. Of course the British socialist is quite prepared to shrug off these facts and allegations when the ANC and the rest are under consideration. Yet when it comes to the IRA, he makes every bourgeois smear his personal property, his excuse for denying support and capitulating to patriotic prejudice.

Why is the IRA a special case?

The IRA is fighting a war against overwhelming odds in very difficult conditions. With a popular base of only half a million it faces a combined British military strength of more than 30 000 men. In the past 11 years more than 2000 people have been killed – including several hundred IRA volunteers. Yet the IRA has not been defeated and it continues to wage war against Britain today.

In the course of the Irish War the republican movement has received almost no support from the official labour movement in Britain. The atrocities committed by British soldiers and the vicious anti-Irish slanders churned out by successive Labour and Tory warlords have provoked no strikes. Most recently, the trade unions held their peace while Labour Party leaders joined with the Tories to affirm their determination to force the hunger strikers to death rather than grant political status to republican prisoners. In an opinion poll published shortly before Christmas, 88 per cent of British people interviewed stated that they had no sympathy for the republican hunger strikers.

The vast majority of British people lines up with Thatcher, Atkins, Foot and Benn against the Irish people; and it is for this reason that we make the Irish struggle a special case. Not only do we give Irish freedom fighters our unconditional support, we also refuse to criticise the IRA publicly. We do this, not because we wish to be diplomatic or tactful, nor because of particular features of the IRA (its politics, organisation or methods), but because we are part of a labour movement whose recent record is one of undeviating support for Westminster against the Irish liberation struggle. Today any criticism of the IRA only gives succour to the forces of British chauvinism.

The left, by contrast, is always criticising the IRA. But before we look more closely at how, as a result, it betrays the liberation struggle, let's consider some general problems thrown up by national liberation movements.

What about the national bourgeoisie?

Socialists side with anybody who fights against imperialism. Insofar as the nationalism of the bourgeoisie and the petit-bourgeoisie is directed against imperialism it plays a progressive role. Socialists in an oppressor country cannot but applaud any struggle for self-determination even if it is led by a capitalist class.

This remains true however reactionary the leadership of the national movement may appear to be. We would have defended Idi Amin against the threat of an Anglo-American invasion of Uganda, or Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Empire against the French, or Khomeini against the USA. No matter how reactionary these regimes may be, imperialist intervention would only multiply the oppression of these nations ten times. The way that these leaders are used as examples to stir up racist and chauvinist support for military interference makes it all the more imperative that socialists declare their support for any resistance they put up against Thatcher, Giscard D'Estaing or Reagan.

Marxists however understand that the national bourgeoisie cannot fight consistently against imperialism. At a certain stage of the struggle the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaderships of the national movements realise that their class interests can only be defended through a compromise with imperialism. It is the failure of the leadership of national movements to pursue a consistent struggle against imperialism that socialists must criticise. It is in this spirit that *the next step* criticised the Patriotic Front shortly after the end of the war in Zimbabwe in April 1980. We said:

> 'The Patriotic Front leaders presented their compromises as gains throughout the election campaign; they sought not to overthrow imperialism, but to make deals with the imperialist leaders.'(*the next step*, No 4, April/May 1980)

Thus it is not the resistance of national bourgeois leaders to imperialist powers that we criticise, but their tendency to hold back mass opposition and come to an accommodation with imperialism.

What about the class struggle?

In every backward capitalist country there are two sources of social tension. The first is the conflict between that



South Africa's SASOL oil refinery in flames: left celebration nation. The left's hypocrisy in refusing support to the Irish r British labour movement.

ican Movement

nditional support

backing from within the official labour movement: the struggle for Irish independence led by the IRA. The republican movement is an anomaly for the British left. Why? Because it presents the prospect of the break-up of the United Kingdom itself. This is the simple explanation for the difference in popularity between Mandela and MacStiofáin. The ANC attacks the apartheid regime in South Africa; the IRA promises to destroy the British state.

The RCT gives unconditional support to national liberation movements, and we particularly give such support to the movement for Ireland's liberation. We have our criticisms of the programmes of the organisations leading those movements. In past issues of the next step we have criticised the politics of the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe and, elsewhere in this issue, we point to the reactionary role Iran's leaders are playing in that country's fight against American imperialism. But we have never used our review to criticise the IRA – indeed we castigate the left for its repeated condemnations of the Provisionals. The Labour Party and the trade unions have no criticisms of any freedom fighters so long as they don't get too close to home. Our attitude is the exact reverse of this. Here we show that, because the IRA is a special case for the British labour movement, it is a special case for us too.

country's people and the ruling imperialist power. The second is the antagonism between the masses (the workers and peasants) and the national bourgeoisie.

What is the connection between the national struggle and the class struggle? Marxists insist on *the logical priority of the national question*. (This does not mean that we put it before the class struggle in time.) It is only in the process of resolving the struggle against national oppression that it is possible for the working class to take control of that struggle away from the national bourgeoisie. As long as the national bourgeoisie remains in the lead of the fight against imperialism, the working class will remain unable to assert its distinct interests as a class.

Over the decades opportunist politicians have exploited confusion among socialists on this issue. Two major errors dog the international labour movement today. The first mistake is to separate the national struggle and the class struggle *in time*. Stalin's 'two-stage' theory – first achieve independence and advance capitalist development, *then* go on to socialism – does exactly this, with disastrous consequences.

One of the first countries where this strategy was applied was China. In the mid 'twenties Stalin advised the Chinese Communist Party to postpone its working class concerns and merge with the bourgeois-nationalist Kuomintang under the leadership of Chiang Kai Shek. The result: once Chiang Kai Shek had consolidated his own position with Britain and Japan, the Communists were smashed. The Chinese working class has yet to recover from this defeat. Yet the Stalinist two-stage schema remains a powerful influence today in anti-imperialist movements from the Middle East to Southern Africa.

In 'Khomeini's capitalism: the imperialists close in', *Revolutionary Communist Papers* No 6, we examined the two-stage approach of the Organisation of Iranian Peoples' Fedayeen Guerrillas. The Fedai, we said, 'sought to postpone the anti-imperialist struggle till after the masses settled accounts with imperialism'. Instead of fighting foreign domination from a working class point of view, the Fedai sought the collaboration of all classes in a 'united anti-imperialist front'. Thus, despite the heroism of many of its members, the organisation was unable to differentiate itself clearly from the petit bourgeoisie. Khomeini's hold over the masses was strengthened by the backing it gave to his anti-working class government. The Fedai lost support, and, becoming more isolated, proved only too vulnerable to tougher state represssion.

The second error is to maintain that 'class politics' should take priority over the national struggle in a country dominated by imperialism. There are two variations on this theme, depending on whether it is taken up by socialists in the *oppressed* country or in the imperialist, *oppressor* nation.

Before the First World War Poland was ruled by Russia. Yet the Polish revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg refused to engage in the struggle for independence for her country. Lenin took her to task, contending that Polish workers would remain tied to their bourgeois-nationalist leaders until a working class party took the lead in opposing Tsarist autocracy. Although Luxemburg seemed left-wing in repudiating the nationalists and concentrating on trade union issues, she was in fact retreating from the key battle against imperialism.

In the second variation socialists in an oppressor country advise workers in a country fighting for national independence to ignore or downplay the national struggle and instead pursue trade union issues. This approach is more reactionary than Luxemburg's (as a socialist in an oppressed country) but unfortunately it is much more common today. The attitude of the Labour Party cabal known as the Militant Tendency to the war in Ireland is a classic example. Militant denies the existence of national oppression in the Six Counties. It exhorts Irish workers to fight their employers just as if they were British workers. At the same time it labels the nationalism of the republican movement as divisive and backward.

Although Militant has taken this position to the most explicit extreme it is in fact common to most left groups in Britain, including the Spartacist League and the Socialist Workers Party. It has nothing to offer Irish people, whose experience of national oppression, in the form of an occupying army, is too immediate for it to take the left's denials of its existence seriously. Militant's policy on Ireland is an adaptation to the nationalism of the oppressor – to the anti-Irish feeling that is rampant in Britain. Not only is it useless to the Irish people: by indulging chauvinism it also damages the British working class.

If the SWP gets up your nose – leave it!

The SWP recently published its first pamphlet on the Irish War for more than five years. Within the space of less than 20 pages only one political organisation is attacked. Which organisation? The Labour Party? The Tories, perhaps? No. It's the Provisional IRA that comes in for the stick.

One full page of the pamphlet is devoted to a detailed critique of IRA politics. Now, the SWP claims an orientation to the British working class. But is it the case that many British workers are committed to the programme of the Provisionals? Are British trade unionists flocking to join Sinn Fein? Then what is the point of producing such a polemic against republicanism?

The point is this. The SWP knows that there is tremendous hostility to the IRA in the labour movement. It wants to express its sympathy with the victims of British repression in Ireland, but it is incapable of challenging anti-Irish chauvinism in Britain. The SWP criticisms of the IRA are received by an audience overwhelmingly hostile to the republican movement. Its criticisms simply fuel the fires of British nationalism.

Early in January *Socialist Worker* published a letter under the heading 'A trade unionist's view of Ireland'. Mike Griffin, secretary of Penrhiwceiber Lodge NUM, South Wales, felt obliged to declare:

> 'Bomb outrages in pubs stick right up my nose because I enjoy a drink in a pub and I don't want to be bombed out of it.' (*Socialist Worker*, 10 January 1981)

Why is Griffin telling us this – more than five years since any pub in Britain was blown up? Has the Penrhiwceiber Lodge had an influx of young hotheads who want to go and bomb pubs on behalf of the IRA?

We've heard it all before. From Enoch Powell to Ian Mikardo, every reactionary British politician has been going on about 'bomb outrages in pubs' almost since the Irish War began. Now they've recruited Griffin to their campaign to prevent any British workers from siding with the republican movement against the British government.

For Mike Griffin a quiet pint comes before the interests of the Irish people. What gets right up many of their noses is that over the past 11 years trade unionists like Mike Griffin and groups like the SWP haven't had the political guts to stand up in defence of the IRA.

One week after Griffin's letter an editorial statement echoed his sentiments. *Socialist Worker* denounced the bombings claimed by the IRA over the Christmas period and warned that a renewed military campaign in Britain would 'make the task of building an effective Troops Out of Ireland movement even more difficult' (17 January 1981). But what makes building an effective Troops Out movement difficult is the politics of the SWP and its recurrent public attacks on the Irish for taking the war against imperialism seriously. If bombings provoke a chauvinist response in Britain it is the fault of British socialists, not the IRA. It is our job to campaign resolutely against British chauvinism – especially at moments when bombing campaigns are exploited by the media to stir up anti-Irish feeling.

First things first

No other liberation movement suffers like the IRA at the hands of British socialists. When the ANC blew up oil installations in South Africa the left was exultant; a similar response greeted the successes of Patriotic Front guerrillas in Zimbabwe. But the IRA has the temerity to bring its bombs into the imperialist heartlands and that's where the fickle solidarity of British socialists stops. SASOL refineries are considered legitimate targets, Bromley-by-Bow gasometers are not.

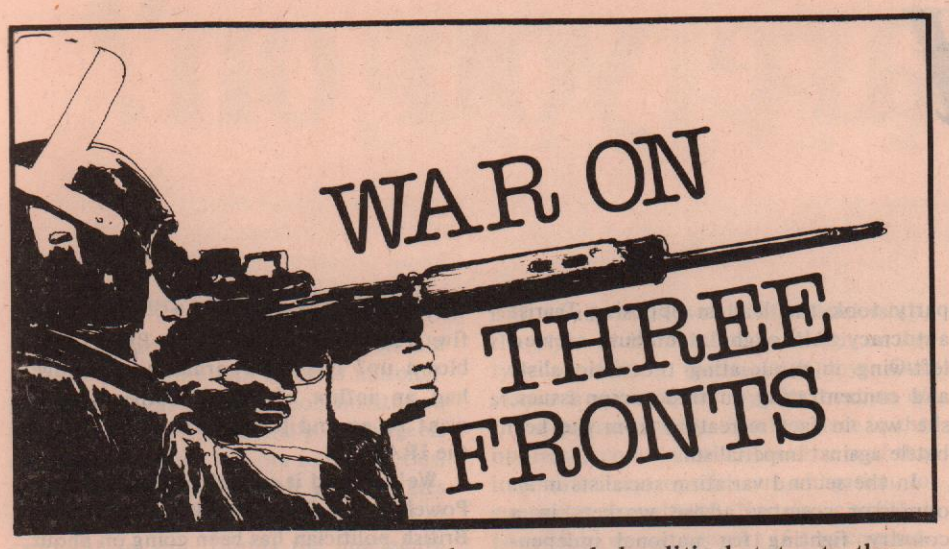
The left's inconsistent approach to national liberation movements reflects the political weakness of the British labour movement. The mortal danger the Irish War presents to British capitalism and the official labour movement's continued support for British rule make the Irish question the central question for British revolutionaries. On no other issue is a working class outlook – in support of the Irish people's fight for independence – so sharply counterposed to a bourgeois outlook. We have to persuade British workers that it is in their interests to give unconditional support to the Irish republican movement.

When we have won large numbers of British workers to respond to IRA bombs with jubilation, when explosions result in trade unionists calling for strike action and mass demonstrations to force the immediate withdrawal of British troops, *then* there will be a time to criticise the programme of Provisional Sinn Fein.

Mike Freeman



Britain's House of Commons goes up in smoke: left condem-tional liberation struggle reveals the political weakness of the



The British Government may not have conceded political status to the republican prisoners but neither has it won the war in Ireland. The republican movement still has considerable military potential and Britain still has no political solution. While Britain ponders its next move we look at how it fights the war – in the Six Counties, in the Irish Republic and in Britain.

'NOT A DRUM was heard, not a funeral note when Mr Humphrey Atkins conducted the burial of his Ulster initiative in the House of Commons on Thursday.' Thus commented *The Times* (29 November 1980) on the demise of the schemes for legislative assemblies, advisory assemblies and executives elected by proportional representation with which Britain had been trying to appease the Unionists and the Social Democratic and Labour Party in the Six Counties. Green Papers, White Papers and hundreds of hours of talks had all come to nought.

'But', *The Times* added quickly, 'that is not to say that Mr Atkins' long trail to the obvious was a waste of time'. No indeed. 'It has taken some of the external heat off the Government in its handling of the Ulster question.' In fact, as bourgeois commentators had observed six months previously, cooling things down was the whole point of Atkins' initiative in the first place. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had conducted the painstaking negotiations for two reasons. First, to show Britain's American and Continental critics that he was determined to find an 'amicable solution' to the 'Ulster conflict'. Second, to give the respectable nationalists of the SDLP in the North and of Fianna Fail in the South the feeling that their views were being taken into account.

The Times was happy. It knew all along that there was no alternative to Westminster fiat in the Six Counties. By the end of last year all it wanted was a clear statement of this: 'It would be better now if Ministers were to say that direct rule will be the means of governing Northern Ireland for the foreseeable future'. In the Six Counties that means war to the bitter end.

War as usual

Atkins' diplomacy provided a useful cover for the build-up of military repression in the Six Counties. Although 2000 British troops were withdrawn in 1980, the total numbers in the armed forces reached an all-time high of 31 500. Under the guise of 'Ulsterisation' – a policy, initiated by Labour Minister Roy Mason, of replacing British soldiers by local police – the total number of state functionaries bearing arms and imposing 'law and order' on the Catholic community has steadily increased. The ranks of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, always a sectarian paramilitary force, have doubled in the last decade, while the Ulster Defence Regiment (the reconstituted B-Specials), a Protestant militia, is now 8000 strong.

'Ulsterisation' was an attempt to make direct rule acceptable by enforcing it through the police and the courts. To do this the British had to make some pretence at cleaning up the 'security forces'. The aim was to give them an impartial image as keepers of the peace: but the record was not impressive. By 1978, 60 innocent civilians had been shot dead by British troops, but only 7 soldiers had ever been brought to trial – none of them had been convicted (R Fisk, 'The effect of social and political crime on the police and British army in Northern Ireland' in *International terrorism in the contemporary world*, London, 1978).

Still, in 1979 and 1980, a few RUC men were charged with offences arising from their out-of-hours terrorist activity; and in January of this year two Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were sent down for hacking a couple of farmworkers to death in a cowshed in rural Fermanagh. But the British press was sympathetic and their superior officer got off with a one year suspended sentence.

The slaughter however continues. Between March and August of last year army and police patrols in the Six Counties killed seven people. Since then a series of assassinations has taken place in circumstances that suggest the complicity – if not the direct participation – of the 'security forces'. John Turnly (leader of the Irish Independence Party), Miriam Daly (former leader of the Irish Republican Socialist Party), Ronnie Bunting and Noel Little (members of the IRSP and prominent campaigners for political status); all have been savagely murdered. Now Bernadette McAliskey and her husband have been seriously injured in an early morning raid.

Yet carnage like this is not enough to satisfy the British bourgeoisie. Alarmed at the recent withdrawal of a few hundred soldiers, William Deedes, editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, asked 'what sort of thinking lies behind moves to scale down the force which has stood in the way of civil war in the province'. His solution: bring back Roy Mason! For he 'took a truthfully pessimistic view, invested in a saturation force of troops and eschewed all talk of new political moves. The credit for the relative order in recent years belongs to him, to the troops he needed and to the measure of boring old certainty he created' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 20 December 1980).

True, Mason was a ruthless direct ruler. (Ulster Unionists have even offered him a safe seat should he be rejected by his Barnsley Constituency Labour Party in future!) But he isn't as daft as Deedes. He's always understood the need for 'political moves' alongside the strategy of coercion. *Protecting human rights in Northern Ireland*, a grotesquely titled pamphlet he published shortly before the end of his term of office, catalogues the moves he made while in power: the introduction of universal suffrage and proportional representation, legal curbs on discrimination, the setting up of a centralised housing agency and the establishment of the Police Authority. Britain needs to try and keep the natives happy as long as it's got the notorious Diplock Courts (impartial, just and totally non-political in Mason's book) and the hit squads of the SAS ready when they start proving troublesome.

Notwithstanding *The Daily Telegraph*, the British bourgeoisie still likes to suggest that there isn't a war on in Ireland – that the Six Counties are 'returning to normal'. But as Army chief Lieutenant General Sir Richard Adard told his troops at Christmas, 'normality is a delicate flower which must be carefully nurtured if it is to grow' (quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 December 1980). It's one thing to reassure the British public with a pamphlet; quite another to 'reassure' people in the ghettos of Derry and Belfast. They know that direct rule means a modern version of the rule Britain adopted almost a century ago to subdue the Boers: Rule '303' – the calibre of standard-issue bullets. It's not a rule conducive to growing flowers.

Anyway 'careful nurturing' costs money – and the British exchequer is on the verge of bankruptcy. Atkins admitted last December that the Six Counties costs the British Government 35 per cent more per head of population than Britain does. To stem the tide of anti-British resentment he desperately needs to do something about unemployment (now at rates of 20 per cent and higher), slum housing and grinding poverty. But he can't afford to – indeed he has to cut back on all but military expenditure. Once again 'Ulsterisation' and 'normalisation' have their limits.

Britain cannot withdraw from Ireland because of the danger to capitalist stability in the entire United Kingdom. Nor can it reform the Six Counties, especially at a time of world recession. That means business as usual – the war goes on.

Haughey turns up trumps

Britain has a real friend in Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Charles Haughey. In 1980 Britain's special relationship with the Irish Republic flourished under the diplomatic umbrella provided by Atkins' northern talks and the Thatcher-Haughey summit in Dublin last December.

London needs two things from Haughey. It needs a promise that he will do his best to isolate the republican movement in the north from popular support south of the border. And it needs the co-operation of the armed forces of the 'Free State' in suppressing the IRA militarily – ie north/south intelligence links, cross-border 'hot pursuit' arrangements, etc.

Haughey is happy to oblige. He too needs to contain republicanism. An upsurge of anti-imperialist sentiment would make Ireland a less attractive prospect for foreign investors. So Haughey refuses support for political status, works hand-in-glove with the British military and fights the IRA with gusto. (Irish security forces boasted several large arms finds in border areas last year.)

Haughey however has his own problems. Last year Ireland's short, shallow EEC-led boom came to an end. Now the ruling Fianna Fail party has to force through reductions in public spending, wage cuts, and preside over closures and redundancies. To retain popular support as it pushes austerity measures, Fianna Fail falls back on the time-honoured method of invoking its republican traditions. This, paradoxically, is where Atkins and Thatcher have skilfully lent a hand.

Early in 1980 at Fianna Fail's Ard Fheis (annual conference) Haughey reasserted his commitment to a united Ireland. Atkins' acknowledgement of an 'Irish dimension' at the launch of his northern talks in July and Thatcher's agreement in the December conference communiqué to discuss new 'institutional arrangements' between Ireland and Britain were important concessions to Haughey. He could offer them to the Irish people as positive proof that he was pushing forward to his party's goal. Britain had at least recognised that the Government of the Republic should have some say in the affairs of the Six Counties.

Haughey's fairly weak green card won him one trick: he successfully fought off a republican challenge in a by-election in Donegal. Now he's expected to opt for an early general election when the going is good. But with a major recession and more working class militancy ahead plus the continuation of war in the north, his long-term prospects are far from certain.

The home front

In the words of Sir John Hackett, author of *The Third World War* and ex-General Officer commanding British forces in Ireland, a 'hard military casing' has to be kept around the Six Counties to contain 'the explosive mixture within, a mixture which will continue to exist into the foreseeable future more or less as before' (quoted in *Hibernia*, 9 August 1979). Why? Because the mixture might escape to Britain. Britain's propaganda approach to the Irish War is designed to prevent this from happening by maximising the support of the public for British rule.

The Government's handling of the escape of republican Gerry Tuite from Brixton Prison just before Christmas shows how the ruling class can turn a threat to the state into a danger to society as a whole. Tuite's smoothly executed breakout was a setback to British prestige: but within hours the police struck back with a massive publicity campaign. 'Terrorist Alert' posters declaring 'This Man Must Be Caught' were distributed in tens of thousands. Video exposes were brought to Oxford Street Christmas shoppers. Newspapers, television channels and radio stations all joined the man-hunt. Yet they were not really out to get Tuite with this campaign. A 'master of disguises' we were told, he was unrecognisable from all the Identikit pictures. No, the object of the exercise was to whip up hostility towards Irish republicans at the peak of the hunger strike and consolidate public backing for the Government's intransigent stand against the demand for political status.

British propaganda carefully undermined every detail of the republican case in defence of political status. The Northern Ireland Office produced a pamphlet *H-Block – the facts* to rebut the claims made by the prisoners about conditions in Long Kesh. It details in glowing terms the facilities provided at 'the most luxurious jail in Europe' and argues against any political recognition of 'convicted criminals'.

During the hunger strike every newspaper published full profiles of the seven leading republican prisoners. Their alleged 'criminal' and 'terrorist' offences were recounted at length, their demands for political status dismissed in a sentence. While workers bought these papers by the million, not a single Labour MP or trade union leader came out unequivocally in support of political status.

Socialists in Britain have to fight the Irish War on the home front. The position of the leadership of the labour movement shows where the first battle line is drawn. The offensive opens on 14 March in Coventry.

Phil Murphy

Women's rights

A decade of paper equality

THE FIRST LEGISLATION 'guaranteeing' equality for women – the Equal Pay Act – was introduced more than 10 years ago. Yet today women are just as oppressed as they were in 1970. The crisis has forced the ruling class to launch a full-scale political offensive against women. The more unemployment rises the more women are depicted as a superfluous section of the labour force. Though more than half of all married women in Britain go out to work for a living, Thatcher has gone on record as saying that they should be providing 'warmth and welcome for the family' instead of having a job; that they 'shouldn't leave their children to go home from school to an empty house'. In this article we look at the present attacks on women's rights and indicate how workers should respond.

Women's work

Statutes making equal pay and sex discrimination illegal have not got women out of their subordinate role in social production. Wage differentials between men and women, for instance, are on the increase: from a peak of 76 per cent in 1977, women's average hourly earnings as a proportion of men's have fallen to 73 per cent in 1979 (Equal Opportunities Commission, *Fourth annual report*, 1979). It's the same story on jobs. Women continue to occupy low paid and unskilled posts. Nearly half of all women workers have jobs men wouldn't touch. On the other hand, the bosses admit that, on principle, they turn women down flat for a fifth of the employment available. And they also concede that they'd think twice about taking women on for another third of the positions on offer (Department of Employment, *Gazette*, November 1980).

Legislation hasn't stopped redundancies among women multiplying much faster than among men. Between 1975 and 1980 the number of registered unemployed male workers increased by 59 per cent; the number of registered unemployed female workers, by 223 per cent. In 1975 only one person in five signing on for the dole was a woman; by last year it was one in three (*The Times*, 20 November 1980). The well-known fact that hundreds of thousands of women simply don't bother to apply for unemployment benefit makes the true proportion even higher.

Laws or no laws, the capitalist class wants women back in the home. That way pressure on the labour market can be reduced and families looked after for free, instead of at the expense of the Exchequer. And, as if that isn't enough, the bourgeoisie wants to cut the meagre support that pregnant women and mothers of young children get from the state. A new Green Paper titled *Income during initial sickness – a new strategy* has proposed major reductions in maternity pay, while childcare facilities are being dismantled everywhere: in Lancashire, for instance, six new nursery schools have been built but will not be opened, and in Oxfordshire 12 nursery schools and 16 nursery classes may close.

No parliamentary road to equality

Even on its own terms, equal rights legislation offers women nothing. The Equal Pay Act proved incapable of preventing the deterioration of women's position in society. Between 1976 and 1979 the number of cases brought up under it fell from about 1750 to about 250. Of the latter, only 78 were heard by industrial tribunals and of those, in turn, only 13 were concluded in favour of the applicant (*IRRR* July 1980). *Thirteen* women workers out of *millions* of women workers get a rise – that's the kind of 'equality' the EPA affords! A look at one of the claims that failed shows why women are reluctant to pursue complaints under the EPA. In 1979 a Mrs Jenkins, a part-time worker, took her employers Kingsgate Clothing Productions to court. She argued she should receive the same basic hourly rate of pay as her male colleagues. The company admitted that she did the same work as its men, but contended that because, unlike them, she worked part-time, there was a 'material difference other than the difference of sex' between her and the rest of the workforce. This was enough for the authorities to find in favour of the employer and thus establish an important precedent (Equal Opportunities Commission, *Fourth annual report*, 1979). Today the EPA does not apply to hundreds of thousands of women in part-time work.



Sheila Marson, Secretary of Chelsea Football Club is one of only four women football club secretaries. The others are at Bristol Rovers, Crewe Alexandra and Scunthorpe United.

from *Breakthrough*, the EOC's latest brochure

'It shows that women can do just as well as men' commented *Socialist Worker*.

Women get this sort of treatment not because of bad laws, but because of the basic structure of capitalist society. Capitalism cannot survive without the existence of domestic work: cooking, cleaning, the rearing of children, looking after the old and the general maintenance of the working class. All these functions are vital to the continued accumulation of capital. They are performed, however, outside the accumulation process. Women perform them in the family, outside social production. Capitalism condemns women to servitude in the home. It is this, the fact that women are *forced by the system* to work away at home, that ensures that they are particularly oppressed when they venture out to work.

Even during periods of economic expansion such as the 'sixties women remained tied to the home. Today, when capitalism is fighting for its very life, women face more of a struggle than ever to overcome the stultifying effects of confinement at home. That struggle will not be won by passing acts through Parliament. It can only be won by destroying the whole fabric of capitalist social relations. That's why a consistent struggle for women's rights has to be anti-capitalist in character.

The significance of women's rights

The present assault on women's rights is also an assault on the working class. The bourgeoisie doesn't simply drive down women's living standards – it also politically isolates women from the labour movement. Tied up at home, cut off from other women and workers, housewives are forced to rely on their family rather than on the social power of the working class. Inevitably they become vulnerable to the ideological overtures of the employers. In recent years media appeals to housewives to urge their husbands not to strike have often been successful.

The labour movement has made things worse for women. The trade unions have seen blows against women as unconnected with broader moves to drive back the working class. Even militant workers often accept the inferior status of women as natural, and many have turned a blind eye to female redundancies. As for the more backward sections of the labour movement, they see women as competitors for a decreasing number of jobs.

The division of the working class along sexual lines benefits only the bosses. It is for this reason that active workers *must* combat the oppression of women, not as an optional extra, not out of any liberal sense of sympathy, but as a pressing political task. A working class unable to resist the oppression of *any* section of society will stay the spiritual slave of the bosses. Freedom and equality are not divisible – if denied to women workers, they will be denied to male workers too.

The battle for women's equality will broaden workers' political outlook and strengthen the struggle for communism. The inferior position of women is natural only from the point of view of the ruling class. For us it is as natural as racism, unemployment, cuts in social services and Britain's domination of Ireland. The fight for women's rights is thus a fight for a proletarian point of view. But it has a practical importance as well. Every step along the road to working class power depends on bringing more and more women into social and political life and reducing the divisive influence of the bosses over the labour movement.

What next?

The left separates opposition to women's oppression from the struggle against capitalism. A reformist political approach pervades much of the radical left and 'the women's movement'. Most feminists share the outlook of the liberal wing of the ruling class. Campaigns against pornography converge with the puritanical message of Mary Whitehouse and endow bourgeois censorship with legitimacy. Campaigns against violence against women fuse with the 'law and order' hysteria of the press. Instead of attempting to mobilise the power of the working class, the feminists place their hopes in the machinery of the bourgeois state.

The left is largely to blame for the right-wing shift of the women's movement. The left plays only lip-service to women's rights, organising occasional academic debates and patronising women-only group discussions. But in the unions it puts the question diplomatically aside. Sometimes left-wingers exhort women to join unions; but they rarely stretch to exhorting unions to defend women.

During the 1980 steel strike the RCT was the only organisation to challenge backward attitudes towards women on the picket lines. We pointed out that contempt for women workers only helps the bosses. The rest of the left? It ignored the problem and concentrated on shouting 'Maggie Maggie Maggie' instead. For us this is unacceptable. It is precisely in the labour movement that the battle for women's rights must be won. Chauvinist perceptions of women unite shop steward with employer: they must be destroyed. Active workers should take a lead now and start to clear away all the obstacles to drawing women fully into social and political life.

Denise Taylor

Reclaiming the night

No way to combat violence

Nothing reveals the barbarism of bourgeois society better than the prevalence of violent crimes against women. Beating and battering, sexual harasssment and rape are endemic in Britain today. But is 'reclaiming the night' the answer?

The January issue of the SWP's feminist paper *Women's Voice* says 'we should support and organise demonstrations to 'reclaim the night' '. We don't agree. Marches through 'red-light' areas only provoke more police harassment of prostitutes and local residents. Protests against strip-clubs and pornography only add to the clamour of right-wing politicians, policemen and priests demanding tighter government restrictions on publications they consider offensive. No doubt *Women's Voice* and *the next step* would soon follow *Playboy* and *Penthouse*.

***Women's Voice* acknowledges that this is a problem. So it concludes that 'the real roots of the violence are in the way women and men relate to each other, and only a change of the sort of world we live in will change that'. In fact the real roots of today's violence against women lie in capitalist social relations, not in personal relations – but we can agree on the need to change the world we live in. The only force in society that can destroy capitalist social relations is the working class. But the working class is conspicuously absent from the radical left's 'reclaim the night' approach to dealing with violence against women.**

Encouraging women to 'learn self-defence' as *Women's Voice* also suggests, or, worse, inviting the state to 'defend' them, relieves the labour movement of its responsibility to fight for women's rights. 'Reclaiming the night' is no answer to the immediate problem of violence and it is entirely unconnected to our goal of overthrowing capitalism. Challenging chauvinist attitudes to women among workers and pressing the labour movement to defend women – this is the only way to combat sexual violence. And it also takes a step on the way towards changing the world we live in.

SERIES



MacDonald's defection to join the National Government was the logical consequence of the politics of Labourism.

THE WAR AND THE WORKING CLASS

The 1929 Labour Government proved that the Labour Party was prepared to attack the working class with a ferocity that put the Tories to shame. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and Chancellor of the Exchequer Snowden the Cabinet carried out all the measures necessary for the survival of capitalism, no matter what the cost for the working class. The blows directed at the labour movement culminated in the announcement in July 1931 of a £97 million cut in public spending – two thirds of which was to come from a 20 per cent reduction in unemployment benefit. In addition, higher insurance contributions and a more stringent means test were to be introduced.

The rest of the Labour Party leadership and the TUC dared not go along with MacDonald. Support for such drastic measures would have meant cutting off all links with the working class. Once MacDonald lost the support of his own party he was forced to resign. Together with Snowden and Thomas, he left the Labour Party to take up office in the newly formed National Government – a coalition with Liberals and Tories. In the October 1931 elections the National Government won a landslide victory and Labour went down to ignominious defeat.

MacDonald's betrayal severely undermined the influence of the Labour Party in the working class. Although few understood that MacDonald's betrayal was a logical consequence of the Labour Party's programme, there was great pressure on the party to revolutionise its programme. In Part Three of our series we examine the steps that Labour took to modify its programme, reorganise a working relationship between its left and right wings and re-establish its lost influence over the working class. We also look at the Independent Labour Party's split from the Labour Party in 1932 and the subsequent disintegration of this left-wing organisation.



The Labour Party in the depression

Slump socialism

THE FORMATION of the National Government purged the Labour Party of its most right-wing leaders. Arthur Henderson now took over the leadership of the party. As one commentator put it: 'Henderson saved the soul of the Labour Party, while MacDonald saved the nation' (J Strachey, *The coming struggle for power*, 1932). However the departure of the party's most prominent statesmen and the disastrous defeat in the 1931 election created confusion and demoralisation in the ranks of Labour.

Face left

The left seized the initiative. The climate of disillusionment gave it the opportunity to reaffirm the validity of the state socialist ideals which had been shamefacedly betrayed. The left – in the form of the Independent Labour Party and later the Socialist League – became a powerful pressure group and policy 'think tank' inside the Labour Party.

The Labour Party needed a new programme and a new identity. Left-wing leader Stafford Cripps declared that it was 'absolutely necessary to throw off once and for all the attitude of compromise. . .and come out boldly with a slap up Socialist policy for dealing with the whole industrial and financial situation' (C Cooke, *The life of Richard Stafford Cripps*, 1957). By late 1931 Henderson had devised a new 'constructive programme' – a programme of anti-crisis socialism. It included the abandonment of MacDonald's austerity measures, public ownership of finance and banking, price control and 'permanent machinery to prevent profiteering' (A Henderson, *Labour and the crisis*, 1931). By adopting a state-socialist strategy Labour was attempting to restore its electoral popularity with the working class.

Growing support for state-socialist policies in the constituencies led to major victories for the left at party conferences in the early 'thirties. The 1932 Labour Party Conference committed the next Labour government to abolishing the House of Lords and the introduction of 'great socialist measures' without delay. Delegates denounced gradualism, demanded 'emergency programmes' and 'immediate socialism'. Calls for state intervention and planning in the interests of working people carried the day.

While Labour's left dreamed and schemed for a socialist future the party leaders kept their feet firmly on the ground in the capitalist present.

Labour's 1934 programme *For socialism and peace* reflected the pressure for radical action. It included plans for a National Health Service and extensive reforms in housing and education. Solutions to the problems of the economy centred on proposals for state control of banking investment and prices.

Capitalist realism

The left's reforming zeal suited the new party leaders: they gave it wide scope. Henderson and Lansbury appreciated that the legacy of MacDonald could only be lived down by giving free rein to radical rhetoric. The left's state-socialist policies were exactly what was required to consolidate Labour's working class base. The result was that the Labour Party recovered fairly rapidly from the 1931 debacle: it was rejuvenated around a radical programme. The new leadership was happy to endorse this programme – it was in no danger of being obliged to put it into practice.

Capitalist realism dictated the practice of the Labour Party throughout the 'thirties. While the working class was subjected to an onslaught on living standards and political rights, the Labour Party stood idly by and encouraged workers to place their hope in a future Labour government. The Labour Party did not lift a finger to assist the unemployed in their struggle against the Means Test. Indeed it actively discouraged constituency parties from assisting demonstrations of the unemployed.

In 1934 the Labour Party approved the Baldwin Government's new Unemployed Assistance Board Act, which was portrayed as a reform of unemployment relief. In fact this Act meant a reduction in unemployment payments for 48 per cent of claimants (Miller, *The British unemployment assistance crisis of 1935*). But it was only after mass protest marches and occupations of local employment exchanges that the leadership of the Labour Party began to move. In January 1935 it issued an 'Appeal to the National Conscience' jointly with the TUC, calling the Act, 'a blot on our national reputation' which 'men and women of good will should be anxious to remove'. The appeal included a call for higher allowances but it did not demand the abolition of the Means Test. By this time even the Tory Government had realised that the cuts had been administered too harshly and concessions to the unemployed were necessary for the preservation of social stability.

State socialism

The Labour left presented state socialism as a progressive alternative to the betrayals of MacDonald. But what kind of alternative was it?

The left wing could not make a *fundamental* critique of MacDonald. Indeed, it saw his policies as an aberration from the tradition of the Labour Party rather than as a *consequence of Labourism in action*. The left fully shared the premises of reformism and only objected to the reactionary outcome of Labour's programme. As a result the left criticised not reformism in itself, but the lack of drive, the vacillation and the compromises of the MacDonald Government.

State-socialist policies were far from progressive. They looked to the state and not the class struggle to bring about reforms. For the left wing the role of the working class was to put pressure on the state to implement socialist reforms. The left's programme assumed that the capitalist state could be forced to act in the interests of the working class. The state socialists thought that reforms implemented by a progressive Labour government could solve the economic crisis and then legislate socialism into existence. In fact what the Labour left had in mind was not socialism but increased state intervention in the economy and a fairer distribution of wealth. Yet even this was illusory. Capitalism in crisis could not be 'fair'; it required ever-increasing attacks on the living standards of the working class.

Labour's 1934 programme did not even question the capitalist system of production. The system of production which depended on the exploitation of the working class was not to be destroyed but reformed.

Whereas for revolutionaries the capitalist crisis showed the need to smash the system to defend the interests of the working class, for the state socialists the crisis *was something to be overcome* through progressive policies. And it was precisely here, in their basic approach to the crisis, that the politics of the left converged with those of the right wing of the party. The starting point of both was the need to solve the crisis to regenerate

British industry and restore prosperity.

Practical socialism

The Labour leadership had only contempt for the utopian policies of the left wing. They were practical men who knew that the survival of capitalism required measures which were often unpleasant for the working class. In the 'thirties they systematised their economic policy into what they called 'practical socialism' – a programme of reforms designed to rationalise production through state intervention, reflation and the introduction of new technology.

The only difference between the programme of the left and the right was one of emphasis. Both were committed to saving British industry – the question was how. While the party leadership drew out the harsh consequences of its reformist policies, the left wing could not face the bitter truth. The ILP and the Socialist League continued to peddle the myth that the position of the working class could be improved in the process of solving the crisis.

The arguments of the right wing won through because its policies were more consistent with reality. The policies of the left lacked conviction, especially when every measure required to restore capitalist profitability demanded more sacrifices from the labour movement. In the end a compromise was reached: the Labour Party would pursue its practical socialism but from time to time it would adopt some of the more palatable state socialist policies.

Labour's immediate programme for 1937 represented the victory of practical socialism over left-wing fantasies. The programme made good sense from a capitalist point of view. The Labour Party, it argued, was 'determined to use the resources of our country so as to create a real prosperity in which we all share. Science has placed in our hands the means of attaining this but only if finance and trade, industry and agriculture conform to a national plan under the guidance of the state' (*Annual Conference Report*, 1937).

By the late 'thirties little remained of the indignation and anger provoked by MacDonald's betrayal. The watchwords now were 'science' and a 'national plan'; not 'bold socialist policies' but Keynesian demand management.

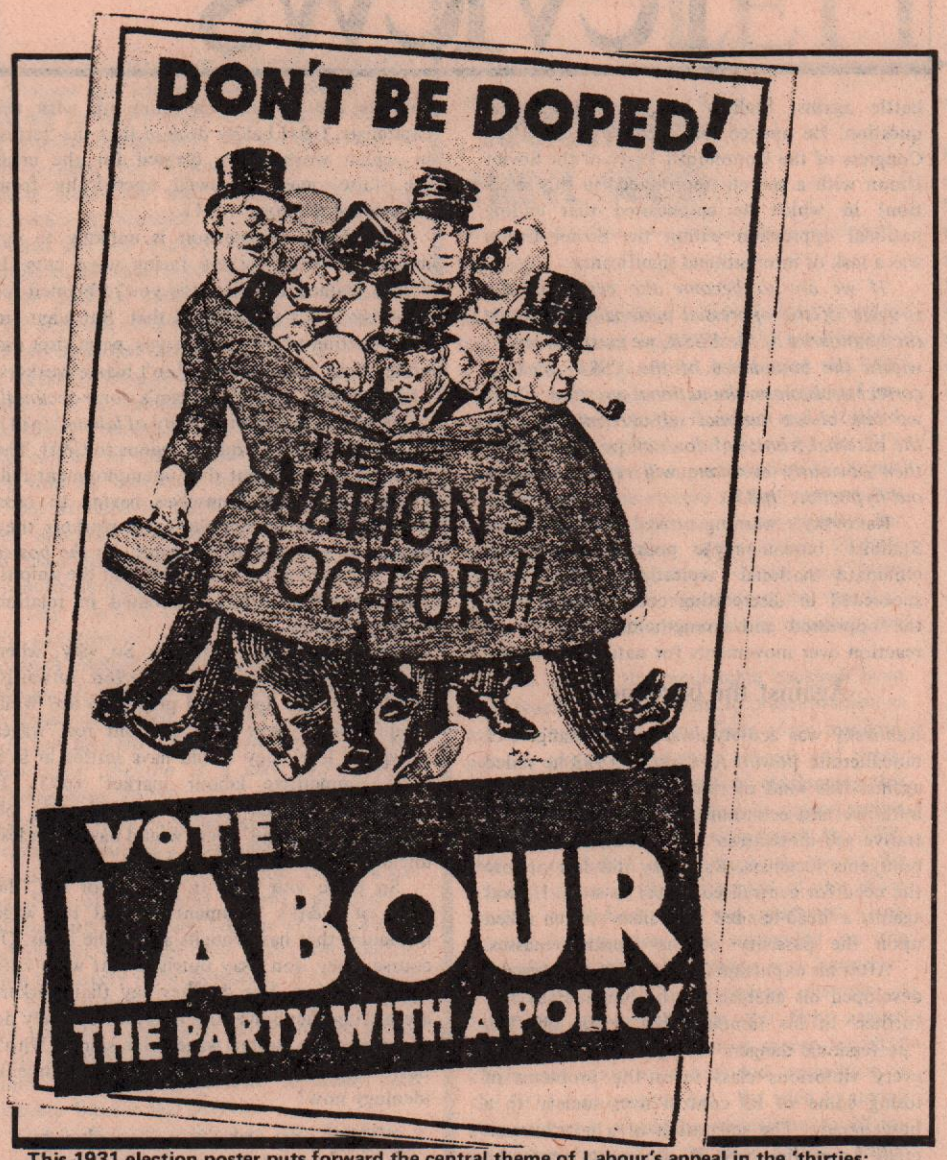
Now is not the time

By the mid 'thirties the Socialist League faced an identity crisis. The Labour left was unable to play a distinctive role in the class struggle. Indeed, apart from its fiery Marxist rhetoric there was little to distinguish the Socialist League from the party leadership. It was never able to challenge the capitalist rationality of the Labour leadership because it lacked political independence from the party chiefs.

The persistence of the crisis and the intensification of imperialist rivalries forced the left to become even more realistic. The more capitalism was threatened the more it was prepared to sacrifice the interests of workers for the survival of the 'nation'. By 1938 many on the left were prepared to postpone the goal of socialism to the indefinite future.

The more the left became irrelevant to the class struggle in Britain, the more it concentrated on international issues: Abyssinia, Spain, Germany. Overseas affairs were clearly important, but the Socialist League approached them not from the standpoint of the working class but from that of a British democrat threatened by fascism. On New Year's Day 1937 the lefts launched *Tribune* in the cause of building anti-fascist unity. The struggle against British capitalism was put on ice – saving bourgeois democracy became the left's main preoccupation.

Radical nationalism was the dominant



This 1931 election poster puts forward the central theme of Labour's appeal in the 'thirties: it was 'the party with a policy' to cope with the crisis. It fell on deaf ears, until the war loomed. . .

theme in the left's international solidarity work. In October 1938 the National Council of Labour attacked Tory leader Chamberlain as a traitor to the national interest:

> 'Aided and abetted by Hitler he has actively intervened in Spain to ensure victory for Franco and thus establish a new threat to the Empire life-line through the Mediterranean. . . . Violent wireless propaganda has been carried on vilifying Great Britain and seeking to undermine British influence, authority and security in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. . . .' (*Save peace – save Democracy – save Britain*, leaflet, 1938)

Support for the 'Empire' and 'British influence' moderated the left's stance in relation to the class struggle. All classes now had to make sacrifices to defend British interests. Once the chauvinist content of state socialism triumphed the left and the right could unite under the banner of 'Peace, democracy and Britain'.

It was a united Labour Party which faced up to the challenge of Britain's imperialist rivals. Its call for 'a progressive peace alliance' against Hitler was in fact a call for another war between Britain and Germany. A 1938 Labour Party leaflet put it with undisguised bluntness:

> 'YOU CAN GET PEACE BY COOPERATION. . .
> YOU CAN GET PEACE BY FAIR DISTRIBUTION
> "Give" our Crown Colonies away? – for the raising of huge native armies? No. Labour will entrust all suitable native territories to International Mandate – ensuring a fairer distribution of the raw materials all need. YOU CAN GET PEACE IF YOU WANT IT. By saying, as we and others have always said: "What we have we hold – take it if you can". Not by feebly giving away every time someone points a gun. . .' (*Labour's Path to Peace*, 1938)

By 1938 all talk of bold socialist manifestos was forgotten as the two wings of the party settled down to solve the crisis in the only way possible. MacDonald had the last laugh.

Only one Labour Party

Relations between the two wings of the Labour Party were not always fraternal. Heated words were exchanged at conferences, and on several occasions left wingers like Nye Bevan were expelled for breaking party discipline. In the end however the damage was not irreparable and most of those expelled were eventually readmitted to membership.

Behind the acrimonious debates lay the different pressures exerted on the left and the right. The party leadership had to ensure that the Labour Party was a credible political force capable of running British capitalism. For this reason the party's policies had to appeal to the middle class and not threaten the capitalist class. But to become a party of government the Labour Party needed to be more than just another bourgeois party. It had to demonstrate its ability to mobilise the working class and win its acquiescence to the measures necessary for the regeneration of capitalism.

The practical socialism of the Labour leadership could not whip up mass enthusiasm in the labour movement. This is where the left wing came into its own. The radical rhetoric of the Socialist League and *Tribune* was directed at the working class. The very existence of a radical left wing held out the promise that sometime in the future a Labour Government could transform society in favour of the working class.

Thus a clear division of labour developed between the left and right wing. The role of the left was to relate to working class aspirations and guarantee the continued support of the labour movement. The brief of the right wing was to establish the Labour Party's credibility as a party of the nation, one that could be relied on to look after the capitalist system.

At the end of the day left and right were part of the same team. The Second World War united the party as never before: with the survival of British imperialism at stake now was not the time to push the needs of the working class.

Sabena Norton

During the 'thirties and the Second World War the British labour movement was tamed and then integrated into capitalist society. The legacy of this experience still haunts the working class today. Shortly after the Second World War *The Times* could boast: 'the long and painful transition from barricades to the board-room has at length been accomplished, and today the TUC exerts its influence not so much through strikes and demonstrations, as through reasoned arguments before an independent arbitrator or an industrial court – or in the Cabinet Room. It is a far cry from Tolpuddle to Transport House. . .' (2 November 1946). In future issues of *the next step* we continue to analyse the experience of the working class in this period.

The ILP

Poor man's labour party

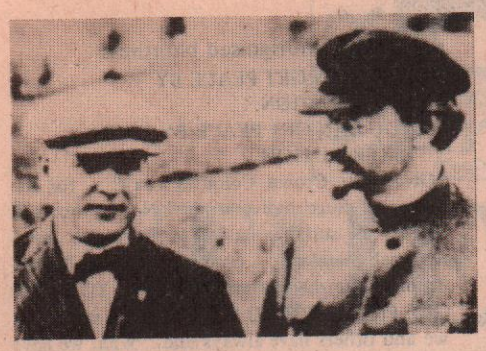
The ILP was never able to offer an alternative to the Labour Party. The reason for its decline and subsequent disintegration lay in its programme.

The ILP's break with the Labour Party expressed the disgust of militant workers with the betrayals of the Labour leadership. What distinguished the ILP from the Labour Party above all was its commitment to working class militancy. It championed the organisational independence of the working class and fought for 'direct action' in contrast to the moderation of the Labour leadership. Its militant outlook made the ILP into a pole of attraction for a small number of revolutionary workers.

However the ILP could never transform itself into a revolutionary force because it had only an *organisational*, and not a *political* independence from Labour. The ILP programme was state socialist to the core, anticipating the Left Alternative Strategies of today. ILP Member of Parliament H N Brailsford described this perspective as the 'advance through prosperity to socialism'. Like all reformist programmes the ILP wanted to ensure that prosperity should precede socialism. The classical reformist division between reforming the capitalist state now to prepare for socialism in the future ran through the ILP's politics.

The programme of the ILP was certainly more radical than that of the Labour Party. But it was no more than that. Its main appeal to militant workers was its insistence that the Labour Party had to be transformed by mass pressure. Its role throughout the 'thirties was to canvass support for the return of a 'socialist' Labour government on a platform of radical reform. In this way the ILP acted as the militant left face of reformism. Its lack of political independence ensured that it could not survive as an indepedent organisation. By the late 'thirties it was a spent force. Given a choice between two Labour parties the working class opted for the genuine article and the ILP went into oblivion (its remnants rejoined the Labour Party in 1973!).

reviews



After October

Review: **Christian Rakovsky**, *Selected writings on Opposition in the USSR, 1923-30*, Allison & Busby, 1980, pbk £4.95, 189pp.

THE STALINIST bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is the best argument politicians like Reagan and Thatcher have against communism. How was the Russian Revolution transformed into a system of bureaucratic oppression? The rise of the Soviet bureaucracy, the fusion of the Bolshevik Party and the state, and the defeat of the revolutionary wing of the Bolsheviks are well described in the works of Leon Trotsky. But the writings of Christian Rakovsky, an important member of Trotsky's Left Opposition to Stalin, also document the struggle against the bureaucratisation of the Soviet regime with considerable insight.

Christian Rakovsky represented the finest traditions of the international working class: this English language selection of his writings is very welcome. A Bulgarian by birth, Rakovsky fought for socialism throughout the Balkans and was active in the socialist movements of numerous countries, becoming a leader of the Rumanian Socialist Party. By 1914 he had become renowned for his anti-militarism, a stance that he maintained throughout the First World War in his campaign against the opportunism of the Second International.

Rakovsky joined the Bolshevik Party in 1918, was made leader of the Ukrainian Provisional Government, and went on to become a founder member of the Communist International. From 1923 to 1927 he became the Soviet Union's most successful diplomat in Western Europe, pulling off dramatic coups in negotiations with the imperialist powers and extending the influence of the Russian Revolution everywhere he went. In political terms, however, his most important contribution was as a leader of the Bolshevik Left Opposition.

Rakovsky was one of the first to begin the struggle against the growth of bureaucratic tendencies in the Soviet Union and remained the bureaucracy's steadfast enemy all through the 'twenties. After Trotsky's exile in January 1929 he became the dominant figure in the Left Opposition. Rakovsky held out against intolerable conditions imposed upon him by Stalin's dictatorship until, in 1934, he capitulated to bureaucratic pressures. But, unlike others forced into the same position, Rakovsky refused to recant on his past ideas. In 1937 he was arrested and dealt with in the way Stalin knew best: absurdly slandered, given a show-trial, sentenced and, on 22 June 1941, shot.

Internationalism starts at home

From 1920 onwards, Rakovsky fought against those in the Soviet government who failed to rectify the past oppression of Georgians, Ukrainians, Estonians and other nationalities by Russia. Today we can still see the importance of this issue. The policies of Brezhnev & Co continually exacerbate nationalist tendencies inside the Soviet Union. Indeed, fear of unrest among the USSR's Moslem population was one of the factors that led the Kremlin to invade Afghanistan.

Lenin was sensitive to the rights of national minorities. But by 1922 many leading Bolsheviks – in particular Stalin, Ordzhonikidze and Dzerzhinsky – were of the view that national divisions could be dealt with by purely administrative measures. Instead of leading a struggle against national oppression, they felt they could trample on national rights.

The new government stood in danger of continuing the policies of the Tsarist regime. Before his death, Lenin became aware of the problem and argued: 'It is better to overdo rather than underdo the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities' (*Question of nationalities or 'autonomisation'*, 1922). Lenin's last testament contained a plea to correct the policy towards the non-Russian nationalities, as well as a condemnation of the chauvinist attitudes displayed by Stalin and his allies.

After Lenin died Rakovsky took up the battle against Stalin's line on the national question. He opened his offensive at the 1923 Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with a speech (reproduced in this selection) in which he emphasised that ending national oppression within the Soviet Union was a task of international significance:

'If we are to become the centre of the struggle of the oppressed nationalities outside the boundaries of the USSR, we must internally, within the boundaries of the USSR, make a correct decision on the national question. For if we talk about national self-determination on the external front, but don't allow it internally, then obviously everyone will reproach us for our hypocrisy.' (p85)

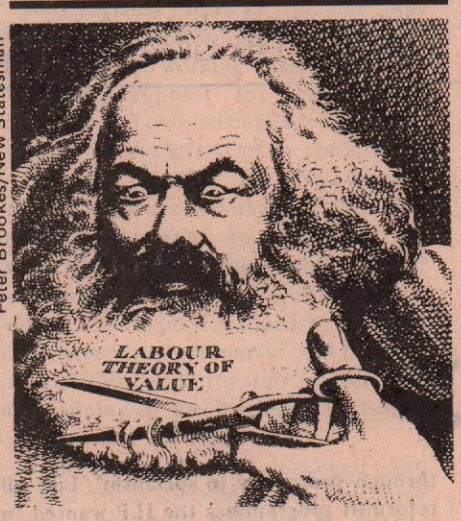
Rakovsky's warning proved prophetic. The Stalinist bureaucracy's policies could not eliminate national aspirations; they only succeeded in discrediting communism among the oppressed and strengthening the grip of reaction over movements for national freedom.

Against the bureaucracy

Rakovsky was acutely aware of the dangers of bureaucratic power. As early as 1923 he railed against this kind of rule as 'the destruction of initiative and economic, political and administrative self-motivation' (p99). Unlike the petit-bourgeois socialists, Rakovsky did not oppose the need for centralised power as such. He was against a 'dead-handed centralism' which relied upon the passivity of the working masses.

After his expulsion from the CPSU Rakovsky developed his analysis of the bureaucracy still further. In his famous 1929 article on 'The "professional dangers" of power', he noted that every victorious class faces the problems of losing some of its control over society to a bureaucracy. The separation of a new bureaucracy from the class it represents starts, he contended, as a functional, adminstrative one, but 'later becomes a social one'. Rakovsky said that unless the proletariat was vigilant and continually ready to challenge the bureaucracy, it would lose its power as a class.

The central importance of Rakovsky's writings lies in the stress he placed on the need to pursue the class struggle after the revolution. He did not give up and write obituaries for the Russian Revolution as did many others. On the contrary he outlined the way to reverse the bureaucratisation of Soviet society. In the end the Stalinist bureaucracy destroyed him. But in his writings the spirit of Bolshevism lives on.



Peter Brookes/New Statesman

Another British Economic Disaster

Review: **Andrew Glyn & John Harrison**, *The British economic disaster*, Pluto Press, 1980, pbk £2.95.

MESSRS GLYN and Harrison have written a book that will serve their colleagues in the Militant tendency well. *Disaster* re-interprets Marx to give the Labour left's programme of economic reforms a theoretical underpinning.

They say you started it

Why is capitalism in crisis? Glyn and Harrison's position is simple: trade union militancy has pushed up real wages, higher wages have squeezed company profitability, and lower profitability has brought investment to a halt. At bottom, therefore, *wage rises* have caused the crisis.

G&H know that there are dangerous political consequences to this line of thinking. *Disaster* recognises that it was because they accepted bourgeois tirades against 'excessive' wage increases that the trade unions supported Labour's Social Contract in 1975 (p109). So, anxious not to be seen lining up with the capitalists, G&H baldly declare that the 'terms' in which workers are blamed for the crisis are 'false ones, borrowed uncritically from ruling class ideology' (p51).

This kind of assertion is unlikely to cut much ice with workers facing wage cuts. If you're blamed for the crisis you're blamed for the crisis – it's as simple as that. But what are G&H getting at? They say: yes, wage rises did bring about the crisis, but don't blame workers. The problem was capitalism's *'over-accumulation in relation to the supply of labour'* (p11).

Eh? Well, it's all quite obvious to G&H. The post-war boom meant that unemployment fell. Employers found themselves having to raise wage levels to attract the extra workers they needed as labour became scarce. So *the bosses* were responsible for wage rises, not the unions. The capitalists. . .overaccumulated in relation to the supply of labour.

An interesting hypothesis. So why, when unemployment soared from 1966 onwards, didn't wages go down and profits go up? Well, 'trade unions were able to hold real wages above the level they would have settled at in a fully competitive labour market' (p55). If wages had adjusted 'to the level balancing job supply and demand' there would have been less unemployment and higher profits.

So there you have it. Like it or not, the logic of G&H's argument is that it's wage militancy that has brought about the crisis. Of course, they don't say outright that wage rises cause inflation. Nor do they say that workers are pricing themselves out of a job. But they do go on about a 'severe wage/price spiral'. Who's borrowing terms uncritically from bourgeois ideology now?

They say robots come cheap

What happened in post-war Britain was this. The boom did indeed ensure that unemployment fell. Low unemployment and tight trade union organisation did help increase wages. But workers wound up more exploited, despite being paid higher wages: the wage rises that the bosses granted were nothing compared to the increases in productivity the unions agreed to make in return. *Yet it was these increases in productivity which led to lower profitability.*

The drive for higher profits forces capitalists to raise productivity by automating production. Now, though productivity is temporarily to the advantage of every individual capitalist, it leads to a general increase in the means of production (plant, machinery, raw materials) that each employee works with. In other words, what Marx called the *organic composition of capital* rises. Each worker churns out more suplus-value than before, but the extra surplus-value is measured over a still greater increase in the value of means of production. So the rate of profit tends to fall – for reasons that have nothing to do with the working class, but everything to do with the capitalist system of production. The crisis occurs because profits, in relation to the capital invested, become inadequate for the continued expansion of production. There is an over-accumulation of means of production in relation to the surplus-value capitalists can extract from the working class.

G&H know that productivity increases. But, like all radical left 'economics experts', they're intent on showing that it was workers who brought the rate of profit down, not capital itself. They don't agree with Marx that the organic composition of capital tends to rise. They claim that because higher productivity lowers the value of commodities, the greater *quantity* of means of production that a worker works with tomorrow can be *worth less* than the smaller quantity of means of production he works with today. G&H even fish out figures to show that, for most advanced capitalist countries, productivity growth has led to a *fall* in the 'value of capital per worker' (see p176).

But their figures are very dubious. Even their authority noted the 'great number of difficulties, both practical and theoretical' in estimating capital stock levels (A Boltho, *Japan: an economic survey*, 1975). And this was before G&H played around with the numbers to reach their conclusions! At least G&H could have noted the results of other studies. *The Economist*, for example, found that 'over the past 20 years or so there has been a steady shift from labour to capital in the ratio of industrial inputs. . .' (25 August 1979). In other words, the organic composition of capital has gone up.

It's difficult to resolve these problems empirically. That's why it's important to understand Marx's theory of capital accumulation. Of course increases in productivity do cheapen the value of means of production. But, relative to the value of the labour-power employed, this value must still rise. When productivity increases, Marx explained, 'what becomes cheaper is the individual machine and its component parts'. But at the same time

'a system of machinery develops; the tool is not simply replaced by a single machine, but by a whole system. . . .Despite the cheapening of individual elements, the price of the whole aggregate increases enormously. . . .It is therefore self-evident or a tautological proposition that the increasing productivity of labour caused by machinery corresponds to increased value of the machinery relative to the amount of labour employed. . . .' (*Theories of surplus-value*, volume 3, pp366-67)

So it *is* increases in productivity that drive profit rates down. G&H's infatuation with 'labour supplies' leads them to ignore the fact that, with an increasing organic composition of capital, accumulation itself necessarily produces a reserve army of unemployed. The authors' ignorance of the process of capitalist production allows them to believe that lower wages and a 'fully competitive labour market' would reduce unemployment.

They say reforms will do

G&H believe that the crisis originates in workers' wage packets, not in capital accumulation. In this way they side with the bourgeoisie. But they do have a difference with the bosses: they think workers should keep up the pressure and shouldn't make sacrifices to shore up the system.

In G&H's view, the working class should not only push for bigger wages, but for a *bigger share* of everything – political power included. The same approach which makes them focus on the labour market and the distribution of income contaminates their politics too: the 'class struggle' is reduced to the redistribution of wealth and power. Here's how they assess the Labour left's Alternative Economic Strategy (AES). It 'may not be a viable strategy for socialism', they say, but it is 'anti-capitalist':

'Its redistributional proposals are quite inimical to the interests of capital. Its proposals for increased state and trade union control over profitable manufacturing industry are a direct threat to the economic power of the capitalist class. If fully and successfully implemented, the strategy would severely curtail capital's control of economic activity.' (p96)

For G&H the AES demands for the nationalisation of industry do not go far enough. Apart from one or two other defects (like calling for import controls!) it's OK.

This is where G&H end up – providing Militant's fraternal and constructive criticism of the chauvinist programme of the Labour left. Dreaming about the 'economic possibilities of socialism' when 250 monopolies are nationalised, it lends credibility to the Labour left's demands for planning under capitalism.

The British economic disaster is a political disaster from start to finish. Its only merit is to confirm the truth of the old adage that trying to revise Marx always results in trying to reform capitalism. At less than £3, it's a must for every aspiring trade union bureaucrat and Labour Party entrist.



The Troubles

Robert Kee, *Ireland – a television history*, BBC.
R Broad and others, *The Troubles*, Thames TV.

MANY Irish people and left-wingers welcome the fact that the British public is at last getting a bit of education in Irish history and politics. Most prefer the Thames approach – powerful interviews, extraordinary newsreel footage, generally liberal politics – to Kee's urbane, slow-moving style and more conventional analysis. Yet the two productions have a lot in common. Both use history to obscure the essence of 'the troubles' in the Six Counties as much as to reveal it.

One common theme is that it is possible to trace 'the bloodlines of the conflict' back

through long traditions – from Wolfe Tone to the H-Blocks on one side, from the Apprentice Boys to the Red Hand Commandos on the other. Both traditions, it is alleged, are sustained by myth and ritual, tribal customs and folk memories. But the nationalism of Tone was based on the strength of a rising (protestant) bourgeoisie; that of Gerry Adams and Ruairi O'Bradaigh, on the power of a (catholic) working class which has only come into its own as a social force since the deaths of Connolly and Pearse.

The nationalism of the men in the H-Blocks and the women in Armagh is founded on their experience of the present, not their reading of the past. Many, imprisoned as teenagers, have known British brutality all their lives and have nothing to look forward to but permanent unemployment. Many only acquired their detailed knowledge of republican history after admission to the University of Long Kesh.

There is a gulf too between the Protestant settlers of the 17th and 18th centuries and Ian Paisley. Under English protection, the settlers developed agriculture and later manufacturing industries in the territories they occupied. The settlement was brutal, but it did lead to the development of the productive forces. Paisley's loyalist followers are now allied with a Britain which is in an advanced state of imperialist decay. British imperialism cannot bring prosperity to Ireland – those who declare their loyalty to the Crown today stand in the way of social progress. There can be no escape from poverty and repression in Ireland until Britain is defeated.

One of the most remarked-upon features of the two series is that Britain comes in for a lot of stick in its dealings in Ireland (the further back you go, the more stick). But at the end of the day, despite all Britain's past mistakes, both credit it with the potential to play a progressive role in Ireland. This is most explicit in the Thames series: it tentatively suggests an old division between die-hard, coercive colonialists (Tory) and liberal, conciliatory anti-imperialists (Labour). This won't do. Ireland, better than anywhere else, shows the emptiness of this debate over different forms of imperialist domination. When Britain comes under serious threat, bi-partisanship rules. The Irish War is not one policy option among many that the British bourgeoisie can choose from – it is the only way it can maintain the stability of the United Kingdom. That is the essence of 'the troubles' that Kee blandly skims over and for which Thames has produced a war weary apology.

The Six Counties

Review

Kevin Boyle, Tom Hadden, Paddy Hillyard, *Ten years on in Northern Ireland, the legal control of political violence*, The Cobden Trust, 1980, £2.50, 119pp.

Liam O'Dowd, Bill Rolston, Mike Tomlinson, *Northern Ireland: between civil rights and civil war*, CSE books, 1980, hbk £12.00, pbk £3.95, 224pp.

Paul Arthur, *Government and politics of Northern Ireland*, Longman, 1980, £2.50, 160pp.

EACH of these three books contains interesting and useful information on different aspects of the Six Counties, its changing constitutional relationship with Britain, its trade unions, housing and regional policy and the operation of its enormous apparatus of repression. Each also reflects a distinct approach to the present war.

Boyle and his colleagues are 'civil libertarians'. They document the violations of democratic rights perpetrated by the British state every day in the Six Counties. For those who believe in British justice it will be illuminating reading. One statistic alone gives the lie to Britain's 'criminalisation' strategy. In 1968 and 1969 the daily average prison population was about 600; last year it was around 2500 – a remarkable 'crime wave'!

Our 'civil libertarians' are outraged by the brutality and injustice of British rule in the Six Counties. Their solution is the abandonment of the Diplock courts and the return to a 'criminal prosecution model' and the reform of criminal procedure (they include a draft code of interrogation practice). It is remarkable how the touching faith of liberals in British fair play remains unscathed after a detailed review of Britain's conduct of the Irish War. But their quest to put a humane face on Britain's trample through democratic rights is futile: Britain has no alternative to repression in the Six Counties.

O'Dowd and company are academics. This book will be very popular among British liberal and 'Marxist' intellectuals. For ten years they've been looking for a justification for doing nothing about the war in Ireland. Now the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) has provided just the bucket of sand they've been wanting to put their heads in.

The authors present a novel resolution of the problem of the relationship between the national and class struggles. They first identify the national struggle as a religious, 'sectarian' conflict – a familiar bourgeois view. The relationship between class divisions and the basic conflict of the Irish people against Britain they find so 'complex' that they rapidly give up any attempt to work out the connection. Their solution is to fuse the terms 'sectarian' and 'class' together and wrap the result up in impenetrable prose:

'Class relations in Northern Ireland were only experienced as sectarian class *relations. Sectarian division is itself a particular historical division of class, or more precisely of class fractions, cemented together in Protestant and Catholic class alliances. In other words sectarian class division is a class phenomenon and vice versa.' (p25)*

This formulation explains nothing and confuses everything. But in a book that uses the term 'social democratic' to describe the political character of Protestant unions, all post-war governments in Britain (Tory as well as Labour) and the Six Counties since direct rule, clarification is scarcely to be expected.

Obscurantism serves a purpose. The CSE can now convene conferences and stimulate debate in its journals around the complex determinations of social democratic sectarian class relations. But the war goes on.

Paul Arthur is a teacher. His book is a short survey of the development of the Six Counties regime and its workings during the Irish War. His faith in the 'international dimension' and Atkins' quest for the middle ground in 'elements of a solution', the concluding chapter, has been overtaken by events. However, of the three, this book is the best introduction to the subject. Written for A-level students, it would be useful reading for most British socialists. A well-written bourgeois account is always preferable to the confused perspectives of liberals.



A British hack

Paul Johnson, *Ireland: land of troubles, a history from the twelfth century to the present day*, Eyre Methuen, 1980, hbk £6.95, 224pp.

PAUL JOHNSON, according to the dustjacket blurb, is 'among Britain's foremost writers on politics and current affairs'. This book seems to have been thrown together from notes scribbled down from the BBC and Thames TV series and the history texts he read at public school. The book is rank with historical errors and British prejudices.

Wolfe Tone was not 'rounded up' with Humbert's army, Daniel O'Connell spoke fluent Irish, there was a lockout (not a strike) in Dublin in 1913, the Provisional IRA was formed in 1970 (not in 1969), and so on. Cromwell's massacre at Drogheda was only standard army practice. The famine: did one and a half million really die? Economic stagnation in the 'thirties was a result of DeValera's encouragement of the revival of the Irish language. And Johnson hasn't forgotten Ireland's 'disloyalty' in staying neutral in the Second World War. The 'proximate cause' of the Civil Rights disturbances was the events of May '68 in Paris. When British soldiers shoot Catholics and ransack their houses it's all the IRA's fault.

Formerly the editor of the *New Statesman*, Johnson is an ignorant bigot posing as a man of letters. The British bourgeoisie needs his sort to whitewash its grisly record in Ireland. His conclusion is that 'if there's one lesson the history of Ireland teaches, it is that military victory is not enough'. Not enough perhaps, but a victory over Britain would make a very good start.

LETTERS

Teachers' next step

Comrades,

ELWAR's fight against racism in East London has been taken up inside the NUT local branch – East London Teachers' Association (ELTA). Teachers have reported numerous cases of immigrant children being harassed and attacked by white youths, often influenced by the NF/BM. Inside ELTA a group of teachers has begun to document these attacks so that support can be won amongst the local community for measures to be taken against them. ELTA's anti-racist sub-committee, which had been defunct since 1979, was revived for this purpose. It circulated a news-sheet detailing the attacks.

This created the predictable backlash from head-teachers – who want to present racism as normal 'bullying' – and from some teachers, nervous about having their schools and themselves singled out. Instead of challenging this reaction and giving a strong lead against racism the ELTA leadership – dominated by SWP/IMG – published an 'apology' to one of the schools, although the substance of the information published was not disputed. And further investigation was suspended on the grounds that the whole issue was 'sensitive'.

This is not the only recent example of SWP/IMG soft-peddling in the fight against racism. When their motion on racism for NUT conference came up it included 'opposition to the 1971 Immigration Act'. We tried to amend this so that it would be opposition to *all* immigration controls – the only position which defends *all* black people. This was rejected, and the SWP then put a compromise motion opposing all immigration controls but 'in particular the 1971 Act!'

For four years ELTA has been run by these two groups. Now they have 'united' – in order to run a joint slate in elections and thus avoid having to argue for their politics with the alienated membership. This year supporters of *the next step* are challenging this clique by taking the fight against racism and the cuts out to the membership. We intend to fight all elections on a programme emphasising these issues. Any other teachers in East London or elsewhere who want to know more details about this fight should write to The Teachers' Next Step, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High St, London, E8, or ring 274 3951.

the next step supporters in the NUT
East London

EP Thompson

Dear comrades,*

My congratulations to Edward Ludd for exploding E P Thompson and his *vile* and extremely *dangerous* anti-communist peace movement. The article was amusing *and* drove home a very serious political message. I hope *the next step* publishes more satires like it on other pompous and pious *frauds* in British radical politics. I think there will be plenty of opportunity and necessity to do so in the near future.

As you may imagine the radical left in Bristol/Bath area are into CND in a big way. They did manage to get me along to one Bath CND public meeting which billed Mary Kaldor the "left-wing" economist and author of several books, such as *Decline of the west* and so forth. She was speaking on "Arms and the Economy". The Quakers' hall was packed with very old and very young people plus a few indeterminate hacks from the local Labour Party.

Ms Kaldor commenced by saying that although it was a CND sponsored meeting she would concentrate on "conventional", non-nuclear weapons because she had a lot of data on them. Her argument was that Britain's non-nuclear arsenal is:

1 financially wasteful – as proved by Lucas' workers' "alternative plans" for production etc.
2 obsolete – equivalent of what the USA and Japan had 15/20 years ago etc.
3 "only" fit for export to such Third World clients as the late Shah, the Saudis etc – who would be so much better off buying "alternative" forklift trucks and minibuses for "economic development" from Lucas Aerospace Combine Committee.

I got the impression from some remarks Kaldor dropped about her sources of information that a section of the young military brass is not too happy with Britain's armed forces and arms production industry at present and are willing to take unorthodox measures to achieve tighter state control and cut out the dead wood before the next imperialist war starts. What irony if it turns out that old Ed's (and the radical left's) mass peace movement is being subsidised and manipulated by some bright brains in the Ministry of Defence. Do you think I'm being paranoiac for suggesting this? Kaldor certainly seemed to be doing her bit for a "reformed" British army.

At question and discussion time there were the usual questions about "Can we afford not to sell arms to Saudi Arabia?" etc from young college economics students. Fielded by Kaldor with reference to those wonderful and sadly misunderstood "plans" at Lucas Aerospace.

Towards the end a woman who from her style and content of speech I would say was a CP or former CP member addressed us about how "we" had to stand alone against Hitler in 1940 since unfortunately due to "Tory policies" even "our" generous "Russian friends" were unable to help us. So didn't this prove "we" needed *some* kind of defence? Some of the pure pacifists didn't like this and said *they* were in favour of "non-violent resistance" to an invader only. Then another younger woman joined in: why not an "alternative defence policy" to go along with the "alternative production plans" at Lucas?

Yes, said Mary Kaldor, summing up, she agreed with them all. Although as a "good socialist" she didn't for a moment think the Russians had any evil intentions toward "us". If Britain was occupied by vastly superior forces she would favour "non-violent resistance" but she felt "we" needed some kind of "low-key" military defence force now. She would fight for the next Labour government to develop such a policy. A collection and the distribution of an idiot prayer to King Arthur to awake from his enchanted slumber and save us from the devil's nuclear fall-out concluded proceedings.

L F Holley
Twerton
Bath

***this letter has been shortened**

Gardner's – a defeat?

Comrades,

Your article on Gardner's ('SWP joins TUC jobs auction', *the next step*, January 1981) was all very fine and principled. It's exactly what you would expect from a group of Marxist intellectuals who know more about dialectics than about diesel engines. But if you knew anything about the realities of fighting inside the labour movement in the very difficult times we're going through, you would recognise a partial victory when you saw one.

OK, so 300 voluntary redundancies went through at Gardner's. This was much less than what the company was asking for at the start. So the occupation achieved *something* – and these days that's saying quite a lot. And next time they try it on they'll face a much more confident workforce. Your approach is totally unrealistic in the present circumstances. It might be 'correct' but it will never achieve anything in the real world.

Tony Farben
Stockport

Keith Tompson **replies:**

Farben's realism is the same as that of Gardner's convenor Macafee whose acknowledgement of 'the facts of life' led him to recommend voluntary instead of compulsory redundancies. It's the same realism that has led union bureaucrats at BL and BSC to sacrifice tens of thousands of jobs. It's the realism of capitalism in crisis. It may seem 'unrealistic' to challenge the commonsense of capitalism, but if you don't defend every job today you're on a slippery slope that leads from 'natural wastage' to complete closure, from Eccles to Speke.

the next step

THE RCT FIGHTS

During the next two months RCT members and our supporters will be carrying out an ambitious programme of activities. The Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign is holding the first ever National Labour Movement Conference against TUC policy on Ireland. (See page 7 for background information and details.) Both East London Workers Against Racism (ELWAR) and the newly formed Lambeth Unemployed Workers Group (UWG) will be stepping up their work in preparation for the May Greater London Council elections. And in Manchester the RCT will be following up its hunger strike activities with a series of pickets of army recruitment centres. We'll be challenging the Labour Party in the Greater Manchester Council elections in Moss Side and Hulme.

In the local elections the RCT campaigns will present a practical alternative to the Labour Party. In East London we'll be up against right-wing Labour councillors who have ruled unchallenged for the last 50 years. During that time they've given nothing to the working class but shocking housing, appalling social services and unemployment. The Labour Party has created ideal conditions for the growth of fascism.

In South London we face Ted Knight and a left-wing Labour council. Knight has just taken £50 from the pocket of every family in Lambeth through his special supplementary rate rise. And now he's asked the council to survey the likely effects on services of a 30 per cent cut in spending. At least Manchester's right-wing Labour council makes no pretence to be 'socialist'. There it's open attacks on workers in the city all the way – including office rationalisation at the council and victimisation of NALGO members who refused to cover unfilled vacancies.

In all our activities the RCT's message is this: the working class cannot rely on the Labour Party to fight for its interests. Whatever the issue – resisting fascism in the East End of London, organising the unemployed in Lambeth or building support for the labour movement conference by urging the unemployed to have no part in Britain's oppression of the Irish – workers must take matters into their own hands and begin to organise defence of themselves and oppressed people in opposition to the existing leadership of the labour movement.

Racism

The fascists are back with a vengeance. The isolated murders and beatings that blacks in East London have faced for years are turning more and more into organised attacks by gangs of racists tooled up with bottles, clubs and knives. On 18 January over 100 thugs rampaged down Brick Lane wrecking shops and houses. It took local police 15 minutes to arrive on the scene – by which time it was all over.

East London Workers Against Racism is standing Fran Eden – a well-known local anti-racist – as its candidate in the Brick Lane area in the May GLC elections. The constituency covers Bethnal Green, where the National Front polled more than 20 per cent of the vote last time around. Racial tensions run high – and not only between the immigrant community, the fascists who congregate around Brick Lane, and the police. There is widespread anger at the way local politicians have neglected the immigrant areas, where unemployment and homelessness are major social problems.

Labour councillors out!

ELWAR is fielding candidates in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham – all areas with large Labour majorities supporting reactionary Labour councillors. In our public platforms, estate sales and street meetings ELWAR will have one thing to say: the Labour group on the GLC is no more able to deal with the widespread problem of racism – or its causes – than Horace Cutler and his Tory administration.
Organise workers' defence against racist attacks!
Vote ELWAR in the GLC elections!

Public meeting to launch ELWAR's GLC election campaign

Labour councillors out!
Speakers: Farouhk Aszal (ELWAR), Ford Dagenham and West Ham Trades Council
Wednesday 25 February 7.30pm
East Ham Town Hall, High St South, E6

East London readers of *the next step* meet regularly to discuss the paper, RCT activities and local and international events
Thursdays 7.00pm
Hackney Labour and Trades Union Hall
96 Dalston Lane, Hackney E8
(British Rail: Dalston Junction, bus: 277)

Unemployment

If you're unemployed, life in Lambeth is grim. There are over 10 000 unemployed workers in the borough – that's 30 per cent up on December 1979. The chances are that you won't find work for a long time because there are 11 people chasing every unfilled vacancy. And things are only going to get worse. So far most of the unemployed are college and school leavers who've never found jobs and older workers made redundant from local factories. Soon they're likely to be joined by hundreds more from Lambeth Council, the area's biggest employer, where cuts and redundancies are likely any day.

All this makes unemployment a crucial political issue in South London. That's why, in January, RCT supporters launched the Unemployed Workers Group in Lambeth. Its purpose is to organise and defend the unemployed – from harassment at the Benefit Office and the DHSS, from the council and from the area's marauding community policemen. The UWG is going to play a central part in building working class politics in South London. Unemployed people, who are often isolated from the labour movement and demoralised by their plight, can become a political force to be reckoned with; and *organised* workers can begin to fight for the rights of the unemployed.

We got off to a good start by organising a picket of the regional DHSS headquarters at the Elephant & Castle, South London, protesting against the recent round of cuts in social security benefits. The UWG has followed this with a protest against Lambeth Council's decision to raise the rates by 20p in the pound. Although our stand drew a great deal of hostility from Labour Party members and radicals who claimed that we were 'playing into the hands of the Tories' many local tenants and unemployed people approved of it. They agreed that by raising the rates Ted Knight was merely doing the Tories' dirty work for them.

We hope readers of *the next step* in South London will support us. If you live locally ring us at 01-274 2895 to find out more, and come to our next meeting. If you're from further afield write to *the next step* for UWG literature and speakers.

Unemployed Workers Group activities

Public meeting
No to the dole queues – organise!
Speaker: Mike Freeman
Wednesay 18 February 7.30pm
Lower Assembly Hall, Lambeth Town Hall, Acre Lane, SW9

Picket of Army recruitment offices
Support the Irish liberation struggle!
Don't join the British army!
Saturday 14 February 11.00–13.00
Camberwell Church Street, Camberwell Green, SE5

Central London Public Meetings

Friends House, Euston Road, NW1

Friday 20 February 7.15pm
The class struggle in Eastern Europe
Speaker: Frank Richards

Friday 20 March 7.15pm
Stop the Nationality Act!
Speaker: Judy Harrison

Dayschool

On Sunday 22 February readers and supporters of *the next step* from all over Britain will be in London for a national dayschool.
Sessions:
The class struggle since the General Election
Speaker: Frank Richards
RCT strategy and tactics to fight racism
Speaker: Judy Harrison
Most of the day will be given over to questions and discussion.
Details and registration (£2, unwaged £1): BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX, or phone 01-274 3951.

Ireland

'Working class people in Britain have no interest in supporting Britain's war against the Irish people – let alone participate in it by joining the Army.' This was how Denise Taylor, North West England representative of the Smash the PTA Campaign explained SPTAC's decision to hold a series of pickets of unemployment offices and Army recruitment centres in the Greater Manchester area. She went on: 'we're not asking people to be pacifists or not join the army because they don't like violence. That wouldn't make much sense to workers in the North West anyway because they know that peaceful protest doesn't get you anywhere. They saw what the police did to the pickets at King Henry Pies in Levershulme. We want the unemployed to join us in our active opposition to British rule in Ireland and to join our trade union delegation to the national conference against TUC Irish policy in March.'

Stop army recruitment!

North West SPTAC plans to take a large contingent of unemployed workers to that conference. So far we've held one picket of an Army recruitment office on 17 January to mobilise support for it. More than 25 people turned up for that – including members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, SWP supporters and a handful of students from Manchester Polytechnic. The picket was successful enough to close down the recruitment office for the rest of the day.

Over the next month we'll be picketing Aytoun Street dole on Wednesday 18 February at 11.00. There are also other pickets planned for the Job Centres in Stretford and Moss Side. Write or phone for more details.

If you want to take part in any of these pickets or any of our work in Manchester write to the RCT at the address given below, or get details from sellers of *the next step*. We hold regular sales at Chorlton Shopping Centre, Moss Side Shopping Centre and Piccadilly Gardens between 11.00 and 12.30 on Saturdays. If you're unemployed you'll find us at Stretford Dole on Monday mornings and at Aytoun Street on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

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