No 13 May 1981

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p



Derry: Day of Action

IRELAND
Breaking Labour's silence



inside

Manchester occupations	6,7
The united front	8,9
Oil wars	11
Reviews: MI5 and IRA, Gays and South Africa, Mattick	12,13
Letters: CND, GLC; Brixton, Belfast?	14,15

RCT activities

LONDON

South London

● **South London Workers Against Racism**
Picket of Camberwell Magistrates Court
18 & 20 May 10am

● **Stockwell Park Estate Tenants Group**
meeting
No more police harassment!
Wednesday 20 May 7.30pm
Details from sellers of *the next step*

If you need help, want to work with or just talk to SOLWAR, ring 01-274 3951 anytime.

East London

For forthcoming ELWAR and East London SPTAC activities ring 01-274 3951.
Write to ELWAR, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8

MIDLANDS

● **Birmingham** *the next step* **supporters group**
discussion on the Labour Party.
Tuesday 26 May 7.30pm
Committee Room 1, Students Union, Birmingham University

● **Midlands SPTAC** *anti-recruitment picket*
No to the dole queue draft!
Monday 15 June 10.30–12 noon
Army Careers Information Office, 65 Queens Road, Coventry

● **Coventry RCT** *public meeting*
Who needs the Labour Party?
Friday 26 June 7.30pm
Hertford Tavern, Junction St, Coventry

MANCHESTER

● **North West SPTAC** *public meeting*
Smash H-Block!
Thursday 4 June 7.30pm
AUEW District Office, Margaret St South, Ashton-under-Lyne

● *March to defend Nasira Begum, Nasareen Achtar and Cynthia Gordon*
Saturday 6 June 12.30pm
Meet at corner of Princess Road and Moss Lane East
March with the RCT under the banner – Smash all immigration controls!

● **Manchester RCT** *public meeting*
Poland erupts – what next?
Speaker: Frank Richards
Thursday 18 June 7.30pm
Details from sellers of *the next step*

NALGO CONFERENCE, BLACKPOOL

Smash the PTA Campaign *fringe meeting on Ireland*
Kick out TUC policy – support the Irish people
Speakers from Hackney NALGO, republican movement and SPTAC
Thursday 11 June
For details ring 01-274 3951

Municipal elections

Labour under pressure

On 7 May the Labour Party triumphed in Britain's municipal elections. But more than a thousand people voted, for the first time, for revolutionary communist candidates. And five Labour councillors – in East London, South London and Manchester – had no easy election campaign. They had to fight their way to County Hall against active working class opposition.

East London: Labour on the defensive

Fran Eden, East London Workers Against Racism candidate for **Bethnal Green and Bow**, led an assault on the Labour council for leaving the Afzali family in an empty slum block in Wapping for two whole years after other tenants had been rehoused. To highlight squalid housing conditions in the area, ELWAR and local supporters occupied Labour's housing offices. Embarrassed at this exposure of their racist housing policies, Labour councillors were relieved when Asian protestors were arrested and charged. No wonder Labour's GLC manifesto called for more police on the streets!

In **Newham North East** the issues were bad housing, massive unemployment and the rising tide of fascist violence against black people. ELWAR argued that Labour can't fight racism and certainly can't defend workers' living standards. One Labour councillor claims the housing shortage is caused by having to find accommodation for too many 'wogs and coons'. When a council meeting was called to agree further spending cuts in Newham, ELWAR was there to protest.

Labour candidate for **Hackney North and Stoke Newington**, Gerry Ross, had a bad time at his campaign meeting at the end of April. Ross and other Labour dignitaries visibly squirmed when ELWAR criticised their record and manifesto, exposing the attacks they were planning on East London workers and their inability to oppose racist killings and firebomb attacks. The audience remembered Jarnail Singh, petrol bombed by fascists and accused by Labour councillors of trying to jump the housing list! Incapable of defending Labour's recent record, Ross declared he had fought and beaten the fascists in the 'forties. But they don't look beaten in East London today. In the same meeting, an Ulster Loyalist denounced ELWAR's support for political status for the republican hunger strikers. Ross, under pressure from the floor, declared himself a 'friend of the Irish people', but like local left-wing Labour MP Ernie Roberts drew the line at supporting the national liberation struggle.

South London: Labour's bobbies

In South London's **Lambeth Central** constituency, the Labour candidate was conspicuous by his absence from the public eye. Paul Moore declined invitations to the Revolutionary Communist campaign meetings, and held none of his own because he doubted anyone would attend them. Not surprisingly, he supported Labour's plans to bring the police under 'democratic control' through the GLC and to step up 'community policing'. Perhaps this was a reason for his low profile in the Brixton area where police of any sort have been getting a rough reception recently. But in Lambeth, as elsewhere, the Labour candidate could count on the solid support of the radical left – from deep entrist Militant, to deep apologist WRP and deeply demoralised SWP.

Revolutionary Communist candidate Kevin Green ran an outspoken campaign. In our work in support of the Irish hunger strikers, our campaign against police harassment of black youth and our attack on Labour's record and promises, we tried to turn anti-Labour feeling in the local working class into positive support for a revolutionary alternative. Years of 'socialism' from Labour and 'community communism' from the CPGB have meant that many workers are understandably cynical about seeing an alternative. But our election campaign and other activities in the area have provided a firm foundation for changing all this in the future.

Manchester: Labour's economies

Keith Tompson's campaign for a seat on the Greater Manchester Council focused on housing, transport and racism. Our tenants' charter drew widespread support in the crumbling modern council blocks of Moss Side and Hulme. Our platform for no redundancies, a fares freeze and better services exposed the Labour Party's 'responsible' approach to making economies in local government spending. And we held a march against the deportation of Cynthia Gordon a local West Indian resident. When Bobby Sands died supporters of the Revolutionary Communist election campaign took the initiative in organising an immediate demonstration in Manchester city centre.

The election campaign fell at the right time for workers occupying Laurence Scott's in defence of jobs: we turned canvassing on housing estates into collections for the strike fund.

Next time

Revolutionary Communist candidates may not have won seats on the local councils on 7 May. But they have raised the flag of working class politics in the corrupt environment of local government, where until now merely different approaches to sound bourgeois housekeeping compete for power. Now a new alternative has begun to be put before the electorate. Our election campaigns helped to extend our activities in relation to local issues, to draw in new supporters and to build up the pressure on the labour movement in the vicinity of our local branches. Before May 1981 we were known for our call for abstention from voting Labour in the May 1979 General election. Now we need to go forward to build a real alternative to the Labour Party – not just in 5 council seats – but throughout the country.



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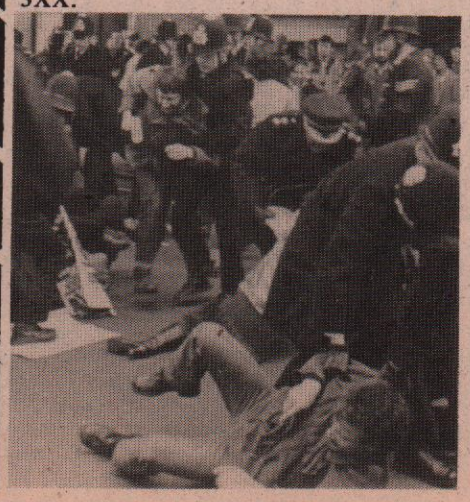
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KILBURN 42

Arrest is one of the hazards of backing the Irish struggle. On 26 April police broke up a march in Kilburn in support of Bobby Sands, arresting 42 people.

Some of the charges are heavy – assault and threatening behaviour. The damage is likely to amount to several thousand pounds.

Back the Irish struggle with cash! Speed large donations to Smash the PTA Campaign, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX.



CONTENTS

Editorial		**Reviews**	
Fighting the bans	3	*Accumulation and breakdown*	12
Ireland		*Irish nationalism*	12
Derry Day of Action	4	*'The strong state'*	12
Bobby Sands	5	*SWP: Gay power*	13
Labour movement		*SWP: Zimbabwe*	13
Local elections	2	**Letters**	
Manchester occupation	6,7	*CND – then and now*	14
The united front	8,9	*RCT sell out?*	15
Teenage nightmare	10	*Brixton, Belfast*	15
Imperialsim		**Racism**	
Oil wars	11	*This means WAR!*	16

Editor
Mike Freeman

Editorial board
Tony Allen, Kevin Green, Nick Jenkins, Fenna King, Frank Richards, James Wood

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FIGHTING THE BANS

The police move in

MORE MARCHES were banned in the first four months of 1981 than in the preceding 30 years. Bans covered the London area (for two one-month periods), Leicester (one month), Wolverhampton (two weeks), Leeds (one month), four parts of South Yorkshire (one week) and Glasgow (three months). The Government has taken advantage of threats from fascists to march in areas where many black people live to restrict the democratic rights of the labour movement.

The Government's capacity to impose bans has been increased by appeals to the police from the leaders of the labour movement to outlaw fascist demonstrations. The TUC and the Labour Party, as well as the Anti-Nazi League and the Communist Party, have repeatedly demanded that the state curb the activities of fascist organisations. When their own demonstrations are banned too, they can only plea feebly 'ban the racists by all means, but don't ban democracy' (*Morning Star*, 25 April 1981). But the left has a long tradition of approving state restrictions on the fascists: when a National Front march was stopped in Tameside in 1977, the Socialist Workers Party called a 'victory rally' – apparently forgetting that its own demonstration had also been banned.

No politics on May Day

In the first few months of 1981 another ominous trend has come to the fore. Not only does the official labour movement invite state bans on fascists, it also co-operates more and more with the police to exclude left-wingers from demonstrations. At this year's May Day celebrations Labour Party stewards allowed the police to pick out anybody they chose as the rally assembled. These mainly consisted of supporters of the Irish hunger strikers who intended marching as a contingent. Placards and banners were seized and people herded against a wall. They were rapidly joined by others – a man selling the Connolly Association's *Irish Democrat*, somebody selling Bobby Sands badges and even a collector for the Brixton Defence Committee. When some stewards made feeble protests the police assured them that the Labour Party organisers had agreed that no 'political' demonstrators should be allowed to spoil a traditional May Day commemoration. The decision about what was politically acceptable having been left to them, senior police officers scurried around studying banners, reading newspapers and scrutinising badges.

The Labour Party stewards profferred their sympathies but refused to hold up the march until the detainees were released. From behind a corner and three lines of police they could just hear Michael Foot proclaiming the determination of the Labour Party to fight all restrictions on the democratic rights of the labour movement. After more than an hour of harassment they were allowed to go. The object of this police exercise was supposedly to prevent fascists from carrying out their declared intention of joining the May Day march. The result was that the police, with the co-operation of the Labour Party, extended their political interference in the labour movement.

Nor is this an isolated example. In Manchester, Labour and Communist Party organisers of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament co-operated with the police in an attempt to expel Smash the PTA Campaign supporters from the Easter protest march, because they insisted on chanting slogans against Britain's war in Ireland and in support of the republican hunger strikers.

The co-operation of labour bureaucrats with the police is only a further extension of their own attempts to curtail democratic rights within the labour movement. The TUC's proscription of trades councils that oppose its line on Ireland is one example. The attempts by committees co-ordinating the activities of left groups in support of the Irish hunger strikers in Manchester and Coventry to ban the sales of political newspapers at public events is another indication of this bureaucratic trend. The TUC's People's March, on which all participants are prohibited from chanting 'sectarian' slogans or wearing 'sectarian' badges and on which no newspapers except the *Morning Star* are tolerated, shows up the increasingly repressive character of the labour bureaucracy. While Stalinists have generally taken the lead, libertarians and radical left supporters have often given their support to this intrusion of bourgeois censorship into the working class movement.

Anti-working class

Whether or not they are justified as measures aimed against fascists, *all* state restrictions on the freedom of speech, assembly and press are ultimately directed against the working class. This is because the working class is the only force in bourgeois society whose interests lie in the overthrow of capitalism. The fascists may at particular moments pose problems of law and order for the bourgeoisie but at the end of the day they want to do what's best for British capitalism. The interests of the working class movement however are always antagonistic to those of the ruling class – acutely so at a time of economic crisis.

The history of the Public Order Act, under which recent demonstrations have been banned, reveals the function of this sort of repressive legislation. Supposedly brought in to deal with Mosley's blackshirts in the wake of the Battle of Cable Street in London's East End in 1936, its powers were used to ban *all* demonstrations in East London from 1937 until 1940. And in the last few months many more labour movement protestors have been kept off the streets than have fascists.

Because the bans are directed at the working class it is vitally important that workers oppose them – no matter what organisation is the immediate target. One of the key weaknesses of the British labour movement is its acceptance of the intervention in society of the state, which is perceived as neutral or even beneficial, rather than as the agency of bourgeois class rule. When state interference in the labour movement itself is tolerated or even approved it becomes a matter of urgency to campaign against it. We have to organise to deal with the threat to workers and ethnic minorities from the fascists *ourselves* and not encourage state repression by inviting the police to deal with them (which is in any case ineffective). And we have to keep the police *out* of the affairs of the labour movement.

The marches that defied the ban in Kilburn and Westminster on 26 April were a major breakthrough. A demonstration in support of the Irish hunger strikers had been long planned, but was outlawed by Metropolitan Police Commissioner David McNee's ban on all marches in the London area, ostensibly intended to prevent fascists marching to their doom in Southall and Newham. The decision to march was taken by the H-Block/Armagh Committee (which includes representatives of all organisations that support the prisoners' demands); the move off was initiated by members of the Socialist Workers Party, the Revolutionary Communist Tendency and the Troops Out Movement; the largest organised contingent came from the Smash the PTA Campaign. Even though the march was broken up by the police after a few hundred yards, it showed the British government and its police force that we will not have our rights to assemble, march and protest withdrawn at the whim of the Commissioner. Shortly afterwards demonstrators reformed to march in Westminster – to form a picket at Downing Street. The police responded ferociously: at Kilburn and Westminster banners were seized, placards smashed, marchers were kicked and beaten and 42 people were arrested.

Although the impact of the Kilburn march was reduced by the appalling mobilisation for the demonstration by radical left groups, it was vitally important that it went ahead. Scheduled for the height of the hunger strike, it could not be postponed. The fact that it went ahead showed that some British people were prepared to stand up against the British Government's refusal to grant political status to republican prisoners, irrespective of the edicts of the British legislature. The march against the ban was also a gesture in solidarity with those in the Six Counties who, in their thousands, regularly turn out on the streets for demonstrations the British occupiers declare 'illegal'.

No equivocation!

The official labour movement has a different approach to the bans. Its response is obediently to call off its demonstrations and to try and persuade the Home Secretary and the local police chiefs to impose more selective bans. CND for example is considering legal action against McNee on the grounds that his 'blanket' ban on all demonstrations in the London area is too wide. However, as the Tory organisers of the Fulham Carnival failed in their appeal to William Whitelaw to relax his ban and allow their harmless Bank Holiday parade, we can hold out little hope for CND. The labour bureaucrats accept the right of the state to dictate who can march, where and when, but plead that their marches be allowed to take place. But, having once sanctioned state regulations, the bureaucrats are in a weak position to demand exemptions – especially as it is labour movement protests the police most want to control.

Radical left groups share this equivocal approach. Having welcomed bans on the NF in the past, they are now concerned about restrictions on their own activities. But their emphasis, like that of the TUC, is on the *unselective* character of the bans, rather than on the bans themselves. The International Marxist Group recently declared that 'the time has come to call a halt to the blanket bans that William Whitelaw has been placing on the right to demonstrate' (*Socialist Challenge*, 30 April 1981). Was there a time when bans were acceptable? Would non-'blanket' bans still be OK? The editorial is evasive, churning out platitudes about the need for 'debate and discussion within the labour movement' and for 'political clarity', but avoiding any direct repudiation of state intervention in the labour movement. However the IMG has given its answer in practice: on 26 April in Kilburn its leading members scabbed on the decision to defy the ban and transformed their tiny contingent into a picket, effectively preventing others from joining the march and allowing the police to cut them off. Again on May Day its members could be seen acting as official Labour Party stewards on a march that excluded 'political' protestors.

While the SWP has not yet reached the depths of subservience to the labour bureaucracy to which the IMG has sunk, and is still prepared to defy the police, it shares the same confusions about state regulations on demonstrations. Thus Gareth Jenkins in a recent article in *Socialist Review* describes the bans as 'a backhanded compliment to our ability to mobilise against the fascists' (April 1981). The bans are no such thing: they are a forearm smash against the democratic rights of the working class. Jenkins warns that 'we should not be lulled into the belief that they (the bans) are working on our behalf', but the SWP's equivocal attitude to bans on fascists in the past has helped to strengthen the widespread view among workers that bans can operate 'on our behalf'.

Organise against the police!

The British labour movement tolerates police interference in its public activities on a greater scale than any other working class movement. Over the last few years the police have been allowed to build up steadily their regulation of marches and demonstrations: now they dictate their terms to organisers, insist on points of departure and dispersal and rigid adherence to prescribed routes, times of starting and stopping. They surround demonstrations, often two deep, and deploy special vehicles in front and behind, break up contingents at will and pick off individuals with ease.

In their intensive regulation of labour movement protests, the police have been greatly assisted by the bureaucrats and by the wider acceptance among workers of the essentially benevolent role of the British bobby. The inability of the left to organise efficiently its own activities has also played into the hands of the police; the presence on demonstrations of liberals who make a virtue out of marching like a rabble has also helped the police to take over the functions of stewards on labour movement events.

The extensive use of bans on marches and the more and more intensive regulation of demonstrations by the police require an urgent response. First we must clearly repudiate all state restrictions on our democratic rights in our propaganda and whenever possible on the streets. Second we have to take back control of our own marches and demonstrations and resist any further police intervention. Finally we must fight relentlessly against the co-operation of the labour bureaucrats with the police and their attempts to police the labour movement themselves.

Smash the PTA Campaign labour movement delegation

Derry Day of Action

One of the motions passed at the Smash the PTA Campaign's Coventry conference, 'TUC Hands Off Ireland' in March resolved to back the 15 April day of industrial action in Derry in support of the hunger strikers. In the weeks following the conference SPTAC supporters up and down the country won widespread backing for a trade union delegation to Ireland. A total of 36 delegates, including representatives from four trades councils, eventually crossed the Irish Seas for a 3-day visit. Many messages of support were also sent from union branches and trades councils to the Derry H-Blocks/Armagh Trade Union Committee which organised the strike.

OUR long drive – in minibuses from London and Manchester – was uneventful. However, familiar British style road signs, post boxes and other features could not disguise peculiar features of life in the Six Counties: army patrols running in full battle dress around ordinary street corners, police in armoured landrovers and police stations like military fortresses. And nobody could miss the graffiti in the nationalist areas we passed through. In some villages every available wall and window were plastered with slogans supporting the hunger strikers. Printed Bobby Sands posters had been altered to include a hastily-scrawled 'MP' after his name. One very long and steep hill a few miles outside Derry had slogans painted across the road at 20-yard intervals.

'This is Provoland' one wall proclaimed as we crossed the Foyle and entered the Bogside. Our destination, the smart, new Pilot's Row Community Centre, looked out of place amongst the desolate open spaces, the tower blocks of the Rossville Flats and the remaining back-to-back houses beneath Derry City's famous walls. One of Roy Mason's sops to woo the nationalist youth away from the liberation struggle, the community centre went along with vicious repression and the criminalisation of prisoners in the Labour Government's iron fist and velvet glove strategy of the mid 'seventies. Labour's plan was to shift the police (the RUC) into the army's role – but the RUC is no more welcome in the nationalist ghetto than the soldiers, so 'Ulsterisation' never really worked. In the Bogside itself, and up the hill to the Creggan Estate, we saw no RUC officers during the entire three days of our stay. Their occasional visits with army protection are met with fusillades of bricks, bottles and whatever else is to hand.

The morning before the march and rally we spent getting to know our hosts and the general situation in Derry. Walking around the town centre was at first an uncanny experience: people picked out our English accents and, naturally, avoided contact. But within a few hours the news that we had come to support the Day of Action was out and the atmosphere changed dramatically. Strangers came up and welcomed us warmly. It is clear that the laws of survival are very strictly adhered to in Derry. Signs carrying the warning 'Don't speak in public and if you have to, say nothing!', reminiscent of wartime civil defence posters, were prominently displayed in most bars in the town.

As the afternoon approached we began to prepare for the demonstration. In all, three marches were planned, to converge on the square outside Derry's Guildhall. The Day of Action followed two strikes that had brought Derry to a halt during the first hunger strike. Our contingent assembled in the Shantallow area two miles from the city centre.

At first small groups of youths appeared in Shantallow, surprised and curious at the sight of banners from over the water, and soon many more people began to arrive. Contingents from factories which had closed down for the day appeared along the road, many people still in their workclothes, assembled under hand-made factory banners. One large group of women, all dressed in blue overalls, were behind a banner which simply read 'Denim Factory'. Others were from 'Bacon Factory', 'Derry Dockers' and numerous engineering plants and small workshops. It was clear that the prisoners and the liberation struggle have massive support from the workers of Derry. Despite the fact that the strike was called by an unofficial committee, made up of representatives from each workplace, few factories were unrepresented.

As a mark of appreciation the SPTAC trade union contingent was asked to head the march. As we moved off more people came out of their houses, and others joined along the route. Besides the factory contingents, the next most prominent section of the demonstration was made up of youth from various 'Youth against H-Block' committees.

On our way to the town centre we marched past a police barracks – olive green corrugated steel girders with small observation towers built into each corner. The small blue 'POLICE' sign above the steel-shuttered double doors looked distinctly out of place. Further on, an RUC landrover with speakers mounted on the roof blared out the Riot Act (repealed in Britain in 1967 but still in operation in the Six Counties). This is the normal procedure for all anti-H-Block marches. It provided a source of great amusement, especially to the youths, who seemed to regard it more as an invitation than a prohibition and began to chant 'SS – R–U–C!' as they went past.

By now our march numbered around 2000. The two other marches had already arrived in the Guildhall Square. As the banners came into sight the platform speaker announced the presence of a contingent of English trade unionists. As the banners from Tameside, Hackney, Greenwich and Camden Trades Councils, led by the SPTAC 'Victory to the Hunger Strikers' banner, came into view a great cheer went up from the crowd, which by now numbered about 6000. Chairman of the Derry H-Blocks/Armagh Trade Union Committee Paddy Logue pointed out the importance of trade union support for the H-Blocks campaign, especially from British workers. He was followed by speakers from Provisional Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, Edinburgh Trades Council, Dave Hallsworth from Tameside Trades Council and the Smash the PTA Campaign and Derry journalist Eamonn McCann.



Dave Hallsworth explained how Tameside had been expelled from the TUC because of its support for the Irish national liberation struggle. He outlined the work which had gone into building SPTAC's Coventry conference and into getting the delegation together. The hunger strike, he said, provided a major opportunity to raise support for the Irish War and to organise workers against the British state. His speech was very well received.

Shortly afterwards the rally dispersed into the Bogside. Within an hour the rioting began as youths threw bricks and petrol bombs at the RUC and Army patrols. We could hear the crump of plastic bullets being fired in return. Later that evening a 15-year old youth was taken to Belfast with a fractured skull. He has since died. The rioting continued until the early hours of the next day, as barricades of burnt out cars went up on roads into the Bogside.

After a social curtailed by the intervention of the British army, we stayed the night with families in the Bogside and on the Creggan. Later the next day the delegation assembled for a discussion with some of the organisers of the Day of Action, trade unionists and unemployed young people. They explained the kind of problems which they faced in organising within the official trade union movement, the most obvious being the predominance of Loyalist workers amongst the membership and particularly the bureaucracy. A further barrier within the trade unions is the strategy adopted by the 'stickies' (the pro-imperialist rump of the Stalinist *Official* IRA) supporters of the Militant Tendency and others who are bitterly opposed to the national liberation struggle. Their supporters on Derry Trades Council had opposed the day of action from the start. Our discussion clarified the peculiar conditions which exist for trade unionists in the Six Counties and explained why Derry workers had had to organise unofficially.

Many of us were embarrassed by the hospitality of our hosts and their enthusiasm for a positive approach to their struggle from British trade unionists. It made us more acutely aware of the reality that the British labour movement has not – through years of war and weeks of hunger strikes – delivered the sort of support to the Irish people that they need to carry through their struggle to victory. But if the delegation motivates 36 trade unionists to come back and carry on the work to undermine British rule in Ireland from within the labour movement then it will justify the claims of Derry workers that it marked a historic breakthrough. The Smash the PTA Campaign will be working to realise this potential in the months ahead.

Denise Taylor

The Labour Party united

THE LEADERSHIP

'The Government could not concede political status for IRA prisoners without giving sure aid to the recruitment of terrorists, Mr Michael Foot, Leader of the Opposition said to loud Conservative cheers during exchanges with the Prime Minister on the death of IRA hunger striker Mr Robert (sic) Sands.'

(*The Times*, 6 May 1981)

THE RIGHT. . .

'There is no question in the Labour Party of granting special category or political status of any kind. . . I made that perfectly clear to the four hunger-strikers whom I saw individually.

'[Bobby Sands] conducted a political argument with me for a minute or so. . .

'There was no aggravation, but Francis Hughes told me he wasn't pleased to see me.'

(Labour Northern Ireland spokesman Don Concannon quoted in *The Irish Times*, 2 May 1981)

. . . AND THE LEFT

'[Concannon's statement] was not in the slightest bit helpful to a solution and. . . could have been sent by post.'

(Chairman of the Don't Let the Irish Prisoners Die Committee, Ernie Roberts, quoted in *The Irish Times*, 7 May 1981)

'This was a very successful meeting and at no point was the question of political status raised.'

(Ernie Roberts describing a Don't Let the Irish Prisoners Die Committee press conference, quoted in the *Hackney Gazette*, 1 May 1981)

BOBBY SANDS
1954-1981

MP FERMANAGH AND SOUTH TYRONE
IRA VOLUNTEER
POLITICAL PRISONER



'I had seen too many homes wrecked, fathers and sons arrested, neighbours hurt, friends murdered, and too much gas, shootings, and blood, most of it my own people's.

'At eighteen-and-a-half I joined the Provos.'

'I was only a working class boy from a nationalist ghetto, but it is repression that creates the revolutionary spirit of freedom. I shall not settle until I achieve the liberation of my country, until Ireland becomes a sovereign independent socialist republic.'

'I refuse to change to suit the people who oppress, torture and imprison me, who wish to dehumanise me. . . I have the spirit of freedom which cannot be quenched by even the most horrendous treatment. Of course I can be murdered, but I remain what I am – a political prisoner of war.'

The voice of West Belfast

ANDERSONSTOWN NEWS

A CRIME, IS A CRIME, A CRIME

'Political violence has been engaged in by almost all the so-called civilised nations of Western Europe for centuries, but by the hypocritical English more than most. They have burned, raped and plundered half way across the world, and yet continue to berate us Irish for our violent ways.'

(25 April 1981)

'The Catholic people of the Six Counties know something about forms of violence. Illegal and undemocratic partition; disenfranchisement; discrimination in every field; being suspect before the law because of religion; being the subject of continual legal violence by both police and judiciary; being the subject of loyalist assassination and pogroms with the connivance of the police; internment; torture and death in prison; no-jury courts and criminal judges; enforced naked confinement and isolation; enforced living surrounded by excrement; enforced hunger strike; breaking of promises made to dying men; enforced hunger strike.'

(2 May 1981)



The murderers

'Mr Peregrine Worsthorne of the *Sunday Telegraph* is right to point out that Britain's continued attempt to administer Northern Ireland for the benefit of its people is an act of the highest political altruism. There is nothing in it for Britain; nothing at all, but a drain on lives, a hole in the pocket and a reputation in which the worst regimes of Eastern Europe can take malicious pride.' (*The Guardian*, 6 May 1981)

In Ireland and abroad the British Government is losing the propaganda war over its conduct of the hunger strike. Bobby Sands' electoral triumph in Fermanagh and South Tyrone crushed Britain's five year campaign to isolate republicans and label them as criminals and psychopaths. Mass demonstrations in Belfast and Derry and the sustained revolt of the youth on the streets of the Catholic ghettoes confirm the popular support for the liberation struggle.

In these troubled times, the liberal editor of *The Guardian* reaches out for the hand of one of Britain's most right-wing commentators. This unusual liaison reflects the unity of the British ruling class in its perception that Britain is doing Ireland a favour by dividing the country in two and occupying part of it with colossal military force. The British bourgeoisie, from rabid Tory to liberal wet, is wounded by the outrage of the world's press at its callous murder of Bobby Sands.

The Tories

So the British bourgeoisie takes refuge in its traditional posture as benevolent mediator in the bizarre Irish tribal conflict. But there is not a shred of altruism in Britain's occupation of Ireland. Thousands of troops are stationed in the Six Counties and millions of pounds are poured in to shore up British domination, because the ruling class has no alternative at present to direct rule in Ireland.

Britain cannot withdraw from Ireland because the only way it has managed to maintain capitalist law and order in the British isles for the past half century is through the Partition of Ireland and the integration of the Six Counties into the 'United Kingdom'. Because this regime violates the desire of most Irish people for a united independent Ireland, this state of affairs can only be maintained by force. For 50 years systematic discrimination and repression succeeded in containing resistance to British rule in the Six Counties. Then, at the points where oppression was most intense, the battle for national freedom erupted once more. The Irish War that rages still began.

It was in this war that Bobby Sands, soldier of the Irish revolution, was killed. Like many others, he died because the British Government is prepared to deploy whatever level of violence is necessary to sustain its rule in Ireland. He died because of the intransigence of Margaret Thatcher – but her intransigence is a product not merely of her personality, but also of her class. The British ruling class cannot afford to lose in Ireland – because a defeat for the army in the Six Counties would mean the break-up of the United Kingdom and the breakdown of the British state itself. The monolithic commitment of the British Parliament to the War in Ireland and its unanimous refusal to compromise over the issue of political status confirms that, for all *The Guardian*'s apologetics, the British ruling class is determined to stay in Ireland.

Yet the myth of British reluctance, the notion that the Government would really rather withdraw from Ireland than remain and terrorise its people, remains. Nowhere is it stronger than on the British left which has passed the last decade with its gaze firmly fixed on the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie, eagerly anticipating the emergence of a section of the ruling class in favour of 'withdrawal'. Despite many false dawns (arising from *The Daily Mirror*, A J P Taylor, the Young Liberals and numerous opinion polls), the British ruling class continues to display a remarkable unity in its commitment to the oppression of the Irish people. Never has this been more evident than in the current hunger strike when scarcely a voice was raised in criticism of Thatcher and Atkins. And nowhere was this silence more damning than in the British labour movement.

The Labour Party

'The official Opposition policy has remained one of total unswerving support for the Government's refusal to grant political status. The proof was in Mr Michael Foot's complete backing for the mission to the Maze of Mr Don Concannon, Labour's Northern Ireland spokesman. He was to ensure that every avenue had been exhausted and to demonstrate to all in Ulster that no one should look to Labour to weaken the British position.' (*The Times*, 2 May 1981)

Bobby Sands was forced to a grim death by a Tory Government; but his blood is also on the hands of the Labour Party and its backers in the trade union bureaucracy for their 'total, unswerving support' for the Tories. Just as guilty as Michael Foot and Don Concannon are those left wing Labour MPs who waited almost until Bobby Sands was in a coma before they tabled a motion 'urging the Government to negotiate'. This was no attempt to put pressure on the Government. Like MP Patrick Duffy's lone criticism of Thatcher on the day Bobby Sands died, the Labour lefts' eleventh hour intervention was designed to save their own face and the reputation of their party among Britain's large Irish population and the working class sympathisers with the national liberation struggle. It is true that this was not their only concern – they also wanted to save Her Majesty's Government from the international embarrassment of a death in H-Block and the inevitable violent response from the nationalist people in the Six Counties.

Just as it clings on to illusions that withdrawal is a viable option for British imperialism, the Labour left and its Stalinist and radical backers like to pretend that 'a small liberalising of the prison regime could still solve the crisis' (*Morning Star*, 7 May). A collection of their patrons in the arts wrote to *The Guardian* to urge the Government 'to adopt a more flexible, constructive and above all honourable approach' (30 April). Bobby Sands fought for political recognition of his status as a soldier in a war of liberation; he died because British imperialism cannot afford to be flexible, constructive or honourable on this issue, or over any other challenge to its right to rule in Ireland. The left's failure to take sides with the republican movement against the British state, its feeble pretence that no major principle is at stake in the hunger strike and its pathetic faith in the essential benevolence of British imperialism mean that it too must share the blame for the slow murder of Bobby Sands.

The struggle in engineering

Compromise or confrontation?

The May engineering workers' (AUEW) policy making National Committee meeting in Eastbourne was a sad affair. President Terry Duffy told the delegates that the union had lost 117 000 members because of the recession. Mass redundancies are only a part of the problem facing the engineers. The threat of sackings has been used to discipline those engineering workers who still have a job. Management has taken the initiative to reorganise production on its own terms. Recently it was reported that 'something approaching a revolution is going on in the productivity of British industry'. Top British management said that it was now possible to introduce changes in their British plants which would be unthinkable in French or German subsidiaries' (Financial Times, 10 April 1981).

This 'revolution' in industrial relations has hit AUEW members with a vengeance. Local bargaining procedures have been scrapped and negotiations centralised. As a result shop floor militants have been excluded from important discussions affecting their living standards. In a number of plants new disciplinary procedures have been established to curb the power of shop floor organisation. During the past year traditional work practices have been abolished and 'flexible' work introduced. Flexible work means scrapping certain grades of work and forcing workers to perform operations which had hitherto been carried out by other groups of workers.

The setbacks suffered by engineering workers are bad enough. What is even worse is the indifference of the AUEW National Committee to these attacks on their members.

What, me worry?

The right-wing dominated AUEW National Committee simply ignored the plight of its members. The leadership talked about lodging a claim for a 'substantial' wage increase and then fudged the issue by refusing to specify the claim. The big debates were not about how to strengthen the position of engineers in industry or how to fight redundancies. Every issue affecting the interests of the rank and file was glossed over. The only controversial issues were the make-up of the Labour Party's electoral college and the method of selecting the party leader. A lot of energy was devoted to discussing Duffy's proposal to accept state aid to finance union elections.

Fortunately Duffy's proposal was defeated, giving the left an excuse to gloat over a great moral victory. The Communist Party's industrial organiser claimed that 'the Thatcher government' had 'sustained a tremendous setback by this vote' (*Morning Star*, 8 May 1981). Duffy might have lost one vote but what did workers gain? All that happened was that the AUEW leadership staged a non-debate to avoid considering the pressing problems of the day.

The left-wing bureaucrats offer no alternative to Duffy's leadership. Like Duffy, the Broad Left in the AUEW is quite prepared to negotiate new onerous productivity deals and sell jobs in exchange for better redundancy money. For example, Sheffield CP leader and AUEW District Secretary George Caborn recently tried to sell the jobs of 90 workers at Plansee Tooling Rotherham for token redundancy payments; in the same way he has helped employers to push through thousands of redundancies in Sheffield already. In effect the left has given up the struggle against sackings and has chosen to fight for *voluntary* as opposed to *compulsory* redundancies.

For all his socialist rhetoric, the Broad Left bureaucrat has the outlook of a pragmatic businessman. He approaches each dispute from the point of view of the firm's accountant. If the books show a profit then a struggle against redundancies is justified. If the books are in the red then a struggle is unrealistic and he will propose voluntary redundancies and demand substantial redundancy payments. Today, when the engineering industry is in a profound recession many left bureaucrats have drawn the conclusion that jobs cannot be defended – that struggles for the defence of all jobs are so unrealistic that they might force firms to close down altogether. In this defeatist frame of mind the Broad Left shares Duffy's enthusiasm for debating the composition of the Labour Party electoral college rather than the important problems of the shop floor.

Our approach

Regular readers of *the next step* will be familiar with our attitude towards the struggle for jobs. Fighting for every job is indeed unrealistic – from a capitalist point of view. But it is essential for the survival of the working class. A realistic defence of working class living standards is entirely unreasonable for the employers. This is the case because whenever workers stand up to defend their livelihood they prevent their bosses from solving the crisis at their expense.

Whether a firm is profitable or not is irrelevant for the working class. If workers take responsibility for the financial state of their firm they in effect take responsibility for the capitalist system. Those who accept that these areas are the concern of trade unionists must also accept the measures necessary for the survival of capitalist industry – redundancies, speed-ups and wage cuts. Our message is this: let the bosses worry about their profits, workers should look after their own interests regardless of the state of the firm, the industry or the national economy.

The pre-occupation with profits and the state of industry has overshadowed the struggles of engineering workers. Even militant occupations have been influenced by the Broad Left approach. Thus the factory occupation at Gardner Diesel Engineers in Eccles late last year was presented by the left as a 'victory'. Victory in this case meant more than 300 voluntary redundancies and the introduction of a short-time working scheme following the acceptance of a six per cent wage deal.

The most negative feature of the Gardner's experience was that Broad Left politics influenced militants to adopt voluntary redundancies as an acceptable objective. In effect the voluntary sacrifice of workers' living standards has become reconciled with rank and file militancy. Today this philosophy of voluntary as opposed to compulsory sacrifices dominates every important dispute. We look at the occupation of Laurence Scott Electromotors (LSE) and outline the fight of supporters of *the next step* to avoid another Gardner's type 'victory'.

Laurence Scott in dispute

The anatomy of an occupation

ON 7 APRIL 1981, Arthur Snipe, owner of Doncaster-based conglomerate Mining Supplies, announced the closure of the Manchester plant of his recently acquired group of companies – the Laurence Scott and Electromotors Group. Mining Supplies bought up the Scott Group only a few months previously for a knock-down price of £6.5m. At the time market value was estimated by independent accountants to be around £18.5m.

At the time of the take over Snipe gave the usual assurances about maintaining the LSE Group as a going concern and guaranteeing jobs and conditions. But Snipe didn't spend £6.5m for fun. Like all capitalists he wants to get the highest rate of return on his investment.

Following the announcement that the factory would close on 10 July the workforce began to discuss its response. There was agreement that some action had to be taken to save jobs. But what kind of action? *Dave Hallsworth* reports.

AFTER HEATED DEBATE the workforce voted to occupy the factory. When the workers took over on 24 April management was taken aback. After all the 650 employees of LSE had no tradition of militancy. Indeed the workforce had only recently accepted short-time work and was even resigned to the inevitability of redundancies.

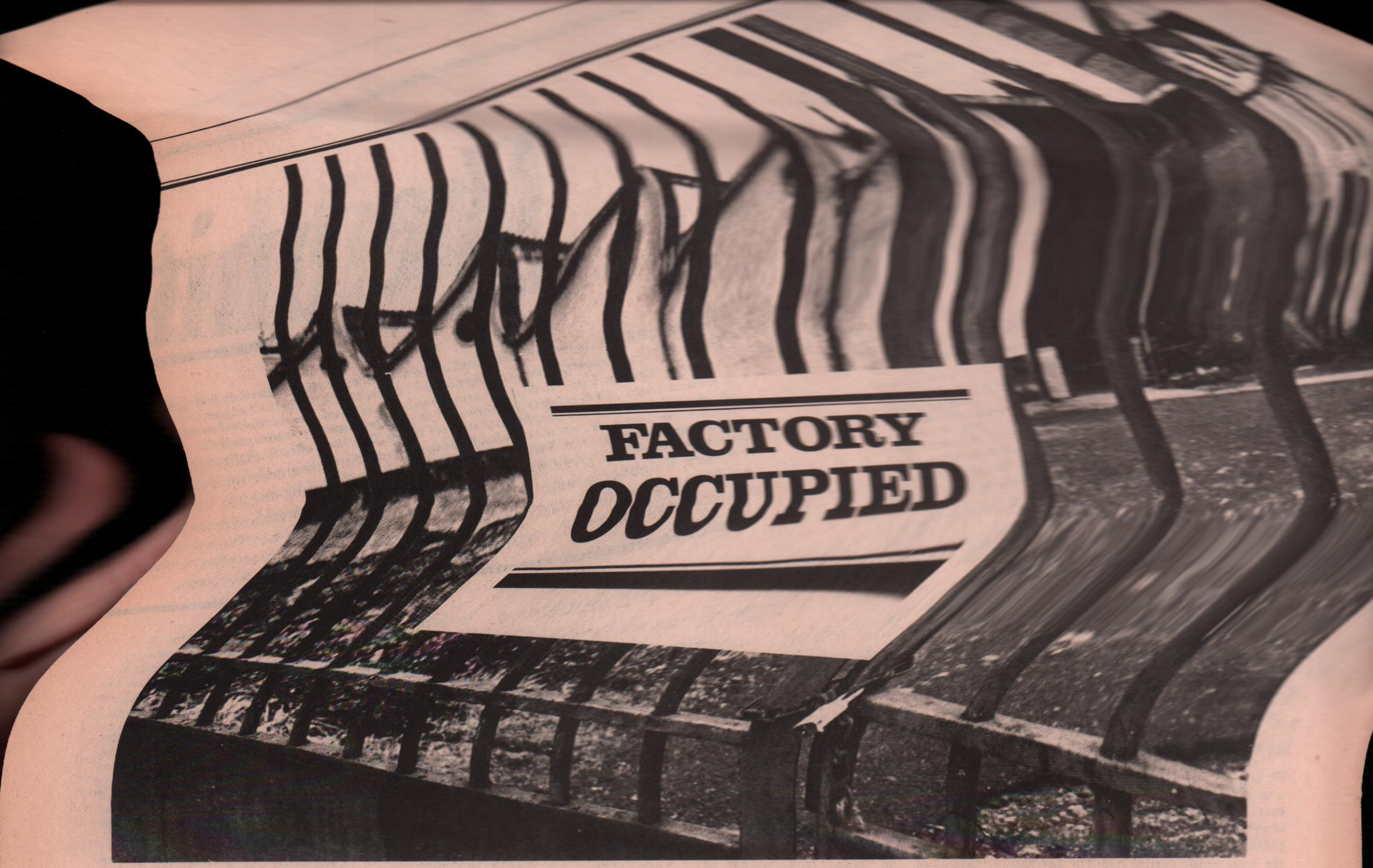
The bosses were not slow to counter-attack. Noting that a substantial minority of workers had voted against the occupation they felt confident about their ability to split the workforce. So on 29 April, Mining Supplies wrote to all employees threatening to sack anyone who did not return to work by Tuesday 5 May. The implication of this letter was clear – workers were in breach of their contract so those with less than 12 years' service would forfeit all redundancy pay. The objective of this notice was to force the younger workers to break the strike. It failed.

On 3 May a factory meeting voted 313 to 247 to continue the occupation. Despite the employer's expectations the younger workers were the strongest supporters of continuing the action. Full-time AUEW organiser, John Tocher argued that if the workforce gave in every employer in Manchester would claim that workers were in breach of contract whenever they were in dispute. Sackings for striking would become commonplace and the union would be smashed. So far so good.

Behind the occupation

Following the 7 April announcement of closure the local union officials approached the Engineering Research Unit at Manchester Polytechnic to work out an economic case for keeping LSE open. It quickly produced a document which was distributed to every worker in the factory. The arguments contained in it were based on the 'lessons' of the Gardner's occupation. It called for realism and compromise.

'The unions accepted short-time working as preferable to redundancies and if the factory stays open they realistically accept that if orders do not increase then they will have to negotiate redundancies, exploring fully ways of obtaining reductions in the size of the workforce by voluntary means.' (*Engineering Research Unit*, p2)



This message was reiterated by Tocher at the 24 April factory meeting. The result was that right from the start the aim of the occupation was unclear. Was it to save jobs or was it to find an alternative method of giving them up?

The realism which the local union officials share with the Engineering Research Unit implies that redundancies are better than closures. Their arguments to the workforce are based entirely on what makes sense from the point of view of Arthur Snipe. They advised workers to reconcile their interests with the commercial criteria used by LSE.

The union officials were prepared to put the case of the workforce in accordance with the business needs of the bosses. Thus the call for compromise contained in the Research Group document was appended to the first appeal sheet for funds. This was only changed under pressure from supporters of *the next step*. However the bureaucrats' second attempt was no better. This is how it read:

Our case for staying open

1 Profitable over last 9 years
2 Made profit of £70 000 last year. Rest of Group lost £1.8m. Yet we are closing down
3 Ongoing order book. Current unexecuted orders of £2.75m. Projected order book £8m for next financial year
4 Complete solidarity of the site unions involved

AUEW, EETPU, TGWU, APEX, TASS, ASTMS, ASB

The bureaucrats' 'case'

It was an attempt to tell the bosses that they were bad businessmen who didn't know their own trading position. Unfortunately Mining Supplies know their business. They're out for maximum profits and LSE Manchester does not fit into their plans. If the unions use economic arguments for their case they're merely preparing the ground for their own defeat.

The tactics of doom

The tactics of the LSE occupation reflected the narrow objectives of the local union officials. Instead of stepping up the fight and placing the maximum pressure on Mining Supplies, the leadership inside the factory ran the occupation in first gear. It was manned by shifts of only 40 workers. By not planning regular mass meetings the union officials discouraged workers from playing an active role in the day to day affairs of the occupation. As a result the potential power of all 650 LSE workers was ignored. The occupation was all set to become a harmless bureaucratically run affair. Initially nobody took steps to extend the struggle through flying pickets and solidarity action.

Regular factory meetings are crucial in an occupation. Without them workers become isolated and more prone to the arguments of the bosses and the media. Mass meetings are particularly important in a dispute such as LSE where there is a large number of reluctant workers. It is important to bring everyone together so that the experiences of the struggle can be assimilated and the spirit of struggle spread.

The more that workers are involved in an occupation the less reliant they become on the local bureaucrats. Workers who participate in struggle become aware of the ins and the outs of the situation and can resist the attempts of the labour bureaucrats to negotiate behind the scenes. These were some of the points raised by supporters of *the next step* inside the factory. Our first success came on 3 May when it was decided to send flying pickets to Mining Supplies HQ in Doncaster. It was none too soon to go on the offensive.

the next step

Supporters of *the next step* have been active inside LSE for some time. Our first bulletin went into the factory following the takeover at the end of 1980. At that time the employers bullied the shop floor into a shorter working week under the Government's Temporary Short Time Work Compensation Scheme. At that point a four-day week was introduced. Our bulletin argued against accepting the worsening of conditions that a four-day week meant.

> 'We are in a situation where we have to be as unreasonable in defence of our interests as the boss is in defence of his. We have to tell whoever runs Scotts that we are not accepting a worsening of our conditions just so that their position can be bettered.' (*the next step factory bulletin*, October 1980, Laurence Scott and Electromotors)

The warning proved timely. Before long the factory was on a three-day week and wages were reduced. The factory leadership accepted the new conditions and wage reductions without a fight and Mining Supplies were confident that they were on to a winner. Unlike the factory leadership they understood that short-time work was the first step towards redundancies and closure.

When the closure of the factory was announced we put out our second bulletin. One of the reasons why short-time had been so easily accepted was the confidence of the skilled men that their jobs were safe. The shop floor was split. Only the testing bay and the winding room opposed the shop stewards' recommendations. Sectional interests surfaced and many skilled workers ignored the threat to the jobs of the semi-skilled and unskilled. The closure plans cut across sectional interests. They affected all workers: and support for strike action had to come from all.

The record of the local union officials was not one to inspire the confidence of the workforce. Therefore the first instinct of many workers was to accept redundancy money rather than risk all in a fight to save jobs. However, over the next couple of weeks the realisation that unemployment would not go away gave many workers second thoughts. Support for some sort of action began to grow. Supporters of *the next step* played a major role in winning backing for an occupation.

Our bulletin was put out on 23 April after the publication of the Manchester Polytechnic document and a day before the factory meeting. It directly challenged the findings of the Polytechnic report:

> 'We must state clearly that we will not accept closure or redundancies. NOT A JOB MUST BE SOLD! Gardner's made the mistake of only opposing compulsory redundancies. They ended up with over 300 voluntary job losses. Some victory! It would be no victory to agree with redundancy instead of closure.' (*the next step factory bulletin*, April 1981, LSE)

The bulletin went on to argue for an immediate occupation and put the case against proposals for delaying action till 10 July – the closure date. The arguments were discussed and debated for two days and helped convince many to support immediate occupation.

Once the action began we sought to challenge the passive lines on which the occupation was run:

> 'What we do now will determine whether we win or lose. If we sit back and wait Snipe will be relatively unconcerned. After all he has many factories. He plans to close ours anyway. It will not be much of a problem for him to sit it out if all we affect is his Manchester operation.
>
> 'We have to go on the offensive. The £2.25 million of work on the shop floor is nothing compared to the profit he is making elsewhere. We need to organise groups of workers to go out from Manchester to his other factories.' (*the next step factory bulletin*, April 1981, LSE)

Many LSE workers now agree on the need to step up the fight.

The arguments for militant action are relatively easy to present. It is much more difficult to mobilise for the defence of every job. The choice of voluntary redundancies seems realistic to many trade unionists. It fits in well with the politics of sacrifice and compromise that dominate the trade union movement. Right from the start of the occupation our supporters argued against this option. What is at issue is whether *class compromise* or the *class struggle* is the best way for defending living standards.

Workers throughout Britain have a fine tradition of union organisation and aggressive industrial action. The problem as always is the political perspective that influences this militancy. At Gardner's it was directed towards compromise and realism. At LSE we're fighting for our class and not for their firm. Whether we win or lose at LSE depends on which political perspective prevails.

Appeal for funds

Send donations and messages of support to: Appeal Fund
Laurence Scott
Louisa Street, Higher Openshaw,
Manchester 11 1AL

The unit

The united front is one of the most abused concepts of the British left. Every type of heterogeneous movement – from the Anti-Nazi League to the Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament – has been characterised as a united front. Radical left opponents of revolutionary communists always criticise us for rejecting the united front. The Workers Socialist League, for example, attacked the Labour Movement conference on Ireland organised by the Smash the PTA Campaign for going ahead '(literally) under the green banner of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency' for not organising it 'through a trade union body but their own SPTAC, giving their party address for contact'. The author of a polemical article directed against the RCT in the Socialist Workers

The origins of the united front tactic

MANY left-wing organisations use the concept of the united front as a synonym for united action. This loose usage of the concept fails to understand the specific background that led to the formulation of this tactic and its objectives.

The immediate period following the end of the First World War saw the split of the European labour movement into its revolutionary and reformist wings. Until the formation of the Communist International (CI) and of communist parties throughout Europe the division between reformists and revolutionaries had little organisational expression. For Lenin and the Bolsheviks a break with the existing social-democratic organisations and the establishment of revolutionary parties was essential for the forward march of the proletariat. In the revolutionary wave that followed the war large communist parties were built in Western and Central Europe. Even in countries like Britain and Austria, where the social-democratic parties remained powerful, the advanced sections of the working class gave their allegiance to the communist parties.

By 1920 stable capitalist relations were re-established and the revolutionary wave had begun to subside. It had become clear to the CI that the European revolution was not immediately on the agenda and that a protracted period of struggle lay ahead of the communist parties. The problem facing the CI was this: although the communist parties had won the vanguard of the working class they had not yet won the mass of the proletariat. In certain countries, like Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, the communist parties had become the dominant parties of the working class. But these were the exceptions. More typical were Germany and Italy where the communist parties constituted from one quarter to one third of the labour movement.

The tactic of the united front was formulated at a meeting of the Executive of the CI in December 1921. The problem which this tactic attempted to address was how to win the mass of the proletariat to the banner of communism. Trotsky noted that at the Third Congress of the CI 'a new stage begins: the parties take into account that they have yet to win the masses and that an assault must be preceded by a more or less protracted period of preparatory work. There opens up the zone of the united front' (L Trotsky, *The first five years of the Communist International*, Vol 1, Pathfinder).

The aim of the united front tactic was to organise joint actions between the communist and reformist parties. United action in the interests of the working class was necessary for combatting the capitalist offensive. But more than that, reformist workers would, in the course of these struggles, experience the communist parties in action and overcome their suspicion towards revolutionaries. Since reformist parties fear the revolutionary potential of the mass movement more than anything else they would try to contain the scope of the struggle. Thus the CI felt that workers would come to see that social-democratic parties were unable to defend their class interests. As Trotsky noted: 'we are apart from all other considerations, interested in dragging the reformists from their asylums and placing them alongside ourselves before the eyes of the struggling masses' (*The first five years...*).

The united front tactic was designed to win the mass of the working class who through their experience of struggle would learn to reject their reformist leadership. How? It was expected that after a certain point the reformist parties would retreat from the struggle and argue for its termination. This would show the reformists to be the real splitters, for they would rather break up the united front than defend the interests of the working class:

> 'In many cases and perhaps even the majority of cases, organisational agreements will be only half-attained or perhaps not at all. But it is necessary that the struggling masses should always be given the opportunity of convincing themselves that the non-achievement of unity in action was not due to our formalistic irreconcilability but to the lack of real will to struggle on the part of the reformists.' (*The first five years...*)

According to the CI the exposure of the reformists would only be achieved and the masses only won to communism if revolutionaries maintained their political independence and challenged the politics of the social-democratic parties. As Trotsky argued: 'any sort of organisational agreement which restricts our freedom of criticism and agitation is absolutely unacceptable to us. We participate in a united front but do not for a single minute become dissolved in it. We function in the united front as an independent detachment' (*The first five years...*).

The misconceptions about it

To recapitulate: the united front was not simply united action – it was united action designed to expose the reformist leadership of the labour movement and to win the mass of workers to the already existing vanguard parties.

It is quite clear that present circumstances are different from the problems the tactic of the united front sought to address. Today there are large Stalinist and social-democratic parties and revolutionary parties barely exist. Today the problem is to win a significant section of the working class to communism, not to win the masses to an already existing vanguard. The tactic of the united front is inappropriate today if for no other reason than the fact that the revolutionary wing of the united front does not exist! This tactic is irrelevant to situations where revolutionaries cannot lead the struggle of the masses. In 1922 when Trotsky argued for the adoption of this tactic he also outlined the circumstances where the united front was misplaced.

> 'In cases where the Communist Party still remains an organisation of a numerically insignificant minority, the question of its conduct on the mass-struggle front does not assume a decisive practical and organisational significance. In such conditions, mass actions remain under the leadership of the old organisations which by reason of their still powerful traditions continue to play the decisive role...
>
> 'But wherever the CP already constitutes a big, organised, political force, but not the decisive magnitude; wherever the party embraces organisationally, let us say, one fourth, one third, or even a larger proportion of the organised proletarian vanguard, it is confronted with the question of the united front in all its acuteness.' (*The first five years...*)

Where in Europe do revolutionaries embrace organisationally one fourth or one third of the working class? Just posing this question shows that those who call for a united front today mean something quite different by this tactic than the concept's originators. So why is the radical left so fascinated with a tactic that it is in no position to pursue? Let's look at the matter more deeply.

Its misapplication

Through a combination of taking initiatives in united mass struggles and the exposure of the reformist leaders, the tactic of the united front was designed to extend the influence of the communist parties. Unfortunately the implementation of this tactic suffered from a number of problems. A minority of parties, such as the Italian one, were reluctant to unite with the social democrats and therefore allowed the reformist bureaucrats to take the initiative. A more widespread error was to subordinate the communist programme to the united front. At the Fourth Congress of the CI, Zinoviev, its president, congratulated the German party for achieving a degree of success with this tactic. 'But', he went on, 'we have often seen that our German party did not always emphasise sufficiently the independence of our line of action; for with us the insistence upon the independence of communist agitation is the main thing. They were not always successful in this' (*Bulletin of Fourth Congress of the Communist International*, No 2, 12 November 1922).

Most communist parties were politically too immature to understand the united front tactic. Hence many of them saw it simply as a unity pact with reformist parties. As a result communist parties united with the reformists on issues that were acceptable to the latter and failed to agitate around broader questions. Criticism was muted for the sake of unity, and many communist parties argued that differences should only be raised once the immediate objectives of the united front were achieved. This opportunist approach to the united front was particularly marked in Britain. A few weeks before the election of the first minority Labour Government Palme Dutt, the leading theoretician of the CPGB, argued:

> 'Therefore the first need for all of us at the present moment, whatever our differences, whatever our criticisms and distrusts, is to unite in support of a Workers' Government and its supremacy first and foremost, and to exert all our forces one and all to fight on its behalf foursquare against the whole capitalist world.' (*Labour Monthly*, January 1924)

These arguments for a Labour government altered in practice the basic premise of the united front tactic. Instead of pursuing communist politics in unity in action the British party merely pursued unity. Hence these tactics served the Labour Party and not the communists. In effect through the misapplication of the tactic the building of the revolutionary party was counterposed to the united front as unity with the reformists always came first.

Through the years the opportunistic application of the united front tactic led



ed front

Party's theoretical journal noted: 'It is significant that I have yet to encounter in the RCT's works one reference to the concept of the united front.'

Below we examine the tactic of the united front, explain its historical origin, show how this tactic bears no relationship to the radical left's 'united front' and argue why this tactic is inappropriate for the task of building a revolutionary party in the present circumstances. The editors of the next step are prepared to publish the contrasting views of other political tendencies in future issues of the review.

to its practical reinterpretation. Its original objectives were lost sight of and anybody who wanted to justify unity with social democrats invoked the united front tactic. In the 'thirties the now Stalinist communist parties even extended its scope to embrace all 'democrats', including capitalist parties. A few years later this form of class collaboration was renamed the 'Popular Front'. It should be noted that one of the original aims of the united front was precisely to prevent the emergence of this form of an all-class political bloc. Trotsky argued:

'One of the most reliable methods of counteracting inside the working class the moods and ideas of. . .a bloc between the workers and a certain section of the bourgeoisie against another section of the bourgeoisie is through promoting persistently and resolutely the idea of a bloc between all sections of the working class against the whole bourgeoisie.' (*The first five years. . .*)

The misapplication of the tactic along opportunistic lines gained such coherence that by the 'thirties even revolutionary elements failed to grasp the past significance of the united front.

The radical left's usage of the term and its application of the tactic represent the contemporary expression of this opportunist trend. A recent statement by the SWP Central Committee on the united front is almost identical to the approach of the CPGB in the mid 'twenties.

'However, in the present situation, the *major* problem is to develop activity in opposition to the Tories and the right wing. The exposure of the lefts can be left to events provided we maintain a clear independent SWP political presence.' ('Problems of united front work', *SWP Internal Bulletin*, November 1980)

The afterthought 'a clear independent political presence' could only mean a *physical* not a *political* presence, for without challenging the Labour lefts any 'united front' will be dominated by the politics of the reformists.

Not just a misunderstanding

But the zealous adherence of the radical left to this tactic isn't just a simple misunderstanding of the history of the united front. The radical left itself is a product of the Stalinist degeneration of the CI. This degeneration, which contributed to the defeats of the working class, has pushed revolutionary groups to the sidelines. Throughout the last fifty years there has been no revolutionary organisation in Europe able to lead mass struggles. Unable to influence events, even subjectively revolutionary elements have given up the struggle to lead the working class through their independent activity.

As a result the radical left has sought to compensate for its numerical weakness and social insignificance by forming 'united fronts' with each other and reformist tendencies. In the 'sixties the proliferation of social movements among students, women, black people, gays and others reinforced this trend. Increasingly the 'broad' character of these movements was counterposed to the narrow terrain of the revolutionary party.

These movements were broad only in comparison to the insignificant radical left. In fact the focus of broad appeal narrowed down the political character of these movements to what was acceptable to all the participants. Most left groups claimed that they had an 'independent presence' but in practice were indistinguishable from each other in their search for the broad masses. This method of political work had important political consequences. Increasingly the particular nuances of each radical left group's programme became irrelevant for all practical purposes. For what counted was the broad movement and the demands that could be made within each of its sections. In practice the building of a revolutionary party was abandoned in favour of operating within broad movements.

The present-day trend of entering the Labour Party amongst the radical left characterises the latest phase of this broad movement approach. But even groups like the SWP who have not physically entered the Labour Party are desperate to find a movement to survive in. This is the meaning of the SWP's exhortations on the united front tactic. As its Central Committee concludes: 'we must seek to put ourselves at the centre of any significant movement of opposition to the Tories, national and local, whenever we possibly can. Therefore we have to involve ourselves in united front work, both informal and formal, whenever any opportunity or half opportunity offers' ('Problems of united front work').

The price of the broad front

Our difference with the radical left's usage of the united front isn't a linguistic one. To be sure the left calls anything – formal, informal, local, national – a united front. Our difference relates to the character of political activity. Today the concept united front justifies the inability of the left to maintain an independent political existence and a refusal to struggle for influence in the labour movement around a revolutionary programme. The left always baulks at raising even its own more radical demands lest it should alienate others in the 'united front'.

There are many examples. Radical left groups like the SWP and the IMG are formally committed to support the demand for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Ireland. Yet these organisations have set up numerous 'united fronts' which ignored these demands and advanced slogans which were not anti-imperialist just so they could bring in others to the 'broad' movement. They call this a clever tactic. But it's more than that. Their own programme has no consequence, for it is overshadowed by the practice of searching for broad fronts. These groups maintain only an organisational independence – their political activity is dictated by the character of the 'broad movements'.

The reason why the RCT puts such an emphasis on its independent activity is not because of an abstract love for independence. It is because our own demands are inconsistent with those of the existing 'united fronts'. We are not prepared to fight for objectives which do not advance the interests of the working class for the sake of unity. We have established the Smash the PTA Campaign because the existing campaigns refused to take up the fight against British imperialism in Ireland. Similarly we have launched our own anti-racist campaigns – ELWAR, SOLWAR – because the radical left campaigns are not prepared to fight all immigration controls and build workers' defence against racist attacks.

Unity in action

We are for unity in action as long as it is unity around objectives which are in the interests of the working class. What we oppose is the trend which places unity before class interest. Anti-Tory unity with the Labour Party does not unite workers around their independent interests but unites workers around the capitalist policies of the Labour Party.

As far as the tactic of the united front is concerned its irrelevance to today's struggle should be evident. Those who seek to pursue this tactic are blind to the realities of the day.

Reformist politics dominate the European working class and strongly influence even its militant sections. Tactics and strategy must relate to this state of affairs. The immediate task is to transform the most active section of our class into a class conscious vanguard. But this cannot be done by remaining in the shadow of reformist politicians and building incoherent broad fronts.

Precisely at a time when active workers see no alternative to their traditional parties the independent activity of revolutionaries assumes a momentous significance. The reformists can shrug off episodic criticisms and even vehement denunciations. They know that their left critics will not go too far and question their leading position in the labour movement. In Britain radical left criticisms of the Labour Party are more a form of advice than an alternative. What conclusion will workers draw when they read in *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Challenge* that they should support Benn against Healey in the contest for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party?

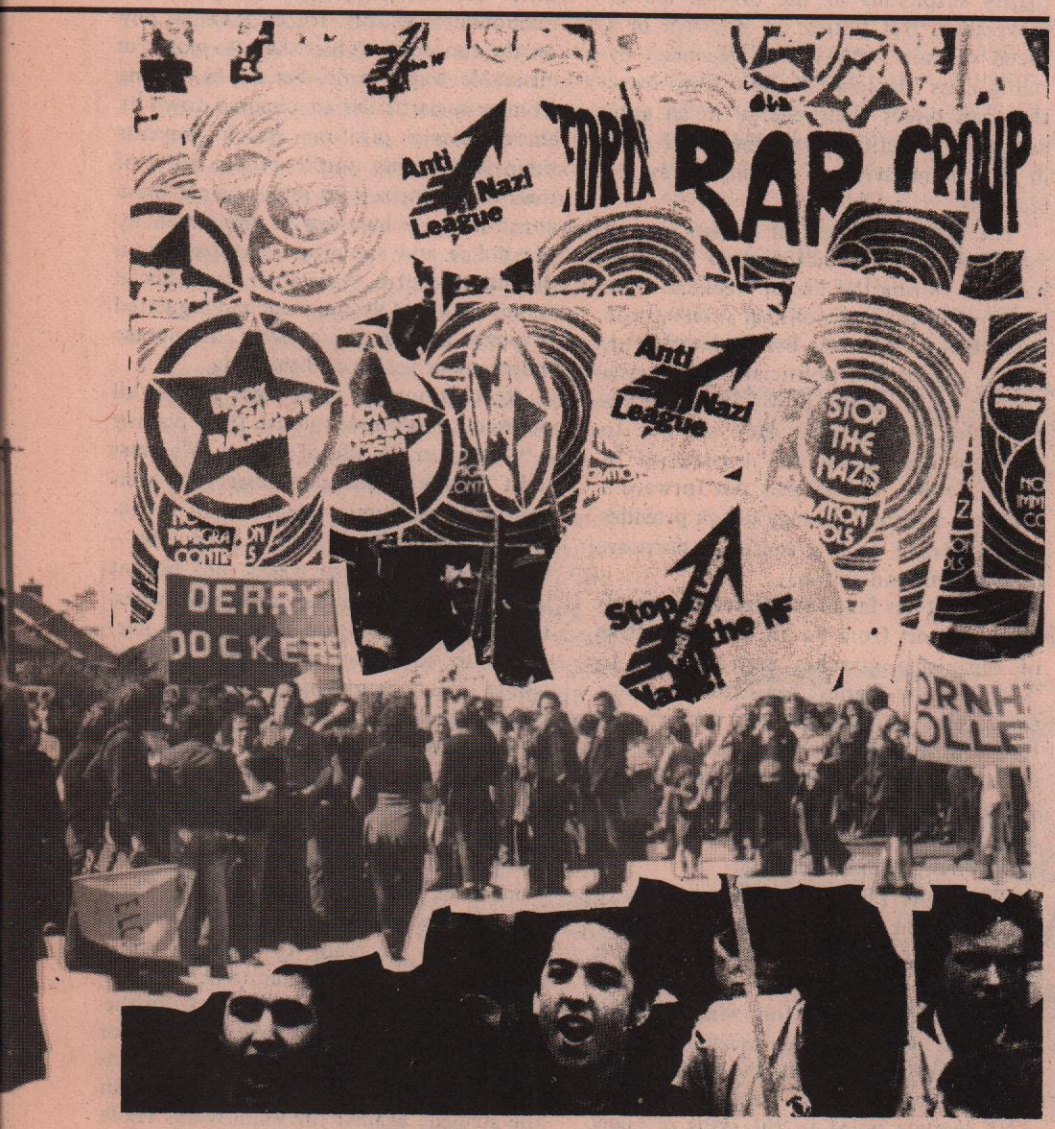
The reason why independent revolutionary activity is so important is because no significant section of the working class will break with reformism unless they see an alternative in the here and now. Those who call for a united front against the Tories or a vote for Labour are not offering an alternative in the present. They are telling active workers to stick with the traditions of the past and wait for an alternative in the future.

First the great divide

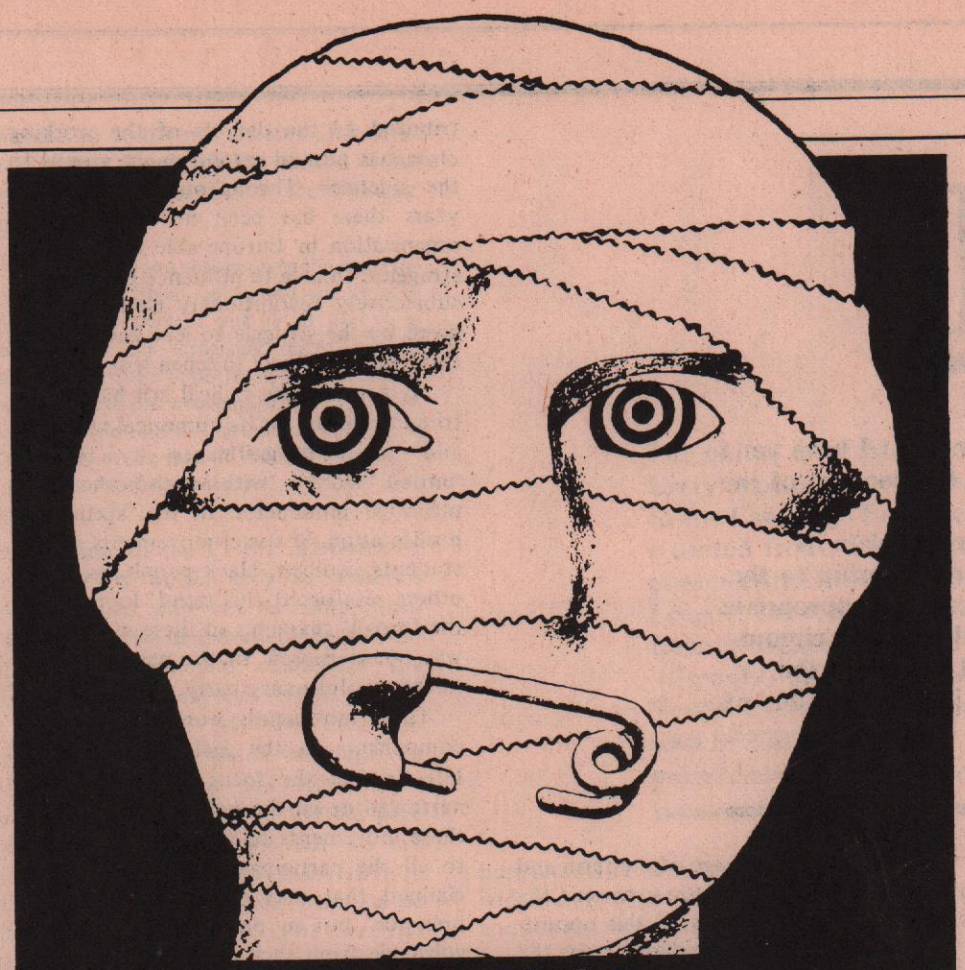
The struggle against reformism cannot be left to theoretical journals and symposiums. It has to be carried onto the field of the class struggle. It requires concentrated revolutionary propaganda which coheres active workers into a political force. It requires independent activity which utilises every experience of struggle to clarify the need for a political alternative.

At present the working class is united around the banner of social democracy. The formation of a vanguard necessarily means the destruction of this unity. Those who criticise our independent activity are in reality criticising our determination to polarise political opinion in the labour movement between those who want to reform capitalism and those who want its overthrow. Yet the working class will have to be politically divided before it can be a united force. But then it will be united around its own revolutionary leadership and not as at present around a capitalist Labour Party.

Frank Richards



The Smash the PTA Campaign labour movement delegation to Derry: unity in action in support of the Irish hunger strike splits anti-imperialist workers from the labour bureaucracy.
The Anti-Nazi League: unity under reformist control led anti-fascist youth and workers into bureaucratic passivity.



A teenage nightmare

Whenever the ruling class is in trouble young people had better watch out. Today is no exception. More than 40 per cent of all unemployed are under 25. And half of these are teenagers. School leavers face the grim alternative of joining the dole queues or the army. The prospect of economic necessity, boredom and frustration means that most youth have little stake in society. The violent outbursts of anger during Easter Bank holiday, street fighting in Brixton and vandalism on housing estates all show the volatility of youth today.

The ruling class response

THE BOSSES fear young workers. Even at the best of times youth are not easy to control. Still too young to be cowed by the system, teenagers have the energy and sometimes the idealism to rebel against authority and to reject existing social values. Unlike their elders, youths have often not been disciplined into accepting the reality of capitalism. Even less rebellious young people expect something more out of life than the grey existence to which their parents are accustomed.

Today the bosses cannot rely on their traditional instruments of social control. Contempt for authority among the young no longer lies under the surface. Violent confrontations with the state have become a daily occurrence. As the *Daily Mirror* lamented about the Easter weekend riots: 'Police were kicked and spat upon'. For the state the problem is not vandalism and petty crime but the threat of losing control over young people. The ruling class wants to make sure that the anger and frustration of young people leads to despair rather than to defiance. The state has taken a number of steps to realise this objective.

Hard-core young 'criminals' can expect 'short, sharp shocks' in detention centres for 17 to 20 year olds. Organised on military lines, these centres exist to crush young people into passivity. This approach, in combination with the sort of indiscriminate police repression that followed the Brixton revolt, is designed to scare young people into good bourgeois behaviour.

But naked violence is not enough. A more subtle approach can be detected in the recent proposals to resurrect National Service. In February came the proposal for registering young people for conscription. Since then there have been numerous suggestions for introducing some form of military-type organisation for unemployed youth. These plans are always presented in economic rather than disciplinary terms. For example Tory MP Hugh Fraser justified conscription on the grounds that it would provide useful skills and 'create a workforce adapted and trained to meet and win the challenge of the 1980s' (*The Times*, 8 April 1981). The real aim of these schemes is quite different. National Service would take young people off the streets and place them under the direct control of the state. Those conscripted would be 'educated' to respect authority, salute the Union Jack and accept discipline. National Service is an antidote to the spirit of rebellion – it is designed to make young people act middle-aged.

The ruling class runs cosmetic exercises in job training. The Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) is meant to provide unemployed youth with work preparation courses and experience. These temporary schemes have failed to provide new jobs. A recent ILEA report showed that 70 per cent of YOP trainees could not find a job. They pay you £23.50 for a forty hour week to prepare you for unemployment. YOP schemes have been touted as evidence of the Government's determination to do something about unemployment. Indeed YOP schemes have done something about unemployment – young workers have been used as £23.50 scabs to take over jobs formerly done by higher paid older workers. According to one report, up to 100 000 people are on the dole because their jobs have been taken over by YOP trainees (*Sunday Times*, 15 March 1981).

But these measures are just the beginning. The state is prepared to devise new schemes appropriate to its objective of quelling the anger of youth and isolating 'trouble makers'.

Labour's solution

The TUC and the Labour Party have done nothing to support unemployed youth. The labour leadership has been quite prepared to let the young unemployed stay isolated from the organised working class. The trade unions have allowed apprenticeships to be scrapped without a murmur. Insofar as the TUC has an attitude towards young unemployed it springs from its narrow self-interests: first to prevent potential competition from young workers prepared to undercut union rates and secondly to maintain control over the activities of unemployed youth.

Labour bureaucrats have issued numerous statements on the plight of the young; they have condemned this 'waste of human resources'. But they have taken no practical measures to defend young workers. Indeed their sole pre-occupation has been to control youth unrest. The TUC has established numerous unemployed workers' centres which are carefully monitored to prevent any form of militant action. It is interested in organising young workers solely because it does not want unemployed youth to fall under the influence of 'extremists'.

This preoccupation with policing young unemployed workers is very much in evidence on the widely publicised People's March. Tight bureaucratic control is being exercised to guarantee that its proceeds as a smooth and respectable affair. It is no surprise that with this attitude the official labour movement has not been able to inspire young workers. Young people find it hard to identify with the trade union movement. Their absence on labour movement marches and rallies shows the irrelevance of the unions to today's youth.

Many young people have grown up under Labour councils and governments. They have seen the poverty and decay of inner city areas. They have seen Labour politicians break one promise after another. No wonder that they have become cynical about labour movement politics.

A force for change?

The youth are always the most dynamic section of society. Because they are the most open to new ideas, historically they have been the most enthusiastic opponents of the capitalist system. If the working class movement is to become an effective force for revolutionary change it must incorporate the revolt of the youth.

Yet today the anger of young people finds little political expression. It is characterised by passivity, combined with episodic outbursts of violence. Aimlessness is the tragic consequence of the paralysis of the British labour movement. Labourist politics evoke only indifference among young people and many are rightly suspicious of the official labour movement. But youth do not live in a social vacuum – they are influenced by ruling class ideology. If there is no force that can direct their energy in an anti-capitalist direction then they will turn in on themselves or become prey to reaction.

The growing appeal of fascism among youth is a clear indictment of labourist politics. During the Easter weekend riots the only organised political intervention came from the fascist British Movement. Unlike the Labour politicians the fascists do not try to clamp down on youth unrest. On the contrary they are out to build on the anger and frustration of young people. The fascists put forward a coherent political strategy which provides young people with a sense of purpose, involvement and action.

The left has failed to attract any significant support from youth. Its perspective of organising marches and activities to 'kick out the Tories' has little relevance to the life of young people. Why should they join in activities whose real purpose is to strengthen the Labour Party's electoral appeal? Tony Benn may stir the heart of the radical left but he leaves most young people cold.

When the radical left tries to talk to young people all it can do is make patronising and pompous pronouncements. It apparently believes that teenagers are morons, incapable of following a logical argument. The Anti-Nazi League is particularly guilty of this. Rather than arguing against racism on the football terraces, ANL leaflets point to the skills of black footballers. One of the most disgusting manifestations of this patronising approach is the magazine *Revolution* or *Revo* as it has been endearingly called by its middle-aged, middle class supporters. This paper, the brainchild of the International Marxist Group and 'controlled by the kids', is written in a language of its own – which corresponds to the IMG's conception of how children talk. The main message of a recent issue is: 'If we want to fight sexism among the kids then we have to fight it through music' (*Revolution*, No 3).

These pathetic attempts to 'relate' to youth only generate contempt. They offer no alternative to the more persuasive pull of populist, action-oriented chauvinism. But fascists can sing too and they have proved that you can 'rock against communism' as well as 'rock against racism'. But unlike the left, the fascists offer more to frustrated youth ready to strike out.

Train young revolutionaries!

If young people are to play a leading role in the revolutionary movement a number of decisive steps will have to be taken.

Young people breathe the air of capitalist society. Although they lack the conservatism of their parents, they are still influenced by the views and prejudices that prevail in society. Angry young workers can be transformed into revolutionaries – but only if they are treated as serious individuals who can be trained in Marxist politics. Young people have a lively and experimental outlook. Political education can strengthen this critical faculty and encourage their quest for new solutions. Revolutionaries should not aim to ape the language of children like trendy vicars, but present Marxist politics in a lively and direct manner.

This requires special forms of work amongst youth. It requires action which relates to the specific social problems faced by young people. Young workers cannot have a life of their own. They cannot come and go as they please or experiment in their social life. Rules and regulations and lack of housing ensure that young people are continually frustrated in their social and sexual relations.

The central problem youth face is their lack of economic independence. Economic insecurity forces them to rely on the family. It forces them to work for miserable wages in dead-end jobs. Young women in particular are chained down by an economic position which prevents them from going out to pursue a life of their own. Those who rebel against these constraints are harassed on the streets by the police and are often sent down to a detention centre, borstal or gaol. Social values enforced by the state and regulated through the family actively discourage independent action and thinking.

Revolutionaries must fight against all obstacles that prevent youth from playing a full part in the life of society. We must fight for the resources necessary to overcome the economic insecurity of youth. Young people don't simply need jobs – but jobs with decent wages, not pocket money. Access to housing, social services, training and education facilities are necessary to allow young workers to overcome their degradation. Fighting for these policies is essential for winning young workers to the anti-capitalist struggle.

Lastly we must change the attitude of the labour movement towards youth. At present the trade unions look upon young workers as potential rivals for jobs. They fear that wages will be cut by young people who are ready to work for a pittance. This short-sighted approach ensures that the youth remain isolated from the labour movement. We have to convince workers that if young people are organised they will become a powerful force in the struggle against the employers. Trade unions must be forced to organise the unemployed youth – not to control them, but to unleash their energy in the struggle against capitalism. *Paul Saunders*

US policy in the Gulf:
Oil Wars

The sight of Margaret Thatcher dressed in an ankle-length robe and bowing before an Arab sheik probably grieved many a British patriot. But only a few weeks previously US Secretary of State Haig had been through the same kind of ritual. Both leaders made large arms deals with Gulf states – the Americans sold five AWACS early warning reconnaissance planes and the British a batch of fighters. The arms deals, and the new humility in the face of Arab leaders which secured them, are both unprecedented. They both reflect new foreign policy priorities in London and Washington. Below we examine how the USA, for 30 years the leading political force in the Gulf, has responded to the turmoil of Iran and Afghanistan.

RONALD REAGAN has finally begun 'refurbishing' the US presence in the Middle East – in line with the problems created by the fall of the Shah and the Russian intervention in Afghanistan. His new policy portrays America as engaged in a worldwide confrontation with the Soviet Union, and the Middle East as one of the main arenas of struggle. Reagan intends to deploy a large naval force in the Indian Ocean and get the agreement of local states to the stationing of special forces in an 'emergency'. He's also considering the siting of permanent bases in the region.

Of course the Soviet bogey is primarily aimed to prepare the US public for armed intervention. In El Salvador where no Russians are to be found the US Administration simply invented them. What really frightens the Americans is not the external threat to the Gulf states, but the possibility of internal coups, revolutions and social upheaval.

Built on sand and oil

Every single state in the Gulf is unstable. Most are beset by regional strife, religious conflicts and the class tensions that have accompanied their rapid transformation from desert kingdoms to industrialised and very rich capitalist countries. They all fear a repeat of the type of events that deposed the Shah of Iran. Without exception they are presently ruled by autocrats – hardly even a vestige of bourgeois democracy exists. In Saudi Arabia for example no political parties or public assemblies are allowed. Across the Gulf a working class is being formed – mainly from foreign workers. As the 1979 disturbances in the Eastern Arabian oilfields and the recent strike by 3000 Palestinian oilworkers in Kuwait showed, it poses a new and growing threat.

The ruling groups in the Gulf states maintain an uneasy relationship with the major imperialist powers. Their one and only asset, oil, is extracted according to the needs of the world economy. Being the largest and probably most vulnerable country in the region, Saudi Arabia is willing to win favours from the imperialists by running its economy directly in line with Western policies. In recent months it has engineered a glut of the world oil market and cut prices by increasing its own production levels. Yet the Arab regimes know that their peoples resent their rulers' links with the West and their support for Israel.

Looking for friends

The imperialists need to stabilise the Middle East, bringing it further in line with their needs, without at the same time provoking the kind of upheaval which would damage Western interests, as happened in Iran. The old tried and tested methods no longer work. Following the demise of the Shah there was no country in the region which could act as overall guarantor of capitalist social relations. Until then the American policy had been to encourage countries in strategic areas to play this role. After Iran fell, the first reaction of the USA was to look for another regime in the Middle East to play the same role. But Egypt, the obvious candidate, was too deeply implicated in the notorious Camp David negotiations to carry on where Iran left off – although its troops have acted recently as US surrogates in Zaire, Morocco, Oman and Somalia. Iraq, the second choice, while having moved dramatically towards the West in the last two years, was not strong enough to exert its authority in the Gulf. When it did move against Iran in September 1980 its failure to gain a quick victory ended any pretension it may have had to take on the Shah's mantle.

In January 1980, unable to find a co-operative regional ally and disturbed by the destabilising influence of the Soviet move into Afghanistan, President Carter drew up plans for a new American strategy. Defence Secretary Harold Brown and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski came up with the concept of a Rapid Deployment Force. A new military strike force of 110 000 men ready to go at a moment's notice anywhere in the world was soon formed. The RDF remains central to American strategy today even if it has come in for a good deal of criticism and scepticism. *The Economist* recently described it as 'all hot air and paper: neither rapid, nor deployable and with no force at all' (2 May 1981). Whatever the shortcomings of the RDF, the USA has made it clear that it intends to play a much more interventionist role in world affairs.

Naturally Carter wasn't the only one watching developments in the Middle East. His uncertainty over the Camp David negotiations allowed the European initiative – a plan to consider involving the Palestine Liberation Organisation in negotiations over a future West Bank state – to get off the ground, despite American displeasure at this 'meddling'. Reagan has been looking for an alternative policy in the Middle East since he won the election last year. His first statements indicated he was looking towards the 'Jordanian option' of forming a West Bank state above the heads of the Palestinians and in co-operation with the reactionary King Hussain of Jordan. But this has faded from sight, since it left Egypt out of the reckoning.

At the beginning of the year Reagan tried a new tack. He dispatched arch-diplomatist and exponent of the 'softly, softly' approach to negotiation, Dr Henry Kissinger, as an 'unofficial' envoy to the Middle East. His unsubtle denouncement of the EEC plan and calls for US bases in the Middle East won the Reagan Administration no friends either there or in Europe. Kissinger too has disappeared from sight.

By March this year it was the turn of Secretary of State Alexander Haig to try his hand. He set out around the Middle East with the aim of establishing an anti-Soviet alignment, while at the same time assuring the Arabs that America was looking for a solution to the Palestinian question. Haig's Gulf-before-Palestine position was publicly rebuked in both Saudi Arabia and Jordan. He was also criticised by the Israelis for supplying advanced weaponry (capable of both detecting and destroying Israeli forces) to Saudi Arabia. But although the Arab rulers publicly disapproved of bases on their own territory, they assured Haig that in principle they accepted the need for a RDF. They are quite prepared to accept an 'over the horizon' force – and Oman, Egypt and Somalia are quite willing to supply facilities which amount to little less than fully-fledged bases on their territory.

The cost to America was generous arms deals with Gulf states. Egypt has already concluded a $4.2 billion weapons agreement with the USA. America has also had to face Israeli displeasure which may still force the cancellation of the Saudi arms deal, but the Israelis have been told that they will be kept one step ahead of their Arab rivals. Haig flattered them by calling them his allies and was even prepared to look the other way while Israeli jets launched sorties into the Lebanon. In any case, Israel's fears are partly misplaced because the involvement of Egypt in Camp David means its most powerful potential adversary is effectively neutralised. It is unlikely that any Arab country would risk an attack on Israel without Egyptian backing.

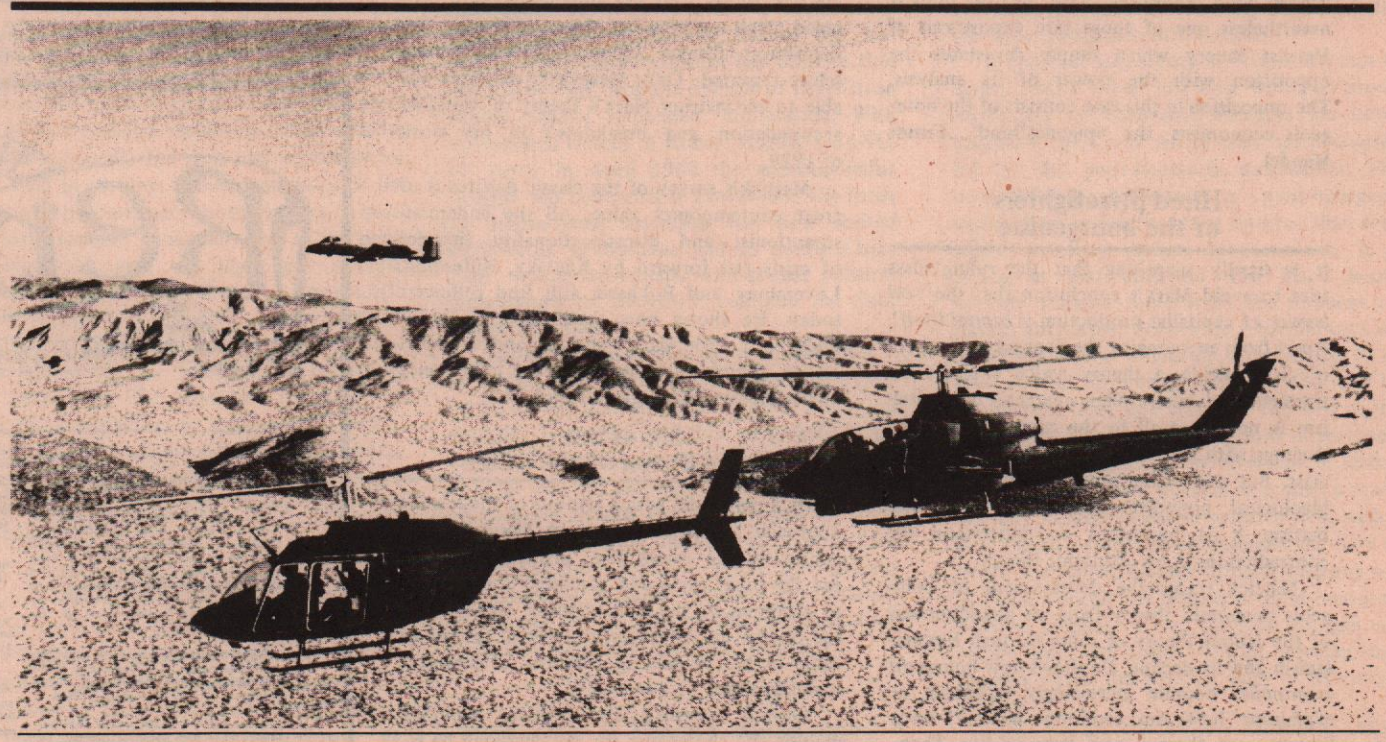
Gunboats at the ready

The USA has largely won acceptance for its increased military role in the Middle East. (It lost no opportunity at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war to increase its naval presence under the pretext of keeping the Straits of Hormuz open for oil tankers.) But the Arabs are still disturbed about Israeli intransigence over Palestine. They fear the radicalisation of the Arab masses which may arise out of sympathy with and support for the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian question is still a potentially explosive issue on which the USA is unwilling to make a move until after the Israeli election in June which will probably return the Labour Party to power. Haig has apparently extracted a promise from Lord Carrington that the EEC will not follow up its initiative until at least after this date to allow Camp David to get off the ground. But this has not stopped the Europeans from trying to win friends in the Middle East at the expense of the Americans.

Thatcher's recent tour was successful for British imperialism. She reassured the Arab regimes that Britain still sees the need to settle the Palestinian question. Britain is still an important political force in the Gulf – especially in Oman, which is virtually a British protectorate – and may have played a vital role in getting the Gulf states to come together into a security pact earlier this year. In public Britain and America have agreed to differ, although Britain may be asked to provide forces for the RDF. Besides touting for business Thatcher was in the Gulf to win support for an increased imperialist military presence in the region and to allay fears arising from European recognition of the Palestinians. In these areas she was successful.

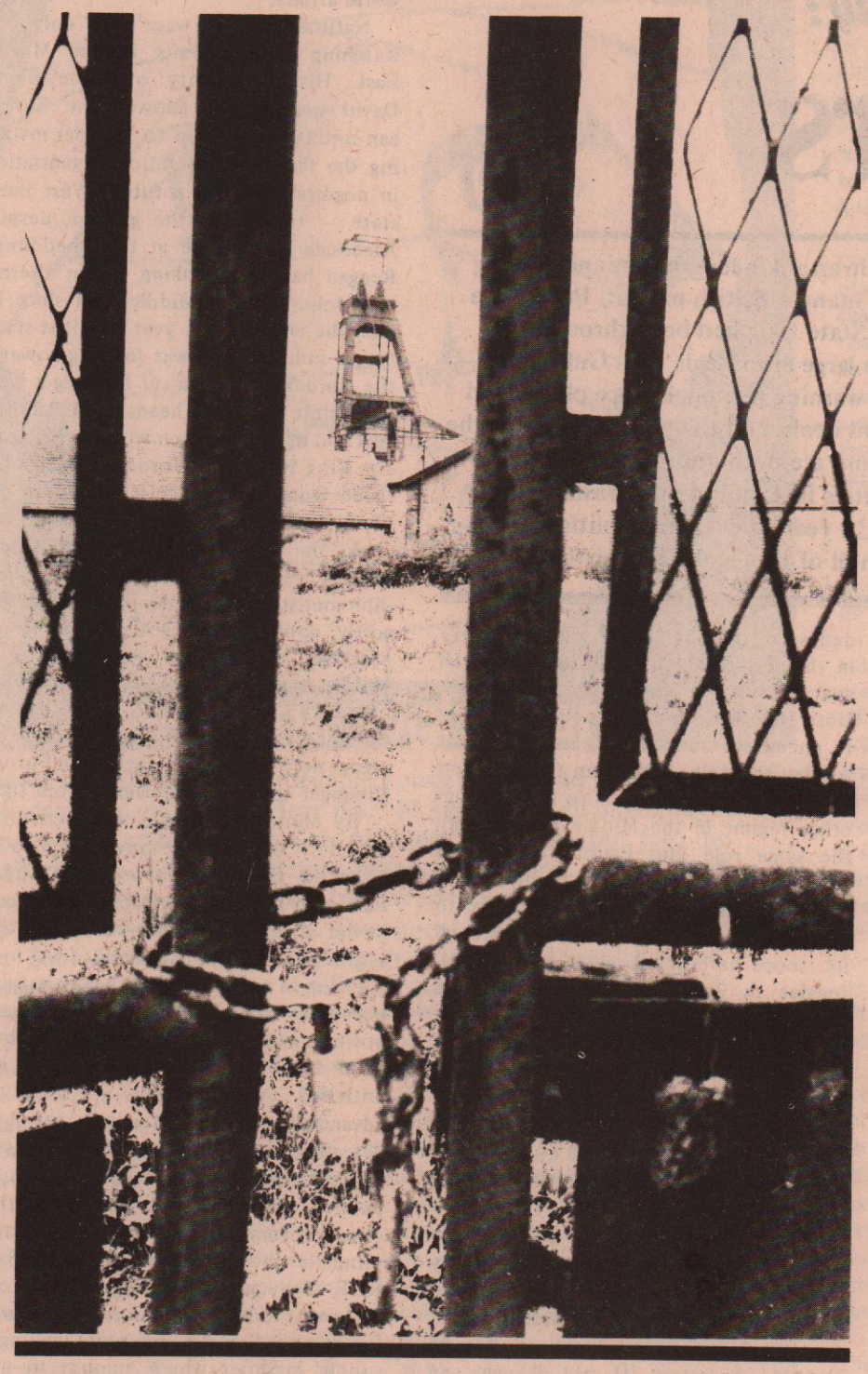
Despite the initial reception of the RDF, US Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger has pushed ahead with plans for the new force. Three divisions (parachute, helicopter-mobile and infantry) have already been allocated under a new command structure. At present the armada of American, British and French ships in the Gulf is carrying enough equipment to land 12 500 marines with full air support. It remains to be seen how long the rest of the force stays 'over the horizon'.

Nick Jenkins



In the Mojave Desert, California – Cobra helicopters guide an A-10 bomber in simulated attack on a Gulf target.

reviews



Accumulation and breakdown

Paul Mattick, *Economic crisis and crisis theory*, Merlin Press, 1981, £3.60 pbk.

The greatest weakness of the left today is its inability to explain how the recession results from the accumulation of capital. Superficial and vulgar notions of the crisis unite the most diverse organisations in the British labour movement. From the right-wing of the Labour Party to the Socialist Workers Party, we find regular denunciations of the Tories as the real culprits. From all sides come alternative policies to increase spending power and help overcome the recession.

Here is a book which is different. Mattick analyses what lies beneath the surface appearances of the crisis and brings to light how these depend upon 'the laws, directly unobservable yet fundamental to the capitalist economy, of surplus-value production'. He shows how the crisis appears in the process of circulation, yet originates in 'the tendency of the profit rate to fall inherent in accumulation and governed by the law of value'. Doubtless the book will be condemned as 'dogmatic' and 'fundamentalist' by reformists and radicals, who prefer the sterile dogmas of the revisionists to the vital force of Marxist science.

Mattick's anti-Bolshevik Marxism

Paul Mattick – who died in his late 'seventies only a few months ago – played an active and contradictory role in the history of the labour movement. Born in Germany in 1904, he joined the youth section of the Spartacus League in 1918 and eight years later emigrated to the USA. He backed the 'left communists' against Lenin and became involved in a political trend known as 'council communism'. His political outlook developed in response to the serious defeats of the international working class movement in the 'twenties and 'thirties. Hostile to Stalinism, Mattick came to see no real distinction between the reactionary politics of the Soviet bureaucracy and the revolutionary Marxism of the Bolsheviks.

This had theoretical consequences. Mattick wound up calling the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe 'state-capitalist', despite the theoretical absurdity of this concept. For example, in his best known book, first published in 1969, we find the statement: 'State-capitalism is still a "surplus-value" producing system, but it is no longer a system which finds its "regulation" through market competition and crisis' (*Marx and Keynes*, Merlin Press, 1974). Here Mattick uses quotation marks to hide a blatant inconsistency: how the 'regulation' of the Soviet economic system is meant to conform to the laws of capitalist production (which are set out earlier in the book) is left unexplained.

Fortunately *Economic crisis* contains no such arguments. It does make some gratuitous attacks on Lenin which would be more properly directed at Bukharin – on the theory of imperialism for example (p202; for a discussion of Lenin's theory see 'Revisionism, imperialism and the state' *Revolutionary Communist Papers*, No 4, February 1979). But the book is nevertheless one of those rare expositions of Marxist theory which simply devastates the opposition with the power of its analysis. The opposition in this case consists of the bourgeois economists, the 'epigones' and. . .Ernest Mandel.

Hired prizefighters of the bourgeoisie

It is hardly surprising that the ruling class tries to avoid Marx's conclusion that the *'real barrier* of capitalist production is *capital itself'*. Apart from encouraging the depressing prospect of class suicide, a theory which explains the transient and crisis-ridden character of capitalism is no use at all to the capitalists in their dealings with each other and with the working class. But aside from noting the businessman's ideological prejudices and his narrow pragmatism it is important to understand the contradictions in his economic theory.

Mattick traces the development of bourgeois economic theory from its abandonment of the labour theory of value through Keynesianism and its decline. He shows how bourgeois economists became increasingly incapable of explaining how the economy worked, until Keynes gave them a new lease of life. Then, just as academic economists were becoming complacent, 'stagflation' in the 'sixties left them dumbfounded. Mattick does explain it, demonstrating the bankruptcy of bourgeois theory and the strength of Marxism.

All our yesterdays

A lengthy chapter on 'the epigones' – reviewing the debate on crisis theory in the labour movement early this century – shows that the bourgeoisie was not alone in its failure to understand capitalism. The debate was initiated by Bernstein's explicit rejection of the theory of capitalist breakdown. Luxemburg challenged Bernstein's revisionism, attempting to establish Marx's theory of capitalist collapse. However although her objectives were revolutionary, her theory was flawed by a series of errors. Mattick shows that her opponents were outraged much more by her objectives than by her theoretical mistakes, many of which they themselves repeated. Only Henryk Grossmann was able to reconstruct Marx's theory of capitalist accumulation and breakdown in his work of 1929.

Mattick's survey of the classic debates is of great contemporary value. All the underconsumptionist and disproportionality theories of crisis put forward by Kautsky, Hilferding, Luxemburg and Bukharin still find followers today. He shows how these theories are at odds both with Marx's analysis and capitalist reality, thereby demonstrating the importance of the theory of capitalist breakdown.

Six of one, half a dozen of the other

Mattick concludes with a critique of the eclectic approach to crisis theory in Mandel's *Late capitalism*. He shows that, 'Instead of explaining the crisis cycle and capitalist development as governed by the laws of value, Mandel does the reverse: he seeks confirmation of the law of value in the surface appearances of capitalist accumulation'.

Mattick systematically explodes Mandel's analysis and shows him for the charlatan he is. Mandel analyses capital accumulation in terms of six (relatively autonomous!) 'basic variables', such as the organic composition of capital and the rate of surplus-value. As Mattick observes what for Mandel is dialectics is, in reality, simple inconsistency of argument. Given his starting point, Mandel's empirical investigations are superfluous. By trying to explain the development of capitalism through six variables, Mandel is explaining 'the history and inner regularity of capital. . .by reference to the historical and inner regularity of capital' (p180).

Mattick was the last survivor of a small band of Marxists (including Grossmann and Rosdolsky) who lived through the years of defeat yet fought to salvage Marxist theory. This book upholds the gains of the past and is an invaluable guide for revolutionary theory today.

A sticky end

Sean Cronin, *Irish nationalism: a history of its roots and ideology*, Academy Press, Dublin 1980, £13.50.

IN THE RUN-UP to the Irish general election, Taoiseach Charles Haughey must surely welcome the publication of this pretentious thesis written by *Irish Times* New York correspondent and ex-IRA Chief of Staff Sean Cronin. At a moment when the Thatcher/Haughey negotiations, designed to stifle the War in the Six Counties, are in danger of exposing the spurious independence of the Twenty-six Counties, Cronin asserts the independent status of the Republic and dismisses the liberation struggle as 'really a post-colonial problem'.

Not content with lambasting the armed struggle and justifying the rights of the Loyalists in the North, Cronin takes his reactionary opinions south of the border to bolster up the flagging fortunes of Haughey's Fianna Fail party. Representing the so-called 'progressives', he enthuses over life in the Free State dictatorship:

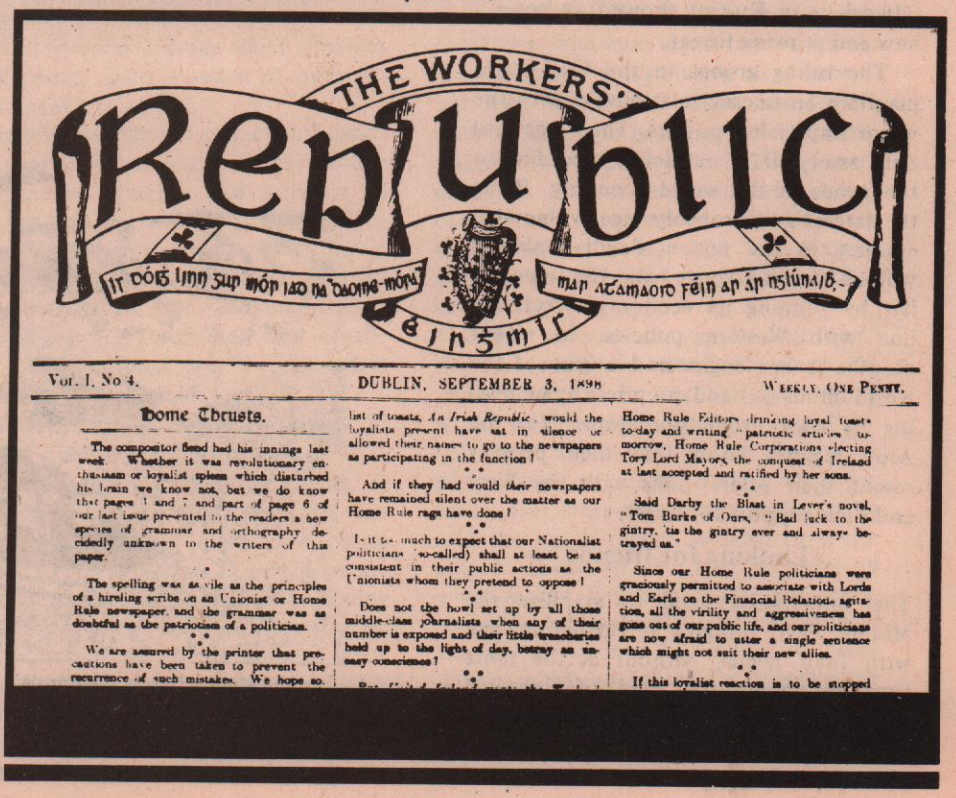
'The Republic is a modern state with a growing economy and a standard of living on a level with Britain. For its middle class life is much as in other Western states. Censorship has disappeared. Contraceptives are being legalised despite Church displeasure. Western bourgeois values of the post-Christian era are beginning to prevail. In such an era, it may be argued, it is anachronistic to think that religious, communal or national differences will be more powerful than the integrative forces based on economic and political co-operation existing in Europe. Here then is one possible solution to the Irish question: some form of unity within the EEC.'

Cronin's equation of Ireland with Britain is yet another attempt to obscure the real cause of the crisis facing the Irish people – Britain's oppression of the whole of Ireland through Partition.

Irish nationalism. . . contains a long and pedantic chronology of Irish uprisings since the days of the United Irishmen, adding nothing much new. Cronin's banal account is enlivened only by material gleaned from interviews with men like Roy Johnston and Daithi O'Connell, filling in some of the gaps in the history of the republican movement in the 'sixties before it split into Official and Provisional wings. The appendix contains the full text of the British army intelligence document *Northern Ireland: future terrorist trends* intercepted by the IRA in 1979.

Cronin's now lives in self-imposed exile. After playing a leading role in the ill-fated Border campaign in the 'fifties, he gave up the struggle to free Ireland and went to live in New York. Now Cronin joins Conor Cruise O'Brien and other Irish reformists in sympathising with Sinn Fein The Workers Party, the reactionary degeneration product of the Stalinist Official IRA. In this, he is at least consistent. Just like Cronin, the 'stickies' have turned their back on the liberation struggle and look to Britain, the centuries old oppressor of the Irish nation, for a progressive solution to its problems.

James Connolly's paper 1898: many have since invoked his name only to sell out the Irish struggle in shabby compromises with imperialism.



THE WORKERS' Republic

Vol. I. No 4. DUBLIN, SEPTEMBER 3, 1898 WEEKLY, ONE PENNY.

Dome Thrusts.

The compositor fiend had his innings last week. Whether it was revolutionary enthusiasm or loyalist spleen which disturbed his brain we know not, but we do know that pages 1 and 7 and part of page 6 of our last issue presented to the readers a new species of grammar and orthography decidedly unknown to the writers of this paper.

* * *

The spelling was as vile as the principles of a hireling scribe on an Unionist or Home Rule newspaper, and the grammar was as doubtful as the patriotism of a politician.

* * *

We are assured by the printer that precautions have been taken to prevent the recurrence of such mistakes. We hope so.

list of toasts, *An Irish Republic*, would the loyalists present have sat in silence or allowed their names to go to the newspapers as participating in the function!

* * *

And if they had would *their* newspapers have remained silent over the matter as our Home Rule rags have done!

* * *

Is it too much to expect that our Nationalist politicians (so-called) shall at least be as consistent in their public actions as the Unionists whom they pretend to oppose!

* * *

Does not the howl set up by all those middle-class journalists when any of their number is exposed and their little treacheries held up to the light of day, betray an uneasy consciences!

* * *

Home Rule Editors drinking loyal toasts to-day and writing "patriotic articles" to-morrow, Home Rule Corporations electing Tory Lord Mayors, the conquest of Ireland at last accepted and ratified by her sons.

* * *

Said Darby the Blast in Lever's novel, "Tom Burke of Ours," "Bad luck to the gintry, 'tis the gintry ever and always betrayed us."

Since our Home Rule politicians were graciously permitted to associate with Lords and Earls on the Financial Relations agitation, all the virility and aggressiveness has gone out of our public life, and our politicians are now afraid to utter a single sentence which might not suit their new allies.

* * *

If this loyalist reaction is to be stopped

reviews 2



The strong state

Crispin Aubrey, *Who's watching you? Britain's security services and the Official Secrets Act*, Pelican Books, £1.50.

THE BRITISH ruling class is in deep trouble. Not only is manufacturing industry on the verge of collapse but the highest levels of the state apparatus have been rocked by a series of scandals. Paedophilia and pornography in the diplomatic service, intelligence operations riddled with KGB agents, regular leaks from Cabinet – all this, at a time when the state needs maximum cohesion to face its enemies at home and abroad, dictates the need for a strong hand and firm measures from the top.

The bourgeoisie needs a more centralised, secretive and ruthless state machine; it needs more and better surveillance techniques, more hidden cameras, more telephone tapping, better computer records and a thriving 'dirty tricks' department. While the capitalists understand the importance of strengthening the security services, their liberal critics like to think that capitalism can be sustained without such a build-up of repressive techniques. Investigative journalist Crispin Aubrey is such a liberal.

Like many on the left of the Labour Party Aubrey complains that the state's security operations are becoming more extensive and intrusive. He is particularly concerned that they are less and less under the control of Parliament. He warns the bourgeoisie that its intelligence services are expensive and in danger of becoming a power unto themselves. He urges the rest of us to press for making the bourgeoisie's spies more 'accountable' to the people's representatives at Westminster.

For the bourgeoisie these civil libertarians, 'whistle-blowers' and upright investigative journalists are a bit of a joke. For the labour movement the illusions they foster in the state have serious consequences. British intelligence has little reason to watch these friendly critics – but we have.

Gay power

Socialist Workers Party Gay Group, *The word is gay*, 1979, £0.20.

Gay Rights at Work Committee, *Gays at work*, SWP, 1980, £0.25.

FOR ALL the talk of permissiveness and enlightened legislation, gay people remain a persecuted minority in Britain today. Gays are beaten up by fascists and harassed by the police: they are regularly prosecuted on charges of 'gross indecency'. Recently a Manchester councillor said that the best 'cure' for homosexuality was a bullet in the head. Yet it is generally only gays who stand up for gay rights. The silence of the labour movement on the question of gay oppression stands in marked contrast to the outlook of the founders of the Bolshevik Party in Russia at the turn of the century.

In 1902 Lenin declared that the workers' movement ought to 'respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse no matter what class is affected'. For the Bolsheviks, fighting oppression was not only necessary to defend the oppressed but also to strengthen the workers' movement, to enable it to fight the capitalist class from a position of ideological independence. Lenin was concerned that the Russian working class did not respond to police brutality, the persecution of minorities and censorship. But he did not blame the workers – he pointed the finger at the socialist movement for failing to take the lead in fighting all forms of oppression.

The oppression of gay people is enforced through repressive legislation which legitimises violent attacks and philistine attitudes towards homosexuality. Homosexuals also face many restrictions on their democratic rights. They are debarred from certain occupations, prevented from looking after children and discriminated against in getting employment or accommodation.

Of course some gays have been integrated into the system. Like the feminists with their weekly page in *The Guardian*, gays have their reactionary magazines, their exclusive clubs, their MPs and their bourgeois advocates. But although both gays and feminists have been well integrated (for example, compared with Irish republicans) at the end of the day even the most successful are still regarded as 'queers' or 'poofs'.

The main political point is this: the oppression of homosexuals is a vital issue for training workers in the spirit of democracy. At the same time we must attract into our movement those gays who identify their interests with the working class. This is the straightforward Leninist approach. Yet organisations like the SWP which claim to be Leninist have completely failed to give this kind of a lead.

The word is gay (June 1979) is the product of a debate in the SWP which still remains unresolved. The failure of the SWP to develop a working class approach to gay politics in the early 'seventies led to the growth of an opposition around the ideas set forth in Don Milligan's *The politics of homosexuality* (1973). Milligan and others drew the wrong conclusion from their experience: they decided that Leninism couldn't defend gays, that the revolutionary party was irrelevant and so they abandoned any attempt to build one. Our concern however is not with Milligan's reformist views but the failure of the radical left to take a class conscious stand on gay oppression. For it is organisations like the SWP who must take their share of the responsibility for anti-gay attitudes of some trade unionists and the anti-socialist views of some gays.

The word... is often seen as a Leninist pamphlet. It is not. Its first paragraph argues that men oppress women, whites oppress blacks and heterosexuals oppress homosexuals. This is not the case. All these groups are oppressed by capitalism itself, with the result that divisions in the working class are intensified. If socialists do not start from seeing capitalism as the problem then who are they to identify as the enemy? Men? White workers? Heterosexuals? And why should the oppressed groups have any interest in uniting with these 'oppressors' in the class struggle for socialism? No reason at all.

When the authors go on to deal with their idea of the socialist revolution, they criticise themselves casually for their past contempt for gays. And in seeking to overcome its guilt the SWP turns its customary workerism on its head – it patronisingly 'looks forward' to the most oppressed '19 year old black gay woman' leading the revolution. Poor old Tony Cliff!

The approach of *The word...* is to confront prejudice by adopting the same assumptions as the reactionaries. So being gay is something you 'admit' to. The pamphlet refers to the 'local gay community' in a derogatory way – warning young homosexuals that they will be regarded 'with fear or with lust'. It even advises young gays to seek 'help' from vicars and councillors.

Gays and the unions

Gays at work (June 1980) is no better. Whereas in 1979 the SWP made one gaffe after another in its attempts at 'sexual politics', *Gays at work* steers clear of these issues and concentrates on the only area it feels 'confident' about – gay rights at work. But even this confidence is misplaced.

The pamphlet is not directed at the real problem – workers with anti-gay prejudices – but is addressed to the oppressed themselves. Its two main points can be briefly summarised: gays should come out at work and should join unions (apparently gays don't join unions 'or are at best token members').

We believe that gays like all workers should join a union. As union members gays, like anybody else, are more likely to hold onto their jobs and defend their living standards. So far so good. But what has this got to do with fighting the oppression of gays? At this point the pamphlet falls silent.

The pamphlet informs us that the problem with trade union bureaucrats is that 'they are unlikely to know you personally'. The only possible reason for making this point is to indulge the liberal view that if only straights knew 'personally' more gay people then their prejudices would subside. And when it comes to repressive legislation, the pamphlet surveys the Prior Bill and other employment legislation – anti-working class measures certainly but nothing to do with the specific oppression of gays.

The SWP's technical trade unionist approach to gay politics ignores the ideological underpinning of the oppression of homosexuals. It obscures the particular problems faced by gays. Instead of showing how gays must be defended and their isolation overcome, the SWP exhorts homosexuals to join the fight against the Tories. This narrow approach in practice amounts to giving gays advice on how to pursue complaints at work.

The SWP implicitly recognises that it has nothing useful to say about fighting the oppression of gays. It has so little confidence in its politics that it recommends gays to get 'help' from the National Council for Civil Liberties, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and various phone up centres. To the many gays who know that counselling is a sick joke and want to fight capitalism the pamphlet offers nothing. Nor does it challenge workers to take a stand and to fight back against anti-gay repression.



Southern Africa after Callinicos

Alex Callinicos, *Southern Africa after Zimbabwe*, Pluto Press, 1981, 186pp, £2.95 pbk.

AS A KEY source of gold and strategic raw materials and a profitable sphere for investment, Southern Africa has assumed a major significance in the calculations of businessmen and imperialist politicians during the last decade. Their major concern has been to find ways of holding back the struggle of the African masses against imperialist domination. With the election victory of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party in April 1980 the anti-imperialist struggle was contained in Zimbabwe. The focus of international attention has now shifted southwards to Namibia and to South Africa itself, where movements with similar political programmes to ZANU-PF continue the fight against imperialism.

All this makes it vital for revolutionaries – in Britain and in Africa – to assess the experience of the Zimbabwean national liberation struggle. Unfortunately this text, written by leading SWP academic Alex Callinicos, will be of little use. For although it contains a mass of information gleaned from newspapers and journals collected during the 1980 election in Zimbabwe *Southern Africa...* rarely goes beyond the empirical material to make any political assessment. Worse still, on the occasions when Callinicos does, he is invariably incorrect.

What went wrong?

Within weeks of Mugabe's election victory it became clear that events there would follow closely the traditional pattern of decolonisation. There was to be no revolutionary upheaval. White businessmen and farmers were welcome to stay and foreign investors encouraged. Mugabe promised no seizure of farmland and no nationalisations. Land reform meant only the resettlement of landless blacks on uncultivated ground. The new minimum wage remained well below the recognised poverty line. Workers' strikes were suppressed using the old state's laws and the state machine and security forces of the Smith regime remained intact.

Why this apparent reversal in Mugabe's politics? Mugabe was never in fact the dangerous 'Marxist' terrorist his enemies in the Smith government described him. The Zimbabwean nationalist movement he led represented the interests and political outlook of the small black African petit bourgeoisie. Although its tactics had varied, its aim had always been the gradual reform of society so that a small group of blacks might gain a greater scope to exercise economic and political power. It adopted the rhetoric of socialism and sought the support of the black masses only as a means to achieving that goal. Robert Mugabe was not a socialist, forced by circumstances beyond his control, to make concessions. He was, and remains, a petit-bourgeois nationalist, who, through the transfer of political power, has achieved what he wanted. At the same time he has provided the imperialists with the best means of re-establishing stability in a war-torn region of Africa.

Callinicos misses all this. He takes ZANU-PF's 'socialist' programme at face value and makes only misplaced and liberal criticisms of Mugabe. For Callinicos the major defect of ZANU-PF was not its political outlook, but its undemocratic structure. His biggest complaint is that 'the Zimbabwean masses were called on to participate within ZANU structures under the party's leadership'.

No doubt ZANU is undemocratic. But that is a minor consideration. The main problem is that it led the urban working class and the peasants of Zimbabwe with petit-bourgeois politics. When they struck for decent wages the Zimbabwean workers came into conflict with the realities of capitalist oppression in a country dominated by imperialism. ZANU's commitment to a *capitalist* Zimbabwe led it to suppress the strikes at the Hippo Valley and Triangle Estates and at Wankie Colliery.

Don't follow leaders...

As for south of the Limpopo, Callinicos offers a few standard criticisms of the Stalinists in the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress and makes a crude attempt to apply the politics of *Socialist Worker* to the struggle against apartheid. In Britain the SWP has enough to answer for. In South Africa, where capital rules through direct military oppression and the class struggle takes its daily toll of death and mutilation, Callinicos' solutions would be an unmitigated disaster.

The main defect of *Southern Africa...* is its belief that trade union struggles in themselves will throw up a revolutionary leadership. We are told that 'it is through the confidence and organisation developed out of successful economic struggles – over wages, conditions, etc, that black workers can acquire the consciousness and strength necessary to take on the regime'. Later Callinicos adds that economic struggles provide 'the leadership for the wider political confrontations'.

A minimal knowledge of recent disputes in South Africa shows just how wrong an assessment this is. Economic struggles are never leaderless: in South Africa they are invariably led by the petit-bourgeois nationalists. The overwhelming dominance of petit-bourgeois nationalism in South Africa ensures that even when militancy errupts spontaneously it is pulled in that direction. For black South African workers there is at the moment no serious alternative. Strikes are almost always led by organisations which are either allied to or have no real differences with the ANC and its co-thinkers. This was certainly the case at the Ford Port Elizabeth strike. More importantly there is nothing about involvement in strikes as such that will lead workers to acquire a revolutionary consciousness or select a new leadership. South African revolutionaries will have to create that consciousness through pointing out to black workers the defects of petit-bourgeois politics. Neglect of that political struggle will ensure that the South African working class remains under the political sway of its current leaders.

This book's predecessor, *Southern Africa After Soweto* (1977) gained the SWP some support among South African comrades because of its thorough research and seemingly radical views. It will be a great pity if this one influences anybody at all.

LETTERS

CND - then and now *

Comrades,

I would like to comment on Jannie Frost's article on CND in your current issue. You are both too kind and too unfair about the founding of CND and the organisation of the original campaign. Too kind because the launch by an intellectual clique was more cynical than you state; there was an article in the *New Statesman* by Taylor and Priestley, following Bevan's sell-out at the Labour Party conference, saying: Bevan had made a bad compromise, compromise is the stuff of politics and therefore one did not blame him for a compromise, only for a bad one; it was necessary to rebuild the left of the Labour Party, in order to get a better compromise with Gaitskell; to rebuild the left of the Labour Party it was necessary to harness the radicalism of youth; to harness the radicalism of youth it was necessary to pose an impossible demand; the most suitable impossible demand which appealed then to youth was unilateralism on the bomb.

Cynical?

Thus the campaign was created cynically to pose an impossible demand to bring youth into the Labour left (which would pay lip service to the impossible demand but not fight for it) where they would then be expected to work for minor reforms, and then their leaders would trade these reforms in a new compromise with Gaitskell. (Later Calder was to warn the Labour leadership, also in the *NS*, of what could happen. 'If we disbanded the headquarters staff and removed the strong hand of Peggy Duff, the groups would still function but without the moderation of a politically responsible, constitutionally minded executive. . . .It shall not happen, but if it did it would carry with it the debris of the Labour Party'.) Moreover when it came to the launching meeting in February 1958, the executive announced that it was creating a 'movement for unilateralists but not a unilateralist movement' and it was only when the majority of those present threatened to walk out and found a rival campaign, that the executive gave way. It took us until 1960 to force the executive to accept conference resolutions on policy over and above this – specifically the commitment that unilateralism involved opting out of NATO.

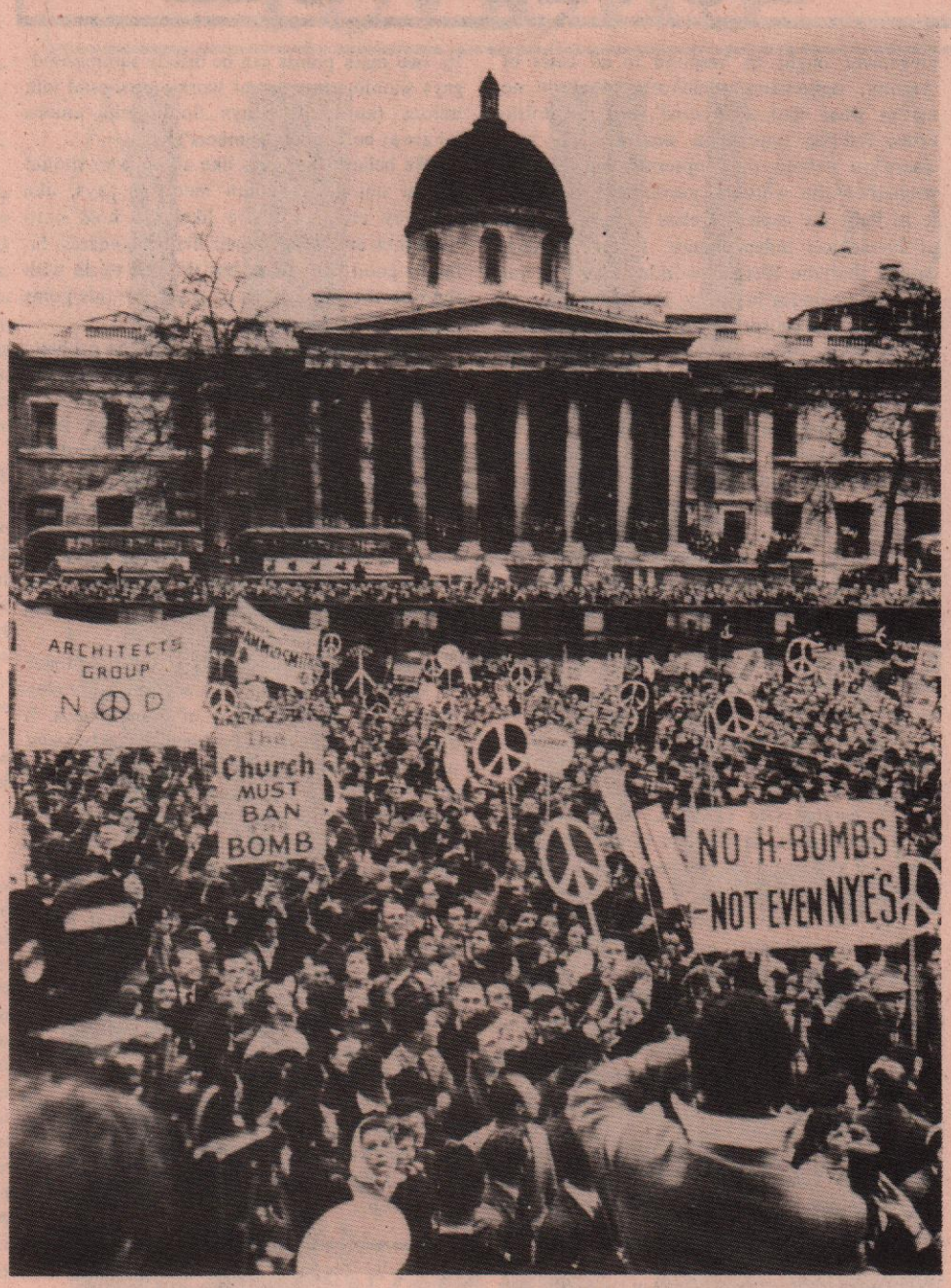
However though viewed from above CND was even worse than you say, viewed from below, it was a different matter.

The rank and file of CND for the first three years of the campaign ie 58-60, operated almost without regard to the executive. The executive confined itself to issuing pronouncements to the press, but except for the farcical march on London in June '58, no campaign action was directly organised by the national office. The various regional offices organised their own campaigns – which in consequence varied from region to region. This allowed the campaign at ground level to be very different from the campaign you describe. No doubt all the evils you describe could be found in some areas; but not all in one place, nor all together did they form the majority aspect of the campaign.

Pacifist?

Only a small minority of the CND was pacifist. And only a minority of the classical pacifist movement supported CND (the majority of the latter regarded campaigning for a movement ostensibly opposed to only one weapon as a betrayal). Those pacifists who were in CND were of two sorts: a right-wing type typified by Dr Donald Soper (which formed the hard left of the Labour Party) and a left wing, typified by Peace News, the Direct Action Committee and some smaller anarcho-pacifist groups, which insisted that the only way that Unilateralism could be attained – let alone maintained – was through social revolution and specified that this would be a combination of mass Civil Disobedience and industrial action.

No doubt much of CND would have produced ethical reasons for their opposition to the Bomb, just as they would to other products of capitalism, and indeed to capitalism in itself. If however by saying that many were motivated by moralism you are arguing that they only had moral arguments against the Bomb and did not see it as a class matter, this is just flatly not true. The most characteristic exponent of a moralistic case on the Bomb would be a campaigner who had come to radicalism through reading something like Gollancz's 'Letter to



Timothy' or Fr Michael Scott's 'A time to speak'. Occasionally one might meet a very young and new campaigner – usually a campaigner recruited by a semi-Stalinist group, wherein other political issues were not discussed – who had no wider vision. And more often one would meet the Stalinists who (contrary to party line) had joined the campaign and regarded raising other issues as divisive. But this was very rare. (I spent these three years as a full-time voluntary worker for the direct actionist wing of the campaign, and when not in prison travelled all round the country, attending demos all over the place, and almost certainly met more rank and file campaign members than did anyone else.)

Stalinists

The Stalinists denounced the campaign at the time of the first Aldermarch (organised not by CND, but by the DAC, on that occasion) as being Trotskyist 'posing a maximalist demand in order to split the broad unity of the peace movement and so aid the warmongers'. Two years later (1960) they came on the march calling for 'unity between Unilateralists and Multilateralists against the warmongers', whatever that might mean. They tried to split the campaign in 1960 by launching a National Disarmament Campaign. Naturally many CND branches did not note the difference, and sent delegates to what was a British Peace Committee front meeting. London Region CND circularised all branches pointing this out and that the NDC was not Unilateralist, and suggesting that CND delegates might move a motion asking that it should be, and that as many CND branches should after all send delegates as well. The Stalinists were defeated at their own conference. Certainly the Stalinists tried to use nationalism – not only in CND.

In days before CND I had heard a CP speaker use race prejudice against black American servicemen, and try to use this against American bases in this country. And even at the height of CND, CP members in the Campaign would try and justify this tactic, saying "you can't afford to be purist, you have to use every weapon you can'. Moreover anti-German prejudice, mainly used by the Stalinists, was also used by some others (it was because of his use of it on a CND platform that John Braine was removed from the campaign speakers' panel, and so in dudgeon went over to the right). Nevertheless, it too was still a minority attitude and was countered by other campaigners for the racism it was.

Lenin said: "The enemy is in your own country': it was precisely out of the same motivation that the majority campaigners demanded unilateralism. Alright, yes that may mean to some, 'Britain setting an example', 'giving a lead'. Far more of us were motivated by rejection of the Summit Conference mentality – as one much favoured banner put it, 'what's the use of meeting at the summit, when we're all arse-upwards?"

Multilateral disarmament comes through the actions of statesmen, sitting down together; apart from the fact that it's a pipe-dream that will never happen, campaigns for it engender illusions in politicians. Unilateral disarmament can only be won despite politicians – no government will ever willingly give up its major weapon of coercion – and the arguments for it immediately pose the trust-worthiness of aspirant governments.

The Labour Party

Certainly, even amongst the more radical campaigners, there were widespread illusions in the Labour Party. This would range from the quite pathetic belief amongst the Campaign right wing that Gaitskell was only pretending to oppose us in order to win votes, and that he would change over to us once in office, to the various Trot groups which believed that you could usefully work for socialism and disarmament inside the Labour Party. Nevertheless there was a constant stream of pamphlets and leaflets in the Campaign, pointing out the Labour record – it had after all sanctioned Hiroshima, taken Britain into Nato, and made preparations to build the British Bomb – and a sizeable number of CND members first became critical of Labour in result.

Survey after survey showed that despite the middle class image that the press tried to give the campaign, despite trendy sociologists like Parkin, the vast majority of Campaign members were in fact working class, and by no means overwhelmingly white collar. Much of the famed middle class element was working class originated – you may have come across 'The glittering coffin" (Potter), much of the early New Left, itself the theoretical centre of the Campaign, originated in scholarship university graduates who had become culturally alienated from their working class roots, but remained alienated from the middle class milleux into which they had moved, and which in consequence sought in Lukacs and Gramsci a new socialist humanist culture.

The working class

Nevertheless even had this not been the case, it is surely curious to find a Leninist group, arguing that the social composition of a group rather than its orientation, denotes its class interests. The question of the orientation is certainly more complex. The initial executive certainly had envisaged a nice quiet pressure group within the Labour Party, which would harness youth, but which would really operate by that executive working with leading union bureaucrats. Direct Action – that of the initial DAC and the anarcho-pacifist groups on its left fringe – on the other hand was designed to make a direct approach to the workers directly involved in making, servicing, transporting, storing, building sites for, bombs, and nuclear sites, and workers involved in servicing them. We would canvass every house within ten miles of a rocket base or a weapons factory as a prelude to civil disobedient obstruction. Alright, results could only be measured in terms of a few dozen workers leaving such sites, a few dozen token strikes and a couple of blackings, in industries making rocket parts, a number of union branches that had not previously discussed the Bomb, raising the matter. But this hardly testifies to ignoring the working class. Between these there were a host of mid-positions and a general movement towards the centre. Thus the leadership after 1960 tended to look not so much to the top TU leaders – men like Cousins – nor even to those rising from CND numbers to become candidate top leaders (Seabrook, Daly, Ernie Roberts), but to the middle rank. With the formation of the Committee of 100, the task of direct approach to workers tended to be delegated to industrial sub-committees rather than being the central aim of the whole organisation.

The class organisation of the proletariat depends not merely on class consciousness. It depends on solidarity, mutual aid as between workers, on a consciousness of the essential identity of the great mass of mankind; on an opposition to racism, sexism, and such other divisive influences within the working class. There may have been an occasional CND member who saw Campaign insistence on 'The family of Man' as being uniting humanity across classes – indeed I once met someone who argued that I was being sectarian since the boss class had an interest in staying alive and in this had an interest in common with the working class (he was a former member of the RCP) – but this was not a common attitude.

You may be right in much that you say about the current CND; I get the impression that it is much more tied to the Labour Party, much less open to rank and file democracy and is far less potentially on the road to socialist consciousness; but that deserves a more informed analysis.

Fraternally,

Laurens Otter
Salop

*This letter has been shortened.

Jannie Frost **writes:**

Our correspondent has missed the point. For us neither the class composition of CND nor its attempts to win workers' support (even in militant forms like strike action) are critical. We refuse to support it because the nuclear disarmament issue does not help to clarify the distinctive interests of workers as a class. It is not a question of the views of 'an occasional CND member' but of the orientation of the campaign as a whole to saving humanity from the bomb. CND stands for the submergence of class interests in a movement of the people to pursuade the ruling class into a different defence policy. Supporting this sort of campaign is no way to build a party up to the task of overthrowing capitalism, which is our only safeguard against nuclear extermination.

Of course many young workers were – and are – drawn into CND through its range of activities. The problem is that their spontaneous anti-capitalism is submerged in the pacifism, moralism and chauvinism of the campaign and its leadership. The left thinks that it can work inside CND, help to build it and through criticising the leadership push the members in

continued on next page

LETTERS 2

continued from previous page

a more radical direction. But the left's participation in CND, however critical, tends to strengthen the sort of reactionary views that permeate CND propaganda and are an obstacle to people moving towards revolutionary politics.

'Multilateral' versus 'unilateral' disarmament is a debate which has raged in CND circles through the ages, between two equally utopian positions. The former is that representatives of rival national bourgeoisies should disarm by mutual agreement; the latter that the British bourgeoisie should abandon nuclear weapons by itself. Neither position is consistent with the survival of capitalism – but the debate helps to keep capitalism alive by distracting the labour movement from the job of overthrowing it. Workers have nothing to gain from choosing between two different brands of pie in the sky.

No doubt most CND supporters were – and are – 'critical' of the Labour Party. It is just this sort of critical support that keeps the party going. From the New Left to the radical left, militant campaigners on the fringe of the Labour Party sustain its image as a party of protest. At the same time the leadership ensures that Labour's status as a party of government is not jeopardised by taking on any serious policy commitments that might embarrass ruling class defence arrangements. You protest – they survive.

Editorial sell-out?

Dear comrades,

Does the RCT now aspire to class collaboration? Reading *the next step* No 12, I was more than surprised at a number of comments about the forthcoming elections.

Under the Manchester column of 'Vote, Vote, Vote': *'If you vote him in (Tompson) . . .we will be represented for the first time in our lives.'*

In 'Running for the Council': *'. . .Revolutionary Communist councillors. . .are not likely to be in a position to take full control of Manchester and the GLC after 7 May.'*

And under 'Break with the Labour Party': *'ELWAR is standing to sweep labour representatives off the GLC. . .'* and *'the day of the Marxist municipal council isn't so far off.'*

These articles all imply that the RCT/ELWAR candidates are actually running to get elected ! Back in the general election when the RCT argued for abstention, your politics were up-front, as they should have been. While I support the issues you are raising, and the use of elections for building working class support for working class politics and organisation, on this issue *tns* appears to me to have singularly failed to clarify a crucial point of strategy. Surely you do not see 'marxist municipal councils' as a goal for revolutionary communists.

Is this a symptom of creeping Stalinism?

Would you ever suggest a freedom fighter should take up a seat in the colonial oppressors' house of bourgeois representatives? Standing and fighting for politics in municipal elections is surely an altogether different class issue than an election within a trade union.

I remember clearly the Conway Hall meeting, some weeks ago, when Joan Lamont and other comrades almost collapsed with laughter when they were asked what they would do if they got elected.

The reply was flippant then, publicity stunts and trying to vote ELWAR some GLC money, but apparently it hasn't been taken seriously at all.

I would expect ELWAR to reject finance from such a source but above all argue against the working class opportunists who are only too happy to collaborate in these bourgeois ratepayers' committees. Use the elections to build support for our politics and organisation but not legitimise theirs!

The clarity of *the next step* on previous issues and the way in which it draws out the decisive issues has been excellent but this point has been treated ambiguously in all the election material I have seen.

Yours fraternally,

Tim Martin
West London

Kevin Green **writes:**

We regret that as none of our candidates was elected in the May council elections we will not have the opportunity to test Tim Martin's grim forebodings in practice. We are disappointed. Revolutionary Communist councillors would be in an excellent position to present a distinctive working class approach to the important problems of the moment in opposition to the bourgeois rationality of the Labour Party. Working closely with a growing level of activity in workplaces, in the local labour movement and on the streets, Revolutionary Communist councillors could assist the defence of jobs and living standards and play a key role in publicising and helping to build resistance to redundancies and cuts, rises in rents and rates, bad housing etc. The more Marxists on the council the better!

Our correspondent confuses tactics and principles. All elections are different and each requires an independent assessment of how it can be used to advance working class interests. Was Bobby Sands wrong to run for a seat in the oppressor Parliament? Obviously not. And just think what a Revolutionary Communist MP could have done to embarrass and put pressure on the Government during the hunger strike! Roll on the next general election!



Passing Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton: only one organisation supported the Irish hunger strikers in the GLC election campaign.

Brixton, Belfast

To equate 'police out' of Brixton with 'troops out' in Belfast is completely ridiculous. Police have to be in Brixton but subject to real control, discrimination ended, housing improved etc – a long way to go but blacks themselves have made a great step forward if supported, and French style riot semi-military police not gradually introduced. 'Police out' suggests a Brixton UDI – not even remotely realistic.

JF
Sheffield

Fenna King **writes:**

There is a widespread and deeply held conviction that the function of the police is to protect people against crime. This is quite mistaken. The police are ineffective in protecting people from muggers or working class homes from burglars. Their job is to preserve bourgeois law and order, to safeguard people who own property from people who don't and generally to defend the existing system of society from those who want to change it. The additional services provided by the police – dealing with traffic, lost property, etc – are very important in winning public acceptability for their wider repressive functions. The British bobby is one of the most sophisticated agents of the tyranny of the bourgeoisie.

Brixton is the place where the true role of the British police has been most clearly exposed. In a society which can offer young blacks nothing it is the job of the police to club them into submission. The Brixton revolt took place when the local blacks decided they would take no more. We defend their response to the oppression meted out by the police – just as we defend the Irish people in their struggle against national oppression.

Our reply to those who say we need police is that *we* need them like a hole in the head. In Ireland whole communities live without any of the 'normal policing' – the only police are an occupying army and their local paramilitary agents. We could manage well without them, without the troops in Ireland and without the police in Brixton, and without the capitalist system they uphold.

CONFERENCES

PREPARING FOR POWER

At a time when the British left is in disarray, active workers need to get down to considering the major problems thrown up by the deepest capitalist recession in fifty years. This is what *the next step* conference on the working class movement in the 'eighties aims to do.

Workers throughout Europe have gone through a series of setbacks. Unemployment is rising, wages falling and trade union and shop floor organisation is crumbling in face of an aggressive employers' offensive. The old social democratic and Stalinist parties have no answers; the radical left stands by helpless.

The 'eighties are going to see growing class conflict; now is the time for the working class to prepare to take state power. This conference should not be missed by anybody who wants to help build revolutionary workers' parties across Europe.

Workshops, discussion and debates

- Workers' struggles – Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Eastern Europe. . .
- What's going on in the unions. Fighting redundancies. The problem of sectionalism. Occupations: the recent experience
- Social democracy and the working class. The Labour left and the unions. The Left Alternative Strategy
- Stalinism, past and present. What happened to Eurocommunism?
- Fighting the divisions in our ranks. Racism and the unions. The position of women workers. Is there an aristocracy of labour?

For details write to BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (01) 274 3951

11-13 September, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1

WORKERS' DEFENCE – THE ONLY WAY

Atlanta, Georgia. . .almost 30 racist killings
Brixton. . .stop, search, sus, police harassment mounts
Coventry. . .Satnam Singh Gill stabbed to death
Deptford. . .13 burnt alive
Enoch Powell. . .'you've seen nothing yet'

The working class movement urgently needs a strategy to combat fascist violence, police attacks and immigration controls. But the Labour Party and the TUC haven't got the answers.

Drawing on the experience of organised defence in East London, ELWAR is holding a labour movement conference to establish Workers Against Racism as a national political force.

Workers' defence – the only way!

Speakers from ELWAR, South London and Coventry Workers Against Racism, the campaign against Filipino deportations, and others

Sessions and debates include: defence work, fascism, immigration, police, youth

For details contact ELWAR on (01) 274 3951 or c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8

Early July, venue in East London
(Please note: the previous venue has been cancelled; for new arrangements see the next issue of the next step)

Building workers' defence

This means WAR!

BRIXTON
Blacks rounded up in hundreds, assaulted and held on trumped-up charges arising out of the weekend revolt against police repression

COVENTRY
Satnam Singh Gill, 20 year-old student, stabbed and kicked to death by a skinhead gang in broad daylight in the city's busy shopping precinct

Our response to these two events has been to follow the example of East London Workers Against Racism. We've set up South London and Coventry Workers Against Racism groups – SOLWAR AND COVWAR – to build labour movement resistance to the oppression of black people.

Frontline

NOTHING SICKENS THE STATE more than defeat and humiliation at the hands of the black community. So when the police returned to reassert control over Brixton after the 11 April revolt they played it with gloves off.

They first showed they were riled during the riot. Driven from the Railton Road ghetto by the black youth, squads of police and SPG vans roamed the area beating up young blacks. Then they burst into Trinity Gardens, just off Brixton's main shopping street, sealed off the road and cornered a group of West Indians.

One of the people they seized on was Tony Amos, a 20 year old from Tulse Hill. He was viciously kicked and punched, dragged into a van by three SPG officers and driven off to the police station. He reappeared, temporarily, on Monday morning at Camberwell Magistrates Court, his face covered in scars, his torso badly bruised and his shirt torn and soaked in blood.

Amos was charged with assaulting a police officer. The magistrate refused bail and sent him out to Lewes Prison. Two weeks later he was again remanded in custody for another month, despite his offering to meet stringent bail conditions. It was only because of pickets and a publicity campaign launched by South London Workers Against Racism – and because of concerted efforts on the part of his legal representatives – that he was released three days later.

Amos' arrest was not exceptional. At a Brixton Defence Committee meeting local blacks poured out dozens of similar tales: youths trampled under police horses, teenagers thrown out of speeding police vans, more than 50 people were still missing in police custody. At an inaugural press conference held by SOLWAR nearly 30 similar accounts were given by victims, their relatives and their friends.

As the days passed Lima Delta – Brixton nick – became more sophisticated. The head of the police's 'anti-terrorist' squad was called in. While some prisoners were released, others were framed with serious charges like arson. Even now the pressure continues.

With 'friends' like these...

The Brixton revolt was a spontaneous expression of black people's hatred for the police. But as the local West Indian community has few stable political organisations there was no immediate focus for a defence campaign. Eventually two lines of thought emerged.

Some prominent West Indians and local Labour Party councillors quickly realised what a serious threat to social stability the riot represented. Soon the calls went out for a change in police tactics, more money to create jobs in the area and better housing and social services. Lambeth council leader Ted Knight demanded an immediate financial boost from central government. Black community politician Courtney Laws urged blacks to seek solutions 'not in the politics of confrontation and anarchic violence, but in conciliation and negotiation' (*New Standard*, 14 April 1981). More sickening still, local reformists – black and white – urged West Indians to back the alternative programme of the Labour Party. Community policing and 'democratic control' over the police by ratepayers were all the rage.

The campaign reached its crudest in a leaflet issued by the newly formed 'Afro-Caribbean-Asian Alliance for a Labour GLC victory'. Published at the local Neighbourhood Centre – which had been wrecked by angry blacks during the riot – it urged West Indians to vote for Ted Knight because he had 'proved himself a man of the people' ('So what are you going to do about it? Kick the Tories out', leaflet). But already an alternative to this was being built.

Police out of Brixton!

We've all heard about community policing before – and know it won't make any difference. We've had job creation, Manpower Services and Inner City Partnerships and we know that even if Nigerian Chief Francis Nzeribe pours his entire personal fortune into Railton Road British capitalism will still want black youth in the dustbin and the lid kept firmly down. We know the police will be back.

In Brixton violence is a fact of life. The only choice you have is to support the oppressors or the oppressed. There is no middle ground.

This is why SOLWAR is taking up the cause of the oppressed so aggressively. We've gone about this in three ways. First, legal defence and campaigning – both on behalf on Anthony Amos and dozens of other victims. Second, going on the offensive against the police. Apart from just defending them in the courts we're supporting blacks who want to sue for damages or bring charges against the police. Third, and most important, campaigning in the local trade unions.

Already we're organising a speaking tour of Brixton victims around sympathetic local union branches. Its purpose is to expose the police for what they are and to generate wider opposition to immigration controls. SOLWAR intends to make sure that next time the Front Line fights, it doesn't have to fight alone.

SOLWAR
Picket of Camberwell Magistrates' Court
18 May 10am
Assemble Camberwell Green (buses 35, 36, 45, 68, 171)
Support the victims of police repression!
Free the Brixton prisoners!

No more racist murders!

A WEEK AFTER the Brixton riot *The Daily Telegraph* reported that the RCT was 'still trying to stir up violence' in the area (20 April 1981). In Coventry, chief superintendent Dennis Cubby likewise condemned the setting up of a new section of Workers Against Racism. 'This', he pontificated, 'is a group from outside Coventry which has the sole intention of inflaming the racial situation in Coventry' (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 30 April 1981).

It's the same story wherever you go. But Cubby is particularly angry because, for the first time in the Midlands, the Asian community and the local labour movement have begun to organise against racist violence. Here's how.

The racists' rampage

Boom city of the 'fifties and 'sixties, Coventry was a stranger to racial violence until recently. But in the last couple of years the collapse of the Midlands motor industry and the failure of the unions to save jobs has created a climate of demoralisation which racists have been quick to exploit.

In February the Hindu temple in Stoney Stanton was wrecked. Since then Asians walking home at night have become a regular target. On 4 April a white racist attacked Susan Cheema in her father's shop in the Foleshill area; two weeks later skinheads stabbed a young Asian in the city centre. He survived. The next day Satnam Singh Gill didn't.

Fast off the mark

Coventry Asians had already shown they would not put up with things as they were. Earlier this year they had sent six coaches to London to protest against the Nationality Bill; and, on the afternoon of the attack on Satnam Singh Gill, hundreds of Asians were marching in protest against the attack on Susan Cheema.

Immediately news of the death became known Asian and anti-racist groups began to organise. The next day they met, set up the Coventry Committee Against Racism, called a national demonstration against racist attacks for 23 May and began discussing plans to send a 50-strong squad to defend the shopping precinct.

The blue and the red

Naturally the police weren't going to stand idly by and let all this happen. Primed by his mates on the local community relations council, who'd been in on the meeting, chief superintendent Cubby assured Asians that any attacks or crime against coloured people would be treated 'in exactly the same way as similar attacks against white people' (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 21 April 1981). Soon he doubled the number of police patrols in Coventry's black neighbourhoods – not to protect people there, but to prevent Asian youths and their supporters in the labour movement from taking to the streets to organise defence for themselves. COVWAR was worrying him: 'I know', he said, 'that responsible members of the Asian community will completely ignore this organisation' (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 30 April 1981).

Cubby's intelligence isn't too hot. COVWAR has already gained support from students at Henley college and from the young unemployed. Now we're building up support for workers' defence in the local labour movement. We're going to be raising the issue in the unions, challenging the Labour Party and publicising workers' defence in a Midlands speaking tour in preparation for the July ELWAR conference.

We aim to make racism politically unacceptable and physically impossible. The murder of Satnam Singh Gill has forced the issue of racist attacks into the minds of many. Now is the time to make sure that anti-racist politics gain a firm foothold in the working class.

Support the national demonstration against racist attacks called by Coventry Committee Against Racism
23 May Coventry
Join the COVWAR contingent
Mobilise behind the slogans:
Workers' defence against racist attacks!
Smash all immigration controls!



Police out of Brixton!
- first authoritative account of the Brixton uprising
- exposes the police – and the record of the local official labour movement
- SOLWAR's campaign for working class defence

Our flag stays red!
- the revolutionary answer to racist violence
- workers' defence in action on the streets of East London

Workers Against Racism pamphlets
30p (+ 14p postage) single copy; take ten of either – £3 post free
Write to the next step, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX

the next step