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BEFORE THE RIOTS AND AFTER

Police against blacks

Moss Side – May

Nicky Smith and his friend Terence had just started playing Space Invaders in the Arndale shopping centre. A shopkeeper told them to clear off – and when they refused he called the security men. Minutes later 14 year old Nicky was kicked in the head and taken to the police station with blurred vision, a bruised jaw and a bleeding nose. He was charged with 'causing a breach of the peace'. Since then he has been picked up twice by the police 'for questioning'.

Nicky's mother is white and his father black. A senior security man at the Arndale later told his mother, 'I am not prejudiced, but when blacks come into the centre we set the cameras onto them. They are here to cause trouble'.

'That boy' he continued 'could have caused a riot'.

Moss Side – July

Wayne talked to Pam Laurence of Manchester Workers Against Racism about how he lost his front teeth during the riots.

'I was walking down the road with a few mates and a load of riot vans came round the corner. When they got near us you could hear a shout "let's get them" and about 30 of them piled out. We ran down a side street but this copper caught up and hit me with a truncheon on the back of the head. Then he dragged me across the road and three more ran up and kicked the hell out of me.

'One thumped me in the mouth – he broke two teeth. Then they threw me in the van and took me down to the police station. When we got there they pulled me out and kept me in this crab-like hold. The gate was open but they said it was locked, messing about, saying what shall we do, shall we chuck him over? So they chucked me over – right onto the concrete. It went on like that till six o'clock in the morning.'

(continued on page 2)

Brixton – May

In the early hours of the morning on 13 May uniformed and plain clothes policemen burst into at least a dozen homes of black people on Stockwell Park estate in the centre of Brixton. They rampaged through livingrooms, bedrooms and kitchens, searching wardrobes and cupboards for 'stolen goods'. Mildred, one of the victims, told Sabena Norton of South London Workers Against Racism what happened to her family.

'Five of them burst in. They dragged my two (teenage) boys out of bed and took them down to the police station. They grabbed hold of two televisions, an amplifier and a turntable, some headphones – they let me keep my electric alarm clock– and took them all away.'

After five hours down at Brixton police station the two boys and all the property were released. No charges were made.

Brixton – July

On Friday 10 July Malachi, a young Rasta, was stopped driving his own car under suspicion of having stolen it. While he was being beaten up in the street a crowd gathered to protect him. The second Brixton riot this year began.

In the next 12 hours the police went on the rampage in squads of up to 50 men. With vastly increased numbers and new helmets, Brixton's occupying army was in buoyant mood. Around 150 people were arrested: within hours many of them had been processed through a hastily convened extraordinary Saturday session at Camberwell Magistrates Court. 'Instant justice' resulted in stiff prison sentences for minor public order offences.

Since the April revolt more than 500 people, mostly young blacks have gone through the mill of British justice. Stop, search, truncheon,

(continued on page 2)

'Anything goes'

Comment by police sergeant after he had beaten up a 14 year old black girl in Brixton's Effra Road quoted in The Guardian (13 July).

Summer special 10 page feature
The labour movement Which way forward?

Moss Side

(continued from page 1)

Terry talked about the police charge down Princess Road:

'There was about a hundred bobbies that time, and they had all axes and everything, sledgehammers, the lot, what the rioters had, they picked them all up. When they caught them, the ones that got knocked down, they were whacking them up. They caught one bloke and they whacked him in the face with a truncheon and hit him over the head with the hammer. They were just giving it to them'

'They go round in ones the rioters, you know, but the police they don't go round in ones, they go round in dozens. Everybody's on about it being organised. Well, in one way, it was, in one way it wasn't. Like the police, they're organised, they were ready,they've been organised for years. But us, we're not organised at all.'

Brixton

(continued from page 1)

handcuffs, van, station, cell, charge room, court room, sentence – this has been the experience of black people in areas like Brixton for the past 10 years. The state's first response to the revolts in Brixton, Moss Side, Toxteth, Southall has been to step up this process.

The government has put more police on the streets, put coachfuls of them in the backstreets and equipped them to strike harder and more effectively. The magistrates have set up special courts and the prison service has set up an army camp on Salisbury Plain as the Long Kesh for the blacks who will not lie down and accept their oppression in Britain's inner cities.

WAR TAKES OFF!

WORKERS AGAINST RACISM groups in Manchester and South London have been to the fore in organising the defence of the victims of police repression in the recent riots.

Manchester

In Manchester, MANWAR had already taken up the case of Nicky Smith, organising a picket of the court when he came up at the end of May and arranging a further picket for his next appearance in August. He has been appealing for trade union support. But Manchester Trades Council does not see it as the responsibility of the labour movement to fight this sort of attack – it looks to the state to deal with the problem. Its secretary told Nicky's mother that she could not put her case to the trades council, but should go to the Community Relations Council instead!

During and after the Moss Side riots MANWAR was active in giving practical assistance to people as they were arrested and dragged through the courts. In the Brixton area, where the largest number of raids and arrests have taken place, organising an effective defence campaign has been SOLWAR's main preoccupation. Apart from blacks the local gay community has also come under attack. Police eager to concoct a conspiracy behind the riots have raided the homes of gays and anarchists, made arrests, conducted in-depth interrogations and made some trumped-up charges. SOLWAR activists have been visiting people who have been attacked, attending court proceedings and helping to coordinate resistance.

South London

Right from the start SOLWAR rejected the Scarman inquiry. While local radicals and community leaders capitulated to Scarman and Militant's labour movement 'alternative' inquiry flopped, we pressed

ahead with a campaign to sue the police for damages. Our play, 'Put the Police in the dock' got a very favourable reception from the local community at its world premiere at Lambeth Town Hall in June.

In East London and Coventry, work – already well underway in the climate of intense racial oppression prevailing in both areas – proceeded along similar lines. Another racist atrocity – the firebomb murder in Walthamstow of an Asian woman and her three children – and fresh riots in Dalston, East Ham and Coventry, underline the importance of our campaign to build workers' defence.

Building workers' defence

The riots – and the labour movement's response – were the major themes of the first Workers' Against Racism national conference held in Brick Lane on 18 July. More than 250 people attended workshops on racial violence, the trade unions and racism, and the police. Plenary sessions on workers' defence focussed on the importance of rallying working class opposition to racial oppression and the obstacles to achieving this.

Two areas of controvery emerged. There were those who thought that racism was not a *particularly* important issue for workers, but only one of many areas of struggle – around wages, working conditions, cuts, closures, etc. Indeed, it was argued, workers would only be able to take effective action in defence of black people if they gained confidence in their basic trade union activities. On the contrary, argued RCP members, the riots provided a very effective means of pulling workers towards a clear identification of their class interests, in solidarity with black people against police and government attacks.

A few Maoists maintained that racism was not *particularly* an issue for workers. The British working class had magnificent traditions on internationalism, blacks could well defend themselves, and we should appeal for the *unity* of the poor against the rich. RCP members insisted that, notwithstanding its traditions, the British labour movement had not yet taken a decisive stand against state oppression of blacks. Blacks must not be left to fight in isolation against the common enemy of all workers – not 'the rich' but the British state.

By an overwhelming majority, the conference passed a resolution opposing all immigration controls and pledging full support to all those involved in the recent riots. The perspective for the months ahead is to build up WAR branches and extend support for their activities in the labour movement.

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You can't reform a riot

NOW THAT the streets of London and Liverpool have come to resemble those of Belfast and Derry commentators are discovering all sorts of similarities between the conflict in the Six Counties and the riots in Britain's inner cities.

When a number of chief constables were despatched to Belfast to pick up some tips on riot control from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the ruling class itself seemed to be acknowledging a direct parallel. No doubt when the RUC tells them how it has lost 100 men in conducting its brutal repression and that it cannot operate in nationalist areas without full army back-up, the British bobbies will come home feeling a bit queasy.

But the most striking parallel between the riots in Ireland and those in Britain is not the use of riot shields and rubber bullets in both, but the common response of the labour movement to a revolt of the oppressed and the bourgeoisie's attempts to contain it.

'Jobs not jails'

The labour movement accepts the prevailing view of bourgeois sociology that the cause of the riots is unemployment, bad housing and environmental decay. Everybody from Lord Scarman to Tony Cliff thinks that the solution is to provide more jobs, improve housing and spend more money in the inner city areas. This view is particularly favoured by Labour MPs. They blame the riots on Tory 'monetarism'; and they say that the 'alternative economic strategy' would soon cure this, like all the other ills of British capitalism.

Thus, while the Tory Government and the police carry on the great debate about how the ruling class is really going to deal with the riots – riot police or the army? rubber or plastic bullets? water cannon or CS gas?, the labour movement has different preoccupations. Labour's spokesmen protest: 'No, there's a better way'. Everybody from Roy Hattersley to Ted Knight agrees that the police must keep the old 'Dixon of Dock Green' image; they are worried that tough tactics will weaken the public acceptance of the police on which the stability of British bourgeois society partly depends.

What this labour movement response to the riots ignores is the *particular oppression* that is at the root of the revolt of young blacks against the authority of the British state. From radical left to Labour right, the labour movement unites, not in solidarity with blacks under attack, but in calling for government reforms to ameliorate their oppression.

Not race riots?

On one key aspect of the recent disturbances a consensus extends from Manchester chief constable Anderton to Brixton SWP – these are not 'race riots'. Now, it is apparent that many white people were involved in street fighting in Brixton, Toxteth, Moss Side and elsewhere. And it is certainly the case that vast numbers of young whites are unemployed and some get harassed by the police. But to deny a crucial *racial* component in the riots is to deny the *racial oppression* that is their single most important cause.

However bad the conditions suffered by young white people, the heaviest treatment is reserved for blacks. In all the major riot areas young blacks have had to put up with intense surveillance and constant interference over the past few years. They can't walk down the street without being searched for drugs or weapons; they can't drive a car without being under suspicion for having stolen it; they can't stand at bus stops without being accused of being 'muggers' or pickpockets.

Because British capitalism has no place for young blacks it has defined them all as potential criminals and used the police to keep them down. Black people experience all the effects of this criminalisation policy – the arrests, the raids, the interrogations, the courts, the prisons – *in addition* to the high unemployment and bad housing they share with many whites. The riots began when some blacks decided they weren't going to put up with it any more.

The defence of the black community and determined resistance to state oppression has to be at the centre of our reaction to the riots. The problem is that the official labour movement is not ready to stand up to the Government. While the police are tooling up for more repression, Labour's spokemen are still pleading for a 'softly, softly' approach. But 'all sides of the House' are ready to condemn attacks on the police and back urgent measures to supply them with the weapons they need to crush the revolts.

Peace, jobs and progress

All this is very familiar to anybody who knows the record of the Labour Party and the TUC on the Irish War. They – and their allies in the Communist Party and the radical left – explain the violence in Ireland as a response to economic deprivation in the Six Counties. And their solution is for the government to create employment, improve housing and promote economic development. As the TUC-backed Better Life For All Campaign has it, the British government should bring peace, jobs and progress to Ireland.

So for 12 years, while the British government has built its machine of repression all the way up from the B-Specials to the H-Blocks, the official labour movement has been feebly protesting and trying to make out that there is a better way that Britain could rule the Irish.

At the last major TUC debate on Ireland in 1979, steelworkers' delegate John Atkinson told Congress that there was 'only one way to take the gun out of Irish politics' and that was 'by finally removing those evils which have brought the gun into Irish politics'. By 'those evils' he meant, not British troops, Partition, British rule, but unemployment, slum housing and poverty.

What Atkinson and the rest ignore is the specific oppression at the root of the conflict in Ireland – the denial of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination. Throughout the War the leaders of the British labour movement have refused to give support to the national liberation struggle against British rule. Instead they have lined up with the government, appealing for it to rule Ireland more leniently.

And just as the left has obscured the racial aspect of the riots in Britain, it has tried to hide the national question in the Irish War. Thus 'Better Life For All' promoter and veteran Stalinist Andy Barr told the TUC in 1978 that 'there has never been any conflict of interest between Protestant and Catholic workers in Ireland'. Now, it is true that the War in the Six Counties is not simply a sectarian conflict. But Barr's implication that all workers in the Six Counties face common problems of unemployment and bad housing avoids the particular oppression of Catholics. Catholics in Ireland aspire towards a united independent country. Britain's denial of that right is the cause of the present war. And all the particular grievances of the Catholics in the Six Counties – discrimination in jobs, housing, etc – result from British domination.

'Imaginative breakthroughs'

The response of the left in Britain to the hunger strikes is fully consistent with its past record. While the Tory Government pursues its policy with ruthless determination, the left pleads for 'flexibility'. For five years Labour and Conservative governments have tried to brand as criminals those who fight back against British oppression in Ireland. The centrepiece of this strategy is the denial of political status to republican prisoners.

While Irish prisoners have been forced to starve to death in rapid succession, not a single Labour MP has made an unequivocal statement in support of their demands for political status; most have, like the TUC, unreservedly backed Margaret Thatcher against the hunger strikers.

Meanwhile the major public work of the radical left's leading Irish activists has been in the Don't Let the Irish Prisoners Die Ad Hoc Committee. This activity takes the form of periodic press conferences in the House of Commons at which labour movement celebrities like left-wing MP Ernie Roberts and *Morning Star* deputy editor Chris Myant try to persuade the Government that a few trivial concessions would solve the whole problem. But Thatcher and Atkins know that there can be no compromise on the key questions of British oppression in Ireland. Political status is such a question – and the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie know which side they're on.

It's time the labour movement took such a decisive stand on issues of political oppression. The British left always wants to equivocate, find the middle way, make compromises. Riots and hunger strikes to death demand that tough choices be made and clear lines drawn.

On the one side stand those who condemn the violence of the oppressed and rush to suggest ways the Government can get itself out of the mess it's in as a result of revolts against oppression. On the other side stand those who support the violence of the oppressed against the British state and fight, not to modify oppression, but to destroy it.

The struggle at Laurence Scott

Fighting the sell-out

The fight for jobs at the Manchester engineering works of Laurence Scott Electromotors is now in its third month. Kate Marshall talked to LSE worker Dave Hallsworth about the latest developments in the factory occupation.

Extending the struggle

To prevent the closure of their factory, workers at the Laurence Scott Electromotors plant in Manchester have been in occupation since 24 April. After a hesitant start the workforce has begun to extend the scope of the occupation. In June pickets went out to the Laurence Scott plant in Norwich. But the most effective step taken so far has been the pickets at the Doncaster factory owned by Laurence Scott boss Arthur Snipe. Despite protests from AUEW officials the picketing of the Doncaster factory began on 6 July.

The first thing that the Manchester pickets did when they arrived was to organise a meeting with the Doncaster workers. Laurence Scott workers were applauded when they declared their determination to fight any loss of jobs. The picket was highly effective. Most suppliers were turned away including the Royal Mail. Dave Hallsworth of the Laurence Scott Action Committee noted: 'Snipe was really getting nervous. On the second day of the picketing he drove his Rolls Royce onto the pavement, in an attempt to run over or frighten the pickets. In the event the pickets were able to jump out of the way, and only their chairs and picket boards were crushed by the Rolls'. According to Dave the Doncaster picket 'gave a real boost to morale. Many of the men said that the Doncaster picket should have been put on from the start'.

The escalation of picketing action has forced Snipe's hand. His response was the time honoured carrot and stick approach. Four days after the Doncaster picket started Snipe took out an injunction to regain possession of his plant. His solicitors boasted that the plant would be in Snipe's hands within the week. He followed up this legal step by sending redundancy payment cheques to the Manchester workers. But while all this was going on Snipe initiated secret discussions with the union negotiators.

The bureaucrats sell out

Throughout the dispute supporters of *the next step* inside the occupation warned of the dangers of relying on union officials to win the fight. Dave Hallsworth picks up the story: 'We knew the record of the AUEW officials. We knew that despite their militant rhetoric they would take the first opportunity to sell us short. So we took every opportunity to warn the workers not to let the conduct of the dispute slip out of their hands. We were particularly angry at those who should have known better. Members of the IMG and the SWP were prominent in their adulation of the officials involved. If you read *Socialist Worker* or *Socialist Challenge* you would not have guessed that week in week out the AUEW bureaucrats were trying to sell us out'.

Matters came to a head over the Doncaster picket. The union officials used every excuse to postpone this action. The Broad Left officials in the AUEW were particularly prominent in obstructing the fight. The secretary of the Confed from Sheffield phoned through in an attempt to get the picket called off. Ken Cure, the AUEW Executive Committee official in charge of the AUEW side of the dispute also put the boot in and sent Doug Daniels, the District Secretary, who made a hard speech demanding that the picket be dropped. Fortunately despite this harassment the shop stewards voted 18 to 4 to carry on with the planned picket.

Once the Doncaster picket began to bite negotiations began. Top bureaucrats Terry Duffy, Alex Ferry, Roy Grantham, Eric Winterbottom, Bob McCusker and convenor Bob Pencion joined Arthur Snipe in working out the sell-out. On Friday 10 July rumours began to circulate that union and management had made a deal. All this time the workplace was kept in the dark and the first they knew of the impending sell-out was when their convenor Bob Pencion suddenly resigned.

Next day on Saturday the local officials presented the memorandum of agreement to the workforce. The deal was brutally simple in its logic. Snipe promised to operate a two-day week for a three month period. After three months the viability of the company would be assessed and redundancies would take place according to the needs of the firm. In return management would regain control of the factory and the court action would be withdrawn. In addition the agreement stipulated the return of the redundancy payment. The local bureaucrats presented this agreement as an instruction to the workers and warned that if it was not accepted then official recognition of the strike would be withdrawn.

Battle lines are drawn

The militants were furious. Just when the occupation was becoming effective the union bureaucrats had agreed to a sell-out. The concession of a two-day week for three months was an insult to workers who had given up everything to save their jobs. Dave Hallsworth tells us what happened. 'That Saturday we began to make plans for fighting this sell-out. We knew we only had a few days as the deal was going to be put to a meeting of the workplace on Tuesday. On Monday we went all out to mobilise opposition to the deal. We put out a *next step* bulletin and argued the case for continuing the occupation. In the evening my AUEW branch in Ashton unanimously passed a motion of censure against the officials handling the dispute.

'When Tuesday came we knew that the workforce was in the picture. To the dismay of the union bureaucrats only 21 people voted for a sell-out. To show our determination we organised a demonstration at the Crown Court hearing of Snipe's application for an injunction that afternoon. Everyone saw that we meant to fight on and the hearing was postponed another week.'

The occupation has now reached a critical stage. The union leaders have been thwarted for the time being. Their frustration was well expressed by the *Morning Star*, the voice of the Broad Left bureaucrats in the unions. On Monday 13 July the *Morning Star* greeted the settlement and noted 'Mr Snipe has accepted that the factory should be kept open and every effort be made to create a viable future'. The next day the *Morning Star* noted a 'dramatic development'. The workers had rejected a settlement even though they 'appeared to have achieved the main aim of the strike – to prevent closure with the loss of 650 jobs'. How the promise of a two-day week for three months came to constitute 'the main aim of the strike', the *Morning Star* did not care to explain. In the end the CP paper found assurance in the fact 'that the AUEW executive yesterday decided to send executive council member, Ken Cure to Manchester in an attempt to persuade the Laurence Scott workers to reverse their decision' (*Morning Star*, 15 July 1981).

The *Morning Star* did not report what happened to Ken Cure when he got to Manchester. As he approached the local AUEW office he noticed that a crowd of angry Laurence Scott workers were waiting for him. Before you could say 'Morning Star' Ken Cure disappeared.

The danger ahead

The rejection of the union leaders' sell-out should not obscure the fact that they have the power to sabotage the occupation. By Wednesday 15 July they were busy trying to work out a new formula with Snipe. If they're allowed to monopolise negotiations they can demoralise the workforce by coming back time and again with yet another sell-out. The logical alternative to this bureaucratic manipulation is for the workers in the occupation to take direct responsibility for the negotiations.

The other danger is that at present only a minority of the workforce believes that the fight against all redundancies can be won. Laurence Scott, unlike other occupations such as the one at Gardner's, is unique in that the argument to oppose voluntary redundancies has been put forward consistently. But unfortunately many hardened 'realists' of the Broad Left and radical left have acted to narrow the scope of the struggle. As a result still too many workers believe that voluntary redundancies would be an acceptable alternative to compulsory ones.

The success of the occupation depends on waging an effective campaign against the bureaucrats. Any solution which accepts the profitability of the company as its criterion must be rejected. The only criterion that's of relevance is the interest of workers. Dave Hallsworth has the last word: 'I am more optimistic now than ever before. In the beginning many were reluctant to escalate the occupation. Now people see we have a hard fight on our hands and that we can win support outside. The last week has also shown where the politics of the Broad Left officials lead. That's something to work on. This important experience and the politics of *the next step* can be a powerful combination in strengthening the fight back'.

10 page feature

Which way forward for the labour movement?

During the past two years the British ruling class has managed to impose its counter-crisis measures on the working class. The combination of ideological confusion and insecurity generated by the recession has weighed heavily on the labour movement. Redundancies have been pushed through and wages have been held down. Trade union membership has fallen and shop floor organisation has been eroded. But the bosses do not oppose the trade unions as such. Indeed they would prefer to negotiate with a TUC that was strong enough to deal with its own rank and file. The Times recently noted that 'the great paradox of British industrial relations' is that 'our unions are not too strong but too weak. Most strikes are unofficial, often small but immeasurably damaging to regularity and efficiency' (22 June 1981). Ninety per cent of industrial disputes are unofficial: and the ruling class wants to clamp down on informal unofficial action. Its anti-union campaign is designed to destroy shop floor organisation and prevent spontaneous action. To carry out this offensive the bosses are prepared to develop a partnership with the union bureaucracy. In return for controlling its membership, the TUC will obtain the recognition of the employers.

In this 10 page special feature on the British labour movement we examine the balance of force in industry. We begin with a review of a recent study of shop floor organisation which reveals how far shop stewards have been integrated into the day to day operation of British capitalism. We analyse the current controversy on the closed shop and proposals for new anti-union laws. And we look at two companies – Ford and Lucas – where workers have paid a bitter price for the co-operative approach of their union representatives to management.

Many rank and file trade unionists respond to the difficulties of defending jobs, keeping up wages and maintaining effective shop floor organisation by turning to the Labour Party for political solutions. Tony Benn has caught this mood and built his campaign for the deputy leadership of the Party on it.

The revival of the labour left under Benn promises to accelerate the death agony of British Stalinism. The Communist Party's declining industrial base is fast dissolving into the Labour Party. But the radical left groups that a few years ago hoped to take the CP's place as a 'community of industrial militants' have not been able to take advantage of its demise. They too are within the field of Benn's magnetism which draws the radical groups, their members and supporters inexorably towards the Labour Party.

In the second half of our special feature we look at the re-emergence of a radical left wing in the Labour Party and the unions. We examine Benn's campaign for democracy in the Labour Party – and the programme of class collaboration that lies behind it. We review the attempts of his supporters in the Labour Coordinating Committee to extend his influence in the unions. And we tell the story (in diagrammatic form) of how the radical left returned after a sojourn in the wilderness to its true home inside the Labour Party.

Our message is that the way forward for the labour movement is not through consultation and participation with management in industry. Nor does it lie along Benn's road of class collaboration on a national scale in a new Social Contract. Tony Benn provides workers today with an escape from reality. The Labour Party cannot be turned into an instrument that fights for working class interests. The way forward lies through breaking class collaboration on the factory floor and building a revolutionary communist alternative to the Labour Party.

Whatever happened to the shop stewards' movement?

William Brown, editor, *The changing contours of British industrial relations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981, pp121, pbk £4.50.

IN THE EDITORIAL of the first isssue of this paper we noted how, having politically won the labour movement to a policy of class truce between 1974 and 1978, the bourgeoisie was growing more and more determined to reorganise basic industrial relations to its advantage ('Breaking new ground', *the next step*, December 1979). Since that editorial was written events have shown our observation to be only too accurate. The ruling class has managed to consolidate its power over the shop floor. Using unemployment to generate insecurity among those lucky enough to be able to hang on to their jobs, the bosses have managed to create a new discipline among workers. Trade union militants have been victimised, workplace organisation has been eroded and redundancies have continued apace.

In its reaction to this process the left has focused most of its attention on the more overt forms of the capitalists' offensive. Legislation like James Prior's Employment Bill, for instance have been denounced – and rightly – again and again. What has not so often been highlighted, however, is the way the capitalists are surreptitiously subverting the organisations of the working class from within; how they have frequently transformed union organisation at plant or office level into a pliable tool for their own use. Yet, as *The changing contours of British industrial relations* confirms, it is time the left woke up to these disturbing trends.

Despite its bourgeois 'industrial relations' approach, this survey by academics from Warwick University of nearly 1000 manufacturing establishments in Britain, provides vital data on the changing relation between capital and labour on the shop floor. Active workers must carefully consider its implications.

The state stiffens things up

The Warwick research was carried out over the winter of 1977-78. The subject of the book, however, is British industrial relations in the 'seventies as a whole; so by reading it we can get a good idea of the impact of the capitalist crisis in the workplace.

The authors indicate that the conduct of industrial relations has become more and more formal in recent times. New management/union bargaining procedures have emerged and the number of personnel directors has multiplied. Why? Largely because the state has increasingly got involved in regulating the wage-labour/capital relationship.

Ever since the 'sixties, when British capitalism first began the drift into today's recession, the state has tried to set industrial relations on a new footing. It has passed laws on the matter, encouraged the bosses to lay down clear channels for unions to explore grievances (Donovan Commission, 1968), tried to arrange 'cooling-off periods' when strikes are called (*In place of strife*, 1969) and even mooted the integration of unions with management through 'industrial democracy' (Bullock Report, 1975). In fact the more the state has been moved to introduce statutory incomes policies (pay pauses, wage freezes, six per cent norms, etc), the more it has attempted to tighten up law and order at factory gate and negotiating table.

The Warwick study suggests that the state has made a lot of headway in persuading managers to codify their arrangements with the unions. In turn, it argues, shop floor organisation has become strongly institutionalised. More than 40 per cent of the factories surveyed turned out to have joint (management/union) consultative committees on pay and working conditions, most of which had been introduced since 1972. And not only do union representatives on these committees collaborate with management; in contest after contest they seek assistance from the state. A tri-partite philosophy prevails, one in which the state is portrayed as an innocent neutral party rather than as what it really is – a weapon of the ruling class.

Who's minding the shop?

One of the main consequences of the institutionalisation of shop floor organisation is that unions lose their independence in the workplace. The setting up of common employer/union structures makes spontaneous action less likely and ensures that those whose job it is to defend the rank and file stay on the straight and narrow. In particular, as shop stewards get drawn into joint committees they are

made responsible for the running of the factory. They tend to become mediators between workers and management rather than workers who fight for their colleagues' interests.

Especially in large plants, management has been quick to recognise the benefits of keeping the shop steward machine well oiled. Indeed, this study points out that in some instances that machine has partly been built by management itself:

'Where shop steward organisations have sprung up in factories with little tradition of workplace bargaining, they may owe the superficial sophistication of their facilities and procedures more to the administrative needs of management than to the bargaining achievements of the workforce' (p120).

Management initiative is particularly marked in relation to combine organisation. The authors say that when stewards are brought together from different establishments in a company for a corporate negotiation, the combine 'is to a large extent management sponsored. Management makes the arrangements and pays for the travel'. Stewards with a strong tradition of independent, workplace-based bargaining are unlikely to link up with stewards from other plants. Conversely, combines flourish where such traditions are weak – among white collar workers and in sectors where industry-wide ('multi-employer') bargaining is the rule.

Management also calls the shots over the closed shop. According to ruling class propaganda the closed shop is a threat to freedom and democracy. But in reality, the survey says, the closed shop is 'massively supported' by management. Management like the closed shop because, through it, they can get the unions to control their own members. It has become a force for stability:

'The closed shop as a reflection of workplace solidarity may be increasingly replaced by an institution which is seen by management and the wider union primarily as an instrument of procedural discipline' (p59).

Stewards' organisation, combine organisation, the closed shop – the bosses have a hand in all of these. They've even taken over the business of collecting union dues. Since 1972 there has been a remarkable increase in the use of the 'check-off' system, by which management automatically deducts dues from every worker's pay packet: 72 per cent of the manual closed shops the survey looked at had such a system in operation. The authors say that the check-off 'shifts the burden of administering the closed shop more than ever to management' and identify it as 'one of the key features' of contemporary British industrial relations.

The authors also call the check-off 'one of the most important advances in union security in the history of British trade unionism'. But it is an advance for the bosses; it is lethal for effective rank and file organisation. Through the check-off system management acquires influence over union organisation. The divide between the interests of workers and those of employers becomes blurred. The traditional role of the steward as collector of dues is no more. This bureaucratic way of dealing with union finances encourages a very cosy relationship between labour leaders and employers.

The shop steward as junior manager

The employers in general and large-scale employers in particular have worked hard to bureaucratise the shop stewards' movement. The rise in the number of 'full-time' shop stewards – workers who still get their wages from the firm, but spend most of their time on union business has been phenomenal: the authors estimate that in 1978 1800 British manufacturing establishments had about 3500 manual full-time stewards on site, half of whom had only come into that position since 1972. Full-time stewards 'now far outnumber the full-time officials in trade unions' own pay-rolls.'

The growing role of management-paid shop stewards is only a heightened expression of the tendency we have mentioned before – the incorporation of unions at the workplace into the employers' apparatus. What it means is that the grass-roots organisations of the working class are becoming emasculated. The authors put it well:

'It seems likely that the nature of trade unionism has undergone a fundamental change. Throughout manufacturing, but particularly where steward organisations have arisen "ready made", management has had a powerful influence in shaping what was previously largely independent. The rapid spread of closed shop agreements, check-off arrangements, full-time stewards and consultative committees all tell of a management involvement in workplace union administration which was unthinkable a decade ago.' (p79)

Local shop stewards' organisations are more prevalent now than ever before. But many of them are almost as senile as the national labour bureaucracy; many are just a force for moderation and control. They strengthen the hand of mangement and union leaders over workers, and prevent unofficial action. Though the survey refuses to spell it out, the inescapable conclusion is that shop floor organisation has been transformed into an instrument for the domination of the working class.

How did this happen?

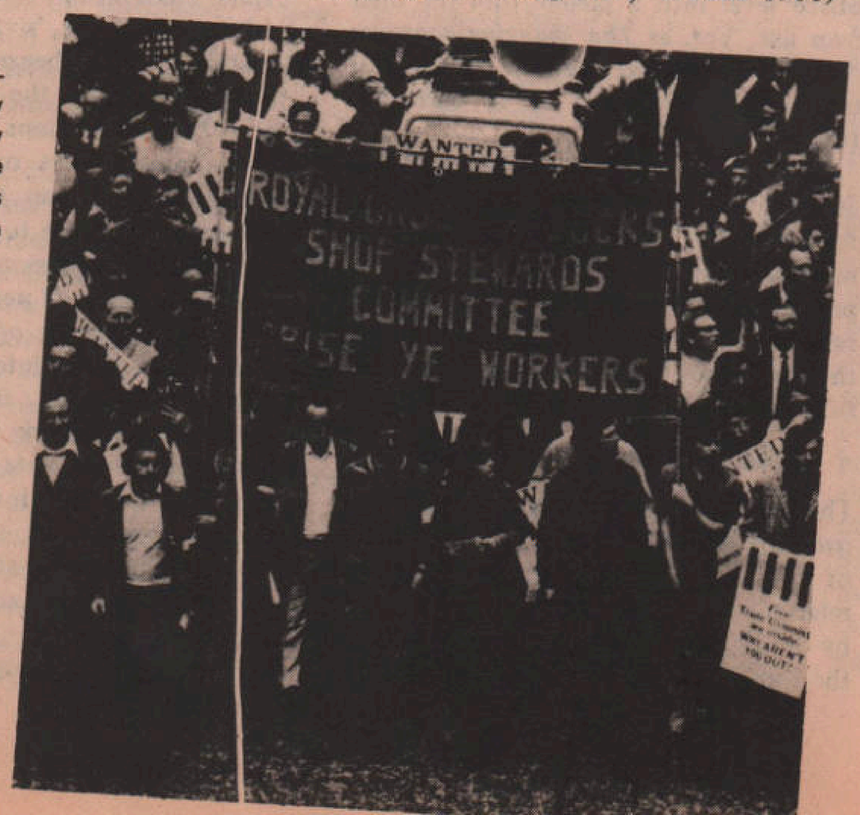
The authors' narrow, technical analysis means that they ignore the social forces that have come to mould industrial relations. What they forget is first, that it is the capitalist crisis and the requirements of the British ruling class that have dictated the pacification of the shop floor; and, second, that this process could not have been completed without the assistance of the labour bureaucracy. Under slogans like 'extend collective bargaining' and 'workers' participation', union leaders, particularly those on the left, made consultation with management appear legitimate. The 1974 Labour Government's Employment Bill provided the legal and ideological context for this, the TUC did its best to educate stewards about the 'realities' of the recession and *Tribune* MPs stomped the country telling workers that the time was ripe to join with management in planning a way out of their difficulties.

As far as the bourgeoisie was concerned these 'enlightened' tactics were a hundred times more useful than naked coercion. They made it relatively simple to get the shop floor to acquiesce to rationalisation measures and job losses. At British Leyland and British Shipbuilding shop stewards led the way in forcing through productivity deals and 'voluntary' redundancies. As Sammy Barr, chairman of the National Shipbuilding Shop Stewards Combine, puts it proudly:

'British shipbuilding workers are 100 per cent committed to the public ownership of their industry and are prepared to sacrifice all to protect it...

'They have accepted changes in working practices and procedures which no other industry in Britain has reached. The industrial relations are excellent between union and management.

'The workforce over the last three years has very reluctantly accepted low wage settlements and all this has been accepted to allow the industry to survive in this competitive capitalist world of ship building.' (*Morning Star*, 5 June 1981)



In 1972 militant shop-stewards played a key role in defeating Tory anti-union laws. The Warwick study shows how they have been tamed.

BL boots out shop stewards
Edwardes against the stream?

In early June management at British Leyland announced that it was getting rid of full- time shop stewards and convenors. Leading convenors could still have their office and telephone but henceforth they would have to return to the shopfloor and do the jobs for which they were employed.

This attack on full-time shop stewards appears to contradict the general trend revealed in the Warwick study, reviewed above. But BL is merely taking its assault on shopfloor organisation a step further.

The victimisation of Longbridge convenor Derek Robinson in 1979 followed by the firing of militant stewards at the plant in late 1980 went through with little opposition. Now the survival of BL requires further attacks on the workforce. Crushing an already weakened shop steward organisation is a prelude to the introduction of even harsher rationalisation measures.

BL management has not rejected co-operation with the unions. BL boss Michael Edwardes wants collaboration, but with a much weakened partner. Nor is this type of hard management likely to spread to other sectors. As the anti-working class *Daily Mail* noted: 'However, Sir Michael's latest tactic for a stricter domestic regime is unlikely to be taken up by other employers in a similar position, as unions and representatives have become built in to the way a factory runs, and indeed some firms claim benefits.' (6 June 1981)

It is craven statements like these that have made British industrial relations change so much over the past decade. Brown & Co may turn a blind eye to them, but we cannot.

Push comes to shove

The survey is not only empiricist in method, it is also a couple of years out of date. Since May 1979 the capitalists have increased their attacks on the working class. They still believe that industrial relations procedures have their merits, but also understand how the threat of mass redundancies can be used to keep the lid on working class unrest. Today the employers are tending to dispense with the forums of the 'seventies and pursue outright confrontation rather than consultation .

A significant section of the ruling class is, however, aware of the dangers contained in this line of attack. That is why important industrial relations experts such as ACAS chief Pat Lowry have warned employers not to overplay their hand. At the moment, a well-integrated, house-trained shop floor organisation is still the best guarantee for enforcing the exploitation of the working class. At the moment – not, as the authors imply, for ever.

Rebuild our movement!

Many British socialists delight in the fact that the working class is well organised. Now of course organisation, union membership and so on are very important. But there is always the possibility that the creations of the working class come to uphold the status quo, not combat it. The closed shop, for example, is an essential means of strengthening working class solidarity. But, run by bureaucrats, it can become a real scourge. The labour bureaucracy can use it to victimise militants and to control unofficial action.

The problem facing the working class is not simply that of strong or weak organisations before the interests of the working class. Shop floor organisation, the product of hard and bitter struggles in the past, could well imprison the same class that constructed it in the first place.

Active workers must struggle to recapture shop floor organisation from the bosses. Check-off arrangements may be convenient, but they give management influence over union affairs and they reduce the collection of dues to a routine. Collecting dues should be the responsibility of stewards. That way they will keep in touch with the rank and file and be able to gauge the feelings of the rank and file.

Stewards have to be made accountable for their actions. At present stewards' committees often fail to divulge vital information and frequently carry out negotiations behind the scenes. This has to be changed. The role of stewards is to prosecute the interests of the shop floor. This simple point must be made again and again. By the same token, stewards must be requested – told, if necessary – to leave joint consultative committees. Their job is to fight for us, not to mull over the problems of the employers.

All procedures must be approached pragmatically. Those that force management to get the agreement of the workforce to say, the introduction of new machinery may be permissible. But those which outline how workers are to be disciplined must be overturned. In general workers can have no faith in procedure. The class struggle, not pieces of paper, is what will defend our interests. *The changing contours of British industrial relations* shows that we cannot afford to be sentimental about the constitutions of the past. The time has come to build shop floor organisations anew.

Frank Richards

Behind the closed shop controversy

Our review of the Warwick survey on work organisation shows what high regard the bosses have for the closed shop. So how do we explain the recent threats made by ministers and industrialists to abolish it?

The answer is simple. The discussion the bourgeoisie launched on trade union immunities earlier this year is not about the closed shop. A few Tory backwoodsmen might rant about 'the freedom of the individual', but the dominant sections of the ruling class have other views. As The Times recently commented: 'Undemocratic as it is, the closed shop sometimes makes for stability in practice' (22 June 1981).

The story so far

The aim of the consultative discussion initiated by Employment Secretary Jim Prior in his recent Green Paper on trade union immunities is to assess how far the capitalist class can go in attacking the labour movement.

Prior's 1980 Employment Act heralded a new offensive against rank and file militancy. At the time it was passed many observers saw it as a move to overturn the closed shop. But although it made forming new closed shops a bit more difficult (they now require the assent of 80 per cent of every workforce), its aim was different.

The capitalists' principal fear was unofficial action and picketing. Once in office, the Thatcher Government had to make sure that the kind of large-scale, effective strikes that had led to the fall of the Heath regime in 1973 didn't happen again. Soon Prior revealed that his major worry was 'secondary picketing' – and the CBI and the Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) told him that his intuitions were correct. *The Economist* remarked that he was 'right to concentrate first on a political priority, secondary picketing' (13 October 1979). In the event, the legal restrictions on picketing Prior established through his 'Code of conduct' became the most important feature of his Act.

The TUC's opposition to Prior was wholly rhetorical. This was not surprising, for what Prior made law was strikingly similar to the Concordat the TUC had drawn up with the Labour Government in its final months of office. Then, the volatility of rank and file workers and in particular the effective tactics pursued during the lorry drivers' strike convinced the Labour Government of the need to crack down on picketing. The Concordat attacked 'secondary picketing' and, in proscribing strikes in essential public services, in fact went further than Prior did.

Prior's Act helped create a framework for limiting the effectiveness of union action. Once it was passed the police and the courts were able to intervene in industrial disputes more than ever before. They could restrict the number of pickets on picket lines to six and serve injunctions against those involved in flying pickets.

Now, having tested its ground, the ruling class wants to go a step further. All the different pieces of 'advice' the various employers' organisations have given Prior have one theme in common: the need to curb unofficial action.

Who they're after

Despite their anti-union propaganda, the bosses rely on the TUC to help them out in the class struggle – which is why their denunciation of 'union power' is always carefully worded. Thus Tory leader of the House of Commons Francis Pym, qualified a recent polemic against the unions with the warning that 'if we go too fast, or too far, or too quickly, we run the risk of confrontation and hostility' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 15 June 1981). And, at about the same time, the EEF observed that while the unions' existing immunities were 'too extensive', suspending those immunities was 'not the most urgent or the most effective action needed to bring greater stability into British industrial relations' (*EEF News*, special edition, June 1981).

Of course, the capitalists can't altogether ignore the anti-union and anti-closed shop diatribes that the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* pour out each week. All the employers have paid lip-service to providing greater financial compensation to innocent 'victims' of the closed shop like chicken-plucker Joanna Harris. But this is merely a token measure. It is useful ideologically, for it highlights the 'undemocratic' nature of the unions; but it has little practical impact on the closed shop.

The direction the ruling class is taking is clear. It wants to stamp out rank and file action and it wants the legal back-up to do this. It wants to get shop floor militants, not union bureaucrats. Thus, *The Economist* argues for 'making individuals rather than the union liable for a realistic, not over-ambitious, restriction of immunities' (27 June 1981).

What they want

There are minor differences of emphasis within the ruling class. The Institute of Personal Management and the EEF want relatively trivial changes made to the law, while the Institute of Directors wants an all-out assault. The consultative document submitted to Prior by the CBI can be seen as the most representative indication of the standpoint of the bourgeoisie. It proposes a seven-point programme:

1 Procedure agreements
strikers to lose their immunity from claims for damages if they walk out before agreed procedures are exhausted

2 Legal liability
unions to be made liable for the actions of their members who act unlawfully

3 Secondary action
the legality of secondary action to be made conditional on a secret ballot of the workers involved; a period of notice to be given to the targets of secondary action

4 Secondary picketing
picket rotas as a device to counter the serving of injunctions on named individuals to be disallowed; to get redress against the act of picketing

5 Political strikes
the definition of a trade dispute to be narrowed to give courts more scope in declaring strikes 'political' rather than 'industrial'

6 Secret ballots
government-financed secret ballots to be held before the calling of industrial action

7 Closed shop
union-only clauses in tenders for contracts to be illegal; more compensation to be given to victims of the closed shop; pre-entry closed shops to be banned.

This is more than the employers can realistically expect to get, but less than certain employers would like. For example the EEF is particularly interested in being empowered to use industrial action at one plant as an excuse to lay off workers at another.

It's not yet clear exactly what legislative changes will take place; but the thrust of Prior's measures will be to contain unofficial action. The status of 'trade disputes' will be narrowed so as to outlaw political and sympathy strikes. Injunctions against pickets will be used more widely. Anything else (more compensation for opponents of the closed shop, the elimination of union-only clauses in tenders of contracts) will be peripheral.

How the TUC is helping them

The TUC has made a few perfunctory speeches against Prior's Green Paper, but that's about all. While they regard legal liability for the actions of their members and tenders for contracts as threats to their basic position, the labour bureaucrats understand that these are not Prior's primary goals. The bosses' main concern is with unofficial action, and the TUC shares this. Although it would prefer to see picketing and sympathy action controlled by 'voluntary' (that is, TUC) methods, it will do nothing to oppose legal embargoes on these forms of militancy.

If Prior's initiatives against unofficial activity are successful the way will be prepared for more extensive action against the official trade union movement. At a later stage in the recession the calls for limiting the legal rights of unions will be irresistible. But the labour bureaucracy can't look that far ahead. Because it believes it can only survive if it keeps rank and file members in check, the TUC will spend all its time trying to prove its worth to the ruling class.

What about the Labour Party? It has promised to scrap the Tories' employment legislation when it gets in power. If it does, well and good. But if the Concordat is anything to go by, any future Labour Government will not let up in the ruling class campaign against unofficial action.

The best way to fight Prior's law is to make it unworkable. At the end of the day the balance of class forces, not any piece of legislation, will have the final say.

Pat Roberts

Union joins employers against foreigners
A ROTTEN ALLIANCE

The transport workers union has a reputation for being a left wing union. But the term 'left wing' these days does not mean 'prepared to fight for working class interests'. It means 'militant advocacy of class collaboration'.

The TGWU leaders' favourite demand is for import controls. The bureaucrats want to unite with the bosses to defend British industry and British jobs at the expense of foreign workers. They have greeted new converts to this cause – the employers organised in the Confederation of British Industry. The union extended 'a welcome from the TGWU to the CBI for their late conversion, and a reminder: a joint union/employer approach on import controls would be the best way to get such policies into action' (*The Record*, June 1981).

Collaboration between union and bosses has a long history. But it has never worked in the interest of workers. It represents a denial in practice of the basic conflict of interests between workers and employers. In this case it fuels the fire of British nationalism – foreign and British workers are thrown against each other and the bosses laugh all the way to the bank.

Victimisation at Lucas

The penalty of collaboration

In May, Mike Cooley, a senior AUEW-TASS representative in Lucas Industries, got the sack. Author of the famous Lucas Alternative Plan and chairman of the Lucas Aerospace combine shop stewards' committee, Cooley is one of the heroes of the British left. He has been nominated for the Nobel prize and his ideas about 'socially useful' products have been held up as an inspiration for all.

We support the fight against Cooley's victimisation – but we disagree with his projects. Cooley's dismissal is not an isolated incident; it is only the latest manoeuvre in Lucas Industries' war against its employees. And the Lucas Alternative Plan and the Lucas combine shop stewards' committee have paved the way for it.

THROUGH a series of takeovers in the late 'sixties, Lucas Aerospace, a section of the Joseph Lucas Industries group, became the dominant producer of aircraft components in Britain. However, it still wasn't able to compete successfully with its rivals. In most years up to 1978 it made losses.

To restore profitability Lucas Aerospace needed to rationalise production at home and set up more lucrative manufacturing outlets abroad. This was, indeed, what the whole of Lucas Industries needed to do. In 1974 management stated: 'Lucas remains determined to concentrate all its major capital investment projects overseas . . . and leave Britain more or less on a care and maintenance basis' (*Investors Chronicle*, 29 March 1974). Accordingly, plants were closed, thousands made redundant and those left in employment forced to endure speed-up and the effects of new technology.

Origins of the Alternative Plan

The workers had no choice but to organise against all this. By 1972, therefore, they established a Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee covering all 13 plants in the division. But unfortunately the LACSSC proved unable to prevent management from having its way. Between 1970 and 1976 the workforce was reduced from 18 000 to 13 000.

The return of a Labour Government in 1974 gave the workers new hope. Initially the LACSSC sought the nationalisation of their company; when it became clear that the aircraft components industry was not to be included in British Aerospace, a different approach was adopted – the Alternative Plan.

The idea behind the Plan arose at a meeting the LACSSC held with Tony Benn, then Minister for Industry, in November 1974. Benn argued that cutbacks in the aerospace sector were inevitable and that, to avoid them, the workers should make Lucas Aerospace switch to manufacturing something different. The LACSSC took his advice. While management prepared the ground for more closures, the stewards spent their energies working out alternative products for Lucas Aerospace to consider.

The Plan was presented to management in January 1976. It contained about 150 proposals for making non-aerospace, non-military goods ranging from kidney machines, through pollution-free transport to cheap heating systems. These, it was said 'should be introduced in a phased manner such that the tendency of the industry to contract would first be halted and then gradually reversed as Lucas Aerospace diversified' (Institute of Workers Control, *Lucas: an alternative plan*, p3). At stake was a 'mix' of products, some 'profitable by the present criteria of the market economy', others not necessarily profitable but 'highly socially useful' (Mike Cooley, 'The right to *useful* work', *Workers Control*, 1978, p3).

Management gave the Plan short shrift. In reply to the LACSSC in May 1976, it stated: 'whilst never spurning any viable opportunity appropriate to its technology . . . [Lucas] intends to remain primarily in the aerospace sector, both civil and military; in defence products; and as opportunity permits, to further its involvement in the nuclear field.' It stressed that it was only interested in profitable products and it derided those that were merely 'socially useful'. As far as it was concerned this phrase could be justifiably applied to its existing operations: 'civil aircraft are needed for business and pleasure activities and it is necessary to maintain military aircraft for defence'.

The shop stewards were indignant at this rebuff. They bemoaned the obstinacy of management and accused government and trade union leaders of giving the Plan 'every encouragement short of actual help' (Cooley, quoted in *Morning Star*, 20 November 1978). Meanwhile management continued to draw up blueprints for rationalisation.

Management takes the initiative

In March 1978 management announced its intention to shut down more plants within two years, so putting 2000 workers on the dole. In the event, however, only 100 direct redundancies took place. Today supporters of the Plan believe that it is what has done the trick. They regard it as responsible for 'saving hundreds of jobs at a time when management and government elsewhere had faced little sustained resistance' (Coventry, Liverpool, Newcastle Trades Councils, *State intervention in industry: a workers' inquiry*, Russell Press, 1980, p140).

This is far from the truth. The reason management did not proceed with the closures was because its previous rationalisation measures had proved effective: thousands of jobs had been eliminated. In addition Lucas was able to benefit from the general upturn in the world aerospace industry that took place in the late 'seventies. Lucas workers gained a breathing-space thanks to the imperialists' rearmament drive, not the Plan.

By late 1978 Lucas Aerospace profits were on the increase for the first time in years. Since then its fortunes have continued to improve. As the *Financial Times* put it recently:

> 'Lucas Aerospace is that rarity among British engineering companies at present: a success. While its parent, Lucas Industries, earlier this year reported a pre-tax loss of £27.5m in the first half of its current financial year, Lucas Aerospace was able to report profits of about £7m. (14 May 1981)

So what role has the Plan played over the past three years? Its advocates are right to suggest that management has paid more attention to it than it did in 1976. But management's motives for doing this deserve inspection.

By 1978 the Lucas bosses had witnessed more than three years of the Labour Government's Social Contract. In those three years they had begun to see the advantages of keeping shop stewards busy with corporate plans. At Chrysler, British Leyland and other engineering concerns, workers' 'participation' in the development of company strategy had, with government encouragement, paid dividends in terms of thousands of redundancies. The time was right for a similar 'experiment' at Lucas. Management was 'interested' in the Plan all right – as a means of integrating the shop stewards into its programme for slimming down the workforce.

Turning decline into sacrifice

In July 1978 management agreed to the formation of official union working parties to assess the feasibility of alternative products. LACSSC vice-chairman Brian Salisbury presented this as a step forward: 'It means that the trade unions will be able to put their side of the case. We can make our contribution' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 7 July 1978). But the LACSSC's 'contribution' turned out to the benefit of the company, not the workers.

The official union working parties produced *Turning industrial decline into expansion*, a 400-page report on their findings, in February 1979. It put forward proposals for alternative, job creating products for the 2000 workers threatened with redundancy and attacked civil servants at the Department of Industry for collaborating with management in previous attempts at rationalisation. The thrust of the document, however, showed that shop floor representatives at Lucas had come to see the company's problems as their own. Instead of outlining tactics to combat redundancies, it criticised Lucas managers for being unpatriotic in exporting capital abroad. It concluded: 'the continuation of present management policy is not in the interests of the workforce, shareholders or indeed the national interest' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 12 February 1979).

Unlike Cooley and his co-thinkers, Lucas managers were very clear that their policy *was* in the interests of shareholders – and in the 'national' interest too. One week after the union working parties presented their report, the bosses got the shop stewards to agree in writing that while *compulsory* redundancies were not on, *voluntary* ones were.

Management had shelved its scheduled closures. But all this meant was that, instead of tackling the workforce head-on, it used the LACSSC to do its business for it. It was here that the Plan had a big 'contribution' to make. It educated Lucas workers in the realities of capitalist economics. It led them to become preoccupied with the diversification of 'their' company: with what was profitable and what was not. It led them, in other words, to tie their interests to those of the bosses and drop the struggle against redundancies.

Since 1978 hundreds of jobs have been lost at Lucas through 'natural wastage'. But the political havoc wreaked by the Plan hasn't ended there. When last September, management offered Lucas workers a 'take it or leave it' wage rise of 10 per cent – well below the rate of inflation – the unions, by now fully appraised of the company's difficult financial and commercial position, took it. This year, too, it was the same story: the workforce accepted a five per cent pay deal.

Alternative to fighting for jobs

Supporters of the Plan claim that it has advantages over traditional, 'economic' methods of fighting redundancies, (strikes, occupations, etc): 'the fact that workers' industrial organisations had positive policies for the future of the industry and the markets they produced for, meant that these organisations took on a political role. They campaigned over issues which have traditionally been the exclusive concern of governments and employers' (*State intervention. . .*). But trade unions *always* play a 'political' role; the question is, *which class interests* do their politics represent? When trade unions campaign for 'positive policies for the future of the industry' they are campaigning for the reform of capitalist industry and the capitalist system. And in today's conditions the

which way forward?

(from previous page)

reform of industry demands the sacrifice of workers' interests.

The Plan was always reactionary. It made defending working class living standards conditional on maintaining the competitiveness of Lucas. It opposed de-skilling, it said, because 'the prosperity of Britain as a manufacturing nation depends to a very large extent upon the skill and ability of its people' (*Lucas. . .*, p5). And it disagreed with redundancies on the grounds that unemployment represented 'a tragic wastage of the nation's greatest asset' and could cost the state more in dole money than Lucas saved in wage bills .

Some of the projects the Plan proposed were not designed to be profitable – a feature which appealed to the British left. But, though the LACSSC was proud of its social conscience, it could not bring itself to reject capitalist profitability. Its 'mix' of profitable and unprofitable products was concocted so that, on balance, the company could at least break even.

But it was all to no avail. The aim of the capitalists is not to break even but to make as much profit as they can. Capital that does not expand collapses, which is why, though they found the Plan politically useful, Lucas bosses felt that it was a joke as far as avoiding bankruptcy was concerned.

The authors of the Plan were in a dream world. They even suggested that 'frequently whether a product is profitable or not is purely a question of Government policy' (LACSSC, *The Corporate Plan – a positive alternative to recession and redundancies*, June 1978). But laughable though statements like this may have appeared, they had a purpose. They implied that British capitalism did not have to be anarchic – that somehow the conscious intervention of a Labour Government could have salvaged both profits and jobs.

Something for everybody – except the workers

Everybody saw something in the Plan. The small but influential Institute for Workers' Control liked it because it avoided one of every trade unionist's 'biggest headaches' – the struggle against redundancies. The old techniques were outmoded: 'If you "refuse to negotiate", and back this with a show of strength, you *may* win; but as often as not management gets its way' (*Workers Control Bulletin*, May/June 1976). Labour left-winger and Department of Industry star Les Huckfield welcomed the Plan because workers were 'getting together to put forward positive proposals for the future of their company'. (*New Statesman*, 3 February 1978) instead of taking on the Government over threatened closures.

The *Financial Times* commented that the Plan showed 'that not every redundancy battle is either a machine-breaking fight to the death or a bargaining strategy to increase severance pay-offs' (23 March 1978). The TGWU, AUEW, CSEU and 1978 Labour Party Conference all endorsed the Plan. The radical left? It applauded the Plan too – with a few qualifications about the problems of getting it implemented. It too appreciated that the Plan would make for 'stable industrial relations' at Lucas.

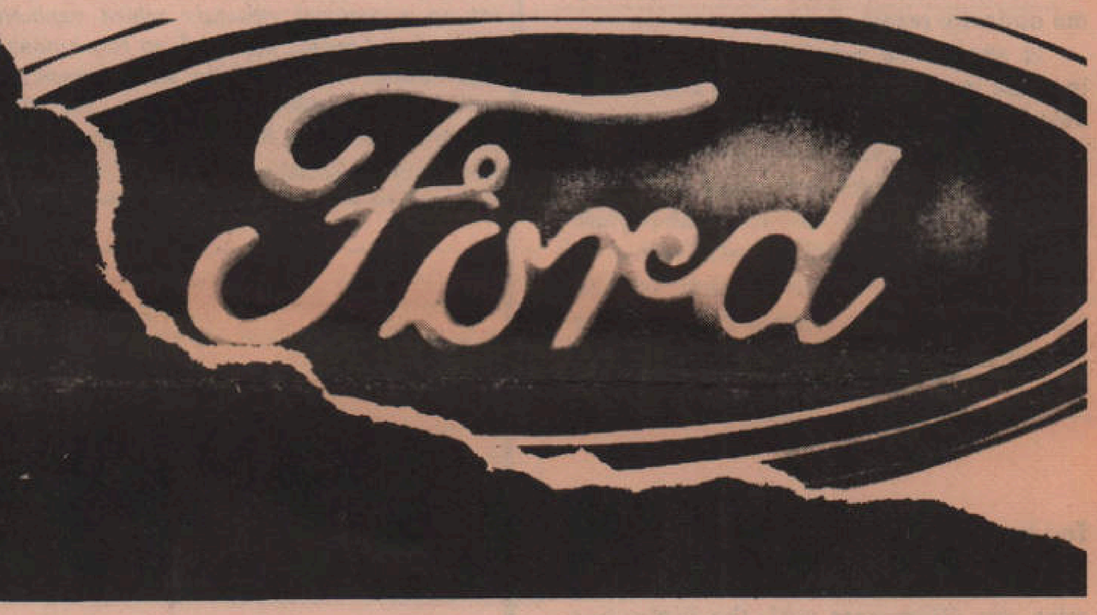
The Plan has meant that workers put aside 'mindless defence of their jobs' (*New Statesman*, 8 September 1978) in favour of a more 'constructive' approach. As far as management is concerned it has had the desired effect. The workforce at Lucas Aerospace has no independent outlook on the question of redundancies and has staked its future on the viability of the firm, despite the fact that, in the present recession, this requires ever more extensive attacks on jobs. Sadly, the most tangible result of the Plan to date is not 150 socially useful products, but the victimisation of its chief author, Mike Cooley. For the bosses his Plan is now 'redundant'. Aware that it has helped keep the workers cowed in the past, they can dispense with it and fight with gloves off.

Planning a better society and developing new kinds of products will be very creative actvities under socialism. But calls for alternative plans and products today only reconcile workers to their oppression. Planning under capitalism only means more subtle domination of the working class.

Phil Murphy

With trade unions like Ford's

WHO NEEDS ANTI-UNION LAWS?



Following three weeks of industrial action at its Halewood plant in May, Ford agreed to withdraw the harsh disciplinary code against unofficial stoppages it had introduced in November 1980. At first sight the concession was suprising, for the strike was far from effective – picket lines were crossed by AUEW members and other Ford plants round the country gave Halewood no support. As Halewood shop steward Jimmy Atkinson put it, 'the whole thing was far too easy'. Mary Masters examines how the union bureaucrats have made Ford's disciplinary code unnecessary.

THIS IS WHAT really happened at Ford. Beween November and May management had got the union bureaucracy to do its dirty work. Union policing of the shop floor was a better bet than management policing, so the code was dropped at the first opportune moment. Such subtlety of approach is typical of Ford. When the Government opened up discussion on anti-union legislation, Ford managers spoke out in defence of the closed shop. Ford's industrial relations philosophy is straightforward: it's all in favour of 'strong unions' – unions prepared to limit the effectiveness of shop floor action.

Company unions

Over the past decade the union leadership at Ford has become a pliant tool of management. Early last year union officials on the National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC) began discussions with the bosses about the more efficient use of machinery and labour. Soon enough they were persuaded of the company's point of view and became strong advocates of wage restraint and increased productivity.

While the Ford management had little difficulty winning the hearts and minds of the bureaucracy, enforcing speed-ups and new work practices on the shop floor was not so easy. This was especially the case at Halewood, where management demanded that workers use the newly installed equipment to maximum output levels. Despite regular verbal and written exhortations from the union officials, stoppages became a regular occurrence.

This was why management brought in the new disciplinary code. It's main provision was a tough one: whole shifts would have their pay docked every time one or two workers refused to meet the new workloads.

The code was launched with a big fanfare of publicity, the content of which was significant. While heaping endless abuse on the rank and file at Halewood, Ford credited the senior stewards and officials with good intentions. It did, however, complain that the bureaucrats had lost control of the situation. In other words, it signalled that they had to prove that their deeds were as good as their words.

The union whip

In January, lorry drivers at Ford's Dagenham plant took strike action against the threat of redundancies. Like many other sections of the Ford workforce, they had seen their working conditions deteriorate enormously over the past five years. The January strike was a move to stop Ford from cutting their living standards further still. It was a move the bureaucrats took determined action to frustrate.

Quick off the mark, union negotiator Ron Todd enlisted the support of local officials and convenors to force the drivers to return to work. TGWU District Secretaray Mick Murphy visited the drivers' unofficial picket line regularly to inform them that negotiations would not commence until they lifted it. Inside the Press shop, where work continued, Communist Party convenor Danny Connors spent the entire dispute disseminating anti-strike propaganda. Finally Todd himself turned up and instructed the drivers to lift the picket.

On 9 February the drivers were forced back to work. Isolated and demoralised by the actions of their union leaders, they accepted a settlement that gave them nothing. Only one task remained for the union bureaucrats. They had to stop the men from supporting drivers at a nearby firm on Dagenham estate who, having taken sympathy action during the Ford strike, had found themselves victimised. Sure enough, the NJNC immediately issued a circular instructing Ford drivers to cross the picket lines their fellow workers had set up:

> 'There is NO dispute between the trade unions representing Ford workers and the Ford Motor Company.
>
> 'In line with our national policy regarding unofficial picketing of the Dagenham estate by any individual group, we re-affirm our decision that the national trade union side do not recognise the current picketing activities' (Statement by the trade union side of the Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee).

This was the *coup de grace*. Still reeling from their own defeat, Ford drivers were in no position to defend their fellow workers.

'Voluntary' discipline

Ford was impressed: the union leaders had shown their determination to stamp out unofficial action. Management's code of discipline was withdrawn in favour of an undertaking by the unions to enforce existing procedures. On 1 June the union side of the NJNC issued a statement calling on workers to demonstrate 'self-control'. It went on to warn:

> 'The trade unions' aims in negotiations on behalf of Ford workers are too often inhibited by our failure to honour the agreements that we sign on your behalf. We, therefore, require our members to reinforce our commitments to ensure that our agreements are observed. Unless we operate as a disciplined and united trade union force we can never direct our efforts against the major problems facing our future – new technology – predicted job losses – foreign penetration of our markets, all of these require our individual attention if we are to safeguard our future interests.'

Profits and 'procedure' came before workers' interests. The officials on the NJNC are nothing more than company cops. Ford managers don't need anti-union laws. But Ford workers do need to get their union organisation back. They must build shop floor organisations that directly reflect their interests, organisations that fight for workers instead of propping up the bosses.

Mary Masters

The Radical Left and the Labour Party

FULL CIRCLE

The Cliff group calls for an incomes policy. . .

Welcoming the TUC's rejection of Tory wage control proposals:
'We must follow it up with a sound wage and price policy.'
(*Socialist Review*, mid-March 1958)

'High wages ensure demand, plus efficient use of labour. Low wages produce exactly the opposite result.

'It should be possible for an annual increase in wages to be paid to everybody based upon the increase in the national income. Even given the present levels of investment that increase would be of the order of 3 per cent. But this will require rational planning and would result in some diminution in the power of the trade union leaders. Hence the apoplexy whenever this subject is mentioned.'
(*Socialist Review*, March 1958)

for tax reforms. . .

'We of the Left cannot reduce or minimise our differences with the Right; but we can fight in the same party for such radical proposals as Anthony Crosland's reforms for the educational system and proposals for really punishing redistributive taxation, which would lead towards income equality.'
(*Socialist Review*, April 1962)

and import controls

Campaigning for Wilson in 1964, the Cliff group called for 'socialist policies (to) remove many of the causes of the present crisis' – import controls, bans on capital export and selective nationalisation.
(*Young Guard*, October 1964)

Rearguard action

'The case for keeping out of the Labour Party' – title of the longest article ever published in *Socialist Review*, July 1981.

The Cliff Group

'Neither Moscow nor Washington, but International Socialism' – Tony Cliff's response to Korea and the Cold War defined the group's 'third camp' social democratic position. His 'state capitalist' theory of the Soviet Union marked him off from the Trotskyists; with his theory of the 'permanent arms economy' he parted company with Marxism.
(Socialist Review)

The Grant Group

Ted Grant entered Labour latest (1954) but went deepest. Grant cooperated with the Cliff group to produce **Young Guard** *in the Young Socialists between 1961 and 1963; he had no distinctive political or theoretical position.* **Militant** *began publication in 1964.*

Nottingham Group

Formed in 1962, the International Socialism group did not really get going until 1968 when it drifted out of the Labour Party to set up a national structure which explicitly rejected a Leninist approach to revolutionary organisation. CND and the anti-Vietnam war movement provided its activists, the 'shop stewards movement' its political target.
(International Socialism)

IS

The IMG was formed in the late '60s by individuals from various Trotskyist fragments in the Labour Party. Its hallmark was its adaptation to prevailing trends – national liberation struggles in the backward capitalist world, the Cuban revolution, Vietnam, the student revolt, feminism, etc.
(The Week)

Militant

IMG

After Healy's group had been expelled and Cliff's had drifted out of the YS, Grant's time had come. Militant gained control in 1970 and has retained it since. This blinkered sect has plodded along inside the Labour Party impervious to outside events; it now finds itself to the right of most of the Labour left.

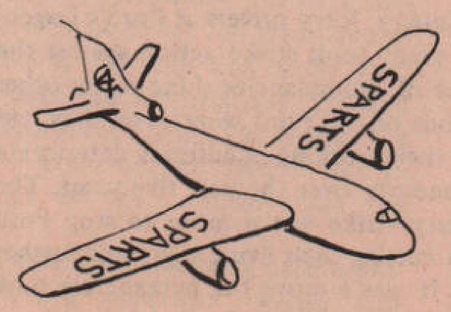
SWP

The radical left group that achieved the least penetration into the working class, it proved the most susceptible to the pressures of isolation and fragmentation in the late 70s. When its 'revolutionary regroupment' initiatives failed and the SWP rejected unity talks its members stampeded back to the Labour Party.
(Black Dwarf, Red Mole, Red Weekly, Socialist Challenge)

Militant

Socialist Challenge

In 1976 the IS became the SWP – but this could not prevent stagnation under the impact of Labour's Social Contract. While still organisationally outside the Labour Party, the SWP has thrown its weight behind Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership, especially building trade union support for the Labour Coordinating Committee pro-Benn conference.
(Socialist Worker)



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'Many of the left groups came into being and grew in strength because of the manifest failure of the non-socialist years of the Labour Party, from 1951. It was a judgement by a generation of socialists on the Parliamentary Labour Party during the years of Revisionism.

'I think it's significant now that there is a coming together.'
– TONY BENN (Interviewed in Socialist Challenge, 4 June 1981)

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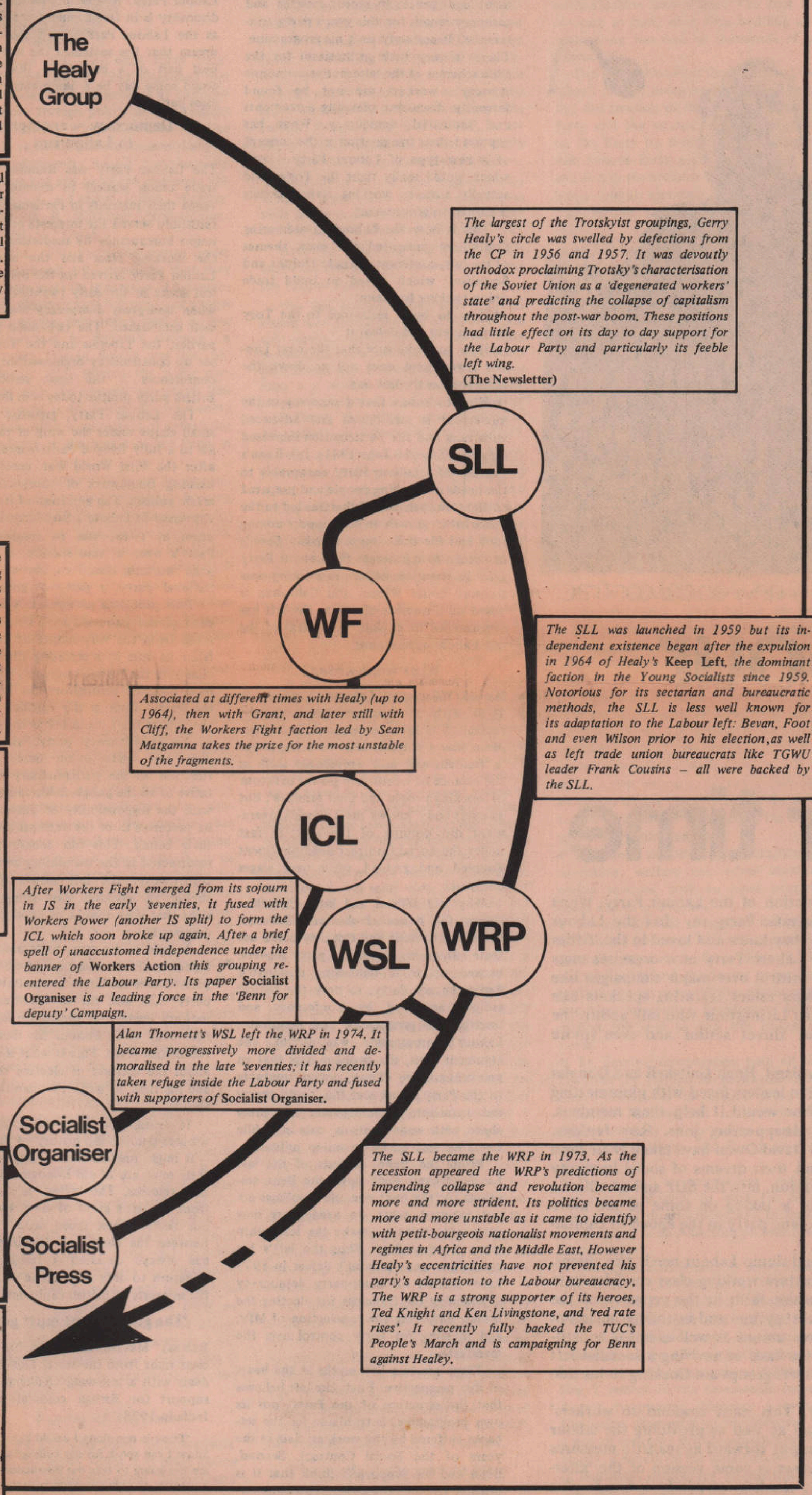


The largest of the Trotskyist groupings, Gerry Healy's circle was swelled by defections from the CP in 1956 and 1957. It was devoutly orthodox proclaiming Trotsky's characterisation of the Soviet Union as a 'degenerated workers' state' and predicting the collapse of capitalism throughout the post-war boom. These positions had little effect on its day to day support for the Labour Party and particularly its feeble left wing.
(The Newsletter)

The SLL was launched in 1959 but its independent existence began after the expulsion in 1964 of Healy's Keep Left, *the dominant faction in the Young Socialists since 1959. Notorious for its sectarian and bureaucratic methods, the SLL is less well known for its adaptation to the Labour left: Bevan, Foot and even Wilson prior to his election, as well as left trade union bureaucrats like TGWU leader Frank Cousins – all were backed by the SLL.*

Associated at different times with Healy (up to 1964), then with Grant, and later still with Cliff, the Workers Fight faction led by Sean Matgamna takes the prize for the most unstable of the fragments.

After Workers Fight emerged from its sojourn in IS in the early 'seventies, it fused with Workers Power (another IS split) to form the ICL which soon broke up again. After a brief spell of unaccustomed independence under the banner of Workers Action *this grouping re-entered the Labour Party. Its paper* Socialist Organiser *is a leading force in the 'Benn for deputy' Campaign.*

Alan Thornett's WSL left the WRP in 1974. It became progressively more divided and demoralised in the late 'seventies; it has recently taken refuge inside the Labour Party and fused with supporters of Socialist Organiser.

The SLL became the WRP in 1973. As the recession appeared the WRP's predictions of impending collapse and revolution became more and more strident. Its politics became more and more unstable as it came to identify with petit-bourgeois nationalist movements and regimes in Africa and the Middle East. However Healy's eccentricities have not prevented his party's adaptation to the Labour bureaucracy. The WRP is a strong supporter of its heroes, Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone, and 'red rate rises'. It recently fully backed the TUC's People's March and is campaigning for Benn against Healey.

Healy and the Labour Party

'The Labour Party ranks are looking toward individuals like Aneurin Bevan to provide that leadership. If the majority should so signify, as it now appears they do, we of the Labour Left are willing to back Mr Bevan's bid for directing the Labour Party forces. Only by enabling Mr Bevan, his programme and his ideas to pass through the test of experience in office, can the whole Labour movement appraise their value.'
(*Labour Review*, **May-August 1952**)

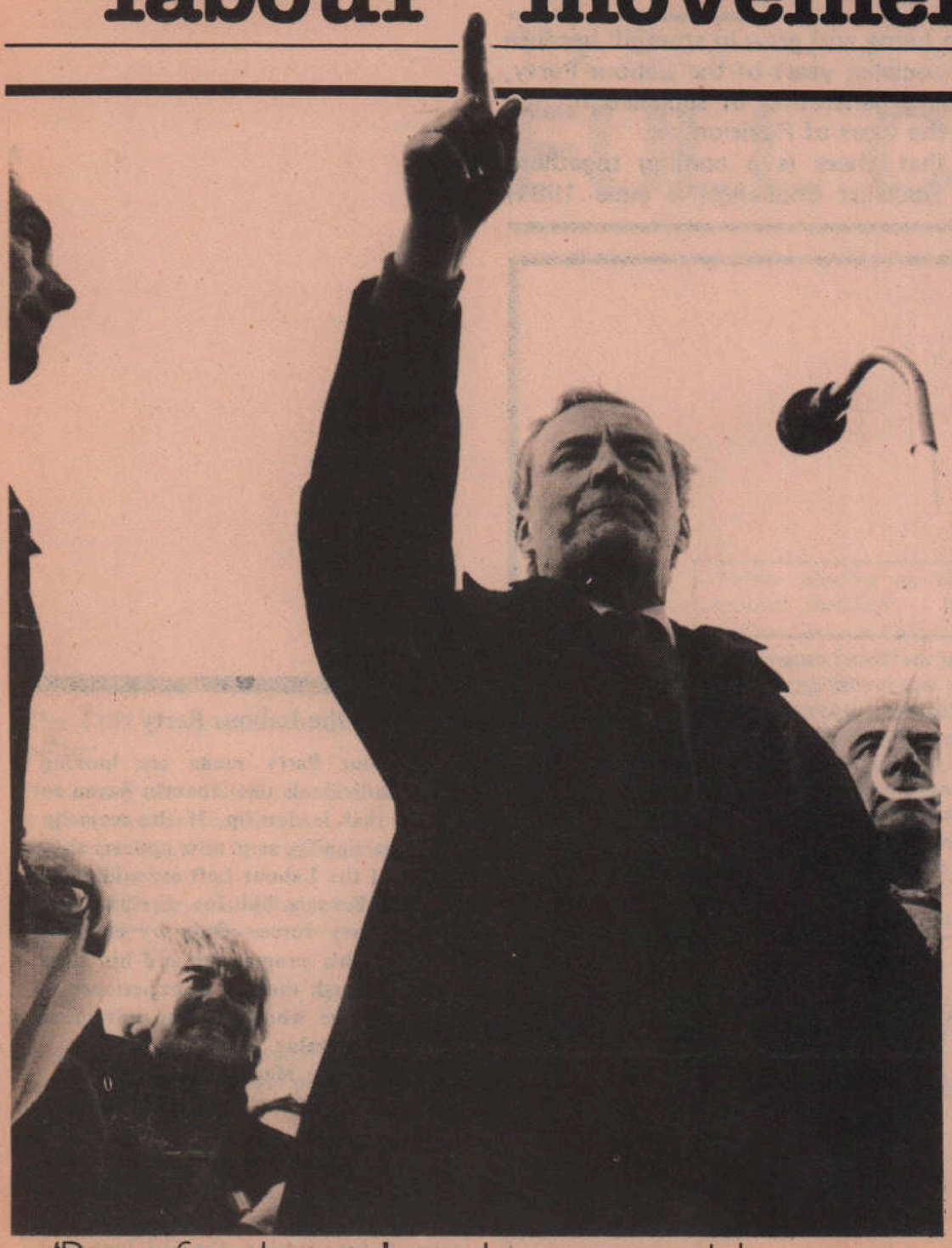
After its proscription, the SLL launched a campaign for affiliation to the Labour Party, so that the League could 'take its rightful place in the development of a socialist left wing.'
(*The Newsletter*, **30 April 1960**)

'Gaitskell and the right wing are the real wreckers of the Labour Party. They are the real disrupters.'
(*The Newsletter*, **18 June 1960**)

'We believe that the experience of another Labour government will form a vital part of the mass education of the working class. We are in favour of the election of such a government even under the leadership of Gaitskell.'
(*The Newsletter*, **12 May 1962**)

Not just yet

'A special recall Congress of the WRP in June "gave support to Benn in the election contest and denounced the witch-hunts against him, but insisted that the WRP would not liquidate itself into his camp like the revisionists have done.'
(*The News Line*, **6 June 1981**)



'Benn for deputy' - and a new social contract

A Labour Party for our time

The recession calls for the reconstruction of the Labour Party. When the leaders of the new Social Democratic Party say that the Labour Party of today is not the party that they knew and loved in the 'fifties and 'sixties, they have a point. The Labour Party now organises mass demonstrations and exerts political control over major campaigns like the People's March and CND. It stages rallies featuring speakers like Denis Skinner, Arthur Scargill and Ken Livingstone who talk about 'the working class' and 'socialism', about 'direct action' and even (more tentatively) about Ireland.

The Labour Party of Anthony Crosland, Hugh Gaitskell and Douglas Jay would be of no use to trade union leaders faced with plummetting membership and influence today. Nor would it help their members, faced with falling real wages and disappearing jobs. Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams, William Rogers and David Owen have taken their fond memories of the post-war boom, and their dreams of social harmony and progress based on capitalist expansion, into the SDP and an alliance with the Liberals. Meanwhile Labour is taking on some of the more traditional features of a social democratic party in the epoch of capitalist decline.

To make it as a party of the second slump Labour needs two things.

It needs a militant left wing to restore working class confidence in Labour. To work the left must inspire faith in the capacity of the Labour Party to transcend the capitalist system and introduce socialism and it has to be organised in the trade unions as well as in the constituencies. Tony Benn has set about the task of reviving a socialist left wing in the Labour Party; the radical left groups are flocking to his side to help him.

It needs a counter-crisis strategy. This must respond to workers' aspirations for decent jobs and wages as well as providing the labour bureaucracy with the policies it can put forward as realistic measures to revive British capitalism. The answer is some version of the 'alternative economic strategy' peddled by the left for nearly a decade plus the agreement on incomes policy currently being patched up on the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee.

Mike Freeman looks at the Benn bandwagon.

Benn – 'you've got a friend in me'

WHAT IS BEHIND Benn's appeal that has galvanised a hundred seaside Labour movement conferences in recent months and gathers strength for this year's party conference? It certainly isn't his programme. There is very little enthusiasm for the stale schemas of the 'alternative economic strategy'; workers are not be found fervently discussing planning agreements and industrial democracy. What has captured their imagination is the concept of a new type of Labour Party – one which would really fight the Tories and actually advance working class interests if elected to government.

This is how the Labour Coordinating Committee presented the main themes of its July conference 'Trade Unions and Socialism' which aimed to build trade union backing for Benn:

- How to build resistance to the Tory Government and defeat it
- How to make sure that the next Labour government does not go down the same road as the last one
- How to ensure that democracy in the movement is maintained and advanced with rank and file participation increased (*Morning Star*, 10 June 1981). It is Benn's promise of a Labour Party answerable to the needs of working people and prepared to fight on their behalf that has led to the remarkable growth in his support among rank and file trade union activists. Benn's campaign to regenerate the Labour Party after its dramatic decline in working class support under Wilson and Callaghan is based on a number of myths the left has constructed to explain the defeat of the last Labour government.

What went wrong?

Harold Wilson led Labour to power in 1974 with a manifesto based on the radical 1973 Party programme. Its centrepiece was a commitment to bring about 'a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families'. But as everybody knows the Labour Government did nothing of the sort; in fact under the Social Contract unemployment doubled and trebled while real wages declined.

Why did Wilson and later Callaghan betray the hopes of the left? Because, according to Benn and Co, they could use their autocratic powers as party leaders, backed up by a right-wing dominated Parliamentary Party, to defy the radical policies approved by Conference and inscribed in programme and manifesto. Labour's programme was alright, the argument runs, the problem was that an unrepresentative clique, not accountable to the Party's rank and file, could throw out manifesto commitments and press ahead with wage controls, cuts in public spending and curbs on union militancy.

From the Benn analysis of the last Labour Government flow the Benn solutions for the next one. New policies are not required, what are needed are new party structures to make the leadership more 'accountable'. Thus the left's big campaigns since Labour's defeat in 1979 have centred on inner-party democracy – widening the franchise for electing the leader, enforcing the re-selection of MPs, and pressing for Party control over the manifesto.

There are two key myths at the heart of this perspective. First, the left believes that the structure of the Party, not its own programme, is to blame for the setbacks suffered by the working class in the years of the Social Contract. Second, Benn and his supporters think that it is possible to make the Labour Party answerable to the needs of the working class.

Benn was shocked to discover in 1975 and 1976 that the Party leadership could frustrate his radical intentions and pursue ruthless anti-working class politics. But what came as a surprise to today's left-wingers has been the experience of generations of their radical forebears in the Labour Party. What is presented as a new discovery is in fact a phenomenon as old as the Labour Party. Let's look at the dream that has sustained the left for the best part of a century – that Labour could some day be a democratic working class party.

Democracy – anathema to Labourism

The Labour Party was founded by the trade union leaders to defend and advance their interests in Parliament. It has faithfully served the interests of the trade union bureaucracy by mediating between the working class and the state. The Labour Party arrived on the British political scene in the early twentieth century when bourgeois democracy was already well established. The two main political parties, the Liberals and the Tories had set up constituency organisations, annual conferences – the basic structure of British party politics today – in the 1890s.

The Labour Party, growing from a small clique under the wing of the Liberals to a fully fledged Parliamentary Party after the First World War, accepted the existing framework of bourgeois democratic politics. The ambition of its leaders, expressed in Labour's first formal constitution in 1918, was to transcend the Party's base in one section of society – the working class – to become a truly national party, a party of government.

Two problems emerged in the earliest days of the Labour Party. Because they arose from the very nature of the Party, from its role in integrating the working class into the British bourgeois state, they have recurred throughout the history of the Party. First is the conflict between the role of the Labour MP as the emissary of his constituency party, his working class and trade union base, and his function as the parliamentary representative of all the people in his constituency, with the responsibility of pursuing what he perceives to be the national interest on their behalf. This old debate has been resurrected in the mandatory re-selection controversy: the left insists that MPs should be working class delegates, the right that they should be good bourgeois democrats.

Second is the same basic conflict at a higher level: the question of whether the party leader should be accountable to the party rank and file or whether, as the nation's leader (or alternative leader) his first duty is to honour the demands of the British state. This is what the dispute about the method of electing the leader and his right to write the manifesto is all about.

It would be good if Labour left-wingers studied the history of their Party – it might prevent them trying to present their re-makes of old B-movies as exciting new releases. The history is a grim one from the left's point of view. Every Labour leader when faced with a conflict between his Party and the British state has always declared a resolute determination to defy conference decisions in the interests of British capitalism.

'The government must govern'

Ramsay MacDonald made his position clear right from the start. This is how he dealt with a left-wing challenge over his support for British colonial policy in India in 1928:

> 'There is one thing I would like to say and I know I can speak for my colleagues also – we are not going to take our instructions from any outside body unless we agree with them' (quoted in Lewis Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference*, 1978, p14).

Every Labour leader has followed the

which way forward?

MacDonald line. Left-wing Party chairman Harold Laski in 1945 demanded that party leader Clem Attlee stick by Labour's distinctive foreign policy in negotiations with Churchill. When the Tories tried to use this as an election ploy against Labour, Attlee vehemently denied that the party executive had any power to challenge 'the conduct of a Labour Prime Minister' (quoted in R Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, 1972, p284).

At the 1960 party conference leader Hugh Gaitskell told delegates that they could pass motions in support of unilateral nuclear disarmament but need not expect him to pursue this policy, which he saw as prejudicial to Britain's defence, in Parliament. Harold Wilson was the Labour leader who treated the party conference with the greatest contempt: 'the Government must govern' he commented haughtily after a succession of defeats for his policies at the hands of the Party in 1966.

The leadership's claim to be in command of a party of government depends on its willingness to serve bourgeois interests and its capacity to control the party machine. The former has never been in question – the labour leaders have been long known for their spineless moderation, their creeping gradualism and their cringing subservience to bourgeois society. The right's control over the machine however has been a constant issue of bitter conflict, because although the right rules, the left provides the grass roots of the Party – in the rank and file of the unions and in the constituencies. But the very existence of the Labour Party as an effective instrument of the labour bureaucracy depends on the leadership containing the left and preventing the Party becoming committed to anti-capitalist policies. So the machine has been built to prevent this from happening.

Party conference, for example, is an exercise in bureaucratic manipulation. Its function is not to give democratic expression to the rank and file – that could have disastrous consequences for the leadership. No, conference is about carefully channelling and containing, about reconciling the aspirations of the working class with the interests of the labour bureaucracy. And the relationship between the conference and the Parliamentary Labour Party, between the membership and the leadership is structured to reduce the influence of whatever left-wing movements that manage to make headway among the rank and file.

The denial of democracy in the Labour Party is not a peculiarity or a product of particular leaders' attitudes: it is an essential feature without which no social democratic party could survive. At the end of the day the Labour Party's allegiance to the state can never be open to democratic debate. If the rank and file could use the procedures and discussion forums of the Party to vote to break its loyalty to the state, it would cease to serve any useful function for the labour bureaucracy. The Labour Party *as it has always been* would cease to exist. This is why democracy is anathema to the Labour Party.

Labour of Sisyphus

When the left talks about 'democratising' the Labour Party, what it is really asking for is the transformation of the party from what it is – a bourgeois workers' party – into something completely different – a genuine workers' party. 'Exactly' cry the more radical Labour left wingers in unison, 'this is just what we're trying to do.' Again there is nothing new in this – the left has been trying to roll this particular rock up a very steep hill ever since the party was founded.

Take one example – the early Communist Party. This soon abandoned Lenin's strategy of breaking the Labour Party by drawing its members to a distinct pole of working class politics through united activity, and set about the more familiar job of reforming the Labour Party. Thus in 1922 CP leader Palme Dutt wanted to make the party more accountable to the rank and file:

'To give power to the local Labour Parties would be to give power to bodies responsive in some degree to the moods and feelings of the workers' (*Labour Monthly*, July - Dec 1922).

And the following year Harry Pollitt called for greater trade union control over the Labour Party:

'The time has now arrived when the Trade Unions who provide the bulk of the numerical and material support of the Labour Party should decide to exercise definite control over the Parliamentary representatives. The Labour Party is at present, and is increasingly so, the happy hunting ground of middle class careerists' (*All Power*, the official organ of the Red International of Labour Unions, May 1923).

No changes here – either in the left's perception of the problem or its proposed solution. But why, we must ask, has the left consistently failed to achieve this aim over the past 60, even 80 years? Here we come to the subject of the second Bennite myth – the question of programme.

Why the left will lose

Trotsky surveyed the British labour movement in the mid-'twenties, when, as today, there was much talk about the left having taken over the Labour Party.

'It would seem that the left faction 'leading' the General Council would also have laid its hands on the Labour Party. But in reality we see something quite different. The Party continues to be led by extreme right wingers. This is explained by the fact that the Party cannot be restricted to various left ventures, but is bound to have a generalised system of politics. The left wingers have no such system: their very nature prevents this. The right wingers have a system: they have behind them tradition, experience, routine: and most important of all, bourgeois society as a whole is thinking for them and thrusts ready made decisions under their noses . . . The weakness of the left wingers arises from their lack of cohesion and this arises from their ideological shapelessness'

The left always loses because it lacks a coherent programmatic alternative to the leadership. The right has no such problem. The right has a set of policies which amount to an alternative way for the bourgeoisie to pursue its interests. The left abjures Marxism – the only working class alternative – so it falls back on radical versions of bourgeois policies. But these inevitably have an air of unreality – they are an attempt to find a way out between two irreconcilable positions. When it comes to the crunch the left's radical bourgeois programme suits nobody – and the left is forced to subordinate itself to the harsh realism of the right. This is why the history of the left is one of being betrayed and sold out by its leadership: the destiny of the left is to be defeated.

To illustrate this point let's look at the evolution of Benn's 'alternative' to Healey. Benn and his apologists have rewritten the history of the last Labour Government to show that the problem was that Wilson, Callaghan and Healey abandoned conference policy and adopted a whole new set of policies from the IMF, the Treasury and the City of London.

The myth of the mature Benn

The scenario of the radical rupture of 1976 is nonsense. What happened was that the Labour leaders adapted the left's 1973 programme to the conditions of continuing recession. This wasn't difficult. The Labour Party conference wanted the restructuring of British manufacturing industry – the left promised the National Enterprise Board as the instrument of rationalisation and revival. The cost for workers in cars, steel, ship building and engineering was tens of thousands of redundancies.

The Social Contract that produced the biggest drop in living standards in 30 years was the creation of the left in the Labour Party and the unions; it was not foisted on the Party by sinister external forces. The Labour Party accepted the need for sacrifice in the national interest – Healey's savage public spending cuts were a vital contribution to British capitalist prosperity.

Callaghan and Healey did not need the gnomes of Zurich, the mandarins of the Civil Service or the barons of Fleet Street (to list a selection of Bennite bogeys) to tell them to attack the working class. They followed their own noses and pursued the logic of the Labour Party programme. They simply divested it of the left's wishful thinking that British capitalism could be restored without unemployment and austerity. The left protested, but having accepted the premises of the leadership's policies, it was powerless to resist their consequences. Benn, having played a major part in launching this onslaught on the working class, quite properly served to the end as a leading member of the Cabinet that paved the way for Thatcher.

Benn's programme

It's worth emphasising the consequences of the programme which led to the last defeat for the Labour left at the hands of the right, because it was such a disaster for the working class. It's very clear that many workers have still not assimilated the experience of these setbacks, because Benn's current wave of support is being won on the basis of essentially the same policies. Here is his manifesto for the deputy leadership in full:

- As a first priority, to restore full employment during the life time of the next Labour government by adopting the alternative economic strategy
- To expand and develop housing, health, education, welfare and other essential public services, both to meet peoples' needs and to create jobs
- To support and strengthen the rights of women, to extend democracy and self-government at all levels in industry and society, to defend the trades unions, to protect the interests of the ethnic communities, to enact a Freedom of Information Bill and to end the House of Lords
- To develop co-operation with all the countries of Europe to secure the complete withdrawal of Britain from the Common Market, and to support the United Nations in its work for peace, international justice and World development
- To adopt a non-nuclear defence strategy for Britain, to work for European nuclear disarmament, and to secure the removal of all American nuclear bases from Britain.

This manifesto is notably more moderate than Harold Wilson's in 1974. Nobody is now talking about 'fundamental and irreversible shifts' and although Benn talks of 'full employment' the staunchest defenders of the AES admit that they see no prospect of unemployment falling below 2 million in the foreseeable future. Benn's programme embraces a radical Keynesian alternative to 'monetarism' as a way of restoring British capitalist profitability; it sanctions the class collaboration of 'industrial democracy' to ease this process; and it appeals to the chauvinist and pacifist prejudices of the labour movement. These policies paralyse workers' action in defence of class interests *now* – never mind the damage they would lead to under a future Labour government.

Tony and Denis

When Denis Healey produced his manifesto declaring agreement on most substantial points of policy with Benn, Benn supporters were outraged. Radical scribes denounced their arch-adversary for his hypocrisy and dishonesty. Certainly Healey was disingenuous, but his basic point – that there is no fundamental conflict between the left and the right on policy – was valid.

The most significant area of agreement between Benn and Healey is scrupulously avoided in the current election campaign. The left too likes to avoid this most sensitive question in Labour Party politics. But behind the scenes and away from the hustings a new Social Contract is being drawn up.

Early in June the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee adopted a document entitled 'Economic issues facing the next Labour Government'. This is the Party's new programme – it will go before both the TUC and the Labour Party Conference for final approval in the autumn. The driving force behind it is the TUC - its top negotiators Len Murray, David Lea, David Basnett and Clive Jenkins have helped to draw up the bureaucrats' solution to the crisis of British capitalism. Its centrepiece is a new incomes policy, vaguely stated to forestall opposition (especially from the TGWU), but unmistakeably present alongside all the old rubbish about planning agreements and industrial democracy. The bureaucrats desperately need a Labour government back in office and this catalogue of class collaboration is the price they're prepared to force us to pay for it. The Labour Party's men on the Social Contract drafting committee? Denis Healey and Tony Benn.

Benn for deputy

The radical left supporters of Benn will agree with our criticisms of his programme. But this is of little concern to them: they want to be a part of the new left wing that Benn is creating in the British labour movement. One leading supporter, 'Women's Fightback' leader and Benn Campaign Committee member Rachel Lever, recently reported how she had met many women who had doubts about Benn because he 'came off so badly' in an interview in the feminist paper *Spare Rib*. 'But' retorts Lever, 'can anyone for a second imagine *Spare Rib* even interviewing Healey?'

'The thought of it is so absurd that it says more than all the policy statements can about the gulf that exists between Benn on the one hand and any of the likely candidates that may stand against him (*Socialist Organiser*, 27 June 1981).

It's the Benn style that captivates: he is articulate and good-looking, he can pull the crowds and inspire them with a vision of the socialist future. What a contrast to the brusque and unattractive Healey, the bland John Silkin or the lugubrious Roy Hattersley! But the 'policy statements' that Rachel Lever so want to ignore ensure that the politics of Healey and Hattersley will prevail and Benn (and Lever) will capitulate to the right like so many before them.

The Benn bandwagon is vital to the prospects of a future Labour government. Benn is the man who can bring workers back to Labour. Benn is at odds with the party leadership, with Foot, with Healey, and with most of the Parliamentary Party. But Benn diverges little from the leadership on key issues of policy. His role in drawing up the new Social Contract shows that he is no threat to the leadership – but a mortal danger to the working class.

LABOUR CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

Radical re-entry

Pete Rowlands, *Trade unions and Socialism*, Labour Coordinating Committee.

Pete Rowlands is secretary of Hounslow Trades Council. He used to be a member of the International Socialists (now the SWP). Now he's in the Labour Party. He's written this pamphlet for the Labour Coordinating Committee to pull his old comrades and the members of other left groups into the Labour Party; he wants to get them all immediately involved in Tony Benn's election campaign. And the circumstances for this are auspicious. On 18 July the LCC assembled hundreds of trade unionists in London to acclaim Bennite policies although their hero was still too ill to turn up.

Policing from below

Rowland's pamphlet puts it straight: 'The LCC believes that it's now time for the Labour left to play far more attention to to extending its base in the unions'. It aims 'to provide the popular mass campaigning party that will sweep [Labour] to power and provide it with an extra-Parliamentary power base for the implementation of socialist policies'. The LCC wants to build a socialist left wing in the trade unions to back up the left wing in the Labour Party. What sort of 'socialist policies' has Rowlands in mind?

The pamphlet reproduces in outline form the familiar 'alternative economic strategy' accepted by everybody from Len Murray and Denis Healey to Arthur Scargill and Tony Benn. Not much of a socialist policy. But Rowlands goes further. He rejoices in the class collaboration fostered by the last Labour Government. It led, he says, to 'the emergence of a far higher degree of expertise about, and knowledge of, the economy and of particular industries by trade unionists'. Yes. But it also acquainted tens of thousands of trade unionists and hundreds of thousands of school-leavers with the procedures for claiming unemployment and supplementary benefits. Rowlands goes further still. Although he thought the last Social Contract 'sincere, but profoundly misguided', he's ready to try again. For him the problem with Wilson's Social Contract was not that it meant trade unionists taking responsibility for the capitalist crisis, but that the left had done 'little if any political preparation' for the implementation of the AES. And a new deal on pay between the next Labour government and the unions is OK provided 'the unions component of such an agreement' is 'flexible, voluntary, kept under constant review and based on mass support from below, rather than on policing from the top'. Now we begin to see why the Labour Party needs 'an extra-Parliamentary power-base' in the unions: to win acceptance for the austerity measures necessary to save British capitalism.

Division of labour

Benn has caused some controversy in the radical left. On the one side are those groups and individuals who back his campaign and have joined the Labour Party and devote the pages of their papers to justifying their move towards Rowlands' position. On the other side are those groups and individuals who back his election campaign but fill their propaganda with justifications of why they have not yet joined the Labour Party. The Workers Revolutionary Party and the Socialist Workers Party both find themselves in the second, somewhat beleaguered camp.

Theirs is a sectarian position. If the WRP and the SWP support Benn they should follow through the logic of this and join him and the rest of the radical left in the Labour Party. The SWP however insists on retaining its organisational identity even though it has no political independence. It accepts a spontaneous division of labour with the left reformists:

> 'They are not prepared to face up to the difficult, often unglamorous task of organising against the bosses' offensive on the shop floor. But deflecting that attack is the first step in building the mass working class movement *outside* Parliament on which the future of socialism depends.
>
> 'That's why the Socialist Workers Party, while we are fully behind Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership, will continue to make our main activity that of supporting those struggles, like Ansell's in Birmingham and Lee Jeans in Greenock, where workers are beginning to fight back' (*Socialist Worker*, 6 June 1981).

While Benn operates in the Parliamentary realm, the SWP will go on 'supporting' those who are fighting back on the shop floor. This is not an alternative to the politics of Benn, but an agreement about different spheres of influence. And because Benn's politics are very influential – not only in Parliament (in fact that's the place they have least influence) but among rank and file trade union activists too – the SWP's 'keep to our separate patches' approach lets the politics of left reformism win out every time.

Between left and right

One of the great weaknesses of the radical left is its propensity for accepting choices offered within the terms of bourgeois public opinion. For or against the EEC? Labour or Tory? Labour left or Labour right? The radical left always chooses the lesser evil. So when it comes to the deputy leadership of the Labour Party the choice is obvious: 'We make it clear at every union meeting or Bennite rally that we support Benn as against Healey' (*Socialist Review*, June 1981).

Trotsky warned in the 'thirties of 'supporting' left-wing trends in reformist parties, observing that 'it has occurred more than once that the Social Democratic opposition has developed an extremely left criticism as long as it does not obligate itself to anything' (*Writings, 1933-34*, Pathfinder Press, p199). Revolutionaries do not choose between different wings of social democracy. They intervene in debates and discussions in the working class movement to emphasise what the right and left reformists have in common, and to show that the left-wing reformists are the greater threat to working class interests.

Today's radical left groups began their political life defending Bevan against Gaitskell; many of them seem destined to end it defending Benn against Healey and Foot.

Democracy – but not too much

The Benn backers want to 'democratise' the Labour Party – but they're much less enthusiastic about democracy in the unions. The LCC does not want to upset the trade union bureaucrats who might be persuaded to put their block votes in the Benn box in October. Democracy is a very embarrassing subject for trade union leaders, so Rowlands treads carefully:

> 'It is often said on the left that unions are undemocratic, but this is a view which needs qualification and consideration. . .
>
> 'The debate about trade union democracy is extremely complicated. . .
>
> 'It is all too easy to sloganise in this area and put too much emphasis on the election of officials. . .
>
> 'There are problems with the block vote, but on balance we suggest that it should be retained.'

Trade union leaders need not fear that the fresh breeze of Bennite democracy will blow through their corridors. As long as Benn is accountable to a handful of time-serving bureaucrats his supporters will not push to make them accountable to their members. So much for the great campaign for democracy in the labour movement. Anyone for Denis?

Keith Tomson

Collaboration ~ continental-style

Mitterand's Social Contract

The recently elected Mitterand regime has provided a major boost for the French capitalist class. This victory of the 'left' has led to the emergence of a new social contract. To reassure the French working class Mitterand has raised the legal minimum wage by 10 per cent, given an undertaking to reduce the working week and has promised to nationalise banking and sections of industry. This is a small price to pay for the cooperation of the working class. Promises are cheap, and bourgeois commentators have been quick to point out the conservative character of the nationalisation programme (See *Le Monde*, 10 July 1981).

Nevertheless Mitterand's programme has had the desired effect. When Prime Minister Mauroy announced the Socialist administration's proposed legislation the trade union leaders were delighted. The CFDT, closely aligned with the Socialist Party 'congratulated the resoluteness' of the prime minister and praised 'his role in negotiating the resolution of the major problems facing the country'. The CGT union federation, aligned to the French Communist Party, was more sober; one leading bureaucrat commented 'we shall begin with this and we shall do our best' (*Le Monde*, 10 July 1981).

A few meagre, short-term reforms have created a 'we'll wait and see' attitude in the working class. The main thrust of Mitterand's programme is the rationalisation of French capitalism. A few palliatives have ensured the collaboration of the labour bureaucracy. When Mitterand 'moves to demand workers' to make sacrifices in the 'interest of France' he will have the cooperation of the union leaders.

The Eurostalinists

Mitterand has nothing to fear from the PCF. The inclusion of four PCF ministers in his cabinet guarantees the acquiescence of the Eurocommunists to the new rationalisation measures. The PCF was savaged in the elections and is now licking its wounds. But the worst is still to come. The PCF is fast losing its trade union base to its socialist competitors. In recent factory ballots to elect union negotiating representatives the CFDT has been gaining ground at the expense of the CGT.

This decline in the strength of the French Eurocommunists in Parliament and on the shop floor is symptomatic of the nature of Eurocommunism throughout the continent (see 'Eurocommunism: An obituary', *the next step*, No 12, April 1981). The Eurocommunist parties have gone so far to the right that they can barely justify this independent existence.

The response of leading Stalinists to this state of affairs is to embrace bourgeois respectability further still. This was the theme of the conference between Berlinguer and Carrillo, leader of the Italian and Spanish parties. The effect of Mitterand's defeat of their French sister party was to force them to stretch the meaning of Eurocommunism. Thus Berlinguer argued the 'the totality of the ideas and conceptions which represent Eurocommunism are not only the property of communist parties' (*Le Monde*, 2 July 1981). His message was clear: there is nothing to choose between socialist and communist parties. They are only different ways of saying 'class collaboration'.

Labour and Ireland

Sixty years of shame

'Your Labour Party is the subject of jest in Ireland. You sent us a deputation, and one of its members was a member of the Government which shot Connolly, and all of them have been and are still silent on Larkin's exile. Our memories are long: is it any wonder they are bitter? In a few days your Parliament will vote on the Military appropriations. Will your Labour Party oppose them, or will they vote payment for the military occupation of Ireland? Of what use is their hypocritical sympathy for us, their acts give the lie to their words.' (Eamon Macalpine, 'Open letter to the British workers', in the Sheffield Worker, April 1920, quoted in Bill Moore, How we stopped war against Russia but failed to free Ireland, Holberry Society, Sheffield 1981)

A few days after the Labour Party's 'Northern Ireland' study group agreed that the Party should accept a commitment to Irish unity, an overwhelming majority of Labour MPs voted for the renewal of Direct Rule and for the continuing military occupation of Ireland. And six republican hunger strikers – Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreesh, Patsy O'Hara, Joe McDonnell and Martin Hurson – have died while the Labour Party has been deliberating over its policy on Ireland. Dave Douglas looks at the debate in the Labour Party.

THE NEWS LEAK that Labour was going to come out for Irish unity was greeted as a sensation. A break from the Party's bipartisan approach with the Tories! The end of twelve years of partnership in war against the Irish! A closer look reveals that nothing much has changed.

When is unity not unity?

For the Labour Party 'Irish unity' is a metaphysical concept. While invoking this stirring vision of the future, the study group had some practical proposals for the present. The common theme is that while the Labour Party would like, ideally, for the Irish to manage their own affairs, for the moment it's got some plans for how *the British* should administer Ireland. This recalls the infamous document passed at the Communist Party's 1979 Congress which, after eight proposals – all demanding legislation from Westminster, recognises in the ninth point the 'right of the Irish people to determine their own future' (*Comment*, 1 December 1979). So, what are Labour's new proposals?

Firstly, the study group wants a power-sharing devolved government. New? Humphrey Atkins has been trying to get some such assembly off the ground ever since he took over at the Northern Ireland Office – and there were several spectacular failures in the 'seventies.

Second, the group wants 'a fundamental review' of the Emergency Provisions Act and suggests that the Prevention of Terrorism Act 'should be at least modified' if not repealed. Scant comfort for the thousands of victims of these draconian laws!

Third, the Labour Party urges 'a major reflation' and close cooperation with the Republic to revive the economy in the Six Counties and provide more employment. When the Government can't provide jobs in Britain there seems little hope of reducing unemployment in Ireland.

Finally, what about the hunger strikers? The group 'opposes the granting of political status and agrees with the Government that any concessions on the Maze hunger strikers' five demands would be unproductive'. So much for Irish unity!

When the Labour Party backs it

However even this hypocritical and cynical support for 'Irish unity' was too much for the Labour leadership. Michael Foot, speaking to Radio One DJ Jimmy Young, one of Britain's foremost 'new wave' political commentators, assured the public that the study group's report was only in draft form. 'There was still a long way to go', he said. And he was right.

As the *Financial Times* observed Labour's commitment to unity 'could still become so hedged about as be meaningless. The Party's desire to be seen doing something new and radical may in the end come second to its reluctance to rock the boat' (2 July 1981). Very percipient – Labour had not yet reached the bottom of the barrel.

'Labour and Ireland: a setback' was the ominous headline in the *Morning Star* on 15 July. The study group had accepted an amendment saying: 'Before any constitutional change is made we would seek to obtain the consent of the people of Northern Ireland by means of a referendum'. What does this mean? It means that Labour accepts the Partition of Ireland which was carefully worked out to ensure that the part of Ireland included in the United Kingdom contained a permanent majority in favour of this arrangement. The amendment brings the study group into line with existing government policy which is to hold a referendum on the Irish border every ten years. The next one is due in 1983. Thus official Labour Party policy is committed to the unity of Ireland while fully endorsing its division! Brilliant!

Unity for Direct Rule

The radical left regard the Labour Party's debate about 'Irish unity' as a great leap forward. 'At least they're *talking* about Ireland', they say. The fact that what the Labour Party is discussing is modifications to British oppression in Ireland, behind a lot of waffle about unity (and 'withdrawal', which in Labour Party circles has about as much meaning as 'unity') is of little concern to the left. The consequences of Labour's new position in support of Irish unity became obvious in the House of Commons debate on Direct Rule at the beginning of July.

Humphrey Atkins kicked off by saying that Direct Rule was fine but needed more of a 'Northern Ireland political input' to make British domination more widely acceptable. He proposed yet another of the toothless assemblies favoured by the Labour study group. It was received with indifference by most British MPs and with hostility by most of the Irish politicians he had expected to participate in it.

Labour's spokesman Don Concannon, known only for his visit to kick Bobby Sands in the teeth on his deathbed, agreed with Atkins, especially, he emphasised, on political status. No other Labour MP had anything much to say... except former Prime Minister, now backbench statesman James Callaghan.

Callaghan grabbed the headlines with his contribution – the proposal of an independent 'Ulster', six-county state. This is neither Labour Party policy nor Tory policy, but it is the position of the Loyalist paramilitary group the Ulster Defence Association. Callaghan did not reveal whether he had joined up but the UDA was delighted: it congratulated him on 'his courage and vision' and urged 'all those interested in peace' to consider what he had said (*Irish Times*, 4 July). This from the group behind numerous murders!

But scarcely anybody in Britain thought much of what Callaghan had said. The *Daily Mirror* thought his scheme was a great idea and might turn out to be the best way of defeating the IRA (3 July). But most bourgeois opinion was unmoved. The Direct Rule debate confirmed the judgement of *The Sunday Times* a week earlier:

> 'A group of half-a-dozen senior people has been considering, over the past five years, the radical political options, and can rattle them off – integration, independence, unification (federal or not), re-partition. The trouble is that this scrutiny has persuaded the Northern Ireland Office that all those options are impossible....' (*The Sunday Times*, 28 June)

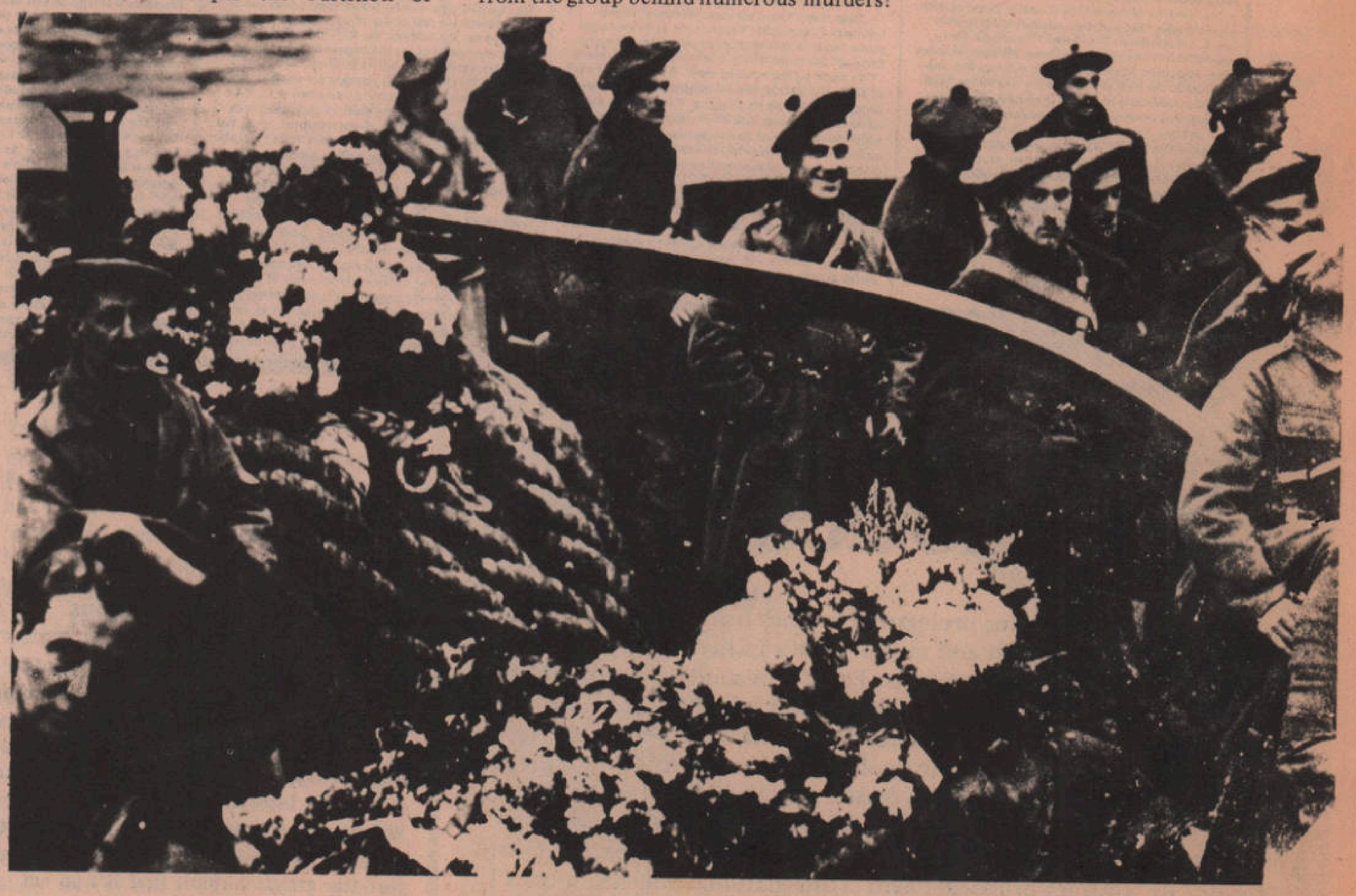
All the important contributors agreed. Atkins thought Direct Rule 'had many advantages'. Concannon 'did not see any immediately available alternative'. And none of the Labour friends of the radical left – Ernie Roberts, Denis Skinner, and the rest – whose opinions about 'Irish unity' are often quoted in *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Challenge*, had anything to say against the official line. Direct Rule was imposed for another twelve months by a majority of 223.

Workers for Irish freedom

After wide circulation of the 'Open letter' quoted above the Sheffield Trades Council passed the following resolution unanimously on 27 April 1920: 'That the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council demands the immediate release of the Irish political prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs, and the application of the principle of self-determination to Ireland'.

This decisive anti-imperialist stand was followed by many workers throughout the country; some took strike action to prevent military supplies getting to Ireland. The trade union leaders subverted this campaign. While they and the Labour Party talked about Irish freedom they acquiesced in the Partition of the country.

Today we have to draw a clear line between those who talk about Irish unity while advancing *British* plans for Ireland and those who are prepared to support those fighting for Irish unity against the British state. The Labour Party debate about Irish unity is as useful to the Irish people as its MPs were to the hunger strikers.



British auxiliaries seize the coffin of Terence MacSwiney, the Irish republican who died on hunger strike in Brixton jail in 1920. British trade union leaders blocked workers attempts to support the Irish independence struggle.

workers power

Who needs the RCP?

There is a fatal logic which operates amongst British left Groups when they become tired of the restrictions that being a small group imposes on them. Either they dissolve themselves into the 'Left' of the Labour Party where they can imagine themselves to be a burgeoning mass force and the next in line for leadership or they declare themselves to be THE Party. The Militant and Workers' Action represent the former tendency while the WRP and SWP the latter.

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency - a group far smaller than the WRP or SWP, and with infinitely less base in the working class, are now the latest group to declare themselves the party. After years of declaring that the working class had no vanguard they have now discovered that they are it after all. There is no use in seeking an explanation for this mainly in terms of the delusions of grandeur that haunt their leadership, nor in the mood of religious exhaltation that a diet of vigorous but abstract propaganda induces in its devotees. The declaration of the party was the inevitable and logical outcome of the whole political development of the RCT.

The RCT originated out of a split in the Revolutionary Communist Group in 1976 declaring its adherence to the fundamental political positions developed by what was to become the RCG before and after its expulsion from the International Socialist (now SWP) in 1974. Indeed in the political method the RCP still bears the stamp of its origins in the International Socialists - its chronic sectarianism,its rejection of the method of communist work developed in the transitional programme and its consequent vacillation between ultraleftism and opportunism.

The RCP proudly proclaims that the major difference between it and the rest of what it likes to call the 'radical' left is its fight for "revolutionary independeace" from reformism. Thus we find in "The Next Step" (TNS) No.14.

"For the RCT activity makes no sense unless it expresses class independence. That's why so much of the RCT's activity takes place independently of the official labour movement".

The practical sectarian results of this justification for remaining supposedly "principled" but *outside* the organisations of the working class can be most clearly seen in the RCP's attitude towards the United Front and the Labour Party.

In a major article in TNS no.13 Frank Richards outlines the RCP's approach to the United Front. Richards correctly points out that the tactic of the united front was developed by the Comintern because the reformists still held the allegiance of the majority of the working class, an allegiance that the communists could only break through united action, in struggle, with reformist workers in order to reveal the bankrupcy of their leaders in practice.

Patently false

While agreeing in principle with this method, Richards then proceeds to reject it on the grounds that it is 'inappropriate' for todays circumstances, **"This tactic is irrelevant to situations where revolutionaries cannot lead the struggle of the masses."** (The United Front, TNS 13)

It is irrelevant , we are told, because unlike the 1920 1920's there is no "vanguard". **"The tactic of the united front is inappropriate today if for no other reason than the fact that the revolutionary wing of the united front does not exist"** (Richards op.cit.) The question then is reduced to one of size - where, we are asked, do revolutionaries embrace one fourth or one third of the working class as they did in the early '20's?

It is patently false to suggest that the Comintern only saw the united front tactic as being of use in such circumstances (which unfortunately were rare even for the Comintern). The British Communist Party pursued a highly successful united front tactic in the Minority Movement in the early twenties with a membership that had only reached 5000 in 1925 (see L.J.Macfarlane -The British Communist Party, Appendix D). The situation was no different in many other countries. In the case of the colonies and semi-colonies of the East the Comintern was telling handfuls of communists to pursue the tactic in relation to "national revolutionary movements". Richards tries to bring Trotsky in on his side but, even in the period of the 1930's, when the International Communist League was directing *tiny* groups of Trotskyists in the methods and tactics aimed at building revolutionary communist parties anew, Trotsky wrote. **"In any case, under discussion now is not the immediate 'proclamation' of new parties and of an independent international but of preparing for them .... in relation to reformist and centrist labour organisations (including the Stalinists) it [the I.C.L.-WP] is guided by the general principles of the united front policy."** (Writings 1932-3)

Was Trotsky then breaking with the method of the Comintern in directing the use of the united front tactic - in relation to the French Socialist Party for instance in 1934? We would answer no. It is

in fact the RCP which rejects this method. It is only by developing the idea that the Comintern applied the united front in *entirely different* circumstances i.e. where there were mass parties, that Richards is able to claim continuity with the Leninist method.

There is nothing new in the conclusions Frank Richards dresses up as discoveries. The same verdict on the united front has been delivered in the sectarian stables often before through the mouths of Gerry Healy and Duncan Hallas for example. The root of the RCP's rejection of the united front lies in their fundamentally *idealist* approach to building the vanguard party.

It is only by intervening in the organisation of the working class, fighting with and alongside reformist workers in action that it is possible to win militants to communism. Instead the RCP proudly proclaim how much of their work takes place "outside", "independent of" the organisations of the class. Far from seeing the necessity to intervene in what Trotsky described as the yet 'imperfect and unfinished' struggles of the working class, the RCP constantly stresses its task as one of asserting the "working class point of view", raising at all times "anti-capitalist *ideas* ", arguing the "proletarian position". The struggle is placed firmly on the ideological terrain divorced from the material struggles of the working class.

This is justified on the basis that there are certain struggles which more clearly raise "class questions" - i.e. are more favourable than others for determining the "working class point of view". So we are told for instance that,**"Wage militancy is the class struggle in its simplest form, it is quite consistent with reformism. As long as the class struggle stays on the level of wages and conditions it is not yet anti-capitalist in character."**(TNS No.1)

Indeed, given that the RCP, following its SWP mentors, has abandoned the only method that allows revolutionaries to intervene in the daily struggles of the class in a communist fashion - **"To find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist programme for revolution"** (The Transitional Programme) - it is little wonder that they either retreat from "imperfect" workers struggles or opportunistically tail them.

Class struggle is the acid test

Thus from "Our Tasks and Methods" (Revolutionary Communists Reprints No.1) onwards the prime target in this "battle for ideas" becomes challenging" (or more clearly - devouring) "chauvanism" - **"We knew it (the working class - WP) did need a lot of advice (sic) about the debilitating effects of nationalist politics on its struggles. We therefore focussed on Irish Freedom and black rights - two issues on which the absence of an independent working class outlook has had disastrous effects".** (TNS No.9) Concrete results of this method could be seen on the "Peoples March" - while the RCT denounced its popular frontist nature from outside, our comrades on the march fought alongside other marchers against the CP's strategy in action on the march. While the RCT "demanded" the marchers take a stand on Ireland from outside, our comrades won their sections of the march to supporting political status from inside. The follow up is predictable; and RCP led "workers march on Ireland" which will involve none but themselves and supporters and is run in true SWP party building stunt lines, justified no doubt as providing a "revolutionary pole of attraction ".

The RCP's much vaunted "independence" does not have the character they imagine it to have. Political, programmatic independence of the party from the bourgeoisie and from bourgeois trends in the labour movement must never be confused with *separation* from the class in struggle. The RCP, like much of the British left, had a 'bad' social composition; i.e. it is dominated by people from a petit-bourgeois background, by white collar workers and students. To say this is not to indulge in vulgar workerism. If they were all miners, dockers or car workers it wouldn't assure the correctness or the proletarian character of their politics. But given a correct revolutionary programme, the living experience of the class struggle is the acid test, the proof in life of its correctness. The RCT(P), standing classicly in the sectarian tradition, however make a virtue out of their separation from the class.

Sectarianism always has specific defining features Deliberate abstentions from the material struggles of the working class is blamed on the working class' inability to recognise the sectarians as the vanguard they have appointed themselves as. As Trotsky put it succinctly when summarising the Marxist definition of sectarianism, **"The sectarian looks upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank around his rostrum. Then the task could be solved".** (Sectarianism,Centrism and the FI, Writings 1935-6)

What's the point . . .

The RCP's approach to the Labour Party is predictable. They reject the united front approach of fighting alongside workers in and outside the Labour Party who have illusions in Benn and attempting to break those illusions in struggle, and in its place put "intransigent" denounciations of Labourism combined with an attempt to provide a "revolutionary alternative".

"The reason why independent revolutionary activity is so important is because no significant section of the working class will break with reformism unless they see an alternative in the here and now (Frank Richards - The United Front TNS No.13)

Yet the actual activity of the RCT during the local election campaign gives striking confirmation of what Trotsky called "a law of political botany" - that sectarianism is only **"a bud from which can always bloom the full flower of opportunism."** Having rejected the united front the RCT then proceeded to stand candidates under the banner of "East London Workers Against Racism" - a political bloc of RCT and non RCT individuals standing for council. And what was the revolutionary programme of ELWAR? An example - **"What's the point of promising jobs for all, decent housing or cheap transport when the money isn't there Everybody knows there's a crisis. Profits are down and three million people on the dole"** . (TNS No.12) What conclusions the voters in East London were meant to draw from this is unclear - tighten your belts, profits are down, the money isn't there? We've heard that one before. At no point is the alternative outlined, make the bosses pay, work or full pay, nationalisation under workers' control of companies declaring redundancies with no compensation, for a massive programme of socially useful public works under trade union control etc. The RCT platforms themselves are no better, rarely rising above the level of reformist demands - cheaper busfares, more house building, better benefits,training facilities for youth. These in themselves are supportable demands but separated from the demands and forms of struggle that give a real workers answer to the capitalist crisis and raise at every step the organisation of the working class for power - they remain *reformist* solutions acceptable, at least verbally, to the labour lefts. What is quite striking is that none of these "intransigent" revolutionary platforms even makes it clear that the candidates stand for the *overthrow of capitalism*; this is an election campaign where it is crucial for revolutionaries to put forward a clear political alternative to reformism - where a communist programme is counterposed to a reformist one.

This reformist practice was accompanied by all the normal RCT bally hoo designed to convince themselves that they really represented an "alternative pole" to the Labour Party - **"We've got a chance to put revolutionary communism on the map!" "the day of the marxist municipal council isn't so far off... "** (TNS 12)**"Labour under pressure... " "Now we need to go forward to build a real alternative to the Labour Party... "**(TNS13). What the RCT **"long suspected"** that **"many working class people have had enough of the Labour Party"**, that **"disgust with Labour's failure to oppose the Tories is widespread and deeply felt"** (TNS12)certainly wasn't reflected in their derisory election results!

Again it is necessary, given the RCP's diet of illusions and breastbeating to *invent* layers of workers who are being won over to the "independent revolutionary alternative".

Crippling practice

The RCP's opportunism does not end with its electoral antics however. It is precisely in the industrial struggle - which for the RCP is "not yet anti-capitalist in character" - that the RCP is disarmed and ends up *tailing* economic militancy.

Seeing the class struggle in terms only of a struggle at the level of ideas the RCP concentrates on exposing the officials and 'explaining' that they share the same ideas as the capitalists. The sectarian necessarily has to reject the method - developed by the Comintern and continued by Trotsky - of advancing a strategy of demands that relate to the immediate demands of workers, offering methods of struggle which strengthen the self-organisation of the workers and offer an alternative to the capitalists' demands for sacrifices to "save the company". it is only this method of advancing a system of transitional demands that enables communists to break from the crippling Social Democratic practice of advancing a minimum reformist programme for the here and now whilst advancing abstract propaganda for the desirability of socialism unconnected to the everyday struggles themselves.

The RCP has no alternative to this social-democratic method. It delivers its lectures against capitalist ideas whilst tailing the immediate struggles of the working class. It is even proud of the fact. The Next Step brazenly declared **"We know that the British working class did not need our advice about how to organise or about what tactics to employ in strikes for higher wages and better conditions"** (TRS 9)

Big Brother

The RCP contents itself with tailing economic militancy in the good old IS/SWP tradition. Both the SWP and the RCP start from the same position - their common rejection of the Transitional Programme and, with it, the method of Bolshevism and the Comintern. Trotsky once said of the Bordigists and certain sectarians in the International Communist League who opposed the entry policy into the SFIO that **"By means of propagandistic literature if it is good, one can educate the first cadres, but one cannot rally the proletarian vanguard which lives neither in a circle nor in a school room but in class society, in a factory, in the organisations of the masses, a vanguard to whom one must know how to speak in in the language of its experiences. 'The best prepared propagandist cadres must inevitably disintegrate if they do not find daily contact with the masses'** (The Present Situation in the Labour Movement and the Tasks of the Bolshevik Leninists - Documents of the F.I.)

This is equally true of the RCP today. By rejecting the united front, denouncing the **"radical left"** for calling for votes for Labour, appearing to pose as an "intransigent" revolutionary alternative to reformism it might well have transitory success amongst sections of students justifiably repelled by the chronic rightward drift and adaption to refomism of the centrist left in Britain today. But the RCP offers no revolutionary alternative to these currents only a warmed over version of the sectarian posturing and opportunist practice of its hugely more successful, bigger, brother - the SWP ■

Our modest approach

Recently the RCP's fight for proletarian politics has come under considerable fire from reformist and radical trends in the labour movement. While the Labour left and Communist Party bureaucrats have launched a witch-hunt against the 'ultra-left' supporters of the RCP in our anti-racist campaigns, others have restricted their attacks to polemics. This latter approach we much prefer for political debate clarifies the issues at stake and teaches us all. For this reason we reprint 'Who needs the RCP' from the July issue of Workers Power. In essentials this critique repeats the arguments formulated by SWP theoretician Alex Callinicos in 'Politics or abstract propagandism?' (International Socialism, No 11, winter 1981). Our reply to 'Who needs the RCP?' therefore also constitutes an answer to all those tendencies on the left who can only portray proletarian politics as 'ultra-left' – or 'sectarian'.

False Counterpositions

THE CORE of the Workers' Power (WP) argument is that groups on the left either dissolve themselves in the Labour Party or they declare themselves the party. Because it is 'sectarian' and 'ultra-left', the RCP falls into the latter category. Now WP never actually states what its objections are to the RCP calling itself a party. But the article implies that it's an act of sectarianism of the highest order. In fact what WP objects to is not so much the term 'party' but the fact that the RCP pursues independent political work.

The RCP is accused of sectarianism for remaining *outside* the organisations of the working class:

'It is only by intervening in the organisation of the working class, fighting with and alongside reformist workers in action that it is possible to win militants to communism. Instead the RCP proudly proclaim how much of their work takes place "outside", "independent of" the organisations of the class.'

This is the basic issue at stake. But WP misunderstands the RCP approach. The RCP works *inside* the labour movement,

but it refuses to let the political content and direction of its work be determined by that movement's leaders. We pursue our activities 'independently', not because we are obsessed by independence, but because other forces are in general not prepared to fight for demands which really express the interest of the working class. Given the choice between following the labour bureaucracy's initiatives or fighting on a question like Irish freedom, revolutionaries will always choose the latter. To do otherwise would be to abandon the struggle for the leadership of the working class.

WP's hostility to independent political activity stems from its own inability to give a lead. That's why it extols the virtues of the united front tactic and why it denounces any independent initiative as sectarian. The pages of WP are full of demands – which they charmingly describe as 'transitional'. But these demands are always for others to pursue, not something WP can fight for here and now. For WP politics is reduced to what should be done in the abstract, rather than something that has immediate practical significance. WP cannot be accused of having delusions of grandeur. It is all too aware of its historic insignificance.

'Who needs the RCP?' makes a half-hearted attempt to point out the destructive results of RCP activity. An anecdote about the People's March favourably contrasts WP's work inside the march with our alleged posturing outside. Anybody vaguely familiar with these events will see this fable for what it is. Even our political opponents know that our intervention on the People's March and related activities was decisive in raising the cause of Irish freedom to a new audience of workers.

The false counterposition between independent work and being inside the working class reflects a lack of confidence in the ability of organised workers to reject their reformist traditions and leaders. In the case of WP this leads to incoherent ramblings about its 'method of advancing a system of transitional demands' and total silence about what it has actually done in practice around these demands.

The intellectual veneer

WP clings for dear life to the tactic of the united front. Against our argument that this tactic can only be applied when revolutionaries are strong enough to challenge the reformist leaders ('The united front', *the next step*, No 13, May 1981), WP looks for quotes from Trotsky. Since Trotsky told a tiny group of Trotskyists to pursue 'the general principles of the united front policy' in the early 'thirties it follows for WP that this tactic can be applied for all occasions.

Anybody vaguely familiar with the science of revolutionary politics will know that a tactic that can be used in all circumstances is not a tactic. In the 'twenties tactics had to address the problem of winning the mass of workers to the already existing communist vanguard. In the 'thirties tactics had to respond to the setbacks and defeats suffered by the working class. Today, tactics have to deal with the problem of creating a new working class leadership.

Trotsky insisted in 1932 that the 'united front is determined by concrete circumstances, for concrete aims'. Unlike WP, Trotsky understood that the Left Opposition was working in conditions which were vastly different from those of the 'twenties. The tactic that he developed for the period was the tactic of entrism. Whether one agrees with this tactic or not, Trotsky at least had the merit of attempting to address the real problems of the day.

In the hands of Trotsky the united front was a revolutionary tactic. In the hands of WP the united front has no tactical significance. It is merely a shabby attempt to endow political incoherence with the legitimacy of the Bolshevik movement.

Toy town polemics

Until this point, WP's polemic at least attempts to put forward a semblance of an argument. But when it moves on to accuse the RCP of not only being sectarian but also opportunist it has to resort to misquoting and distortions. Their case is simple: during recent council elections RCP candidates were opportunists. Why? Because our candidates did not make it clear that they stood *'for the overthrow of capitalism'*. Naturally the overthrow of capitalism (which in WP rhetoric is probably a transitional demand) was not one of the demands that appeared in our manifesto. Why? Because it is up to revolutionaries to lead the struggle in that direction, not to make abstract demands. As it happens our propaganda was clear where we stood on this question. Ordinary workers got the message even if the editorial office of WP didn't.

The RCP is also accused of putting forward reformist demands, or alternatively of not putting forward a communist programme. But, unlike WP, the RCP does not believe in putting forward demands it isn't in a position to fight for. We are not in the business of publishing resounding declarations which cannot be acted on. That is the kind of Sunday School preaching much favoured by the 'bold socialist policies' brigade of the Labour Party. Although we are not strong on inspiring programmes our campaign was revolutionary all the same. We argued: vote for us, but don't expect that capitalism and its institutions can do anything for you, for to defend workers' interests you will have to struggle. In a positive and realistic way, we put forward the need to fight for class interests at all times – even for the smallest concession. This may not fit into the WP's schema of a 'communist programme' but it did fit the requirements of the class struggle in the conditions of 1981.

The toy town polemic against the RCP's election campaign is followed by a series of unsubstantiated allegations. The RCP 'ends up *tailing* economic militancy', has a 'reformist practice' and subsists on a 'diet of illusions and breastbeating'. Nothing much can be said about this for WP provides not one example. But then this argument is designed to assure the WP membership that its leaders still know a thing or two about polemics. These gratuitous insults show that WP's attack on us is built on a house of cards with Trotsky quotes written on them.

WP is a modest organisation. It cannot imagine how it could itself ever give a lead in the class struggle. Fair enough, you know your limitations. But then step aside out of the way of those who are determined to build a combat organisation of the working class.

Fighting deportations in High Wycombe

FOLLOWING a vigorous campaign by Wycombe Workers Against Racism (WWAR), Tajinder Jit Singh has been released from Holloway prison. The Home Office has been forced to drop its deportation threat and allow her to remain in the country.

Tajinder came to Britain in September 1974. In October 1980 Tajinder's husband had an accident and died in hospital. This prompted Home Office officials to attempt to deport her as it emerged that she had been brought into this country on a visitor's passport.

On 4 May 1981 Tajinder was visited by a prison official from Holloway prison and an officer of the Illegal Immigration Intelligence Unit. She was immediately transferred to Holloway prison, where she spent the next eleven weeks as a prisoner of the British state.

Organising defence

Tajinder was not the only victim of immigration laws in Wycombe at this time. Two brothers, Arif Hussain and Zafar Iqbal also faced deportation threats, following the death of their father. Since they had not informed the Home Office of the tragedy, they too became targets for state racism. Zafar spent eight weeks incarcerated at Harmondsworth detention centre. Asians in Wycombe were rapidly discovering the reality of the immigration laws: immigrants can become 'illegal' if their husbands or fathers die.

WWAR responded to these threats of deportation by forming the Wycombe Defence Committee. It drew in support from the Women's Group, Socialist Workers Party, Asian Youth Movement and other anti-racists in the area. After organising petitions and publicity, and a 50-strong picket of the Home Office on 10 July, Arif and Zafar were given clearence to stay in the country.

Inside the system

This success was clearly related to the Defence Committee's actions. However, down at the local Community Relations Council, Alfred Webley, its head, drew a different lesson. He explained to the local paper that it showed how 'public pressure can be put on the immigration department and this should be done through the system'. Illustrating his faith in the system, he added that he did not believe in 'marches to the Home Office or demonstrations'.

While Webley praised the system, the Wycombe Defence Committee called for a demonstration through the town on 8 August in support of Tajinder Jit Singh. But this proved to be only one of Webley's worries.

Victory!

Tajinder's case was given a sympathetic hearing on Thames TV and in several national newspapers on Friday 10 July. The campaign was beginning to have an impact and support was growing. Saturday and Sunday saw rioting by black and white youths in Wycombe and 35 arrests. Tension was rising and the last thing the local police and officials at the CRC wanted was a march through the streets. Wycombe Trades Council and the local Labour Party were due to hear speakers from the Defence Committee, and both were likely to support the demonstration.

Now the wheels of the Home Office deportation machine began to move in reverse. On Tuesday 14 July two members of the Defence Committee visited Tajinder at Holloway prison. They were not allowed to see her. But Tajinder was taken into a small room and told she was free to go. Four hours later, Tajinder returned to her friend's home in Wycombe where she was greeted by members of WWAR and her friends and neighbours.

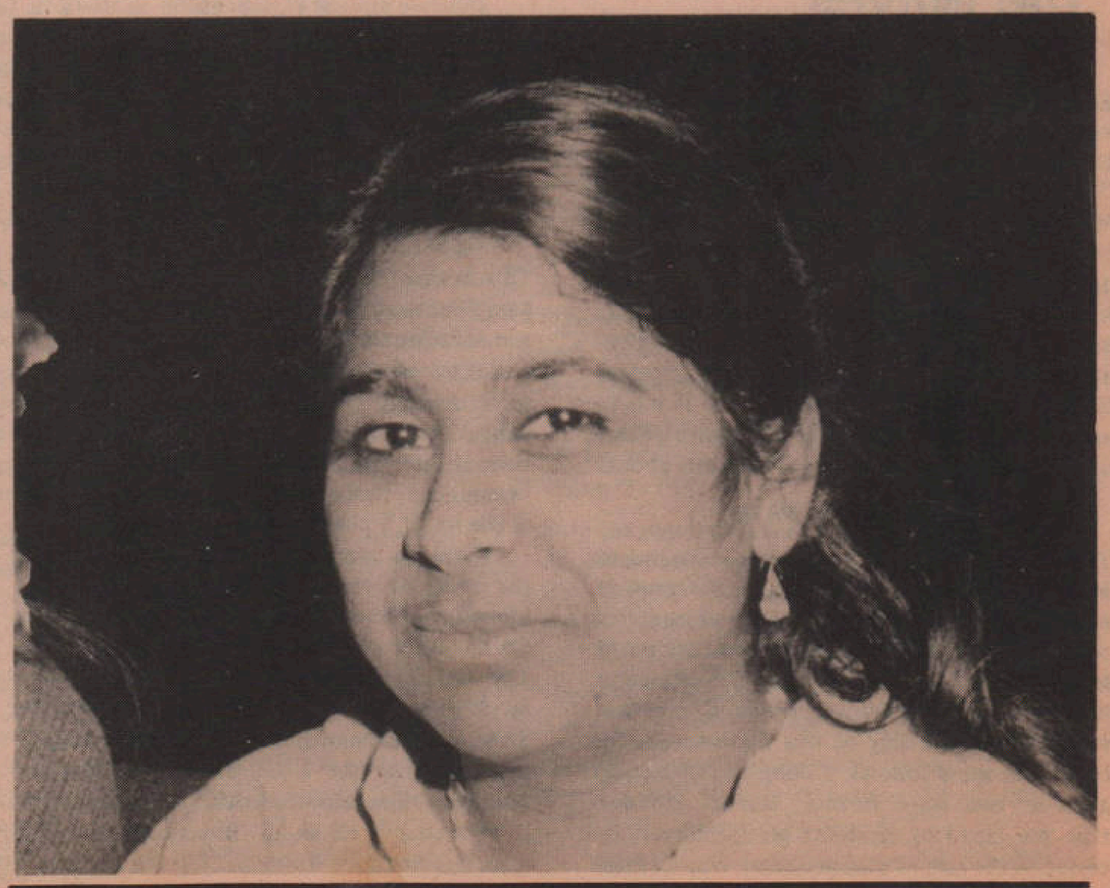
Don't keep quiet

Two days later Alfred Webley had to swallow his words and congratulate WWAR for doing an excellent job of challenging the Home Office. Tajinder had the last word:

> 'It's all right keeping quiet and sticking to the system as long as *you* are not in prison. I was inside and keeping quiet would mean I would still be there!'

Tajinder is right. Immigration laws have to be fought in practice. WWAR will continue to fight all deportations and entry restrictions in its campaign to smash all immigration controls.

Anita Lloyd



reviews

Rotten bloc

Communist faction, *Purge in IMG*, Part II, London, May 1981, £1 pbk.

Feel like a purge? Put down your epsom salts and pick up this load of roughage – a documentary account of the passage of a handful of members of the International Marxist Group into the Sparticist League in May. Seventy-one pages of ponderous posturing, *Purge in IMG* will soon get your bowels moving.

Purge describes the struggles of the IMG's 'Communist Faction' for what is believed was Trotskyism – struggles which, it should be said, led to it being . . . purged. In vivid detail the document traces every intestinal twist and turn, right down to what comrade Lin Khalid said to comrade Paul Smith on the 'phone on 15 May 1981 and the rather constipated proceedings of the IMG Political Committee meeting the next day. More than anything, though, *Purge* reveals the preoccupations of the Spartacist League.

Reports on this and similar 'revolutionary regroupment' work dominate the pages of *Spartacist Britain*. In June, five pages were devoted to factional squabbles in the IMG and elsewhere. The four dead Irish hunger strikers? They got two. The reason for this is that the SL shares with the radical left the prejudice that a revolutionary vanguard already exists in Britain today – one which only requires a bit of regrouping to be transformed into a revolutionary party. On this the SL differs little with the IMG; it too seeks to gather together the fragments in 'genuine united fronts with the Bennites.'

Many upbraid the SL for being 'sectarian'. This document confirms that it is just as opportunist as the IMG. It echoes the sociological notion that informs the radical left's charge into the Labour Party – that Labour is a 'workers party . . . composed of workers'. And it ends up backing the IMG's strategy of 'fraction work' inside the Labour Party.

The virtual liquidation of the IMG into the Labour Party and its more and more explicit acceptance of reformist politics make it a soft target for the factional intrigues and vulgar dogmatism of the SL. The SL's antics won't remove the real blockage to the movement of the British working class – Labourism. When it comes to the Labour Party the harsh aperients of the SL are just as ineffective as the gentle laxatives of the IMG.

Woody Allan

Beneath the waves

Ernest Mandel, *Long waves of capitalist development: the Marxist interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, 1980, £7.95 hbk.

MANDEL CLAIMS to give a Marxist interpretation of the history of capitalism. He argues that Marxist theory must do more than look at the capitalist economy's industrial cycle and the 'whole life span' of the system. It must also get into a 'third time frame' – the so-called long wave of 20-25 years' duration – if it is to analyse and comprehend the successive phases of capital accumulation. What's all this about?

A wave is a wave

The Marxist theory of long waves, according to Mandel, is that long-term trends in economic activity are dependent on the trend of capitalist profitability. In other words, if the rate of profit is boosted for any reason, then this generates higher rates of capital accumulation, and vice versa. The profundity of this thesis speaks for itself. But more follows. Taking the 'dialectical analysis' one stage further, Mandel discloses that the trend of capitalist profitability is revealed in the rate of accumulation. Why all these tautologies? The reason is obscure – until we notice that Mandel's book is based on his 'Alfred Marshall Lectures' given at the University of Cambridge in 1978.

Marshall's parrot

Alfred Marshall, one of England's esteemed political economists, was reputed to be able to teach economics to a parrot: it just squawked 'supply and demand' incessantly. Both Marshall and his parrot found room in their brains to encompass the two independent principles of bourgeois theory. But it was Marshall that made a big name for himself.

Mandel is no parrot. Whereas Marshall explained his world through a synthesis of supply and demand, Mandel stuffs much more into his ragbag explanation of capitalism's history:

'And although the long cycles of the class struggle and their interrelationship with the search for radical transformation in the process of labour organisation must be integrated into that analysis, their relative autonomy must be stressed, as must the decisive role of the subjective factor in determining whether an unavoidable phase of exacerbated class struggle (this phase is, of course, the direct outcome of the long-term crisis in valorisation of capital) will end in working class defeat or victory. The provisional synthesis of all these analytical elements is shown in Table 2.1.'

We have no room for Table 2.1, but warn readers not to teach their pets any of this stuff about things 'relatively autonomous in regard to the general process of capital accumulation' lest its repetition bore their friends to death.

Who makes the waves?

Mandel's cobbling together of a mass of empirical material has nothing to do with Marxism. His random selection of facts fails to show the real relationship between the various phenomena of class struggle, political instability and economic crisis that he cites. Instead of explaining how these phenomena, apparently independent of each other, arise from the crisis of capitalist society – and, like Marx, explaining this crisis from the general process of capital accumulation – Mandel does the opposite. He emphasises 'relative autonomy' and pulls in extraneous factors at will. Mandel's 'long wave' theories are just descriptions of superficial features of capitalist production. They are of no use for the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie which is anything but 'relatively autonomous' from the impasse capitalist production has reached.

Tony Allen

How not to fight the PTA

Catherine Scorer and Patricia Hewitt, *The Prevention of Terrorism Act: the case for repeal*, National Council for Civil Liberties, London, 1981, pp68, £1.75.

'NCCL is utterly opposed to terrorist activity'

This is the opening sentence of the NCCL's pamphlet against the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Similar statements feature prominently in criticisms of the Act by Labour MPs. Indeed such declarations have been made by most radical campaigners against the PTA ever since it was first introduced in the wake of the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974. Let's look at the NCCL's position more closely.

There has been a war going on in Ireland for the past 12 years. The protagonists in this bloody conflict are the nationalist people of the Six Counties and the forces of the British state. The object of the IRA and the INLA is to terrorise Britain out of Ireland. The army, the SAS, the RUC and the UDR (with the help of the UDA and the UVF) aim to terrorise the Irish into submission to British rule. 'Terrorism' is what war is all about. But where does this leave the NCCL?

It is 'utterly opposed to terrorist activity'. And there can be no doubt about which side in the Irish War the NCCL is 'utterly opposed' to. It condemns the terrorism of the oppressed while sanctioning the violence of the British state in Ireland. But these British liberals are a little squeamish about the brutal excesses of government forces against the Irish. That's why they are critical of the procedures of British rule in the Six Counties and of the use of the PTA in Britain.

'Inefficient and unjust'

The NCCL pamphlet opposes the PTA not out of any concern to defend Irish people but because it fears that the PTA is bad for Britain. The Act abolishes 'traditional civil liberties' – 'the right to know the charges, the right to hear and challenge the evidence, the right to a fair hearing and the right to appeal'. And for what? The PTA is not used against terrorists, there is a risk of 'innocent' people being convicted and the ordinary criminal law is anyway sufficient. The NCCL also fears that the 'genuinely guilty escape'! The Act is condemned for its 'inefficiency and injustice'.

The NCCL is concerned that the PTA 'will not reduce terrorism and may – by exacerbating hostility towards police and government – increase it'. In other words the NCCL warns that the operation of the PTA may in fact strengthen the Irish struggle against the British state – and that's the last thing the NCCL wants.

Smash the PTA!

It is true that the PTA has little to do with catching 'terrorists'. But it plays an important part in the Irish War. Like the judicial and prison regime in the Six Counties, its aim is to criminalise Irish people and deprive all opposition to British rule in Ireland of political legitimacy. That's why the PTA cannot be fought in isolation from the Irish War: it can only be effectively opposed by taking sides in the war on behalf of the national liberation movement. The NCCL's opposition on the grounds of 'natural justice and the rule of law' tries to disguise its backing for British imperialism by invoking a legal fiction. No wonder so much opposition has proved ineffectual over the past seven years.

If you want to know a little about the terms of the PTA and some details of its workings, read this pamphlet, If you want to fight the PTA – join the Smash the PTA Campaign.

Mick Kennedy

Allowing us allowances

John Macnicol, *The movement for family allowances 1918-45 – a study in social policy development*, Heinemann Educational Books, December 1980, £15 hbk.

This is an interesting and useful book on one aspect of the modern welfare state. Macnicol explodes the Fabian view that welfare measures are the product of enlightened administrators under the pressure of crusading social reformers. His book would be even better if he had taken on the more radical notion that reforms like family allowances were 'gains' extracted by a victorious working class from an embattled bourgeoisie in the settlement of 1945.

The movement for family allowances, led by Eleanor Rathbone and her Family Endowment Society, got nowhere in the 'twenties and 'thirties. Apart from a few liberals and left-wingers, neither the bourgeoisie nor the labour movement wanted to know. Only war and the defeat of the working class paved the way for a universal, tax-financed system of child benefits.

The Rathbone legacy

Macnicol gives a fascinating portrait of Rathbone. She was a bourgeois feminist of the worst type. For her Poor Law widows unable to care adequately for their children needed help, but were otherwise 'grossly negligent and slatternly' and 'chronic drinkers and loose livers' to boot. As far as she was concerned, one merit of family allowances was that by making it easier for families to obtain accommodation proportionate to their size, they would 'reduce the birth rate among the slum dwellers'. Equally, however, she begged the Government to grant allowances because the 'Anglo-Saxon' race was diminishing in proportion to the 'yellow and coloured' peoples.

In her famous work *The disinherited family* (1924), Rathbone put opposition to family allowances down to what she called men's 'Turk complex' – their need to dominate and possess, and their refusal to recognise wives and children as separate personalities with rights equal to their own. Like today's feminists, she saw the roots of women's oppression not in the material world, but in psychology. The problem was not capitalism, but men's attitudes.

Rathbone drew out the consequences of her analysis forcefully. She rejected the revolutionary struggle to free women from the home. She wanted men and the state to recognise that doing household chores and bringing up children was wonderful and worthy of financial reward.

Rathbone's prejudices were echoed by one of her strongest supporters and a key member of the FES – William Beveridge. In calling for family allowances in his famous 1942 report, he observed that 'in the next thirty years housewives as mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British ideals in the world'. Here was male and national chauvinism incarnate!

Bosses ahead of the bureaucrats

Beveridge had come out in favour of family allowances as early as 1926, when he persuaded the Samuel Committee on the coal industry to recommend allowances as a means of softening the impact of wage cuts on miners. From then on both mineowners and miners were strong supporters of family allowances, although for different reasons. But the miners' union had few allies on this issue in the labour movement, despite vigorous campaigns by the FES at workplaces and union branches.

The left-wing Independent Labour Party backed family allowances, but mainly because it thought that paying workers a 'living wage' would increase purchasing power and thus stimulate demand for the products of British industry. This opportunist line, however, had little effect on bureaucrats like Ernest Bevin and Walter Citrine. They said that the state could not afford to pay allowances – and as far as they were concerned women's rights were not the business of the labour movement. Left-winger Anuerin Bevan also opposed allowances: he felt they obscured low wage levels in industry. Like the right-wingers, his only worry was about the conditions faced by the employed, unionised, male section of the working class.

However when unemployment benefit began to approach wage levels in industry in the late 'thirties some kind of scheme to give both unemployed and employed workers money for their children became necessary to maintain income differentials. Family allowances were now applauded by the Unemployment Assistance Board and the Conservative policy-making body Political and Economic Planning. (The FES counted Tories like Duncan Sandys, Leo Amery, Robert Boothby and Harold Macmillan among its ranks.) But it was the War that brought the bosses and the bureaucrats fully behind family allowances.

Families fit for heroes

In the War women went out to work in unprecedented numbers. They had to slave away in the factories – and slave away harder than ever at home. The bourgeoisie needed all workers, including women, to make the sacrifices demanded by its war drive against Germany. It won their cooperation by promising reforms – including family allowances, which were introduced in 1945. Allowances also helped to ensure that families stayed intact and that children were fit enough to reconstruct British capitalism.

Eager to collaborate in all things, the TUC dropped its opposition to family allowances. The labour bureaucrats now calculated that the government could afford them. And given that full employment seemed likely to outlast the War, they were less concerned about allowances being used to hold down wages. Indeed they shared the employers' approval of benefits that would maintain income differentials between the employed and the unemployed.

The bosses and the unions had another common interest in family allowances. They helped in pushing women out of the factories and back to the home. Child-rearing was now 'rewarded'; the Attlee Government went so far as to represent it as a career in itself. Rathbone rejoiced and Labour Party feminists were just as convinced that the socialist revolution had been achieved as their male colleagues.

Macnicol says that the Treasury resisted

family allowances because it was 'a predominantly upper-middle class, public school/Oxbridge educated elite of civil servants'. This is Tribunite rubbish. For all his good intentions and excellent documentation, he fails to make the central point about family allowances: that they were a monument to the way labour bureaucrats – and feminists like Rathbone – betrayed working class women.

Gemma Forest

Letter from the Bogside

History, someone once said, has a strange way of repeating itself. Terence MacSwiney who was Lord Mayor of Cork was also elected to Westminster. Like Bobby Sands he too ended his days on hunger strike. Recalling this, one cannot but question the wisdom of those who place so much trust in what they term "the democratic process" and call for people to put their "faith in the ballot box", and obey the "will of the majority". It would seem to many militant young people here that the English ruling-elite only advocate "social democracy" when they feel that their opponents can lose electorally. But when the people win, they take no heed whatever of the vox populi – especially when the voice of the masses comes from the nationalists of British-occupied Ireland.

As never before the world spotlight has beamed its focus on the dramatic events unfolding in British-occupied Ireland. T.V., radio, and the newspapers have sent their top reporters into the back streets of Belfast and Derry, and along the country lanes of South Armagh and Co. Derry. The world has been finding out something that has been concealed for many a long year. Yes, there is a popular struggle going on in the six north-eastern counties of Ireland. Yes, there are tens of thousands of people prepared to face the armed imperial might of Britain on the streets in support of defenceless prisoners of a war for national liberation and socialism. Yes, there are many Irish people who feel that they live in a situation of undeclared martial law and wish to see the day when the last British bullet has been fired and the last of its uniformed killers depart, in whatever way necessary, from our shores, thus ending eight hundred and twelve years of foreign interference in our national affairs.

While the strikers approached death in the slowest and most agonising way imaginable, an ever-rising tide of hysterics was manifest in the Tory, Loyalist and even Labour Party ranks. The British media, conscious of distortion, racist attacks and the usual presentation of lies and downright slander. The British forces, UDR and police seem to rise to the occasion presented by such anti-Irish hysteria and so began an escalation of state repression which seems to have the blessing of the ruling-elite at Whitehall and Westminster. A catalogue of indiscriminate beatings, torture and murder on the part of the state forces might lead one to conclude that we are now witnessing a form of legalised genocide. Certainly the mask of 'normality', 'keeping the peace', 'bipartisanship' etc. has fallen somewhat to expose the ugly face of British imperialism, which we know only too well to our tragic cost.

Since Easter about thirty people have been seriously injured by the plastic bullets. These are lethal weapons particularly in the fashion used by the troops and police, who have abandoned any pretence as abiding by the 'Yellow Card' regulations. Four have been killed, and the dead include two girls (11 and 14 years old) who were nowhere near a riot. On May 11, Henry Duffy of Creggan, Derry was killed by this weapon a few hours after the death of Patsy O'Hara, the INLA hunger striker. Mr. Duffy, a widower, left behind him seven children aged between 7 and 15. A special fund has been established to help the children, and is headed by the well-known playwright Brian Friel, the nationalist leader Eddie McAteer, and the editor of the Derry Journal among other prominent local people. The appeal is based at the Allied Irish Bank, 9 Shipquay Street, Derry.

Finn O'Foyle
Derry
*This letter has been shortened.

World in recession

Just out!

Revolutionary Communist Papers No 7

On 20 July the leaders of the top seven imperialist powers met in Ottowa, Canada, searching for an exit from the economic crisis. Beneath the diplomatic pleasantries two things became clear. First, they can all agree on the need to 'fight inflation', that is to force the working class to accept more unemployment and more austerity. But, second, they realise that this alone is not enough to restore the level of profit they need to survive. They also have to fight each other. Import controls against Japanese exports and disputes over American economic policy are the first steps.

World in recession analyses the current phase of imperialism's crisis. The article examines the important developments in the recession – the changing balance of world power, imperialist competition and the trend towards barbarism. Drawing on Marx's theory of capital accumulation it shows how the bourgeoisie's options are narrowing. The article concludes with an explanation of the crisis in Britain and spells out the consequences of the bourgeois strategy to rescue the economy from oblivion.

This issue of Revolutionary Communist Papers also includes a major article on the Loyalist working class in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, and a polemic against the radical left's dogma of 'self-activity'. The Loyalist working class answers the questions which have confused the British labour movement for decades: why can't Protestant and Catholic workers in Ireland unite against the bosses? why is trade unionism so strong yet socialist politics so weak among Protestant workers? The article shows that only by confronting British imperialism and resolving the national question can the hold of reactionaries like the Rev. Ian Paisley be broken.

'Self-activity' makes you blind is a reply to Alex Callinicos and the Socialist Workers Party. It explains how the SWP's glorification of workers' everyday struggles renders it incapable of leading them in a consistently anti-capitalist direction. In today's conditions the SWP ends up supporting the left-wing Labour and trade union bureaucrats. The article brings out how Marxism, on the other hand, can build a revolutionary alternative in the working class.

RCP ACTIVITIES

SMASH THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT CAMPAIGN

Details: phone 01-274 3951 or from sellers of *the next step*.

Central London

Ireland: a new policy for labour
The concluding meetings in our series on the Irish War and the campaign to win labour movement support for the national liberation struggle.

● **What about the Protestants?**
Thursday 30 July 7.30pm
University of London Union, Malet St, WC1
(tube: Goodge St/Warren St)

● **Can the IRA win?**
Wednesday 12 August 7.30pm
Holborn Library, 32 Theobalds Rd, WC1
(tube: Holborn/Chancery Lane)

● **How to get the troops out?**
Wednesday 26 August 7.30pm
Holborn Library, 32 Theobalds Rd, WC1
(tube: Holborn/Chancery Lane)

East London

East London Smash the PTA Campaign meets every Sunday afternoon to discuss activities and work in the unions. Details: phone 274 3951 or from sellers of *the next step*.

Coventry

Midlands Smash the PTA Campaign rally for Irish freedom. Discussion and entertainment. To be held on August bank holiday weekend.

Manchester

Boycott the Wedding – come to the Irish day-school! Use the holiday the ruling class has given us commoners to find out how to overthrow British imperialism's rule in Ireland!

● Discussion on Loyalism and the working class in the Twenty-six Counties. Speakers: Mike Freeman and Phil Murphy.
● Workshops on the PTA, trade unions and Ireland, the media.
● Irish music and a play about Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork who died on hunger strike in Brixton prison in 1920.

Organised by Manchester Smash the PTA Campaign
Moss Side People's Centre, St Marys Street, Moss Side, Manchester 15
Social in the evening
Tickets: £1 (75p unemployed); 50p for social only

North West

Rallies organised by the North West Smash the PTA Campaign in Manchester, Bolton, Preston and Blackpool along the route of the Workers' March for Irish Freedom.
Friday 4 September to Tuesday 8 September.
Details: phone 01-274 3951, or leave a message at 061-226 3691.

WORKERS AGAINST RACISM

South London Workers Against Racism

Police out of Brixton!
Brixton is under seige. Police are patrolling the streets, estates and railway bridges in Brixton like an army of occupation. They are working overtime to provoke and harass the local community: kicking down doors, smashing up houses, arresting and herding people into Camberwell Magistrates Court. SOLWAR has been organising a defence campaign for those arrested during the riots. The Brixton community must be defended from police terror!

If you are a trade unionist contact us to get a speaker to address your branch for its financial and political support. If you need help or advice, or if you have information that may be vital for the defence of those arrested then contact us urgently. Ring us any time on 274 3951. We desperately need your money for the defence fund. Send donations to: SOLWAR, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX.

SOLWAR holds regular fortnightly meetings to discuss local activities, on Tuesdays at 7pm. For details phone 274 3951.

East London Workers Against Racism

If you live in East London and want to do something about racist violence – join us!
ELWAR is in Brick Lane every Sunday 9.30am –12 noon, and has regular meetings for supporters.
Write c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High St, E8

Coventry Workers Against Racism

'Coventry, Moss Side, Toxteth, Brixton. . .after the riots, what next?'
COVWAR public meeting. Speakers from trade unions, Asian and West Indian organisations in Coventry and elsewhere.
Tuesday 4 August 7.30pm
The Railway pub, Boston Place, Lockhurst Lane, Coventry

COVWAR holds weekly planning and discussion meetings on Tuesdays at 7.30pm. Newcomers welcome!
Details from sellers of *the next step* or phone 01-274 3951.

Manchester Workers Against Racism

End police harassment of black youth! Drop the charges against Nicky Smith!

Street meeting in Moss Side precinct, outside the Hotpot
Friday 31 July 4.30–6pm

Stop the deportation of Cynthia Gordon!
Street meeting organised by the Cynthia Gordon Defence Campaign in Moss Side precinct outside the library
Saturday 1 August 11am–1pm

MANWAR SOCIAL!
8 August. Phone 061-226 3691 for details.

Drop the charges against Nicky Smith!
Picket Crown Square Magistrates Court, Manchester. Bring your union banner.
11 August 9.30am

SMASH THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT CAMPAIGN

WORKERS MARCH FOR IRISH FREEDOM

Lobby the TUC on 8 September
Throw out TUC Irish policy!

Route and schedule	
Saturday 5 September	March begins in St Peters Sq, Manchester. March through city and out onto Bolton Road
Sunday 6 September	Bolton — Preston
Monday 7 September	Preston — Blackpool
Tuesday 8 September	Join the Workers' March to a national lobby of the TUC, 11am. Followed by major SPTAC rally in Blackpool

As the People's March for Jobs wound its way from Liverpool to London in May, four Irish republican prisoners died on hunger strike for political status in the H-Blocks. Many of the marchers and the thousands who turned out to greet them in towns along the route expressed sympathy with the hunger strikers and their objectives, and hostility to the British Government's policy.

The Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign appealed to the People's March and its supporters to back the prisoners and their demands for political status. As the March passed through major cities, we raised banners in support of the hunger strike at the mass receptions which took place. In London we organised major interventions at the People's March events in Brockwell Park, Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square. We got an overwhelmingly positive response from the marchers and other demonstrators. But the organisers of the March were bitterly hostile to the Irish cause.

Marchers who put on black armbands when Bobby Sands died were told to remove them or leave the March. Pro-hunger strike protestors who joined the March or supported rallies were beaten up, harassed by stewards, had banners torn down and placards confiscated. The TUC's repressive line followed the same approach that led it to expel Tameside Trades Council in 1980, and to threaten the expulsion of any trades council attending the Coventry conference of trade unionists in support of the H-Block protest earlier this year. All that Len Murray has done on Ireland in the recent period is to turn up at the national trades council conference in June and denounce a motion he thought might threaten the TUC's reactionary stand on the Irish War.

Now two more Irish prisoners have died on hunger strike and others have taken their place. In elections north and south of the border, Irish men and women have shown their support for the prisoners' demands. But still there has been no effective response from the labour movement in Britain. At this critical stage in the Irish War the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign has launched the Workers' March for Irish Freedom from Manchester to the TUC annual congress at Blackpool in September.

The Workers' March has four objectives:

- To declare support for the Irish hunger strikers and their demands for political status.
- To condemn TUC and Labour Party backing of Government policy on the Six Counties. Thatcher will continue to get away with the murder of Irish prisoners unless we can break the labour movement from the stand of its leaders.
- To condemn the TUC's proscription of discussion and debate on Ireland.
- To win British workers' support for the Irish national liberation movement. A defeat for Britain is a victory for the working class in Ireland and in Britain!

Come on the March! Support the lobby of the TUC! Get your union branch or organisation to sponsor it!

SPONSORS

- **IRELAND (Groups)** Irish Republican Socialist Party, Derry H-Block/Armagh Trade Union Group
- **IRELAND (Individuals in a personal capacity)** Phil Flynn (deputy general secretary Local Government and Public Services Union), Brian Sullivan (NUPE district secretary Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast), Paddy Logue (TGWU branch secretary, Derry, chairman Derry H-Block/Armagh Committee), all members of the Trade Union Subcommittee National H-Block/Armagh Committee and Liam Carlin (ex-blanketman)
- **TRADE UNIONISTS (in a personal capacity)** Steve Noble (president Tameside Teachers Association), Geoff Robinson (Bradford Trades Council, SWP), Dave Burrows (TGWU 6/27), Dave Hallsworth (secretary reconvened Tameside Trades Council), Dave Ayre (Wear Valley Trades Council), Alan Hudson (Manchester Trades Council), Stan Meads (Stockport Trades Council, TGWU Region 6, Power and Engineering section district committee), Jimmy O'Hara (TGWU Building Workers section national committee), J Jones (TGWU Coventry/167), A Acheson (Leicester NUT), Tony Pople (Hackney NALGO, Hackney Trades Council), Pat Regan (Hackney NALGO, Hackney Trades Council), Cathy Boylan (NUPE shop steward, NUPE hospitals group 6, Hackney Trades Council), Brian Capell (Warrington Trades Council), Nasser Patel (TGWU buses, secretary West Ham Trades Council), Chris Surety (Greenwich NALGO), Paddy Faherty (UCATT, Hackney Trades Council), Mark Wilks (chairman NE London ASTMS medical), John Defoe (AUEW West Ham), J McDougall-Birch (NATFHE Coventry, Coventry Trades Council), Seamus Duffy (NUPE Birmingham), John Villiers (TGWU ACTTS senior steward, Jaguar, Coventry), Ian Ridley (AUEW steward, Talbot, Coventry), Pat Isiorho (secretary Nuneaton NUT), George Hope (AUEW TASS, divisional organiser, Coventry), Danny Miles (COHSE, Colchester Trades Council, SWP)
- **TRADE UNION BRANCHES** TGWU 6/389, SE London ASTMS
- **LABOUR PARTY** Alf Home (Labour councillor, Old Moat, Manchester), Chris Robinson (Labour councillor, Rosendale), S Crooke (Queens Park CLP, Glasgow), Peter Leigh (Labour councillor, Coventry)
- **ORGANISATIONS** East London TOM, Kurdistan Solidarity Group (Leeds), Iranian Students in Britain (Left Platform), Tower Hamlets Trades Council Irish Subcommittee
- **INDIVIDUALS** Paul Foot

If you would like to join the March contact Keith Tompson on 01-274 3951 or write to SPTAC, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX

Preparing for power

11-13 September
University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1
Registration: £6 (£3 unemployed)

British capitalism is in its worst recession of the post-war period. Soon there will be three million people queuing up for dole money as the sackings continue without relent. Living standards are being driven down and the Government is equipping the police and the army to deal with any sign of revolt. In this situation the left is running for cover into the Labour Party. Born-again reformists devise elaborate schemes for saving the economy, and the TUC tightens its grip on the official labour movement. What's going on? The Preparing for Power conference will analyse these important developments and discuss the way out of the present crisis facing the working class.

The conference will address the major theoretical and practical questions in the labour movement in Britain and in other countries. A wide range of workshops will examine:

- The theory of reformism — the politics of the Second International and the nature of Social Democracy. Is there an aristocracy of labour? The role of the Alternative Economic Strategy
- The history of the labour movement — Trotskyism and Stalinism in Britain. The rise and fall of Eurocommunism. The Labour left then and now. Post-war developments in the trade unions
- Working class struggles — fighting redundancies. Occupations: the recent experience. Overcoming sectionalism. Racism and the unions. The position of women workers
- International — socialism and chauvinism in France. Crisis of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. American workers and Reagan. Blacks against Botha in South Africa.

Three days of discussion and debate will cover these and many other questions. Find out how to combat the paralysing effects of reformism and how to build the revolutionary alternative! Stop preparing for defeat, start Preparing for Power!

Programme and reading list sent on registration. Inform us if you need accommodation or a creche. For more details phone 01-274 3951.