No 14 June 1981

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party 20p

Laurence Scott occupation

Fighting for every job

Special feature

Six pages on workers' defence and the spread of 'Workers against racism' campaigns in East London, South London, Manchester, Coventry. . .

Stop the racist rampage!

Reviews Women, Russia, German social democracy

Letters United Front, SWP, Labour Party

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Preparing for power

International conference on the working class movement in the 'eighties
Dates: 11-13 September
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- 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?

Laurence Scott occupation

Battle on two fronts

The fight for jobs at the Manchester engineering works of Laurence Scott Electromotors is in its second month. Factory owner Arthur Snipe wants to shut down and send 650 workers down the road. The trade union officials want to negotiate a solution that involves workers' acceptance of major losses in jobs and pay to keep LSE open. Supporters of the next step in the factory have been fighting the employers and the bureaucrats to save all jobs and earnings.

ARTHUR SNIPE waited until the occupation had been going for a few weeks before he launched his sneering counter-attack in a personal letter to each member of the 'ex-Manchester workforce':

'Well! you've got yourself into a right mess, you and your mates are sitting in at the Manchester factory which has put you in a position where you get no pay from anywhere, except handouts which cannot amount to much'.

Snipe wasn't stupid. He knew that the engineering union had failed – after six weeks of struggle – to pay one penny in strike pay. The union leaders had given Snipe a weapon and he wasn't slow to use it. Fortunately the workers didn't cave in, despite their financial hardship. They decided to continue the occupation and to step up pressure to get regular strike pay.

'It stands to reason'

Snipe had a second trick up his sleeve. The full-time union officials had been arguing against closure on the grounds that LSE was a going concern. But while the bureaucrats' main concern was the viability of the company, the workers were preoccupied with saving jobs – regardless of the company's profits. Snipe however seized on the union leaders' attempt to show that LSE was thriving.

Snipe is a plain man out to make a profit, but as he wrote:

'The plain fact is that the Manchester plant was losing money at the rate of eighty thousand pounds each week which equals approximately four million pounds in one full year'.

And as a simple capitalist, Snipe can do the sums better than any trade union bureaucrat:

'Simple arithmetic shows that there is only two million pounds on which to operate, and that within six months the whole of the group would be bankrupt and close down for ever.'

Snipe thought he was on a winner. The bureaucrats were no match for his plain speaking and sound arithmetic. Expecting an early end to the occupation, Snipe offered to step down from his previous tough stance and withdraw the 650 dismissal notices. He was ready to negotiate redundancy pay while guaranteeing full wages until the factory closed.

But the workforce told him in no uncertain terms to stuff it! The occupation continued. Supporters of *the next step* can claim some credit for this. Whereas in many other factories workers have given in before these kind of offers, the LSE workers persevered. The difference is that at LSE the arguments of the bosses and trade union leaders have been taken on from the beginning.

Snipe backs off

Snipe was taken aback. His first reaction was to write a letter agreeing to keep the factory open – with ten of the 650 workforce keeping their jobs. This caused more laughs than any other incident through the entire occupation. When this 'offer' was rejected Snipe finally agreed to come to the negotiating table. On 1 June he sat down with local full time official John Tocher and other union representatives.

'Tough boss forced to sit-in talks' announced the *Morning Star* (2 June 1981). It was John Tocher who was talking tough now:

'If we do not reach agreement on withdrawal of the closure here we will continue to fight to save the 650 jobs'.

Things were looking good. But Tocher wasn't talking as tough to Snipe as he was to the press. The next day it emerged that Snipe had 'rejected union proposals for rationalisation through the group, discussions on early retirement and work-sharing' (*Morning Star*, 3 June 1981). LSE workers were shocked. The day before Tocher had been talking about fighting for all 650 jobs – now he was *proposing* redundancies to management. If this is Tocher's way of defending jobs then one thing is clear, LSE workers are about to be sold down the river. Weeks of occupation and poverty line existence will have all been for nothing. It comes as no surprise to learn that Tocher is working in close liaison over LSE with his Communist Party colleague Tommy Macafee, who led the occupation at nearby Gardners' into the acceptance of hundreds of voluntary redundancies.

Which way forward?

The LSE occupation can now go in one of two ways. If the union leaders stay in control then it will go into reverse. Snipe has rejected their generous proposals to cut down manning throughout LSE's other sites and for more short-time work in the Manchester plant. They will have to make even more compromises and accept more redundancies in Manchester.

On the other hand, if the union officials are forced to fight by LSE workers the battle can still be won. Snipe has already been forced to retreat in face of the determined resistance of the LSE workers. This resolute defence of jobs and living standards now has to be stepped up. Blacking of company products can be established. Pickets at Snipe's other factories should be started. And the negotiations must be about saving all 650 jobs at Manchester with *no job losses elsewhere*. If short-time working is introduced it must be at the expense of the company. It must make up the wages to full week's pay. To save jobs and wages at LSE workers will have to widen their attack – to include not only Arthur Snipe but also John Tocher, Tommy Macafee and the rest who will sell out the occupation to keep LSE in profits.

Dave Hallsworth

Donations and messages of support to:
Mr George Fryer
20 Roundcroft
Romiley
Cheshire

RCP activities

LONDON

Central London

Ireland: a new policy for labour
A series of five weekly meetings on the Irish War and the campaign to win labour movement support for the national liberation struggle.

- Can Britain withdraw?
- Is Tony Benn the answer to Don Concannon?
- What about the Prots?
- Can the IRA win?
- How to get the troops out?

Speaker: Mike Freeman
Beginning Wednesday 1 July 7.30pm
University of London Union, Malet St, WC1
(tube: Goodge St/Warren St)

South London

Frank Richards on: What is the Soviet Union?
Public meeting to discuss the nature of Soviet society, and current developments in Eastern Europe.
Wednesday 8 July 7.30pm
Stockwell Hall, Buckmaster House, Stockwell Park Estate
(tube: Brixton)

MANCHESTER

Frank Richards asks: Eastern Europe – what next?
Thursday 18 June 7.30pm
Longsight District Centre, Stockport Rd, Manchester 12

SMASH THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT CAMPAIGN

Coventry
Protest against army recruitment of the unemployed
Monday 15 June 10.30–12.00
Army Careers Information Office
64 Queens Road

Mansfield
Picket Don Concannon, Labour spokesman on Northern Ireland
Saturday 4 July 2pm
Assemble: Mansfield BR station

Birmingham
Rally for Irish freedom
Saturday 4 July 12.00–2.00
Soho Road, Handsworth

South London
Fortnightly planning and discussion meetings
Friday 26 June, Friday 10 July 7–9pm
Waterloo Action Centre, Baylis Road, SE1
For further details ring Dave Douglas: 274 3951

East London
For future activities write c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High St, E8

Manchester
North West Smash the PTA Campaign
Fortnightly meetings. Details from sellers of *the next step*

WORKERS AGAINST RACISM

East London Workers Against Racism
If you live in East London and want to do something about racist violence join us
Write c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High St, E8 or phone 274 3951

Coventry Workers Against Racism
Workers' Defence – yes! State bans – no!
Speakers: COVWAR, local victims of racist attacks
Tuesday 23 June 1.00pm
University of Warwick Students Union

Manchester Workers Against Racism
Launch meeting: WAR not sympathy!
Speaker: Fay Seymour
Tuesday 30 June 7.30pm
Pastoral Centre, Great Western St, Moss Side, Manchester

Leeds
Workers' defence takes off!
3 July 7.30pm
Details: phone 01-274 3951

South London Workers Against Racism
Demonstrate against the Scarman inquiry!
Monday 15 June 10.00–2pm
Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill
(tube: Brixton)

In the evening come to:
Police in the dock! – SOLWAR's 'inquiry' into racial oppression in Brixton
Admission 50p 7.30pm
Lower Hall, Lambeth Town Hall, Acre Lane

South London Workers Against Racism
fortnightly planning and discussion meetings
Monday 22 June 6.30pm
Details: phone 274 3951
Newcomers welcome!

A Tendency to become a Party

THE THIRD NATIONAL conference of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency on 23-25 May was devoted to discussion of the steps necessary to establish a revolutionary party. The balance sheet drawn up by the outgoing leadership drew attention to the extension of RCT activities over the past year and called on conference to assume responsibility for the launching of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP).

Break with tradition

The formation of the RCT in November 1976 was the outcome of a protracted struggle to break from the political traditions of the British left. At the time of its foundation, the RCT's break with the radical left had taken place mainly in the sphere of theory. Unlike the radical left groups that had either reduced Marxism to a sterile dogma or thrown it out altogether in favour of shallow empiricism, the RCT attempted to ground its activities in revolutionary theory.

The theoretical development fought for by the founders of the RCT represented important gains for the revolutionary movement. However the RCT's theoretical capital was limited and its political programme far from complete. Moreover the membership of the RCT lacked much experience of struggle and its influence in the working class was minimal. For this reason the new group called itself a *tendency*. This name signified that revolutionary communist politics were still very much in the stage of formation.

During this early period, the resources of the RCT were devoted to ideological and theoretical development. Our strategy was to address the most advanced sections of the left with the aim of clarifying the major political questions of the day. The RCT operated as a group of propagandists – directing its political appeal towards a small number of individuals. By 1978 this form of political work had yielded important results. RCT propaganda acquired a greater degree of immediacy as it came to reflect the experience of the British working class.

In 1979 it became evident that the RCT had not only broken from the radical left in theory but also in practice. The evolution of a revolutionary communist approach towards social democracy provided an important weapon for the struggle against reformism. For the first time in half a century revolutionary activity was directed explicitly against the Labour Party instead of being subordinated to it.

Break with the Labour Party

Our systematic attacks on the Labour Party and our refusal to give it any electoral support drew the wrath of the radical left. Long accustomed to living under the wing of Labour, the British left could only see the revolutionary approach as 'ultra-left' or 'sectarian'. The RCT argued that a political alternative to the Labour Party had to be advanced in the here and now – not sometime in the future. We saw the radical left's electoral support for the Labour Party as an expression of its lack of confidence in its own politics. This approach meant abandoning in practice the fight for alternative politics in the working class.

The radical left's approach to the Labour Party is the most striking example of its inability to work *independently* organisationally and politically. It reduces its political work to what is acceptable to the official labour movement as it exists today. We make no such concessions to the reactionary labour bureaucrats: indeed for us the growth of the revolutionary movement is inconceivable without the building of a new labour movement.

The radical left's subservience to the labour bureaucracy leads to an inability to fight for the *independent* interests of the working class. For the RCT activity made no sense unless it expressed class independence. That's why so much of the RCT's activity takes place *independently* of the official labour movement. Our recognition of the need for independent revolutionary work led to the development of new strategy and tactics.

Revolutionary tactics

Conference reaffirmed the strategic approach of the RCT. This emphasised ideological issues which challenge the roots of reformism. The RCT always pushed Ireland and racism to the fore. These questions force active workers to act not merely as trade union militants but as class conscious revolutionaries.

During the past eighteen months the RCT's work on Ireland and racism acquired considerable momentum. This is due to the development of tactics which took these issues beyond the realm of ideology and placed them on the terrain of practical struggle. Irish and race work have been organised through the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign and ELWAR. These campaigns are not radical left-style united fronts. They were run by the RCT to ensure that they develop along clear anti-imperialist lines. At the same time they have involved many individuals who are not ready to join the struggle for revolutionary communism, but who are prepared to support the limited objectives of our campaigns.

The aim of these campaigns is not to talk about 'challenging anti-Irish chauvinism' or 'the need to fight racism' but to demonstrate in action how to support the Irish liberation struggle and fight back against racial oppression. Every activity is designed to give a tangible form to anti-imperialist politics. Thus the Smash the PTA Campaign's intervention on the People's March won considerable support from workers for its exposure of the anti-Irish stand of the TUC leaders; practical examples of workers' defence in East London have been used to draw trade unionists into the anti-racist struggle. Public interest in RCT campaigns and the discussions they have stimulated were noted by numerous speakers at conference. The general consensus was that these tactics have been effective in giving revolutionary propaganda a growing popular appeal.

Several speakers recognised the effectiveness of RCT campaigns but warned against complacency. Others made critical remarks about activities organised over the past year which lacked a clear cutting edge. The outgoing political leadership warned about attending pickets, demonstrations and public meetings in a routine manner and not being alert for political opportunities. It observed that the organisation had still not overcome the British left's philistine attitude towards theoretical matters. A revolutionary strategy cannot be effectively pursued unless every member is properly trained in the Marxist science.

Several documents written for conference noted that during the past year RCT campaigns have begun to influence more and more people up and down the country. The Political Committee's document to conference recommended that resources be devoted to national expansion, to organise supporters in areas where no branches yet exist. The perspective of extending the national network of the party was unanimously endorsed by conference.

The Revolutionary Communist Party

Introducing the Political Committee's report, Frank Richards noted that the success of *the next step* was the most important achievement of the organisation since last conference. Circulation climbed steadily as *the next step* reflected the programmatic development of revolutionary communist politics on a wide range of issues. Now established as a regular monthly review, *the next step* will play a vital role in building the RCP, alongside our theoretical journal and pamphlet series.

This is how the report motivated the change in the name of the organisation. 'The success of our campaigns combined with our programmatic development has ensured that we are in a position to fight for the leadership of the working class. The time has come to make the transition from a "tendency" to a "party". This is not merely a name change but a major step forward in our political development. We have not yet built the revolutionary party but launching the Revolutionary Communist Party we give notice that we are ready to assume responsibility for this historic mission.'

The proposals of the outgoing Political Committee were accepted unanimously. But as Frank Richards warned 'To declare a party is easy. To live up to it will be the challenge facing every member of the RCP.'

Now for a workers' march

HUNDREDS of angry unemployed young people joined the People's March for jobs. Tens of thousands more cheered them along their 200 mile trek from Liverpool and more than 100 000 welcomed them to London. But the TUC-organised march was not designed to fight unemployment: it took advantage of the frustration of jobless youth, and the sympathy many workers feel for them, to strengthen the position of the leaders of the trade unions and the Labour Party.

TUC hypocrisy

The TUC has done nothing to prevent mass redundancies. Indeed it has collaborated in rationalisation programmes in every major industry at the cost of tens of thousands of jobs. Nor has it done anything to ensure decent benefits or proper rates of pay on job creation schemes.

But the TUC is concerned about unemployment. Trade unions are losing members and wages are being forced down. And the TUC is worried that if it doesn't organise the unemployed, someone else will – probably in a left-wing movement that would challenge the bureaucracy. The trade union leaders are also concerned about their loss of influence with the Tory Government. They need different government policies – and preferably a different government to implement them.

Thus the People's March. Initiated by aspiring career bureaucrats Colin Barnett, Pete Carter and Jack Dromey in the TUC's regional offices, the march aimed to use the unemployed in a campaign for the TUC's alternative policies and for a Labour government to put them into practice.

All together now

The People's March was 'non-political'. But the TUC used it to give a platform to some of the most reactionary viewpoints in British society. Vicars from the Church of England ('the Tory Party at prayer'), priests from the Catholic Church (vanguard of the attack on women's rights) and even Liberals and Tories were welcomed (until the marchers revolted at the latter). However, the most dangerous politics on offer was the TUC/Labour Party 'alternative strategy' to deal with unemployment by withdrawing from the EEC, cutting defence and boosting government investment in manufacturing. This is a programme of nationalism, pacifism and wishful thinking. With this programme to the fore, the People's March became a publicity exercise for the return of another Labour government.

The People's March confirmed the subordination of the left to the labour bureaucracy. The march was run by Communist Party trade unionists with a rod of iron. But no humiliation from the Stalinist sergeant majors was too great for the radical left to suffer. Barred from carrying banners, selling papers, wearing badges, chanting slogans, smoking in church, members of the SWP, WRP and the rest just buckled under in the cause of unity with the bureaucrats.

March for Irish freedom

The organisers of the People's March were determined to retain political control: on the one issue that seriously challenged the TUC – Ireland – they were ruthless. Marchers who put on black armbands when Bobby Sands died were told to remove them or leave the march. Pro-hunger strike protesters who joined the march or support rallies were beaten up, jostled by stewards, had banners torn down and placards confiscated.

When however a large number of Smash the PTA Campaign supporters joined the march at Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square they got an overwhelmingly positive response from the marchers – despite harassment from police and TUC stewards. We intend to build on that support for a 'Workers' March for Irish freedom' from Manchester to the TUC Congress at Blackpool in September. The aim of the march will be to appeal for *workers'* support for the hunger strikers and the national liberation struggle and to appeal to the British labour movement to throw out its official pro-British Irish policy.

STRAIGHT TALKING

The hunger strikes, the deaths in the H-Blocks, the rioting, bombing and shooting in the Six Counties have provoked greater discussion about Ireland among British workers than for many years. Trade union supporters of the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign have been arguing in support of the hunger strikers in their workplaces and union branches. Mick Kennedy spoke to five of them.

Cowards or soldiers?

NASSER PATEL TGWU bus conductor, secretary West Ham Trades Council

'Quite a few workers on the buses are ex-Army. When I've talked about the hunger strikers' demand for political status they say that the IRA aren't soldiers or prisoners-of-war – just a bunch of cowards. They don't come out in the open to fight and their prison protest is squalid. I ask them why it takes thousands of troops and paramilitary police – and the SAS – and they still can't deal with 'a few terrorists'. I point out that the IRA obviously has a lot of support in Ireland – 30 000 people voted for Bobby Sands – and that they have to use guerrilla tactics against a much more powerful enemy.

'One driver is always saying we should go in there and smash the terrorists, use lead not rubber bullets, and all that. I said to him: "Look who's this 'we' you're always on about? What's in it for you if the British Government smashes the republican movement?" I made the point that the British Government was also trying to cut our jobs on wages and that *we*, as workers, had nothing in common with *them*, the government and the employers. But we had a common interest with the Irish in resisting the government.

'To me this is the vital point to get across – that Ireland is a class question for British workers. I remember when the bombs went off in the Old Bailey a few years ago. I was working in the Post Office just near by at the time. I came out and saw people running everywhere – especially I remember seeing a woman bleeding from the face. It was terrible. At the time I was hostile to the IRA. But I thought about it a lot and talked to people and I came around to seeing that you can't back out of supporting a movement for national freedom against the British state because some people not directly involved get injured or even killed. I blame the government every time for not getting out of Ireland.'

Town Hall terror

PAT REGAN Hackney NALGO, Hackney Trades Council

'We put a motion in support of the hunger strikers and the fight for national liberation to our union branch early in March, but it was May and four hunger strikers were dead before it got to the top of the agenda. Just the idea of discussing Ireland was too much for some people – 36 resigned from the union just because the motion was on the agenda and 200 more threatened to do the same if it went through.

'The CP branch secretary declared "I'm against it" from the platform before the meeting had properly started and the chair cut the debate short. One man waved a copy of the *New Standard* carrying an account of the five soldiers blown up in a Saracen in South Armagh. He condemned 'sinister forces' in the union. I made the point that the meeting was going on to consider the possibility of an all-out strike against the effects of the cuts on staff and services. If they did come out and started picketing this would bring them straight up against the Employment Act and the police enforcing it. They would be in just the same position as Irish people fighting for their rights against the British state.

'Although the debate was short it provoked a lot of discussion in various council departments. At least a hundred extra people turned up at the meeting just because Ireland was on the agenda. In the end only 35 out of 350 voted for the hunger strikers – but if 10 per cent of all trade union members took a stand against the Government we'd be in a much stronger position and the hunger strikers might still be alive.'

A question of violence

DAVE HALLSWORTH AUEW engineering worker, Laurence Scott Electromotors, Manchester

'When I told one bloke at work that I supported the hunger strikers he got quite flustered – "It's OK you supporting them, but what would you do if they blew up your family?" So I said "Well I'd be very angry with the British Government for forcing them to fight for their freedom – and I'd be even angrier with Len Murray and the rest of them for backing up the Tories on behalf of the labour movement".

'He was very militant – a strong supporter of our occupation. I put it to him that he would support people on strike against the bosses – so he should support a movement taking on their government. He wasn't totally convinced; the question of violence was a real sticking point – "What about indiscriminate bombings?". I said that there were no innocent parties in war and that while the labour leaders were hand in glove with the Government the passivity of most workers over the war was helping to prolong the violent suppression of the Irish people.

'We've had this argument ever since the Birmingham bombings. At that time we were involved in a strike at Intex in Ashton-under-Lyne. When I said I supported the right of the republican movement to carry out bombings in Britain and refused to condemn the pub bombings, the workers there didn't speak to me for a fortnight. But in the long term it paid off – when the heat died down they talked openly about it for the first time. Ireland had been opened up – put on the agenda for discussion.

'The problem is that workers have never really had the argument put to them straight. Most of the left-wing groups either ignore it altogether or duck the difficult issues with all sorts of confused arguments. The only way you can win support for the hunger strikers is if you can persuade people to support the rights of the oppressed to use violence against their oppressors.

'I had this discussion a while back with a right-wing official in one of the textile unions who was on Tameside Trades Council. He fought us all the way over Ireland. He said that IRA tactics were alien to the traditions of the British labour movement. One day I told him about the founder of our trades council, Chartist Rayner Stevens. One of his slogans was "If millowners won't give way, set fire to the mill and put out the fire with the blood of millowners". That put an end to that debate.

'By regularly taking on the anti-Irish views that come across in the papers you can begin to build up an atmosphere that's more sympathetic to the hunger strikers. I was working with a bloke who is well known for taking his opinions on Ireland from the *Sun* when the news of Francis Hughes' death came through on the radio. Everybody looked up expecting him to start mouthing off; he glanced over at me and said nothing.'

(Dave Hallsworth was recently re-elected secretary at the first meeting of the newly convened Tameside Trades Council. The new trades council was set up by the TUC with the help of local bureaucrats and CP members one year after the disaffiliation of Tameside from the TUC over its support for the Irish liberation struggle.)

Stalinists in a jam

JOHN ANDERSON USDAW, shop steward, F Duerr's jam factory, Manchester

'The hunger strike happened at the same time as a major dispute in the union at my factory. The workers were getting more and more angry about the employer's use of short-term (12 weeks) contracts as a means of disciplining the workforce and holding down wages (to around £85 per week, with a basic of £62). What was even worse was the close co-operation of the chief steward and the USDAW area organiser with the company. Well things came to a head in March when most of the workers signed a motion of no confidence in the chief steward and elected me instead. Then the bureaucrats played the green card.

'Area organiser Doug Johnstone, a member of the Communist Party, knew my position on Ireland because I had appealed for support for the Smash the PTA Campaign's Coventry conference at the Manchester branch meeting. He proposed that the branch reject the motion without discussion.

'Now he came down to Duerr's to block my election as shop steward. (The bureaucrats insist that all shop stewards are first vetted by the area committee – *and* by management.)

'Johnstone said I was an 'IRA supporter' and 'an extremist'. The workers at Duerr's were not impressed. I had sold *the next step* at work and discussed Ireland with a lot of people. Many supported my position. And after years of 'moderate' shop stewards they wanted a bit of 'extremism' – if that meant defending them against the company for a change. When Johnstone's appeals fell on deaf ears he disappeared and another bureaucrat turned up. He told us that *the next step* does not believe in trade unionism and keeps attacking the TUC'. But the workers knew that *the next step* stood for strong independent shop floor representation at Duerr's – and they thought that the TUC needed some attacking. My position as steward was ratified by a 4 to 1 majority.

'The moral is that if you are open about your support for the Irish struggle and win the workers over to your position, the bureaucrats won't get far trying to use it against you.'

Winning strike action

A member of the NUJ chapel at NALGO HQ, London

'We are only a small chapel (17 members) all working in the same area. The chapel has always taken a militant line on wages and conditions. There have been numerous walk-outs over high temperatures in the building. Until recently, however, political questions had not really come up at work. Some of us thought that issues like Ireland were really important to raise in the workplace because they brought up very clearly the nature of the British state.

'We first raised a motion on political status last year and argued for it on the basis of support for the right of the Irish to self-determination, rather than trying to win moralistic arguments about clothing and conditions. Soon after the first hunger strike started we won support for a motion to come out on strike in the event of a death. We also agreed to send letters to Humphrey Atkins, the Northern Ireland Office, the NUJ and the H-Block Information Centre in Belfast. In the event the hunger strike ended before anyone died.

'When Bobby Sands began his hunger strike we reaffirmed our policy, and came out on strike when he died. Fifteen chapel members supported the picket at the entrance of NALGO HQ. We produced an excellent leaflet spelling out why we had taken the action which we distributed to the 300 or so other members of staff during the morning. Although one or two were torn up the vast majority were taken and read with interest. The chapel also endorsed the visit of one of its members to Derry on the SPTAC trade union delegation where a message of support was delivered. Possibly as a result of the stand we have taken *Public Service*, NALGO's paper, recently received a letter smuggled out of the H-Blocks, although it is unlikely to get printed.

'Our success in raising Ireland is partly due to the fact we are few in number and it is not difficult to get around chapel members and explain the issues. However, it is also due to the fact that the issues have been put quite unambiguously. Our experience has been that people will respond if the politics are put clearly and no-one tries to duck the debate.'

WORKERS' DEFENCE TAKES OFF!

It's now over 25 years since the first large numbers of black people came to settle in Britain. Then they were needed to work on the buses and the trains, in the hospitals and in Britain's declining industries. Blacks were welcomed by the government and by employers.

In 1981 things are very different. There are more than 2½ million people on the doie and there is no work for young whites, let alone for blacks who have always been forced to take second place in the job market. Now the British state has a major problem. It must deal with black people who are not wanted by the capitalist system but who –as recent events have shown – are ready to fight back. The ruling class has replied by stepping up the oppression of blacks: a new Nationality Act, a police force armed and trained to kill and gangs of racists who roam the streets with no restraint from the police.

Only one thing has remained constant through the last two decades. The British labour movement still remains largely indifferent to the treatment of black people. In the 'fifties the trade unions tolerated wholesale discrimination against blacks in housing and jobs. Since, the official labour movement has done next to nothing to oppose the steady build up of police harassment of blacks, the passage through Parliament of successive immigration laws, or the mounting tide of violence from right-wing groups. Black people have faced them all alone because on the question of race many people in the labour movement share the same outlook as the ruling class.

We are determined to change all this. Where the left said it was alright for the state to interfere in the movement of black people we have campaigned against all immigration controls. When the left has accepted the physical intimidation of blacks, we have argued the case for workers' defence. In the last year we have put our politics into practice in East London Workers Against Racism (ELWAR). Its uncompromising opposition to all immigration controls – as shown in the campaign against Filipino deportations – and its preparedness to organise physical defence of black people have marked a major break with the traditions of the British left.

ELWAR's experience in combatting racism holds valuable lessons for anti-racists everywhere. On 18 July ELWAR will be pointing the way forward with its first labour movement conference Workers' Defence Takes Off. The conference aims to establish Workers Against Racism as a national political force. Speakers are coming from anti-racist and black organisations from East London, Brixton, the Midlands and the North West.

In this special six page feature of the next step we introduce many of the themes which will be discussed at the ELWAR conference. Below we report on a recent French protest against deportations and review a new OECD report on the conditions of migrant workers in Europe. On Pages 6 and 7 we feature reports of our defence work from East London, Brixton and Coventry. On Pages 8 and 9 we look at the history of workers' defence in Germany and Austria – and show how the left today is repeating many of the same old mistakes. And on Page 11 we take a close look at the new face of the British police.

Mass expulsion

THROUGHOUT the 'fifties and 'sixties the car factories, steel mills and building sites of Germany, France, Holland, Belgium and Switzerland ran on the labour of workers from Algeria, Turkey, and other undeveloped countries. Deprived by the state of many of the rights granted to domestic workers these migrants remained isolated from the official labour movement and confined to jobs where the pay and conditions were the worst. A recent OECD report notes that still today, foreign workers continue 'to occupy jobs abandoned by the national workforce'.

But today the crisis ridden economies of Europe can't offer jobs to all the workers they took in during the boom. *Le Monde* recently criticised the Swiss for 'making foreign workers scapegoats for the crisis' (19 May 1981). But as the same OECD report shows France and the rest of Western Europe are just as ruthless in their treatment of foreign workers.

Ticket to ride

Since 1977 **France** has operated a state-funded repatriation programme, cosmetically entitled 'aide au retour'. The government has spent more than 545 million francs (around £50 million) on the scheme up to now. During 1979 alone 15 616 cases were processed, involving 30 957 migrant workers and their families, 80 per cent of whom had jobs before being encouraged by the state to go 'home' (*Le Monde*, 19 May 1981).

Migrant workers face the same problems in the other West European imperialist countries. **West Germany** up to now has not bothered with any 'aide de retour', and focuses more on preventing workers entering in the first place. Since November 1973 there has been an official ban on recruiting non-EEC migrants, and now seasonal workers too are no longer admitted.

Belgium is currently devising a repatriation scheme, but meanwhile has restricted the issue of general work permits to the members of a migrant worker's family. Other workers must take jobs in the industries where the employers most need them.

In **Holland** new recruitment of migrant workers is prohibited and bosses are only allowed to employ a certain quota of 'foreigners'. As a result of the quota many migrants have lost their jobs.

The plight of foreign workers is epitomised by conditions in **Switzerland**. Here immigration laws were already so tough that they have hardly needed amending in recent years. Even more striking is the national consensus which accepts migrants as disposable second class citizens. In April this year in a national referendum, a proposal to make immigration laws more liberal was resoundingly defeated.

Deporting 'criminals'

For years the French government has had a policy of branding ethnic minorities in France, particularly Algerians, as drug-fiends, hooligans and criminals. This provides a cover for increasing harassment, police brutality and deportations, just like the British campaigns against 'mugging' and against Iranian students.

But on 2 April Christian Bonnet, the Interior Minister, got a shock. A priest in Lyon, Christian Delorme, went on hunger strike with a young Algerian threatened with expulsion from France. The protest quickly spread. Several others joined the Lyon hunger strike, and numerous demonstrations in solidarity took place throughout France, notably on 25 April when in Lyon itself thousands of people turned out.

By the end of the month, however, Bonnet had defused the situation. Following the best British traditions, he announced a special inquiry and made some concessions. The hunger strike was called off. His 'concessions'? No deportations of youths under 18, a 'case by case' examination of those aged between 18 and 25, negotiations with the Algerian government on France's policy (!), and no deportations of young Algerians during the three month period of the inquiry – except in the case of 'serious crimes'.

Bonnet made use of the narrow way in which the issue of deportations was taken up. The protest was not against all forms of state harassment of ethnic minorities, only against deporting youths born or educated in France. He was able to get away with his criminalisation policy and operate much as before. New socialist president Mitterand has pledged to end the deportations but we know that as long as French workers fail to challenge the chauvinism of the socialist and communist parties, state repression of migrants will carry on and intensify.

Workers Against Racism national conference

Brady Club
192 – 196 Hanbury Street
(off Brick Lane)
London E1
(near Aldgate East tube)

Saturday 18 July
10 am – 6 pm

ELWAR benefit

Saturday 18 July 8 till late

'DEFEND THE BRICK LANE 5'
with
PIGBAG
BUMBLE AND THE BEEZ
MAXIMUM JOY
and SOUNDSYSTEM

Booze, food and good live music
Tickets: £2.00, £1.00 (UB40)

Rock for workers' defence!
Don't let the state put us out of business!

Racist rampage in Coventry

LABOUR IS TO BLAME

HAVING made Coventry ripe for the fascists to grow, the Labour Party is now set to sabotage the fightback. **Phil Murphy** reports.

Racists in Coventry have followed up the murder of Satnam Singh Gill on 18 April with scores of attacks including rape and the bombing of a temple and an Asian club. The police haven't been far behind. After weeks of frustrated public relations work, warning people to have nothing to do with groups such as Coventry Workers Against Racism, the police gave up and came down on the black community with a vengeance on Saturday 23 April. A 10 000-strong march of anti-racists through the city centre was too much for the police to stomach. Skilfully manipulating bands of racists the police provoked demonstrators into breaking ranks. Mounted police waded into them making over 50 arrests. Boosted by this, head of Coventry police Chief Superintendent Cubby has threatened to ban any future anti-racist gatherings in the city. He also warned blacks to stay out of the city centre at weekends – giving tacit support to the racists who've been trying to establish it as a 'whites only' area for months.

Desperate remedies

Everybody – from the right-wing *Coventry Evening Telegraph* to the Labour Party and even the radical left – was taken aback by the upsurge in racist violence in Coventry. In this boom motor city of the 'fifties and 'sixties 'race relations' had always been exemplary. Black, white, Asian and 'even the Irish' got on well, and fascist groups never took off in Coventry as they did in Wolverhampton, West Bromwich or Leicester. Why then can well-known fascists like Robert Relf come to Coventry to find such a ready audience?

One reason is mass unemployment. In the last year Coventry has been hit harder than virtually anywhere else in Britain. In May alone the total out of work rose by 1000 to over 35 000, or more than 14 per cent. Long-term unemployment (those out of work 6-12 months) doubled last year. And there's more to come: at least 2000 redundancies are in the pipeline. Racism has a dangerous appeal to the young unemployed – and about 40 per cent of Coventry's unemployed are under 25; 5000 under the age of 18 have no jobs. Over the summer they will be joined by another 4000 school and college leavers. Coventry careers officers estimate that only 40 per cent of this summer's school leavers have a chance of finding a job.

But the wave of racist violence in Coventry cannot be simply attributed to youth unemployment: the official labour movement in the area must take a share of the blame. Coventry has a long tradition of militant labour movement organisation. For years it elected prominent left-wing Labour MP Audrey Wise to Parliament. But the Labour Party has done nothing to fight the redundancies heaped on Coventry by the recession and nothing to channel the anger of the youth against the employers. When Rolls Royce stewards sought advice in February on an industrial dispute Labour MP George Park sent them away 'with a clear conscience' to Tory MP James Pawsey because the plant wasn't in his constituency! For the young the Labour Party simply requests more money for YOP training schemes – poverty-line wages to keep you off the streets for a few months.

This contempt for the fate of the working class comes wrapped up in the usual nationalist package. Midlands Labour MPs have been the most strident in their condemnation of Japanese and European car and component imports. The fascists simply take this chauvinist appeal one stage further and attack 'foreigners' living in Britain. Calls for bans on foreign imports may seem a long way away from 'Kick a Paki and make Coventry a white man's city' – but the progression is there for all to see. If you're young, angry and on the dole, the fascists' direct action solution has much more appeal than Labour's rhetorical patriotism.

Blaming foreigners

Having stirred up animosity towards 'foreign competition', Labour politicians can only throw up their arms in horror when the fascists take their more extreme form of chauvinism onto the streets. When Asians and anti-racists fight back against the racist attacks, local left-wing Labour MP, William Wilson appeals for both sides to 'cool down'. In response to the police attack on the 23 May demonstration all rebel left-wing city councillor John Hughes could say was that the police should be 'locally' controlled. When asked privately about their attitude to racist violence Labour councillors are *against* vigilante patrols and *for* the special police unit to deal with racist attacks. In public they're less open because to condemn organised defence and back the police would immediately alienate much of their support in the Asian community.

Despite police harassment and threats, a defiant anti-racist movement is taking the defence of the black community onto the streets and estates of Coventry. Every Saturday Coventry Workers Against Racism with other local anti-racists take up position in the city centre shopping precinct to prevent it becoming a no-go area for blacks. Workers' defence patrols are active in the housing estates and other areas of Coventry where racist attacks have been most numerous. Support for this work is growing all the time. Many of the thirty people who turned up to the first COVWAR public meeting volunteered to go on patrols and other defence activities.

Workers Against Racism is a new force in Coventry. But as well as beginning to organise defence local supporters have learnt a valuable lesson: to defend the black community means challenging the Labour Party all the way.

Brixton two months after

SCARMAN GO HOME!

ON MONDAY 15 June Lord Justice Scarman opens his inquiry into the Brixton revolt. South London Workers Against Racism will not be giving any evidence. Nor are we supporting any of the other 'labour movement' inquiries which the Labour Party and Lambeth Trades Council have set up as radical alternatives to Scarman. The last thing we need is months of legal wrangling when, for anyone who lives in South London, the facts are obvious.

In early April the youth of Brixton rebelled against their oppressors. For a few hours, they drove the police from their streets. Since then the police have regained control of Brixton and taken their revenge. More than 400 people have been arrested and charged for offences supposedly linked with the revolt. There have been beatings and arrests and dozens of dawn raids. On the Stockwell Park Estate alone, police have raided at least 12 homes, taking away TV sets, stereos and other valuables. They've kept teenagers locked up, until their parents could prove that they had receipts for all the goods.

Our verdict is that the police are guilty. Not, as some liberals or race relations experts would have us believe, of using 'unnecessary' violence against black people. But guilty of perpetuating the oppression of black people in the way that the ruling class knows best – through terror. It is clear that the violence that is part of the daily routine in Brixton stems from the presence of the police in the area. It will not be ended until they are forced out and the working class left to organise its own policing.

Fight them back

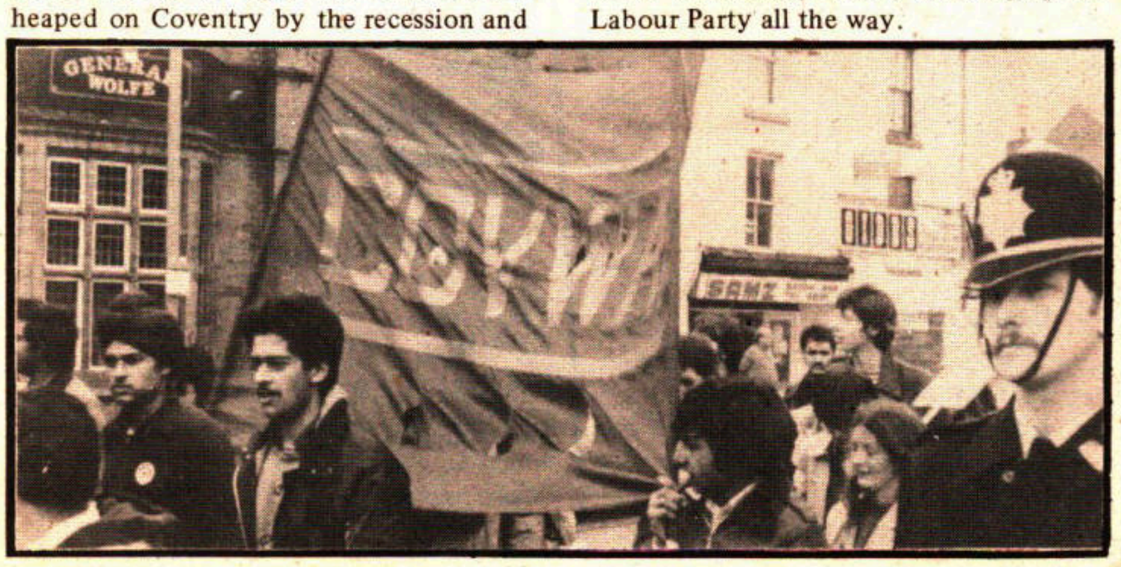
All too often we have been forced onto the defensive in the fight against the police. Defence must be organised – we have arranged barristers and solicitors and picketed the courts to secure the release of prisoners. But in this game the police always seem to have the upper hand. We have to change this. Now is the time to turn the tables on the police and go on the offensive against them. The question is how?

South London Workers Against Racism has been assisting a number of families and individuals in pressing charges against the police. We are not doing this to show black people how to fight the police – they have been doing that for years. We do it for two reasons. First, to salvage from the police some practical recompense for the damage inflicted on the black community – for the homes broken into, the jobs lost, the arms and legs broken by police truncheons and boots. Second, because such a campaign can act as the focus for building support in the labour movement for the defence of black people. Indeed, we have no illusion that we can get anything from the courts. Our campaign will only succeed if it becomes the focus of practical opposition to the police in the labour movement.

So far over 20 families have pressed charges against the police for damage done to them during or after the Brixton revolt. But if we are to expose the police properly, we will have to make it into a much larger campaign. For the same reasons we need much more labour movement backing. So far a number of sympathetic trade unions have listened to speakers and backed SOLWAR's offensive against the police. Even so there are still hundreds of trade unions which have not yet taken any action and where the arguments against state harassment of blacks have not yet been raised. Brixton has given us the perfect opportunity to remedy that.

We appeal to all anti-racists to join SOLWAR's campaign against the police, to support our activities against the Scarman inquiry, and to work to make police attacks on black people unacceptable in the working class movement. If that happens, it can become the first practical step in the fight to drive the police off our streets once and for all.

Laura Bennett



COVWAR
anti-racist social

Friday 19 June 8 till late

General Wolfe's, Foleshill Road
Tickets: £1, 80p unwaged

Come and rock with **CHANNEL A**
and a new hard reggae band **FUTURE**
plus disco provided by **Sidney Stringer students**

SOLWAR benefit

Saturday 4 July 8 till late

Food and drink
Tickets: £1.50 (£2.00 on the door)
The Grand Lodge, 162 Railton Road

Help us put the police in the dock
The Liberator and
DENNIS PINNOCK

Shadwell Gardens, East London

ELWAR in action

USUALLY East London Workers Against Racism provokes outright hostility from the police. So we were surprised when, in response to our activities on the Shadwell Gardens Estate, Tower Hamlets Community Liaison Officer Chief Inspector Newman suggested that ELWAR supporters 'join the Special Constabulary and patrol on an official basis' (*East London Advertiser*, 15 May 1981). We've had to turn down this gracious offer but, in the light of this about turn in police policy, *the next step* decided to visit Shadwell Gardens to see what Newman is so worried about. **Kevin Green** reports.

Shadwell has a militant tradition. In the 'thirties Cable Street and the area around it was the scene of bitter struggles against shocking housing, high rents, evictions and of course against Mosley's fascists. Since then 50 years of neglect by reactionary Labour councils have seen the collapse of local industry, the decay of housing estates and homes and a massive increase in unemployment. Today much of Shadwell is a slum.

Probably the worst blocks of all are on Shadwell Gardens, an inter-war estate earmarked by the Greater London Council – which strenuously denies that it operates such policies – as a Bangladeshi ghetto. Of 150 flats on the worst part of the estate, 125 are occupied by Bangladeshis, 11 by Pakistanis, seven by West Indians and the remaining few by white families. The GLC has persistently refused to improve facilities and now doesn't even bother to maintain basic services. Tower Hamlets Council sends the dustmen once a month. Between times the rubbish piles high, spews out of the bins and across the courtyard.

Around 9.30 everything is quiet, although ELWAR is patrolling the estate with the Shadwell Gardens Defence Committee because there have been a number of attacks lately. Belal is typical of many people on the estate. He's been in Britain since 1975, but didn't get a council flat until July 1980. He first worked with ELWAR in early April, when it organised a 'Smash all immigration controls' march around the Brick Lane area: 'We drove around in a lorry trying to get support for the march making announcements in English and Bangladeshi'. Since then Belal has been much more involved – mainly because of the number of attacks in Shadwell. One of the most serious came in mid April. He explains:

'I was jumped by a gang of white youths just outside my door. One held an airgun to my head, and threatened to shoot me. I stood frozen for five minutes, and then grabbed the gun barrel and turned it away from me.

'After that they came back again, shot at the lights at my door, abused my wife and smashed out my two front windows. That made us start up the Defence Committee, because the tenants' association had done nothing and the council took weeks just to board up the broken windows. We don't even know if the police have bothered to charge the skinheads yet.'

Now the defence committee patrols every night, using a rota of ELWAR supporters and local Bangladeshi people:

'Since we formed the committee it's really been very good: instead of sitting inside and waiting for something to happen, we patrol the estate to prevent it. There have hardly been any incidents at all.'

One good reason for that is that the Bangladeshis have the backing of a lot of the local youth – black and white. Round the corner from Belal's flat is a group of local youths, sitting in a derelict car huddled around three copies of *the next step*, talking to ELWAR activist Paul Saunders.

Mick is 16, still at school but, as he says himself 'heading for the dole because the bosses are putting people out of work all over'. Why 'I'm not sure. I think it's Thatcher's fault, but I can't remember it ever being much different and Tower Hamlets has always been Labour'. The discussion goes on. Mick asks Paul about ELWAR: 'We all get shitty houses and schools. Why do you want to defend Asians in particular?' Paul says that Asians don't just suffer bad housing and unemployment like everybody else, they also get their heads kicked in by fascists and police.

Next Ireland. It's on everybody's mind because we've just heard that hunger striker Raymond McCreesh is near death. The discussion goes on – about the NF, the Labour Party and the IRA. Mick and the others promise to read *the next step* and talk about it again tomorrow. Belal will join in the discussion. He's already agreed to write an article supporting the hunger strikers in the local Bangladeshi paper.

Mick is keen to begin working with ELWAR: 'Once they remember to bring me my membership card, I want to join these street patrols in another part of East London'. He talks with Paul about the practicalities of defence work. There are plans to instal a siren on the estate to warn of racists. At the moment they're pretty confident about being able to defend the estate. 'I'm sure people would pour out of the blocks to help if there was an attack', says Mick.

Paul is more worried about the political problems ELWAR will have to face if it's to obtain support for the Shadwell Gardens Committee from the local labour movement. He explains:

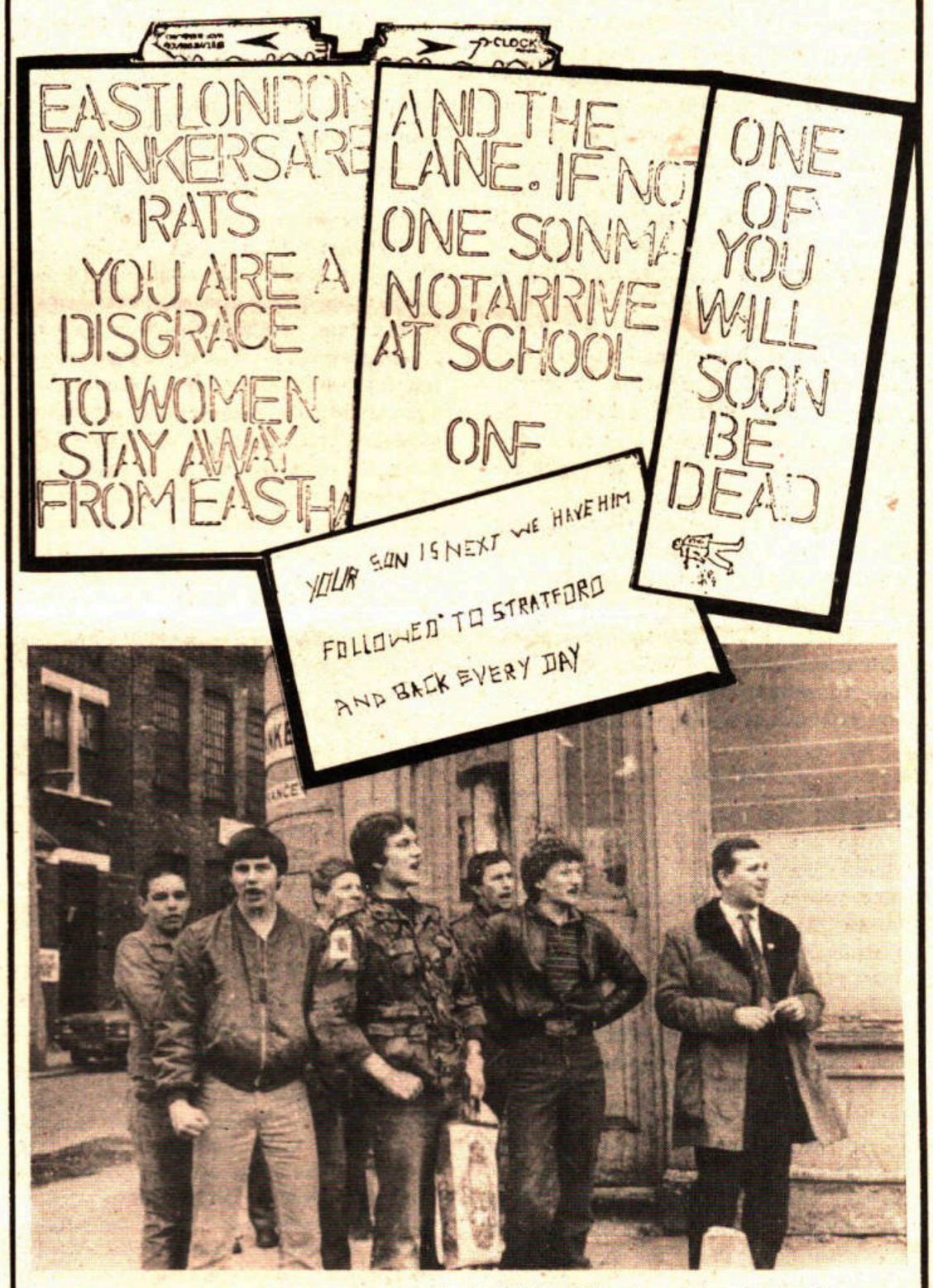
'There's enormous potential here. Everybody hates the police. Not long ago they barricaded the estate to keep them off. The problem is that when news of what we're doing spreads we'll have the local Labour Party down here again, probably with a few community police. Between them they'll try to stifle any independent initiative that comes from the people here. We'll have to prepare for that. You have to convince people that community policemen are no different from the rest of the racist police force.'

He goes on to outline some of their plans: in the near future they'll be demanding support from Tower Hamlets trades council and facilities on the estate from the GLC from which anti-racists can organise their defence work.

By now it's well past midnight. It's been a quiet evening so the patrols can gradually be wound down and supporters escorted back to their homes on nearby estates. Tomorrow another group will be back to make sure the streets are kept safe.

NF backlash

Defend the Princes!



The master race in Brick Lane – and a selection of Mrs Prince's correspondence, plus razor blades.

Angela Prince has been a vocal anti-racist for many years. But it wasn't until she joined in ELWAR's Newham election campaign two months ago that she and her family were directly threatened by fascists.

Since early May she's received regular death threats – almost a dozen letters and a mock letter bomb. Newham NF has threatened her sons and sent a letter to ELWAR stating: 'You can't always be there. We'll kill the nigger loving bitch'. She has twice been assaulted by fascists in the street near her home – most recently suffering a painful black eye.

The defence of the Princes is a test for all East London anti-racists. We know that we cannot rely on the police for protection. They are more likely to arrest anti-racists under attack than fascist attackers.

ELWAR has already mobilised its own members and supporters in defence rotas at the Princes'. Mrs Prince has sent an appeal to local left-wing and anti-racist groups to mount joint defence. ELWAR is not prepared to see its supporters intimidated in this way. Anti-racists who join in defence work will receive whatever protection is necessary.

JOIN IN DEFENCE OF THE PRINCE FAMILY

For latest information and details of how to become involved, phone ELWAR on 274 3951.

Start digging y

Build workers

'Never again!' is the battlecry of the Anti-Nazi League. It rings hollow these days as growing numbers of white working class youth are attracted to racist groups. It sounds irrelevant when the labour movement sits on the sidelines while fascist and state violence against black people mounts. Evoking the horrors of Nazi Germany does nothing to confront the rising tide of British chauvinism.

It also gives a wrong impression of the racist and fascist threat. The working class has never succumbed overnight to fascist takeover, con-

The Spartacusbund in arms 1919: workers' defence remains the vital preparation for the seizure of state pow

The racist challenge

RACIST attacks are on the increase. This is not surprising because racial violence is sanctioned by the state. Behind the racist mob stand the police, the courts, the immigration laws, and above them all waves the Union Jack. These institutions enforce the harassment of black people. Official discrimination – like passport checks in hospital – provides any racist thug with a licence to have a go. The message to black people is clear: on your knees or else! Enoch Powell, currently enjoying a comeback in the bourgeois press as an expert on race relations, puts it across most clearly – 'stay off the streets or go back to the jungle'.

When they're not out to harass black people, the courts and the police cover up for racist thugs. Coventry's head of police – Chief Superintendent Cubby – recently described the fire bombing of an Asian temple and a black social club as 'high spirited'. Similarly, the police went to extraordinary lengths to hide any racist motive behind the New Cross massacre. A young Asian in Southall who had the initials NF carved into his chest is now being charged with 'wasting police time'.

This wave of abuse and repression has thrown the labour movement on the defensive. The left has called for inquiries, produced reports detailing cases of racist violence and has sought the help of enlightened policemen. But nothing has been done to counter racist attacks with the only effective response – class violence.

The only way

Organised class violence is the only answer to the organised violence of the fascists and the state. All recent experience proves that peaceful methods of protest do not work. Try telling the arresting police officer or the racist thug about your rights and democracy.

The alternative is simple. In East London and Coventry where workers have organised to combat racist attacks the results have been positive. The fascists are put on the defensive and the community gains confidence and coherence through organising its defence. And white workers involved in such action set an example for others. All this is so obvious that you might think the argument for workers' defence needs no justification. Not so. The reformists doggedly maintain that working class violence has to be avoided at all costs.

Why this reluctance? Are the reformists physical cowards? Perhaps. But the reason lies deeper. They cannot support organised workers' defence against racist attacks because they are not prepared to confront the state. No doubt many reformists applaud individual acts of violence against fascists. In East London ELWAR has come across many Labour Party supporters who cannot but express sympathy and secret admiration for some of our successful blows against the fascists. But this positive response directly contradicts the political programme they support.

Reformists are committed to the preservation of bourgeois democracy. The survival of bourgeois democracy depends on the monopolisation of violence by the ruling class through its state. Working class violence is hence a threat not only to the fascists but also to the state. This is why, throughout history, the reformists have tried to contain the anti-fascist struggle. In Britain, workers mobilised against the fascists at Cable Street despite the calls of the Labour left and the Communist Party for moderation. In Austria and Germany the reformists' refusal to organise defence led the working class to disastrous defeats. Let's look at the Austrian experience.

Arms without aims

Before the Second World War the Austrian working class spontaneously armed itself against the forces of reaction and established workers' battalions in every major industrial centre. This pressure forced the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SDAP) to marshall these forces into the Schutzbund or Republican Defence League.

But the political goals of the social democratic leaders, Otto Bauer and Julius Deutsch, made the arming of the workers an unnecessary nuisance. Their aim was to create a stable bourgeois state out of the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Throughout the 'twenties they attempted to disarm the workers. They replaced the workers' councils with a bourgeois parliamentary democracy, established a standing army and police force and made other major concessions to the reactionary bourgeois parties. In 1927 they went so far as to make a secret deal with ultra-right monarchists to hand arms the workers had entrusted to their party over to the military. When all this failed to satisfy bourgeois reaction and the fascist tide began to rise, the leadership hung on to the Schutzbund, not to go on the offensive, but in the hope that its very existence might frighten off the fascists.

In 1927 the Vienna workers came out on general strike after the acquittal the fascist murderers of fourteen of their comrades. The Schutzbund leaders refused them arms. An eyewitness account described the grotesque position imposed on the workers by their leaders:

> 'With tears in their eyes the Schutzbuendler had unsuccessfully implored the party leaders at the Parliament building that they be issued arms. Instead, armed only with their pathetic batons, they were placed as sort of buffer between police and workers. In fury and despair, the demonstrators had set fire to the Palace of Justice, the seat of justice that was none. The Schutzbuendler in no man's land were inevitably fired on by the police and spat at by the masses.' (Ilona Duczynska, *Workers in arms*, London 1978)

As fascist provocations increased the social democrats argued against workers' defence in case it provoked a civil war. The reformist leaders hid the workers' arms and made vague promises about organising workers' defence in the future. When the inevitable fascist coup drew nearer they refused the workers' demand to organise an offensive. In February 1934 workers fought in vain and without arms against the fascist takeover. Having hidden the arms and ensured that the working class was defenceless the social democratic leaders fled at the height of the struggle.

Like today's reformists the Austrian social democrats were of course 'against' fascism. But they were not prepared to take up arms against the fascists for fear that this struggle would destroy bourgeois society itself.

Abstention

Today's reformists leave black people to fend for themselves. When workers, attending a recent South East Regional TUC meeting to discuss the arrangements for the People's March celebrations in Brixton on 30 May, asked that a march be held to demonstrate the labour movement's solidarity with the black community, they met blank refusal. SERTUC's top bureaucrat Jack Dromey advised them a march was out of the question – because 'it might be smashed up by the National Front'. This was an absurd proposition as the NF would never dare march through the centre of Brixton. The point was the TUC wanted at all cost to suppress a march, rightly fearing it would be a massive and perhaps not entirely peaceful display of the community's hatred of the police.

The Labour leaders have not lifted a finger to fight the build-up of police oppression in Brixton and elsewhere. Nothing is said by the official labour movement as the police drag over 400 black youth before courts and brand them as criminals. That silence spells doom.

Radical buffoonery

Workers' defence must break that silence. We know the response to expect from the state. But the response from other left groups unfortunately also leaves a lot to be desired. In March Peter Hain, press officer of the Anti-Nazi League, who recently asked Whitelaw for personal protection against fascist attacks, summed up the prevalent outlook on workers' defence:

> 'The one thing we are not getting into is a counter-terrorist operation. I think that would be politically wrong, morally unacceptable. I think it would be totally counter-productive.' (*New Musical Express*, 7 March 1981)

When the Labour left speaks these days the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party is never far behind. For some time it has taken to describing the work of ELWAR as 'ultra-left' and 'substitutionist'. A recent Central Committee statement, 'Fighting the fascists yes – squadism no' (*Internal bulletin*, Spring 1981), sums up

our grave... or

' defence now!

centration camps, gas chambers and all – as the naive view of fascism suggests.

Rather, the ground is prepared for fascism and other kinds of bourgeois reaction when the labour movement fails to combat racist and chauvinist attacks. History shows that when workers failed to take up this fight with their own hands reaction triumphed. That's why building workers' defence is such an urgent task today.

the shoddy arguments. 'Nazism', we are told, 'grows on the basis of the fragmentation and atomisation of the working class. . . .Hence fascism benefits if the fight against it degenerates into pub brawls and isolated street fights'. The SWP leaders imply that physical defence against the fascists *can only* take the form of isolated skirmishes and pub brawls. That workers can organise collectively to defend streets and estates in a disciplined and well planned manner is evidently inconceivable for the SWP leadership.

The red herring of 'squadism' is invented to prove the evils of anti-fascist violence. The CC goes so far as to suggest that 'the logic of squadism would be the formation of a sort of anti-Nazi version of the Red Brigades'. This is 'logical' only for the people who hold a deeply pessimistic and contemptuous view of the potential of workers to organise in defence of their class interests.

The alternative to workers' defence proposed by the CC is appropriately modest and hypocritical. 'Don't wait for the Nazis down alley ways or attack their homes. Find out where the fascists live and leaflet their neighbours explaining that they are Hitler (and Thatcher) lovers'. What the distinguished Central Committee fails to explain to the membership is how this will help stop racist violence.

What is suggested here is the old absurdity: that you can fight the fascists without actually fighting them – hand out leaflets, but abstain from organising in the labour movement to stop their terror against the black community. The SWP misses the point entirely. As history has shown being 'against' fascism is not enough. The fascists as such are not the problem. Every brick thrown through an Asian family's window and every worker deported from Britain without resistance from the labour movement prepares the ground for the defeat of the working class.

Workers' defence is neither 'substitutionist' nor 'ultra-left'. It is the only effective support for black people under attack. Admittedly the numbers involved in workers' defence today can be counted in hundreds rather than thousands. But what does this prove? The labour movement has a deeply ingrained and lethal respect for the authority of the bourgeois state. This only adds weight to the urgency of building workers' defence.

Ultra-what?

Radical opponents of workers' defence try to substantiate their charge of 'ultra-leftism' by pointing to the German Communist Party's (KPD) failure to prevent the Nazi takeover in 1933. They re-write history to suit their argument. According to the SWP the KPD 'fought the Nazis with clubs and petrol bombs and guns. . . and in Altona it ambushed a Nazi march and shot down 19 of the scum'. The trouble apparently was that the KPD was 'ultra-left' and 'it did not draw reformist workers' organisations into the struggle and so went down to defeat'.

This historical analysis is wrong on at least two counts. First, the KPD very rarely organised workers to fight the fascists. Second, far from being 'ultra-left', it adapted its political programme to the nationalism and anti-semitism of the fascists.

The KPD's physical attacks on the fascists came as a brief interlude in its opportunistic history. Between 1929 and 1930 it raised the slogan 'Beat the fascists wherever you meet them'. But even during this period the KPD was not interested in organising workers' defence. Instead it launched a campaign of *rhetorical* violence to create for itself a militant reputation. Its daily paper blustered that 'We want a revolutionary state power which does not spare the life of a single fascist' (*Rote Fahne*, 28 January 1930). In reality this was pure posturing as the KPD did little to organise the anti-fascist movement.

At its June 1930 Politbureau meeting the KPD reversed its tactics. Far from being ultra-left as today's radical left suggests, the KPD adopted a right-wing nationalist stance. The aim of the new tactics was to expose the 'fraudulent' claims of the Nazis that they were concerned with national and social issues. The KPD projected itself as the foremost defender of the German nation. It accused the Nazis of 'betrayal of the interest of the German people' and called Hitler a 'cheap and willing lackey of foreign capital' (*Rote Fahne*, 28 October 1930). The KPD fought the Nazis by proving that they were better chauvinists. On occasions it even accused the Nazis of not being consistent anti-semites and pointed out that Alfred Rosenberg, a leading Nazi theoretician, was an 'Eastern Jew from the Baltic'!

The KPD campaigned to attract leading nationalists into its ranks. In March 1931 *Rote Fahne* announced that leading Nazi Richard Scheringer had left his party in the belief that the KPD was the more genuine defender of the 'national cause' (20 March 1931). Four months later it published a declaration in favour of communism by 13 army and police officers and former leading Nazis (*Rote Fahne*, 22 July 1931). The same month the KPD launched a new journal, *Aufbruch*, in whose pages prominent nationalists like Scheringer, former frei corps officers Count Stenbock-Fermour and Bruno von Salomon as well as ex-Nazi leader Bodo Uhse spread their chauvinist filth.

In August 1931 the KPD joined forces with the Nazis in the infamous fascist referendum to oust the social democratic government of Prussia. In Bremen and Hamburg KPD members cooperated with Nazis in breaking up social democratic party meetings.

The radical left ignores the right-wing direction of the KPD and concentrates on its attacks on the social democrats. According to the left this 'ultra-leftism' destroyed the possibility of a united working class response to fascism. The stand on social democracy adopted by the KPD was ultra-left inasmuch as ultra-left means being out of touch with reality. But the reason why the KPD could not unite reformist with communist workers against fascism was certainly not that it was too 'left-wing' or bent on beating up fascists, as the common view of the period suggests. The anti-fascist united front did not materialise because the KPD abandoned the task of fighting German nationalism and instead adapted to it. Thus it destroyed the potential of the working class to counter the mounting tide of racism and chauvinism.

For workers' defence

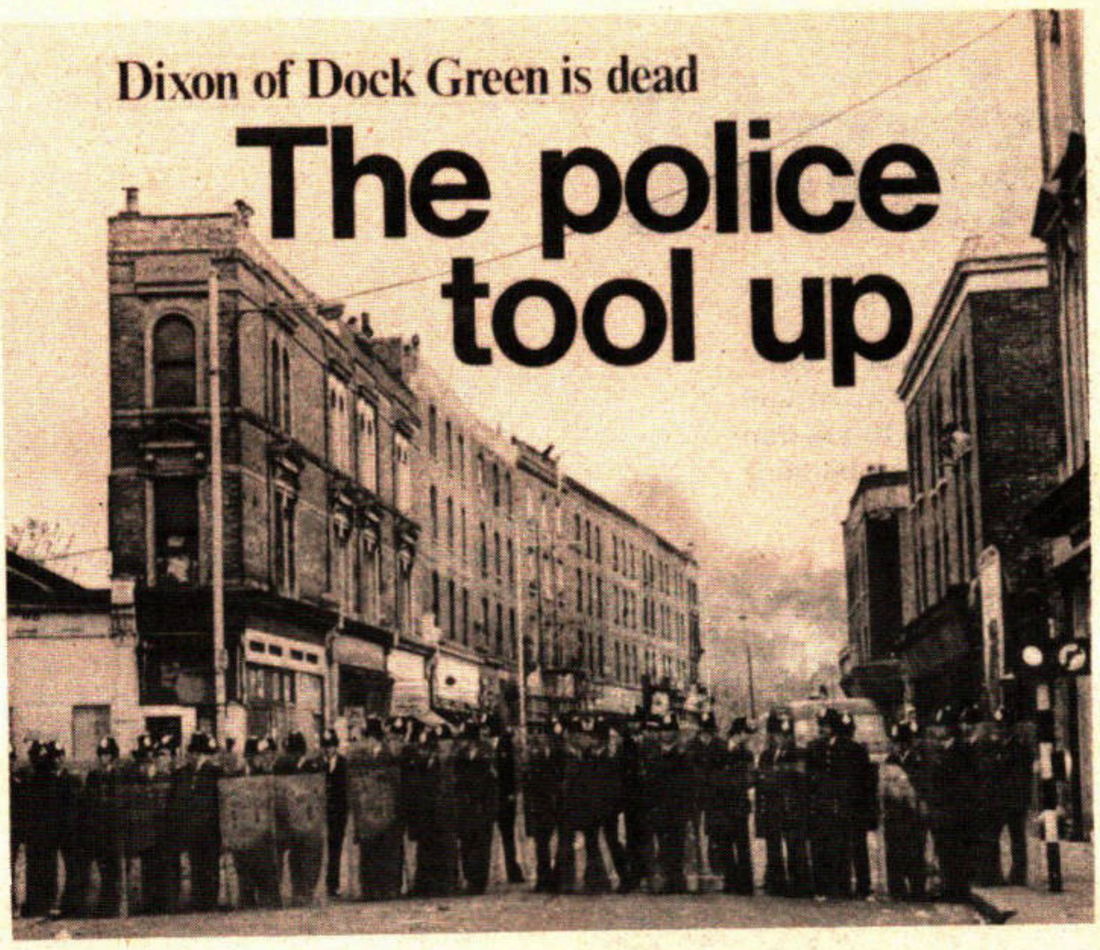
Workers' defence is not just a physical affair. It has nothing to do with pub brawls and behind the scene confrontations. It is a political response to the violence of the racist thugs and their state. Those who dismiss class violence are in fact suggesting a different political response. They may not spell it out but what they are saying is that the defence of working class interests is best handed over to the state authorities.

Workers often spontaneously organise when their own direct interest is threatened. Picket lines express a determination to use force in defence of strikers. Scabs who cross them are treated as legitimate targets of class violence. But this response to scabs is rarely extended to racist thugs. This is because white workers do not see the struggle against racism as their cause.

Organising workers' defence against racist attacks is inconceivable without an ideological challenge to the fundamental assumptions of the British labour movement. Racism influences many workers and where it is not strong, many workers still adhere loyally to British nationalism. Fighting for workers' defence is not only a practical response to racist attacks but also a way of advancing the consciousness of the labour movement. Workers who come out to organise against the racist thugs are not doing black people a favour. They are strengthening the political capacity of their class to fight the bosses.

The ideological struggle is central to the anti-racist fight. But it cannot be separated from taking practical measures now. There is no point in talking about 'the need for workers' defence' in the abstract. By taking steps to organise practical action as ELWAR has done, workers' defence is given a direct focus. It shows what can be done now and it provides a tangible example for others. Moreover it exposes the empty rhetoric of the reformists and it forces anti-racist workers to take a stand. It is the only strategy that can isolate the racists in the labour movement and thus provide a foundation for the unity of white and black workers. Working class power has the potential for crushing racism. Let's use it now!

Sabena Norton



Dixon of Dock Green is dead

The police tool up

The Brixton revolt focused wide attention on the police and their plans to keep control of the black community. The police demanded new riot gear which would allow them to 'go on the offensive'. Home Secretary William Whitelaw launched a public inquiry giving Lord Scarman the power to recommend new techniques of repression and to refine the laws used by the state against black people. The Labour Party pushed ahead with its strategy of 'democratising' the police force. Christina Drury looks at the controversy surrounding the police to refute the view that the police can be made more accountable.

THE BRIXTON REVOLT was a shock to the ruling class. That the police could lose control of a large part of a major city for several hours was acceptable in Ireland, but not in a London borough four miles from Westminster. A whole community demonstrating open contempt for the police and for bourgeois property shook the more complacent members of the ruling class. But Brixton also helped the bosses out. It gave them the pretext to implement new methods of riot control and new laws to curb the resistance of black people. The hysterical media coverage of Brixton – policemen with blood streaming down their faces, policewomen unconscious in the streets – made certain of this by shifting public sympathy behind the police and making authoritarian measures acceptable.

The police have long tried to preserve their image as the friendly bobby, because it makes the coercive character of police activity seem less apparent and obnoxious. But after Brixton they know they have to get tough: the whole tone of debate has shifted in this direction. Last year the Police Federation voted down proposals for new riot gear. This year, it called on the Home Secretary 'to ensure that all police officers when ordered to deal with riots and disorders are wearing headgear which is capable of withstanding a blow from a missile and which protects the face, and have sufficient protection to avoid the risk of serious injury to other parts of the body' (*Police Review*, 8 May 1981). The choice, it continued, is either to 'withdraw police from the streets leaving them open to rioters, or equip the police to go on the offensive'.

Soon the newspapers began featuring photographs of policemen in helmets, gas masks and full riot gear and listing the likely weapons that the police would demand. There was general agreement that water cannon and rubber bullets ('so effective in Ulster') would be needed. *The New Standard* drew up a shopping list: 'high intensity lights; dart guns; cold brine projectors; stun guns firing a four inch bean bag; electrified batons; sound curdlers; dye cannon' (1 May 1981). It also suggested that if the police were to make full use of all these instruments of repression Parliament would have to remove legal restraints on their activities by reintroducing the Riot Act. As businessman and retired army officer Colonel Robin Evelegh explained: 'The beauty of the Riot Act was that it gave clarity to all concerned as to when a riot was officially taking place, and indemnified those who suppressed it for any actions when doing so that would otherwise have been illegal' (*The New Standard*, 1 May 1981). In other words, give full legal sanction to the sort of police terror that followed the Brixton revolt.

The good Lord

For the ruling class, equipping the police to deal with major social disturbances is only part of the solution. Riots still aren't very frequent in Britain, and the police must also find new ways of making sure that society functions day to day without too much upheaval. That means keeping blacks in their place. Every month the police arrest and process through the courts hundreds of black youths – on charges such as Sus, theft, threatening behaviour and burglary. Alongside this has come a media campaign to portray the entire black community as criminals and thugs who cannot adapt to the civilised norms of decent British society. This 'criminalisation' is summed up by Margaret Thatcher's comment:

'No one must condone the violence or disgraceful events. They were criminal, criminal.' (*Daily Mirror*, 14 April 1981)

The policy hit a peak in Brixton in the weeks before the revolt with operation 'Swamp 81', where the police flooded the area with hundreds of uniformed and plain-clothes officers. The revolt was a direct response to this increase in police harassment. It showed the police one thing: they would have to change their tactics if they were to stay in control.

This is what Lord Scarman's inquiry into the Brixton 'disturbances' is all about. For the ruling class it will serve a number of purposes.

- First, it acts as a diversion from the continuing police activity in Brixton. Since the revolt there have been more than 400 arrests. Police in transit vans now roam South London, picking up black youth at will. But public attention has been focused on Scarman, and on the various 'counter-inquiries'.
- Second, it diverts people's attention away from resisting oppression and organising against the police into a meaningless talking shop. As *The Times* explained: 'An inquiry could take the heat off the streets and put it in the tribunal room' (14 April 1981).
- Third, Scarman's inquiry will recommend new ways of policing blacks. His brief is to investigate 'the policing of areas, like Brixton, where the community is multi-racial' (*Inquiry into the Brixton Disturbances, Opening Statement by Lord Scarman*). We can be sure that he will recommend ways of reinforcing the repression of black people. But Scarman is only part of a whole debate about how the black community should be policed in a time of rising social unrest.

Evening all

The most disturbing feature of this debate is that the labour movement has been drawn into it. Both Lambeth Council and the London Communist Party offered to give evidence to Scarman. The Stalinists were snubbed presumably because Scarman appreciated that the CP would have nothing to add to the Labour Party's contribution. But even if Scarman won't listen, the CP will keep plugging its views on the police in the *Morning Star*. Commenting on the death of TV cop Jack Warner (Dixon of Dock Green) it complained that 'the image of the police he projected on the small screen is also increasingly in danger of being a thing of the past' (26 May 1981). The editorial concludes with a nostalgic call to bring back the old style bobby: 'the memory of Dixon and all he meant is too good to let go that easily'.

The view that the police might be less brutal and fairer on black people if they were democratically controlled and accountable to the public formed a central component of the Labour Party's programme for the Greater London Council. When it swept to power on 7 May the Labour Party immediately appointed black lawyer Paul Boateng head of its GLC police committee. The committee's long-term aim is to take control of the Metropolitan Police out of the hands of the Home Office and put it under the control of the GLC, thus bringing London into line with the rest of Britain, where local authorities supervise the operation of the police.

The fact that this toothless committee has such limited aims should tell us just how seriously the Labour Party takes the interests of black people. But even if Boateng and friends were to launch into an aggressive campaign against David McNee and the Metropolitan Police we can guarantee that its objective would be to strengthen the view that the police can be reformed. What the Labour Party wants to see is a police force which helps old ladies across the road, solves burglaries and deals with traffic jams but does none of the brutal things to black people or strike pickets which it does today. Such a transformation is inconceivable since all the services to the community which the police do provide are only an auxilliary to their wide repressive role in society. That has been and remains to maintain the power of the bosses, to safeguard those who have property from those who have none, and to protect the fabric of capitalist society from those who either consciously or through their spontaneous opposition to their own oppression act in a way which will weaken it.

Only doing their job

No matter who 'controls' them, the police will protect the interests of the ruling class. Otherwise they would cease to be the police. This is demonstrated by the Select Committee on Racialism and its response to racist violence. Set up deliberately to monitor the growth of racist attacks on blacks, the committee has a large lobby of left-wing and liberal MPs. Even so, when it presented its report to the Home Secretary, listing over 1000 incidents of racist violence, it noted 'the second and most disturbing development is that of self-defence or vigilante groups' (*The Guardian*, 13 February 1981). In short, racist violence against black people doesn't generally threaten law and order: it is not very 'disturbing' to the Home Secretary. In some cases the police are prepared to make concessions to racist violence. On the Nightingale Estate in Hackney, for example, the police recently encouraged fascists to set up an 'anti-mugger' vigilante squad to take pressure off the police. On the other hand, organised workers' defence of black people threatens the ruling class' monopoly of violence and so is almost always suppressed by the police.

The police cannot be monitored, controlled or democratised. They have to be confronted. And no party which accepts the legitimacy of the police and accepts their right to provide 'law and order' can do this. That Labour cannot was shown in February when Lewisham Council refused to pay a £5 million rates precept to the police in protest against police activity. Were such a move to be successful it would have to be backed by a preparedness to organise the working class against the police. Radical talkers though they are, Lewisham councillors were clearly not going to do this. Within two months the Council coughed up the £5 million.

Even though the Labour Party's police committee is only a useless and reactionary body, the RCP's anti-racist campaigns – ELWAR and SOLWAR – do intend to keep it busy. We have hundreds of cases on our files, of fascist firebombings, assault by racists, police harassment and brutality. Paul Boateng has an open invitation to take up these cases to show how effective monitoring the police can be. While he is monitoring the police of course, we will be monitoring him to expose the myth of an accountable police force. We remain confident that organised defence against fascists and against the police will prove the only effective way of protecting black people.

Police Review

Tired of the *Telegraph*? Numbed by *National Front News*? Then try *Police Review*. Published weekly from – you guessed – East London, it's well worth 25p an issue.

10 April: a picture story of Charles and Diana's visit to Gloucestershire Constabulary HQ. She got a bouquet of flowers; he got a crystal glass truncheon. . .And, on the same page, notice of the 98th AGM of the Christian Police Association. If Jesus isn't your thing though, you could try the 8 May feature – under the headline 'Understanding Asian immigrants' – on Buddhism. 'What causes suffering? Continual craving for the pleasures of life'.

17 April: 'Deeply regret injuries inflicted on all members of the Met' runs a telegram on the Brixton riots sent to the editor. Who by? Anne Evans JP, West London Division. Nice to be reminded that the judiciary is impartial. . . And, in the same issue, some statistics from the Police Complaints Board. In 1980 the PCB dealt with 15 000 complaints. About 2000 seem to have been lost, and the Deputy Chief Constable decided not to take 'disciplinary' action against officers in all the rest, bar 100. Still, the PCB did disagree with him over 18 cases. What happened to them? 'One officer was found guilty of four charges, five charges were dismissed, and two were withdrawn when witnesses refused to attend the hearing'. Reassuring, that. . .

24 April: a kind word for Lord Scarman. 15 May: a long article on the Race Relations Act (1976). It kicks off with the observation that, though the act was 'designed to ensure harmony between the various races now living in Great Britain', it 'for some strange reason. . . does not apply to Northern Ireland'. Hmmm.

Maggie, Maggie, Maggie

HOW DOES SHE GET AWAY WITH IT?

Most workers hate Margaret Thatcher. For the past two years Labour and trade union politicians have tried to take advantage of this anti-Tory sentiment to strengthen their own feeble position. But the politics of 'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie – out, out, out!' have failed to provide any defence of jobs and living standards. The reason is simple: Labour's anti-Toryism is a barrier to workers' anti-capitalism.

Mrs T back in 1970. She's put on more wrinkles since then – but that's because of the recession, Ireland and Brixton, not the Labour Party.

Maggie in a spin?

FIRST take economic policy, the issue on which Labour tries the most to distance itself from the Tories. Even on its own terms, Tory policy appears to be a complete disaster. Promises to control inflation and the money supply, to cut back industrial aid and public spending and to boost private investment have come to nothing, and Britain's crisis has grown worse.

Right from the start, a gulf opened up between Tory rhetoric and grim reality. The 'high priest' of monetarism, Sir Keith Joseph, was implementing 'U-turns' within a month. Business news editor of *The Times* Hugh Stephenson described the sorry state of affairs:

'By the middle of June (1979) his senior civil servants were confident that they had got the guru under control. During the Whitehall arguments about the public spending cuts that preceded the June Budget, Sir Keith had been brought round to defending all the department's spending programmes.' (*Mrs Thatcher's first year*, Jill Norman Ltd, London, 1980)

Nor did it stop there. In the first few months of 1981, Joseph gave almost £1.1 billion to British Leyland, £5 billion to British Steel and promised to guarantee loans of £200 million for the British computer company, ICL.

While bemoaning the damage the Tories were inflicting on the British economy, Labour celebrated Joseph's U-turns as evidence that 'dogmatic monetarism' could not work. The Labour Party's own schemes for state intervention were posed as the best answer to Britain's economic problems. Labour's appeal to the nation was 'if you want a *real* U-turn support the Labour Party'.

But the Tories could easily shrug off this kind of criticism. After all, the real aim was not to meet some obscure target for the growth of sterling M3, but to bring about conditions for capitalist recovery. The crisis had forced them to change tactics, and this was a little embarrassing. Yet because Labour agreed with the Tories' basic objective, all the opposition could do was snigger in the House of Commons. At most there was only a dispute over the means to secure recovery, and here the Tories could only win. In March 1981, the Bank of England's *Quarterly Bulletin* noted that the massive shake-out of jobs in manufacturing industry and the services sector would help boost productivity. And every bourgeois commentator was optimistic about workers' new sense of 'responsibility' in accepting sacrifices in response to mass unemployment.

Labour laws

If the polemics of the Labour politicians were less than devastating, what about the actions of their colleagues in the trade union bureaucracy? Here we see anti-Toryism at its most cynical.

For months after the May 1979 General Election the TUC leaders were complaining – not about Thatcher's reactionary policies, but because she would not consult them first. Of course 'consultations' *were* taking place between the TUC General Council and the Government, but these were conducted largely in the monthly meetings of the National Economic Development Council. The beer and sandwiches tete-a-tetes at 10 Downing Street which were a feature of the last Labour Government became a thing of the past. But while consultation declined, TUC collaboration with the Government in attacking the working class went full steam ahead.

Look at James Prior's Employment Bill. The TUC leaders actually helped the Tories write it! As Stephenson points out:

'It had been drawn up as the result of almost daily consultations between Prior and Harry Urwin, deputy general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union who was representing the TUC. Prior used the fruits of this consultation as ammunition against his more radical colleagues in the Cabinet.... When Len Murray and others attacked the proposals as an unacceptable assault on the fundamental rights of the British working man, the rhetoric was designed to conceal surprise that the government was only proposing to go thus far, and to discourage it from going any further.' (*Mrs Thatcher's first year*)

This amicable deal was easily made. The Employment Bill only rubber-stamped the 'concordat' arrangements the TUC agreed with the previous Labour Government on restricting trade union rights. Little wonder then that the Tories did not quake in their shoes when trade union leaders waved their fists in mock outrage.

The TUC, like the Labour Party, accepts that the working class must do its bit for the country in these troubled times. Curtailing strike action, picketing and the closed shop is a necessary evil according to these guardians of the national interest. But the bureaucrats are quite prepared to sell the right to work also. Last February's miners' strike brought this out clearly.

Helping workers become unemployed

In the face of proposals for widespread pit closures, miners took militant action. Soon Thatcher had apparently backed down, granted the Coal Board more cash and given the miners a resounding victory against Tory policies. Or so the bureaucrats would have us believe. In reality, miners' leaders Joe Gormley, Arthur Scargill & Co had used rank and file militancy to press the Government for more money for the bosses, consultations over pit closures with them and *nothing* for the workers (see *the next step*, No 11, March 1981).

The TUC is an obstacle to the defence of jobs. It's also a barrier to the defence of the unemployed. Unemployment is the result of the capitalist crisis, but the TUC wants to ensure that it is not fought with anti-capitalist politics. Instead, as the TUC-regimented 'People's March' and the bureaucrats' guidelines for unemployed centres demonstrate, the unemployed will have to make do with church bells, ping-pong tables and the Labour Party. The Tories had no qualms about letting the People's March into London after a period of bans on demonstrations – it was 'non-political'.

Brits first

On domestic matters, the Labour Party and TUC like to present pro-capitalist politics as being in the interests of workers too. But on 'foreign affairs' they need get themselves into no such difficulties and their real concern – defending Britain – can be put to the fore. Here the spurious anti-Toryism virtually disappears altogether, and the Tories have a free hand.

Thatcher has gone from triumph to triumph as she has unequivocally pursued the interests of British imperialism. Whether it is demanding repayment from the EEC budget contribution, or securing another order for military hardware from the Gulf states, she has been fully backed by the Labour bureaucrats. They only criticise her for being insufficiently patriotic and too soft on foreigners. As the recession has steadily built up tension in the world economy the Labour Party and the TUC have consistently exceeded the Tories in the chauvinism stakes.

When the stability of British society is threatened from within the Tories can always expect a loyal response from the official labour movement. Even where the labour bureaucracy is vulnerable to some liberal pressure, as on the question of racism, we find no serious anti-Tory stand. Readers of *the next step* will be all too aware of its disgraceful complicity in police harassment of ethnic minorities, deportations and the Nationality Bill, despite claims to oppose (Tory!) racism.

Where liberals fear to tread, there is no trace of apology. Thus on the issue of British imperialism's oppression of Ireland and the Government's murder of the republican hunger-strikers, there is either tactful silence or strident applause. Labour is so conscious of its own part in this act of imperialist violence that it cannot bring itself even to pretend to be against Thatcher's policies. This job has to be farmed out to radical entrists, busy reconciling their consciences with their Labour Party allegiance (see Page 16).

A broad movement

Thatcher has had an easy ride through her first two years because the Labour and trade union leaders have succeeded in containing workers' dissatisfaction with the Government within the limits of their narrow anti-Toryism. A real defence of workers' interests demands a counter-attack on a broader front – against the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC as well as against the Tories. A broad working class movement united around that approach would make Thatcher's chances of surviving another two years very slim indeed.

Andrew Clarkson

SERIES

THE WAR AND THE WORKING CLASS

6. The welfare state

In Part Five of our series we noted the contrast between the grim reality of the war and the popular image of it – as a victory for the working class. Here we look at one aspect of this 'victory': the establishment of the welfare state.

In most imperialist nations unemployment benefit, secondary education and health care are only available through a mixture of private fee-paying or insurance schemes (for those who can afford them) and state hand-outs (for those who cannot). But in Britain these three services are, at least on paper, available to everybody free and as a right. People on the left therefore like to explain this country's uniquely 'universal' system of welfare as a major reform, wrested from the bourgeoisie by a powerful and confident proletariat. They see the creation of the welfare state as one of the main achievements of Attlee's crusading post-war Labour administration. And today, a third of a century after it was first set up, they persist in celebrating the NHS as a massive 'gain' for the working class.

The RCP's view of the welfare state is very different from that of the left. The modern welfare state was conceived in the 'thirties and born in the war – periods in which the bourgeoisie confronted, not a powerful and confident proletariat, but a politically defeated one. The Attlee regime merely ratified what Tory-dominated governments had done before. To call the NHS a 'gain', therefore, is to see the outcome of a capitalist strategy as a result of the class struggle.

The state did not improve workers' welfare because workers put pressure on it; it did so because further neglect of the welfare of the working class threatened to bring the creation of profit to a halt.

The content of the welfare measures granted by the state was and remains dictated by the needs of capital. The form of those measures was and remains dictated by the demands of the labour bureaucracy. The social services are thus capitalist through and through. It is one thing to fight for better jobs, wages and conditions for those who work in them, or to fight for higher dole payments, lower classroom sizes and decent hospitals for those who use them; it is quite another to 'save' the civil service, the Inner London Education Authority or the NHS. If socialism is to be won these branches of the bourgeois state must be broken like any other.

Beveridge: a way out of the mess for British capitalism.

DURING THE DEPRESSION the state had to assist the accumulation of capital. It tried to reorganise industry on more efficient lines, and, through a programme of rearmament, it tried to stimulate investment. But this wasn't all. To facilitate the production of surplus-value, the state got more and more involved in the reproduction of labour-power.

Why the state steps in

The need for the state to make some provision for the welfare of the working class arises out of the very nature of capitalism. Take the example of unemployment benefit. While the *individual capitalist* has no interest in the welfare of the jobless, the state, as representative of the *capitalist class as a whole*, has. Governments are obliged to give the unemployed section of the population something to live on, if only to keep it 'intact for future use'. Likewise, it falls to the state to keep the health and education of the workers up to a certain level.

Of course the state only embarks on welfare measures when the condition of the economy and of the working class makes this absolutely necessary; and if unemployment benefit schemes, schools and hospitals can be run profitably, they are left in private hands. Furthermore, governments only undertake such 'social' expenditures as they can bear. They always discourage demand for services and administer welfare as parsimoniously as possible.

By the early 'thirties, however, unemployment and the depression of wages below the value of labour-power had become chronic in Britain. At the same time trade union insurance funds, institutions of workers' education and 'friendly' societies (which offered cheap medical treatment) were in steep decline; yet the kind of welfare measures initiated by Lloyd George before the First World War and extended after it were obviously insufficient. The state had to step in to improve things.

Sorting out the unemployed

In 1931 Ramsay MacDonald was faced with a rise in the unemployed which threatened to put the state's benefit scheme £80m in the red. He therefore raised insurance contributions, cut benefits, made 134 000 married women immediately ineligible for the dole via the 'Anomalies' Act and struck a further 100 000 workers or more off at once through the hated Means Test (J Stevenson & C Cook, *The slump*, Cape, 1978). But unemployment had become such a permanent feature of the British economy that the state was forced to stop considering what were termed 'transitional' benefits as temporary and to finance them out of general taxation rather than through borrowing.

So began a series of measures to rationalise and – paradoxically – extend unemployment relief. The Unemployment Act (1934) standardised benefit rates and separated the administration of benefits from that of contributions by setting up the infamous Unemployment Assistance Board. As the economy picked up some cuts were restored and children's allowances were raised. Eventually, in 1937, those unemployed who had previously failed to qualify for 'transitional' or 'standard' benefits became eligible for the first time (S Glynn & J Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain*, Allen & Unwin, 1976).

Gradually unemployment relief became more universal. Yet the whole system still stood in need of a drastic overhaul. The Means Test was costly to administer, and the Government ran up annual deficits to the tune of £40m to pay for benefits. One thing became very clear: though universal relief made sense, it would only be possible if Britain had full employment.

During the war Britain got just that.

A brighter Britain

The rise of the new industries, of rearmament and of private and public administration in the 'thirties meant that Britain's schools had to change – even though MacDonald had made education just as much a target for cuts as unemployment benefit. In 1936, a full decade after the Hadow report had recommended it, the school leaving age was formally raised to 15. Five years in preparation, the Spens report (1938) concluded that technical schools should be set up to complement grammar and modern schools, and went so far as to raise the question of comprehensive ('multilateral') education. By 1939 two out of every three secondary school places had been covered by the reorganisation Hadow had also proposed and nearly half the places in grammar schools were state-funded.

Progress of a sort had been made, but 'if there was one field where the existing arrangements were clearly trailing behind informed opinion, it was education' (P Addison, *The road to 1945*, Cape, 1975). A universal system of state education could not be established until a new round of capital accumulation had been begun.

Fighting fit

Health care, too, came more under state control and became more universal as each year passed. As unemployment persisted, special arrangements were made to ensure that those unable to keep up their National Health Insurance contributions could get medical attention. In 1935 an Unemployment Arrears Fund was inaugurated, and in 1937 the minimum age at which workers could receive benefits was lowered from 16 to 14. By 1939 half the population above 14 and 90 per cent of the working population were insured for their health.

State health care didn't just embrace more workers; it was also extended to cover more dependents. After 1934, which saw the highest maternal mortality rate in a decade, the Midwives Act was passed, which required local authorities to provide trained personnel for expectant mothers. The state began to spend more on ante-natal clinics, and started to supply cheap or free milk to pregnant women. Government-subsidised milk for schoolchildren was instituted in 1934.

Meanwhile the state moved to streamline Britain's hospital sector. Since privately-run 'voluntary' institutions were extremely inefficient (most had less than 100 beds), the state found itself more and more forced to help them make ends meet. On the other hand state hospitals became more comprehensive after the Public Health Act (1936), which empowered them to run out-patients' departments. By 1937, therefore, the Voluntary Hospitals (Sankey) Commission felt ready to propose the amalgamation of the debt-ridden voluntary hospitals with municipal establishments.

Health and health care were in a mess. In 1935 60 per cent of army recruits were found to be in no condition to engage in battle – a shocking state of affairs as Britain drifted towards war. Two years later Political and Economic Planning, an influential Tory policymaking body, called for urgent action to repair the 'fitness' of the nation. It also complained about the 'bewildering variety of agencies'

dispensing health care. The British Medical Association duly drew the logic of this and called for a unified, national health service in 1938 (A J Willcocks, *The creation of the National Health Service*, RKP, 1967).

What was clear, however, was that simply rationalising state health care would not be enough to remedy matters. In the 'thirties social investigators like Orr and Rowntree and journalists like Orwell showed that, so long as poverty and unemployment was allowed to continue, disease would flourish and labour-power deteriorate. If the workforce was to be kept in a proper physical state, then state intervention was necessary.

The turn to full employment

In the war the trickle of welfare innovations that had begun in the 'thirties became a flood. At the same time, because the labour bureaucracy won itself a place in government, it was able to present every capitalist reform as the definitive fulfilment of working class aspirations. This was especially true of the bourgeoisie's adoption of 'full employment' as a policy.

Ever since 1929 the bureaucrats had been arguing that increased state expenditure would spur investment; and after 1935 they had got their way. Unable to reverse the slump by conventional means, the bourgeoisie had started a massive programme of public works – rearmament. By wartime it was convinced that only Keynes' strategy of 'demand management' could provide the conditions for sustained capital accumulation.

In practice this meant maintaining the full employment of the war years after hostilities had ceased. The bosses were quite clear about it: the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, for instance, projected a peacetime 'reservoir of public works for the absorption of unemployment should the need arise' (ABCC, *Post-war industrial reconstruction*, 1942), while, after the war, the British Iron & Steel Federation drew its plans for conversion back to civilian production up 'on the assumption that a full employment policy for the country is broadly achieved' (Ministry of supply, *Iron and steel industry*, HMSO, 1946). As for the bureaucrats, they also favoured full employment, knowing it would strengthen their hand in negotiations with the employers and so make their position more secure.

The ruling class opted for full employment for political as well as economic reasons. Workers wouldn't tolerate a repetition of what had happened after the First World War – when sacrifice had been rewarded with joblessness. The labour bureaucracy was equally aware of this. The social contract it concluded with the bourgeoisie meant that it had to offer the rank and file something in exchange for reductions in living standards.

When, therefore, Sir William Beveridge, a veteran welfare administrator drawn from the best bourgeois circles, drew up a blueprint for the modern welfare state, he took account of this. Full employment was the premise on which he based all the proposals in his best-selling report *Social insurance and allied services*. Published in November 1942, this was a 'historic' document; not, as Beveridge thought, because its author was a genius, but because it codified the welfare principles developed in the previous 'historic' 30 months.

Universality in adversity

British workers underwent less poverty and exploitation during the war than did their brothers on the Continent. But what they did go through was bad enough to make state palliatives essential.

The bourgeoisie fought its war on the backs of the working class. It conscripted women and children into industry to

provide it with more sources of surplus-value, cut the value of labour-power by introducing rationing, and squeezed extra profits out of workers by lengthening the working day and accelerating the pace of the labour process. These measures had a devastating effect on the condition of workers and their families.

The state was obliged to make some provisions for the working class to ensure its physical survival. Free milk for children was introduced the week after Dunkirk. Then came free school meals, free health care for school-children, nursery facilities, child minders, free vitamins and a decisive swing towards the granting of family allowances after the war. It was the same story on other fronts. The scope of unemployment benefit, health insurance benefits and pensions was extended and, after a 10 year career, the Means Test was abolished. In addition, the Government was forced by the rise in the number of industrial injuries to consider paying workers automatic compensation for them. And Beveridge prepared his report on the welfare crisis facing the bourgeoisie.

Arise, Sir William

Beveridge proposed six reforms:

(1) comprehensive state benefits to cover for unemployment, ill-health, disablement, industrial injury, old age, death of parents or husband, funerals and maternity (2) the unification of administrative responsibility, collapsing nine different government departments, three sets of local authorities, scores of approved societies and 10 separate insurance schemes into one Ministry, one weekly insurance stamp (payable by the insured person and his employer) and one scheme (3) the rationalisation of contributions and benefit rates into six population groups, including housewives, the old and children (4) according to needs, the establishment of a minimum rate to be applied to all types of benefit (5) according to family size, flat rate benefits to be paid irrespective of their duration and of the level of normal earnings (6) flat rate contributions to be higher than before, but to be 'within reach' of every employee.

Taken together, these amounted to a system of insurance that was universal. Benefits were to be paid 'as of right and without means test'; all workers were to have a regular subsistence income.

Beveridge seemed generous, but he was not. It was the prospect of full employment after the war that allowed him to make benefits so widely available. He anticipated that full employment would reduce ill health and the demand for other services – and thus the burden of benefits on the Exchequer. The cost of running his streamlined system would be low too: in a letter, Keynes told Beatrice Webb that it was 'the cheapest alternative open to us', while Churchill announced on radio that it would bring 'large savings' in administration.

Despite all this the labour bureaucracy managed to convince the masses that the Beveridge report was a major step forward (the Communist Party was particularly enthusiastic). This was a measure of how much the working class had been politically defeated. George Orwell's remark at the time was characteristically percipient:

'People seem to feel that this very moderate measure of reform is almost too good to be true. Except for the tiny interested minority, everyone is pro-Beveridge – including left-wing papers which a few years ago would have denounced such a scheme as semi-Fascist. . . .' (London letter to *Partisan Review*, 3 January 1943, in *The collected essays, journalism and letters of George Orwell*, Vol 2, Penguin, 1971)

Beveridge did not make education and health part of his brief. But developments in these sectors proceeded rapidly.

Training up for battle

In the war demand for skilled and youthful labour was enormous. It was clear that once war was over, a reconstructed, full-employment British economy would require an upgraded education system.

The Economist called for 'a complete change in the social aspect of education' (18 January 1941); Churchill called for a more egalitarian approach to education – in a speech to his old school, Harrow. The White Paper *Educational reconstruction* (1943) took forward the Spens report's ideas on a tripartite school system, while the Norwood, McNair and Perry committees laid the basis for the '11-plus' exam, teacher training and polytechnics respectively. Above all, Tory R A Butler's Education Act (1944) established a Ministry of Education to provide, via local authorities, 'a varied and comprehensive educational system in every area', abolish grammar school fees, raise the school leaving age at last and extend day release classes.

Butler's programme was hailed as truly progressive. But the large, 'all-in' facilities his Act brought about were simply the cheapest way of rebuilding schools in cities ravaged by war and of centralising resources in sparsely populated rural areas (Alun Griffiths, *Secondary school reorganisation in England and Wales*, RKP, 1974). Going comprehensive made sense alright – for the ruling class.

The hospital as bomb shelter

From 1935 onwards the Government had been getting hospitals ready to respond to the effects of air raids – an initiative that, through the pooling of existing state-funded beds, culminated in the creation of the Emergency Medical Service. But the EMS soon found itself pressed by 'normal' patients and by casualties from the factories; so the state had to pay the voluntary hospitals to keep beds empty in case of war emergency. The result was that the voluntary hospitals became parasitic on the state system. Their nationalisation was inevitable.

So too was the establishment of a universal system of health care. The administration of charges on a local authority basis was made almost impossible by evacuation and the exigencies of being 'bombed out': it was obvious that health care had to be provided for all, and that making it free was the most efficient way of providing it. This was the reality of what the architect of the NHS, Aneuran Bevan, boasted was 'regarded all over the world' as 'the most civilised achievement of modern government'.

The great betrayal

The labour bureaucracy's attitude to the measures adopted by Beveridge, Butler and the predecessors of Bevan was straightforward. Insofar as welfare reforms helped oil the British military machine, ensure a smooth reconstruction of capitalism, and consolidate its own position, the bureaucracy favoured them. Insofar as they contained the faintest concession to working class interests, it did not.

The CP backed full employment on the grounds that it would 'increase profits' and give the bosses 'some measure of certainty in planning their production programmes' (Harry Pollitt, *Wages – what should be done?*, 1945). One bourgeois historian has remarked of the servile posturing of the labour bureaucracy:

'The TUC delegation to the Beveridge committee was in fact in many ways a remarkable embodiment of the traditional sterling virtues of the labour aristocracy. The delegates were strongly in favour of contributory insurance: they were contemptuous of 'dodgers', of the 'very poor' and of 'the type of person who will not join a Friendly Society', and to the surprise of Beveridge and his committee the leaders of the delegation favoured the withdrawal of public assistance from the wives and children of workers who went on strike.' (Jose Harris, 'Social planning in wartime', in J M Winter, *War and economic development*, CUP, 1975)

The TUC's attitude to Beveridge was consistent: throughout the 'thirties it had only supported higher benefits because they would 'improve purchasing power' and so stimulate industrial recovery. Nor was its outlook on education any better: it approved of the raising of school leaving age, but only because it feared that the young could provide the employers with cheap labour cheaper than that of its own members.

In fact the Labour Government failed to deliver on its welfare promises. Labour never achieved full employment. It never implemented *subsistence* benefits: instead it forced more than a million people to top up their inadequate benefits by recourse to a new National Assistance Board – which, because it applied a needs test, 'threatened to bring back the old Poor Law under a new guise' (S Pollard, *The development of the British economy 1914–50*, Arnold, 1962). Likewise, it closed down nurseries by the thousand, drove women workers back into the home, left public and fee-paying 'direct grant' schools alone and private medical practice untouched, built no new hospitals or 'health centres' and failed to raise the number of hospital beds per thousand of the population above 1937 levels (Jewkes & Jewkes, *The genesis of the National Health Service*). These betrayals went unchallenged.

Conclusion

There are two points to remember about the welfare state.

First, the labour bureaucracy convinced workers that the formation of the modern welfare state was a major triumph – a view which is still ingrained in the labour movement today. Just as Marx poured scorn on all the protective legislation of the nineteenth century, so must we expose the real nature of the welfare legislation of the twentieth.

Second, the bureaucrats' pro-imperialist line on welfare has continued right up until 1981. The leaders of all Britain's public sector unions can only bring themselves to oppose cuts on the grounds that reducing social services 'puts Britain's future at risk'. We must expose them for the patriots they are.

Illusions in welfare only strengthen reformism. Socialists have no choice but to destroy them.

James Wood

reviews

Senior common room blues

Michele Barrett, *Women's oppression today: problems in Marxist feminist analysis*, Verso NLB, 1980, pp269, £3.95.

YOU MIGHT THINK that a book entitled *Women's oppression today* dealt with the impact of the recession on women – rising unemployment, part-time work, cuts in social services, restrictions on abortion rights, philistine 'back to the home' propaganda, etc. But Michele Barrett has loftier concerns – 'problems in Marxist feminist analysis'. However if you're looking for an elucidation of theoretical problems such as the role of housework in maintaining the subordination of women, or are concerned about the relationship between working class politics and women's struggles, you will also be disappointed.

Women's oppression today is not written for active workers or oppressed women who are ready to take on the capitalist system in the cause of women's liberation. It is aimed at an exclusive circle of radical academics in sociology departments of universities and polytechnics. This circle is notorious for its obscure language and for its reluctance to face up to the consequences of its own analyses. This is reflected in the constant use of awkward passive constructions ('it has increasingly become realised that') and devices ('it is perhaps arguable that') to distance the author from his or her own work. Barrett follows in this tradition. The diffidence of academic Marxists is pure affectation – it is a pretence of openness disguising the narrowest dogmatism. Before we consider Barrett's category 'Marxist feminism', let's consider what she means by 'Marxism'.

Poor Marx

On the British college scene, Marxism means an eclectic collection of theories that became popular among European Stalinist intellectuals in the 'seventies. Barrett devotes much energy to trying to extricate herself from some of the more absurd conclusions which various British academics have drawn from the works of the now eclipsed Althusser and Poulantzas. But she is fundamentally in sympathy with a school of thought whose basic theoretical propositions can be briefly summarised – 'history is bunk', 'nothing is real', 'theory is practice', 'everything is complex', 'it all depends'.

Barrett's convergence with academic Marxism is apparent in her repudiation of what she calls 'economism', 'reductionism' and 'functionalism' (others would add 'fundamentalism'). Whatever the real meaning of these terms, for Barrett they all mean the same thing: Marxism. Marxism is the science that reveals the origin of the diverse phenomena of society in its material foundations in the way human beings socially produce the things necessary for their survival.

Despite all disclaimers and qualifications, Barrett and her ilk reject the determining role of the economy in society and any attempt to understand particular features of bourgeois society in terms of the demands of capitalist production. Barrett's project is to endow old-fashioned feminism with a veneer of post-Althusserian sophistication to make its reactionary politics more palatable to today's radical intellectuals.

Stripped of all its mystifications, Barrett's theory of women's oppression can be simply stated – women's subordinate role has nothing to do with capitalism but is primarily an ideological construction. Let's take this in two parts.

Family life

In her first chapter Barrett states that the oppression of women is a 'relatively autonomous element of the social formation'. By this she means that it is a feature of society that exists independently of other aspects, and particularly that it has no relationship to the *capitalist* nature of modern society. The evidence she gives for this is that women's oppression pre-dated capitalism; it takes different forms in bourgeois society; it still prevails in 'socialist countries'.

Marxists fully acknowledge the oppression of women in pre-capitalist societies, but insist that the particular ways in which women are oppressed today are entirely a product of the capitalist nature of society. The development of industrial capitalism in Europe formed the modern family and established the dual oppression of women – at work and in the home. Barrett does not analyse the role played by the family which in its general features is a remarkably constant and uniform characteristic of bourgeois society; she does not attempt to show how family life is constantly modified by the dictates of capital – moving women in and out of production, forcing migration, shift work, etc. Instead Barrett abstracts from her observation that there are exceptional people who do not live in families and some who live in atypical family groups to conclude that the family is not therefore vital to the functioning of capitalism. This empiricist approach advances her object of divorcing women's oppression in the family from its function in sustaining capitalist social relations.

As for the 'socialist countries', the continuation of women's oppression in the Soviet Union and China is a sure indication of how far these transitional societies are from socialism. This does not mean to say that the position of women in Russia is directly analogous to that of women in Britain. Clearly it requires an independent analysis.

Bad ideas

Barrett tries to escape the conclusion of her argument – that women's oppression is fundamentally a question of ideology. But, having separated women's oppression from its material basis she has no other place to go. Her chapter headings – 'femininity, masculinity and sexual practice', 'ideology and the cultural production of gender', 'the educational system: gender and class' confirm her preoccupation with ideology. Having made this subjective element the basis of her analysis the author disappears into the realm of the individual. Nothing expresses the narrow subjectivism of the modern women's movement better than the slogan 'the personal is political'.

For Barrett liberation is not a social but a personal affair. She writes:

'Not only is socialist revolution not a sufficient cause of women's liberation, but... certain important changes could be achieved under capitalism.'

How? Barrett is disdainful of 'reformist' political activity – apparently more because of the activity than its reformist character. For her the battle will have to be fought out in the head (and no doubt also in the body) of each individual.

'The personal is political' slogan represents the triumph of petit-bourgeois individualism in the women's movement. Taking off from the proposition that oppression is more a product of personal interaction than of the structure of society, it advocates a strategy to combat oppression through the individual pursuit of 'consciousness raising', psychotherapy and intensively self-conscious personal relationships. Self-indulgence is given complete scope, paralysing the sort of collective political activity that could bring both a wide awareness of the determinants of oppression and the extension of women's rights. It is not surprising that the ascendancy of the slogan coincides with the inability of 'the women's movement' to organise the most elementary action to defend women under attack – not from bad ideas but mainly from employers and their state.

As an afterthought, two paragraphs before the end of the book, Barrett calls for 'some kind of alliance between the women's movement and the left'. The point is merely perfunctory because no alliance can be constructed between disparate groups of individuals, if they think that social oppression can be overcome in their personal lives.

Women's oppression today is, according to its publishers, 'a book of notable acuity and poise'. This pompous phrase neatly sums up the book's appeal (it was in *Time Out*'s bestseller charts) around the dinner party circles of Islington and Stoke Newington, a constituency finely balanced between the dying Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party and the still-born Social Democratic Party.

Helen Swift

Understanding Russia

Philip Vander Elst, *Capitalist technology for Soviet survival*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London, March 1981, 63pp, £1.50pbk.

IT IS A STUNNING indictment of left-wing commentary on the Soviet Union that the bourgeoisie is capable of producing material that is more factual and often more convincing. The non-Stalinist left is trapped within its 'state capitalist' and 'degenerated workers' state' concepts which bear little relationship to the reality of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Vander Elst is a former employee of the CIA-linked Centre for Policy Studies who now works for the Friedmanite Institute of Economic Affairs. Predictably his analysis is drawn from a bourgeois economics textbook. Yet although he sees the driving force behind capital as subjective – 'the risk-taking function of entrepreneurship' – his booklet presents a mass of information which explodes many of the myths propagated by even the most anti-Stalinist writers.

Industrialisation

One question on which both Stalinists and others can agree is that the Soviet Union has made fantastic advances in developing the productive forces. There is no doubt that Soviet industry has advanced. But it is vital to analyse the way in which the Soviet Union has managed to industrialise.

At the start of the 'twenties, the aftermath of the civil war saw Soviet industry in ruins. Lenin's New Economic Policy offered concessions to foreign capitalists to allow the importation of vitally necessary foreign technology. This was unavoidable and necessary. But Soviet industry has remained dependent upon foreign technology ever since. Vander Elst shows this clearly. Between 1930 and 1945, of all major industries, only oil drilling and synthetic rubber developed using indigenous technology. Aluminium smelting and refining, steam boilers, helicopters, tanks and machine guns used a combination of Soviet and foreign technology. Since 1945 only a handful of industries have been able to rely on home-produced machines and techniques; some sectors have even reverted to using imported technology. As late as 1965 mining, chemicals, machine building, prime movers, electrical equipment, communications and agricultural machinery were all reliant on foreign plant.

Vander Elst points out that when foreign technology is introduced it is not modernised but merely 'scaled-up'. The increased capacity raises potential output, but only in direct proportion to the increase in size. There is no new real advance in productivity. Technological advance depends mainly on more Western imports.

Planning

Another issue that the 'degenerate workers' state' brigade will not recognise – because it would blow their entire theory – is that planning does not exist in the Soviet Union. Trotsky himself observed in the 'thirties that 'The Soviet economy to-day is neither a monetary nor a planned one. It is an almost purely bureaucratic economy' (*Writings 1932-33*).

Prominent Left Oppositionist Christian Rakovsky wrote in his important 1931 article 'The five-year plan in crisis' that in the vital sector of construction there was a 'total planlessness' (*Critique* 13, 1981). For both right-wing ideologues and Stalinists the Kremlin's muddling *is* planning (the concept of democratic planning as envisaged by Lenin and Trotsky is alien to both of them). Vander Elst shows that what is called planning is a total mess. He quotes a 'disgruntled enterprise manager' complaining in *Pravda* about the formlessness of Gosplan, the Soviet central planning agency. One section knows not and cares even less what other sections are doing.

It is strange that, although Vander Elst states the well known fact that consumer goods in the Soviet Union are normally in short supply and sometimes non-existent, he omits to state that Soviet-produced goods are pretty shoddy. Even with imported technology Soviet factories cannot produce goods to the standards reached in the West.

Imperialism wants to destroy the Stalinist economies and bring the Eastern bloc countries completely into the capitalist sphere. Vander Elst rubs his hands with glee at the prospect of the Soviet Union's collapse. He considers that the West should accelerate its demise by starving it of advanced technology for modernising its industries. He does not want to impose a total trade ban though. Exporting consumer goods 'might stimulate "consumerism" within the USSR and make it more difficult for its leaders to ignore the wants of their citizens'. Nice one.

Crisis

What is entirely absent from his analysis is the current capitalist crisis. Apart from the fact that the decline of capitalism reduces the lure of the West, many Western governments use trade with the East as an important counter-crisis measure. But Vander Elst is not of the school that approves of state intervention. He also fails to consider whether investment in the East could lead to the reintroduction of the market. This is by no means beyond the Stalinist bureaucrats. The Polish government has recently made tentative moves in this direction, and market penetration has already taken place to varying degrees in certain Eastern bloc countries – most notably Yugoslavia – with the approval of the ruling bureaucracies.

Whether it is expressed in Vander Elst's Friedmanite jargon or in Marxist terminology, it is undeniable that capitalism has an inherent dynamic. It's also undeniable that the Stalinist countries do not. However much foreign technology was necessary in the beginning, there is something definitely wrong with a system that can only advance its productive forces by importing foreign technology. Throughout Eastern Europe today the bureaucracy is calling for more 'labour discipline' to improve production.

Many people who call themselves 'Trotskyists' today are drawn inexorably towards being apologists for Stalinism. Some consider that the extension of the Soviet-style economic system over capitalist countries would be a progressive move. When the Soviet Union invades a really backward country then the Kremlin bureaucracy is held to be doing us all a favour. The Spartacist League for example hailed the invasion of Afghanistan as a step forward for humanity. It would, however, condemn an invasion of Poland, but nevertheless 'oppose all violent resistance...against such a Soviet military intervention in Poland' (*Spartacist Britain*, May 1981).

It is time that the left woke up to the facts and stopped being so dogmatic on the matter. It is vital that a convincing political economy of the Soviet Union is produced and absurd concepts discarded. The Soviet Union is not capitalist; neither is it the economic powerhouse of the East as the Spartacists often call it. It is a decrepit system that has little future. It may have been retrievable in Trotsky's day but the Soviet state today upholds a system that cannot progress at all. We only defend it against imperialist attack because its collapse would strengthen imperialism, the system that oppresses the whole world and caused the degeneration of the Soviet Union in the first place. As long as left-wingers bury their heads in the sand and refuse to face the facts, the *politics* of reactionaries like Vander Elst will maintain their stranglehold.

Paul Fenwick

Cartoon of Kaiser Wilhelm resisting the many-headed Social Democratic dragon. To both Bismarck and the Kaiser the socialists were the enemies of the Reich – but the patriotism of the SPD helped them to tame the dragon.

Social democracy in Germany

W L Guttsman, *The German Social Democratic Party 1875-1933*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1981, pp362, £18.50hbk.

BEFORE the First World War the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was the largest working class party in the world. It was the leading section of the Second International and was seen as the model for other working class organisations to follow: revolutionaries throughout Europe looked to the SPD for leadership and inspiration. In its programme and congress resolutions the SPD upheld the principles of proletarian internationalism. Yet when the War broke out, the SPD abandoned its international principles and became a firm supporter of German imperialism. Understanding this volte face was the major preoccupation of leading revolutionaries at the time.

The origins of the SPD

Guttsman's historical survey of the SPD provides some of the answers.

The SPD was the product of the long defensive struggle of the German working class. The repressive political regime with its armoury of anti-working class laws forced workers to organise to protect themselves. Unlike in democratic Britain, the German ruling class ensured workers' subordination by naked force. Bourgeois terror produced a radical working class movement. The anti-socialist laws of the 1870s and 1880s, designed to destroy the SPD, had the opposite effect: systematic state repression convinced many workers of the need for socialist organisation. When the anti-socialist laws were repealed in 1890, the SPD had a mass working class base.

The SPD was not – like the British Labour Party – merely an election machine for parliamentary representation. In the nineteenth century the scope for trade union activity was limited in Germany. As a result workers looked to their political party rather than the trade unions as their first line of defence. Indeed the SPD itself was instrumental in extending trade union organisation. The SPD also created a whole range of working class social, cultural and economic institutions, from walking clubs to building societies.

But in reality the SPD was far from being a revolutionary party. Its radical features were a result of its formative experience of state repression. When the German bourgeoisie abandoned its authoritarian strategy and began to make important concessions to the working class, the SPD began to modify its radical rhetoric.

The growth of reformism

Bismarck's electoral reforms and welfare measures were designed to integrate the working class into the capitalist system. From the 1890s onwards trade unions were allowed to flourish and the SPD expanded rapidly. By the turn of the century a distinct labour bureaucracy had emerged – a bureaucracy so preoccupied with preserving and defending the institutions of the labour movement that it began to lose sight of the long-term interests of the working class. Strikes were frowned upon lest they threaten the financial position of the unions. The labour leaders feared militant action in case the state reacted by attacking working class organisations.

The conservative outlook of the labour bureaucracy was crucial because of its dominant place in the political life of the German working class. Guttsman's material shows that the SPD was virtually run by full-time officials. For example at the 1911 SPD conference out of 393 delegates, 100 were party employees, 80 were trade union officials or employees of the union-run Sickness Insurance Fund and 57 were party journalists or authors.

The strength of the labour bureaucracy lay in the fact that this leadership was thrown up by the working class through a long experience of struggle. This leadership arose out of defensive struggles and originally had close links with rank and file activists. Thus Guttsman's study of the membership of the SPD national executive between 1890-1933 shows that most of the party leaders began their careers as skilled workers and then went on to become party or union officials before joining the executive.

As the bureaucrats became more integrated into the system and isolated from the rank and file, they began to put their own interests first – and their interests were best ensured through the continued recognition of the German state. As a result they sought to defend the working class through state reforms. Insofar as they supported the class struggle, their objective was to use it to put pressure on the state to enact reforms. It was their identification with the German state that led to the labour leaders' support for imperialism and their approval of the First World War. When the German state collapsed in 1918-19 the SPD was there to pick up the pieces – without its collaboration German capitalism would have been overthrown. The SPD-dominated government of 1919 became the executioners of the German revolution.

Bourgeois to the core

During the inter-war period the SPD was transformed into a narrow bureaucratic, election-oriented outfit not unlike the Labour Party. The SPD was now no longer interested in mobilising the working class – on the contrary its aim was to contain working class action. During the 'twenties the SPD lost its mass base. The more workers turned away from the party the more the labour bureaucracy grew. In 1924 the party's newspapers alone employed 5553 people. The SPD had become the main pillar of the capitalist system.

Guttsman's analysis suffers from its institutional focus and narrow historical approach. The organisational continuity of the SPD obscures the fundamental transformation of this party in the inter-war period. During the First World War and the 'twenties the SPD ceased to function as a classical social democratic party. The militant sections of the working class saw through the SPD's betrayals and gave their support to the newly formed Independent Socialist Party (USPD) and to the Communist Party (KPD).

The survival of the SPD was due, not so much to the resilience of the labour bureaucracy, but to the amorphous character of the USPD and the political immaturity of the KPD. The lack of a convincing revolutionary alternative allowed the SPD to maintain its position in the unions and ultimately to survive the erosion of its mass support. But by the late 'twenties the SPD's existence was more dependent on the maintenance of the Weimar Republic than on working class support.

The destruction of the SPD by the Hitler regime was the final chapter of this tragic story. A dynamic party created to defend the interests of the working class became a concentration camp for its supporters. When the SPD was recreated in 1945 its founders were not German workers but American and British imperialists. Read this thorough account of the demise of German social democracy and be prepared for their treachery in the future.

Frank Richards

LETTERS

United front*

I am writing in response to the article in *the next step* for May by Frank Richards on the subject of the United Front.

I would like to fully agree with the analysis. I feel it is important to show that the essence of the tactic is given its best statement in Lenin's work of April 1920 'Left-wing communism, an infantile disorder'. This work is often used to justify the kind of united front that in fact it completely condemns, and specifically is used to argue that, because Lenin actually told people to vote Labour in this book, therefore all kinds of support for Labour can be justified.

The aim of any united front tactic is to carry on specifically *communist* work. Lenin talked of joining unions that were not merely reformist, but actually unions such as those organised in Russia *by the Tsarist secret police*, so as to gain access to the masses. For, said Lenin, one must not expect to find masses of people anywhere except in organisations that are acceptable to capitalism. The aim was to bring communist politics to these masses, and not to practise economism of any kind.

Lenin does indeed recommend people to vote Labour, but the aim of this is *to destroy the Labour Party*, by giving them the chance to discredit themselves so thoroughly with the masses that these same masses will move to the revolutionary forces.

Always any kind of compromise must have forwarding the building of socialism as its aim.

But of course, such tactics are a luxury that we cannot afford for before we can make alliances we must exist, and at the moment in this country there is no Revolutionary Communist Party. There are instead what Lenin would have called 'circles' – small groups of people, quite often based more on personal loyalty than organisational structures.

The next step for us then must be the building of a national party out of these groups. And the struggle to do this must be *primarily* ideological and theoretical, solving to the satisfaction of all concerned such problems as the attitude to the Labour Party, the Soviet Union, the trade union struggle, the Third World and so on, organisational problems such as the attitude towards democratic centralism, healthy inner-party life etc.

I feel that there is very substantial scope for settling differences, but that it will take a long time to sort out these differences unless this is given the priority it deserves.

The one issue that to me is the touchstone of a genuinely Marxist Party in this country is complete condemnation of the Labour Party. It is the most important single issue in the politics of the British labour movement, and unity on that issue will make the solution of other problems much easier.

Dr A N May
Huyton, Liverpool

* This letter has been shortened.

Frank Richards **writes:**

History marches on. *There is* now a Revolutionary Communist Party – it was launched on the day Dr May's letter arrived. We fully endorse his remarks on the United Front tactic and the Labour Party. And we welcome discussion and debate around the important theoretical questions he raises: this will play a key role in ensuring that the RCP truly expresses the interests of the working class. So also will be the active intervention of the party in the class struggle.

SWP and the Labour Party

Just a few notes on these issues, raised in *the next step*, No 12 (April 1981) which caused me some concern and not a little derision.

First, and most glaring, is your handling of the election campaign for 'Revolutionary Communist'/'ELWAR' candidates: I quote – 'If you vote him (ie K Tompson) in as a Revolutionary Communist councillor things in Moss Side will never be the same again' etc etc.

This is disgraceful! (a) It is indulging in the wildest triumphalist fantasies (exceeding even Socialist Unity who had, in hindsight, more justification); (b) it is electoralist in the extreme – worse, it actually encourages illusions in the 'capabilities' of LOCAL government, whereas, as you correctly state in another manifesto ON THE SAME PAGE, – 'only working class action' – can achieve anything!

Mention of Socialist Unity brings me to your article on entryism. This is a reasonable article, marred by an error that glosses over reality on one (totally unsubstantiated) phrase – 'the group that still clings on to its ORGANISATIONAL (your emphasis) independence of the Labour Party, the SWP'.

Let's look a little closer at the *practice* of the SWP as set against the entryists:

(a) Import controls – the LCC, Tribune, CP back them. The SWP does not – 'The demand for import controls DIVIDES working people. Socialism cannot succeed without UNITING US.' (*Why import controls won't save jobs*, Hallas/Harris, SWP, 1981)

(b) Bans on demonstrations – the IMG think it is ultra-left to defy police bans, and actually tried to stall one such attempt in Kilburn. The SWP demonstrated its independence and suffered (with the RCT) some dozen arrests.

(c) Rank and file groups – in my own, Redder Tape, we argue for all-out Civil Service strikes. The entryists in Broad Left call for all-out strikes EXCEPT Benefit Offices. A Socialist Organiser supporter actually told a Scottish unofficial striker that he would be best to return to work! A socialist denying the right to strike?

(d) The Right to Work Campaign – was set up under a Labour government, fought Labour and union bureaucrats at every step, picketed Labour MPs and ministers. Not what you'd normally expect from a group with mere 'organisational' independence!

(e) Rents and rates – the WRP and others support 'Red Rates' in 'Left-wing' Labour boroughs. We do not – our poster declares – 'No Rent Rises, Rate Rises, Cuts – Make the Bankers Pay' – which, of course, will only happen when they are expropriated under Socialism!

(f) Our analysis of Bennism is clear – it is left reformism, utterly incapable of spearheading the fight for socialism.

The SWP makes efforts to recruit the best Labour militants as would you in our position. This is NOT the same as dissolving our politics in the Labour Party swamp.

The Labour Party is historically and structurally incapable of achieving socialism; the SWP is, and shall remain, organisationally, politically and above all, in practice completely independent from it.

T J Anon
Secretary, Central London Civil Service SWP
(Personal capacity)

Pat Roberts **writes:**

The SWP has no *political* independence of the Labour Party.

(a) Import controls. SWP theoreticians are in principle opposed to them. But SWP trade union activists – for example in the South Wales coalfields – support them in practice. Thus in the workplace SWP militants go along with the protectionist politics of the Labour Party.

(b) Bans. Some SWP members are prepared to defy the police. But in common with the Labour Party, the SWP has approved state bans on the NF in the past.

(c) Rank and file groups. SWP militants may call for strikes – but they also call for votes for Labour Party bureaucrats like Bob Wright in union elections. Wright's Tribunite policies in the AUEW provided no alternative to those of Boyd and Duffy on the right of the Labour Party.

(d) The Right to Work Campaign has recently been totally subordinated to the People's March, a cynical TUC publicity stunt at the expense of the unemployed, with the object of returning another Labour government.

(e) Rent and rates. It is true that the SWP has not backed Ted Knight-style cuts – yet. But if the SWP thinks the left-wing Labour councillors provide no real alternative – why not challenge them at the polls as we have?

(f) Benn. If he is an incorrigible reformist then why is *Socialist Worker* campaigning for him for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party?

We could go on. Our correspondent conspicuously avoids some of the key issues on which the SWP adapts its principles in practice to the politics of the Labour Party – Ireland, racism, women's rights.

TORIES IN TROUBLE

Labour's Irish 'solutions'

With its criminalisation policy in shreds, the British ruling class is looking for a new way to sell its policy on Ireland. The Labour Party, which formulated criminalisation when the Wilson Administration withdrew political status in 1976, is also looking for a fresh approach. The Labour Party's debate on Irish policy is about how to give a British solution a more humane face.

We appeal to the People's March to support the prisoners – and reject the official labour movement's attempts to help the British solve their Irish problem.

The debate of the vultures

LABOUR's great debate did not get off the ground until both Bobby Sands and Francis Hughes were dead. On the day the hunger strike was first announced at Westminster at the beginning of March, Labour's spokesman Don Concannon urged his Tory opposite number Humphrey Atkins to give no further publicity to the prisoners: no Labour MP demurred. Early in April the first meeting of the Don't let the Prisoners Die Committee in the House of Commons was attended by only one Labour MP, Ernie Roberts. The chairman of the Labour Committee on Ireland attended to say that his organisation was inactive but was considering a 'labour movement conference' later in the year.

Over the next two weeks Roberts rounded up 15 MPs to sign his petition. But when the Committee sent a telegram in their name to a Belfast rally in support of Sands a week before his death, two of the signatories wrote to *The Times* to disassociate themselves and others denied all knowledge of the message. Even when Sands died only one backbencher broke Labour's silence – and then more in irritation at Foot's grovelling praise for Thatcher's determined stand than in support of the hunger strikers.

It was only with Tony Benn's call for a United Nations peacekeeping force on the day of Hughes' death that the discussion opened up. Within days every Labour politician out to make a name for himself had entered the fray. From the right, Social Democratic Party leader David Owen countered Benn with the suggestion of an EEC initiative. From the left, aspiring MP Peter Hain called for the next Labour Government to set a date for withdrawal between six and twelve months of coming into office. Foot chastised Benn, saying that 'lives of people' were at stake; and Healey condemned his proposal as 'unrealistic'. Meanwhile every left-wing MP suddenly wanted to break Labour's bipartisan approach and end, as Dennis Skinner put it, the 'love-in' between Labour and Tory front benches on Ireland. By the end of the week even former Northern Ireland Minister Merlyn Rees was questioning the future of the Union he has always doggedly upheld.

To understand the dramatic change wrought by the the hunger strike in the outlook of the Labour Party it is only necessary to look at the consequences of the deaths in the H-Blocks and the events surrounding them for British strategy in Ireland.

'Imaginative breakthrough'

Bobby Sands' election victory, the massive demonstration of solidarity at his funeral and the sustained rioting that followed it showed the British Government that it had failed to isolate the republican movement from the nationalist people in the Six Counties. Britain's other problem was the hostile reaction to the Government's handling of the hunger strike from around the world. Even in places like New York and Johannesburg, usually sympathetic to Britain, influential newspapers treated Sands as the heroic victim of Thatcher's ruthlessness. Sands' death and the continuing violence in the Six Counties drew the attention of Britain's allies to this continuing instability within the United Kingdom, a potential danger to the entire Western alliance. From Europe and the USA came renewed pressure on Westminster to sort out its Irish problem.

The Sunday Times caught the mood of frustration and despair of Britain's ruling circles. It argued that 'the task for British politicians now is to pass beyond this expression of principle to a more creative phase' (10 May 1981). A month earlier Ernie Roberts and his fellow campaigner Chris Myant had appealed for an 'imaginative breakthrough' to resolve the hunger strike crisis. They had accurately anticipated the new shift in ruling class thinking. But what kind of 'imaginative breakthrough' can you expect from a professional pacifist and the deputy editor of the turgid *Morning Star*?

When MPs were discussing what to do about Sands' election to Westminster, Roberts was already worried about foreign opinion and the reputation of the British state. He opposed Sands' immediate expulsion because 'to expel him with such indecent haste would earn international condemnation and undermine the authority of Parliament' (*Morning Star*, 13 April). After Sands and Hughes died Roberts was worried that British policy might stimulate the struggle against British domination. 'Even worse' (than the deaths) was, he said, 'the fear that violence will escalate as a result of the provision of more martyrs for the IRA' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13 May). Myant asked 'who recruits for the IRA now?' in a major *Morning Star* feature, and answered – Margaret Thatcher (9 May). Myant was angry that Thatcher's inflexible stand had undone a lot of good work by the repressive forces: 'A more sophisticated and subtle security policy by the RUC and army . . . has been completely negated by the Government's unbending attitude over the hunger strike' (*Comment*, 30 May). The Labour left and the Communist Party want Thatcher to bend a little and adopt a more sophisticated and subtle approach to smashing the resistance of the Irish people.

A non-debate

In fact the left has nothing useful to contribute at the level of strategy for British imperialism in Ireland. For the foreseeable future Britain has no alternative to Direct Rule. Its diplomatic manoeuvres, north and south of the Border, are designed to maximise acceptance of this policy while the relentless repression of the republican movement proceeds apace. Benn and Owen are obviously flying kites with their UN and EEC proposals. Neither would be acceptable to Britain or its allies and anyway neither would make the slightest difference in the Six Counties. Troops are there, not to separate Catholics and Protestants, but to suppress nationalist resistance to British rule. Whatever colour his uniform any soldier in the Six Counties would be an agent of British imperialism.

The rest of the debate about 'setting a date for withdrawal' is just the same old rubbish the Labour left has been churning out throughout the Irish War. The Bill of Rights, the Better Life For All, 'withdrawal at Her Majesty's convenience' – all are utopian schemes for British-imposed solutions. Their true purpose is to give the impression that Britain could possibly play a progressive role in Ireland in the future while endorsing repression now.

The only people who take the debate in the Labour Party at all seriously are the radical left groups. This is because their activity – on Ireland as on other issues – is determined by what is acceptable to the labour bureaucracy. The Labour Committee on Ireland is a good example. Moribund through two months of hunger strike, it sprang to life when Benn gave the go-ahead with his UN stunt. *Socialist Challenge* reprinted Benn's statement (discreetly omitting his evasion of a pointed question on political status – an issue on which he backs Margaret Thatcher – see the *Irish Times* 13 May for a full account). Benn also made the front page of *Socialist Worker* – where there was no room for Sands in the week he died. Both papers ignored Owen's EEC proposal though its political content is identical to Benn's.

The radical left thrives on non-existent contradictions within the Labour Party. The LCI and the rest have now invented a political difference between Concannon and the rest of the Parliamentary Labour Party to justify a 'Dump Concannon' campaign. But the only difference between Concannon and Benn on Ireland is one of style. Concannon disgusted us all with his visit to Bobby Sands' deathbed. But Benn was a senior member of the government under which Concannon built the H-Blocks; he was in the Cabinet that withdrew political status directly creating the present prison protest; and he has fully backed Concannon through two major hunger strikes. Benn has yet to declare his differences with Concannon over the demands for political status. The fact is that Benn's record on Ireland is even more disgusting than Concannon's; his recent posturings are sheer hypocrisy. But Benn is the radical left's candidate for the Labour leadership so its supporters cringe and serve.

If left-wing MPs wanted to put pressure on the Tories or their own front bench they have had ample opportunities. They could have sent a deputation to visit the hunger strikers and declared their support for the prisoners' demands. They could have consistently challenged Thatcher and Foot, Atkins and Concannon in the House of Commons. They could have censured the Labour leaders in the Parliamentary Labour Party. They could have moved the writ to bring forward the Fermanagh/South Tyrone bye-election and force the Government to legislate to bar the prisoners from standing or face another H-Block MP. In the event they did none of these things. They didn't do them because their object was not to embarrass the Government but to help get Britain out of the mess it has got into in Ireland.

It's now fashionable on the left to call for an end to Labour's bipartisan Irish policy. But Labour only adopted its bipartisan position out of a recognition of the mortal threat of the Irish War to British imperialism. For a decade the Labour leaders have understood they could not tolerate any major departure within their party from the policies needed to ensure British rule in Ireland. Bipartisanship is not now under serious threat – it is simply fraying a bit at the edges. It is inconceivable that the Labour Party could move so far against the British state and to oppose its strategic needs in Ireland. In reality breaking bipartisanship would mean destroying the Labour Party.