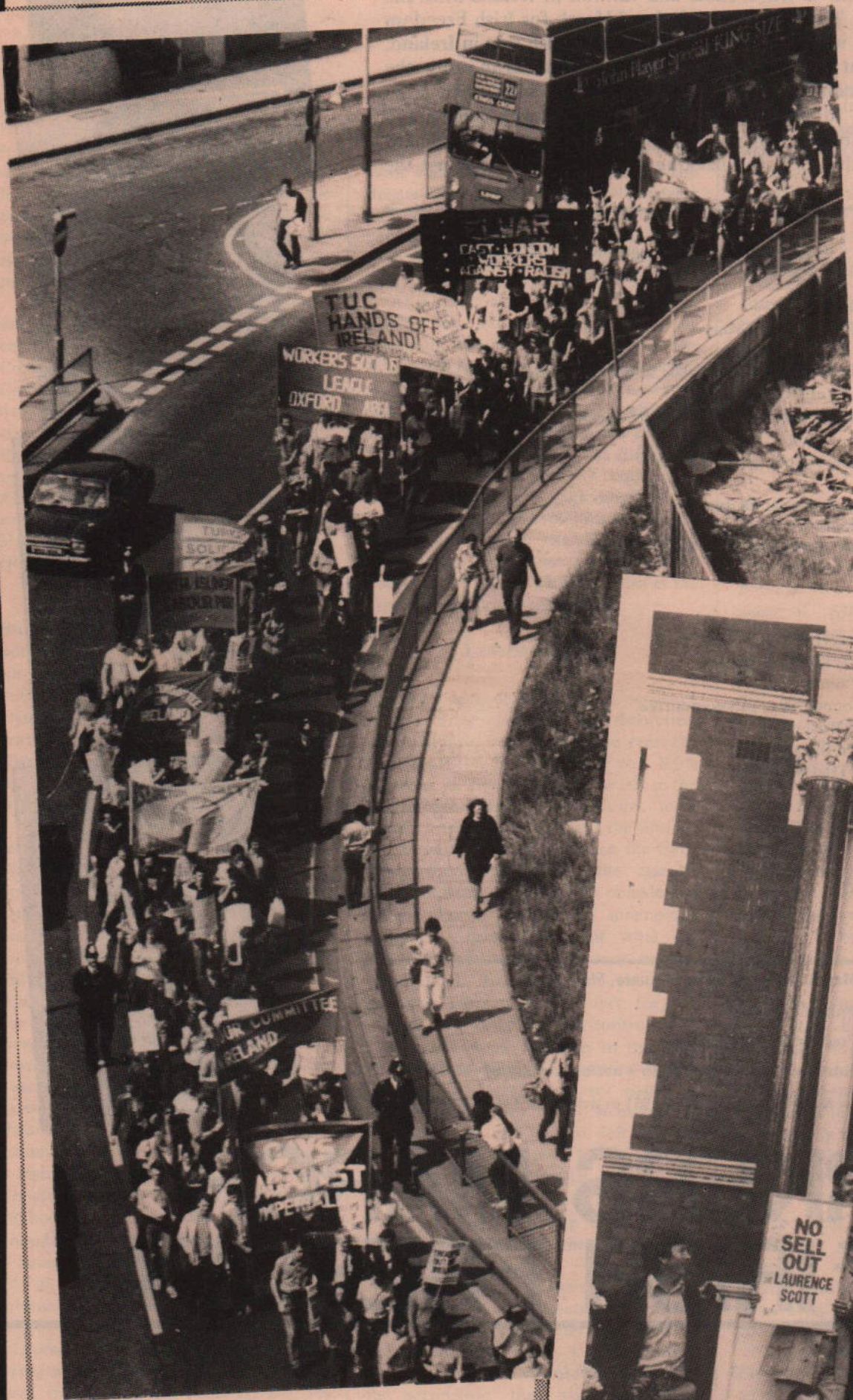


No 16 September 1981

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party 20p



Workers March for Irish Freedom

Manchester to Blackpool
5-8 September
Lobby the TUC!
Throw out TUC Irish policy!

LAURENCE SCOTT
OCCUPATION

Fighting for every job



RCP ACTIVITIES

SMASH THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT CAMPAIGN

Central London

The final meeting in our series on the Irish War and how to win labour movement support in Britain for the liberation struggle in Ireland. Speaker: Mike Freeman

● How do we get the troops out?
Wednesday 9 September 7.30pm
Holborn Library, 32 Theobalds Rd, WC1
(tube: Holborn/Chancery Lane)

South London and East London

South London Smash the PTA Campaign meets on alternate Fridays at 7pm.

East London Smash the PTA Campaign meets on alternate Sundays at 2pm.

These meetings are to discuss local activities and the political issues arising out of the Irish War and the hunger strike.

Details: phone 274 3951, or from sellers of the next step.

Coventry

Coventry Smash the PTA Campaign meets on alternate Wednesdays, starting in September. Come and discuss how to build the anti-imperialist movement on Ireland, and how to follow the success of the labour movement conference against TUC policy held in March.

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

North West

WORKERS MARCH FOR IRISH FREEDOM

Support the Workers' March for Irish Freedom from Manchester on 5 September to the TUC in Blackpool on 8 September.

Rallies are organised by the North West Smash the PTA Campaign along the route through Bolton and Preston, and in Blackpool.

Throw out TUC Irish policy – lobby the TUC on 8 September!

Details: phone 01-274 3951, or leave a message at 061-226 3691.

Luton

Demonstration in support of the hunger strikers called by Sinn Fein.

Saturday 26 September

Assemble 1.30pm, People's Park, Luton

Join the SPTAC contingent: Victory to the hunger strikers!

WORKERS AGAINST RACISM

South London Workers Against Racism

SOLWAR holds regular fortnightly meetings to discuss local activities, on Tuesdays at 7pm. Come and join the campaign to press charges against the police for their violence against the black community in Brixton. We urgently need your support. Send donations to help us cover our costs to: SOLWAR, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX.

Campaign meetings with speakers from Liverpool and local trade unionists are also planned for Tuesday 1 September and Tuesday 22 September at 7pm in St Matthews Church Hall, opposite Lambeth Town Hall (nearest tube: Brixton). Details: phone 274 3951.

East London Workers Against Racism

ELWAR activists meet regularly every Friday at 7pm. If you've had enough of racist violence in East London, then follow the example of many who came to the Workers Against Racism national conference in the local area and join ELWAR.

Details: phone 274 3951, or write to ELWAR, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, E8.

Coventry Workers Against Racism

COVWAR holds weekly planning and discussion meetings on Tuesdays at 7.30pm. New-comers welcome!

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

Drop all charges!

Stop the criminalisation of black youth!

Picket Coventry magistrates court, Bayley Lane.

Thursday 22 October 10am
In support of youth arrested on 13 July riots.

Manchester Workers Against Racism

For information about MANWAR's activities and how you can get involved, phone: 061-226 3691.

VICTORY TO THE IRISH HUNGER STRIKERS!

Ten hunger strikers have now died in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh. The election of Owen Carron to succeed Bobby Sands as MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone confirms the backing of the Irish people for the struggle against British rule. It confirms the tremendous resilience of the nationalist people of the Six Counties who have suffered 60 years of repression and discrimination, 12 years of war and a period of intense British intimidation and torment since the hunger strikes began almost a year ago. But the hunger strikes continue and the War goes on.

There will be no end to the trouble and turmoil in Ireland until the British are driven out. The aim of the Workers' March for Irish Freedom is to mobilise British working class resistance to British rule in Ireland. Our first target is that faithful bastion of British imperialism inside the working class movement – the TUC. We're marching from Manchester to Blackpool to show our support for the hunger strikers and the Irish liberation struggle, our anger at the policy of the Government and our outrage at the TUC for backing the British state against the Irish people.

SPONSORS

Listed below are just a few of the individuals (in a personal capacity) and groups who are backing the Workers March for Irish Freedom.

Irish Republican Socialist Party
Derry H-Block/Armagh Trade Union Group
Phil Flynn
(deputy general secretary Local Government and Public Services Union, Dublin)
Paddy Logue
(chairman Derry H-Block/Armagh Committee, TGWU branch secretary)
Brian Sullivan
(NUPE district secretary, Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast)
Finbar O'Doherty
(founder member Civil Rights movement, Derry)
Liam Carlin (ex-blanketman)
Patsy McNeice (IRSP POW, the cages, Long Kesh)
Ken Livingstone (leader GLC)
Mick Martin
(Hammersmith Trades Council)
Paul Foot (*Socialist Worker*/*Daily Mirror*)
Coventry Hunger Strike Action Committee
Leeds H-Block/Armagh Committee
Tower Hamlets Trades Council Irish sub-committee
East London Troops Out Movement
Building Workers rank and file group
Wear Valley and District Trades Council
Moslem Students Society
Kurdistan Solidarity Group
Iranian Students
Fedayeen minority
Revolutionary Gay Caucus
Au Pairs
Burnley SWP
Preston SWP

Saturday 5 September March begins in Crown Square, Manchester.

Sunday 6 September Bolton – Preston

Monday 7 September Preston – Blackpool

Tuesday 8 September Join the Workers' March to a national lobby of the TUC

For more information contact Keith Tompson: 01-274 3951 or write to SPTAC, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX.

WORKERS MARCH FOR IRISH FREEDOM

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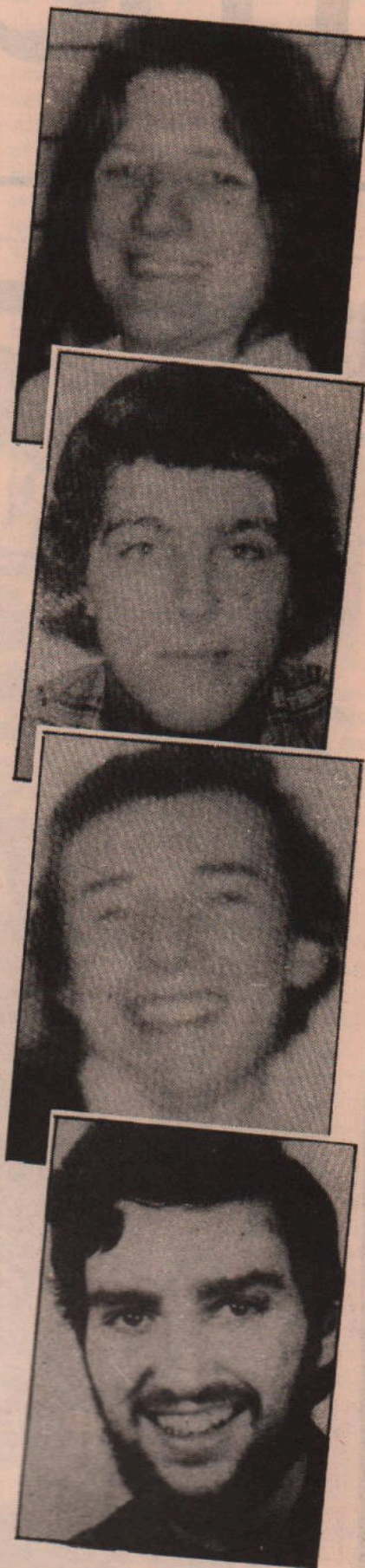
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Preparing for Power

THE REVOLUTIONARY Communist Party is holding a three-day conference from 11 September in London on the working class movement in the 'eighties. Entitled 'Preparing for Power', the conference is about the theoretical and political problems facing activists in workplaces, in trade unions and in the wider political life of contemporary Europe.

'Preparing for Power' is the first major initiative we have organised since we changed our name from Revolutionary Communist Tendency to Revolutionary Communist Party. It marks a decisive departure from the tradition of shoddy socialism in Britain. In preparation for the conference we have recently published two issues of our theoretical journal *Revolutionary Communist Papers* in rapid succession: the first (RCP 7) on the Marxist theory of crisis, the second (RCP 8) on the theory of reformism.

Theoretical torpor

British socialism has long been notorious not only for its reformism but also for its theoretical poverty. Most radical politicians pay lip-service to theory; yet argument about, for example, Marx's critique of bourgeois political economy always takes second place to debate on the day to day minutiae of trade union struggles.

The left's theoretical journals are testimony to its denigration of theory. The Communist Party's 'theoretical and discussion journal' *Marxism Today* is not a theoretical journal at all: it is a slickly produced magazine stuffed with turgid replies to such burning questions as: Is the Marxist tradition democratic? Is British Steel in irreversible decline? Can the British car industry survive? Must we wave goodbye to detente? *International Socialism*, the Socialist Workers Party quarterly, carries both incoherent apologies for the SWP's revisionist economic theories, and articles which are of purely academic interest. While *Marxism Today* is distributed by WH Smith, *International Socialism* seems not to be distributed by anybody, with the result that virtually nobody — certainly few SWP members — actually reads it.

The left's journals are largely for internal consumption: indeed they are aimed at the various organisations' intellectual constituencies rather than their paper-sellers (a division the left has taken over from bourgeois society). It's the same with the Workers Revolutionary Party. The only connection between the seller of the WRP's *Newsline* and the reader of *Labour Review*, the WRP's 'monthly theoretical organ', is that both get served up Gerry Healy's schoolboy guide to Marxist philosophy. The content of *Labour Review* has virtually nothing to do with the political realities that so overwhelm the pages of *Newsline*.

As for the left's theoretical summer schools — from the CP's 'Communist University of London' to the SWP's 'Marxism 81' — they only represent another measure of its backwardness.

Students attend and lecturers descend to give a series of badly-prepared and badly-organised sessions. It's like a second rate sixth form. The audience is passive and debate minimal or artificial: how relatively autonomous is women's oppression from capitalist production (CUL)?, how much rope should *Women's Voice* get (Marxism 81)?

As a result of its frivolous attitude to theory the left never even asks the important questions. What are the forces tending to arrest the decline of capitalism and which factors are tending to deepen the recession? How has the changing composition of the working class affected its political outlook? Why has the British Labour Party — and its equivalents throughout Europe — again moved to the centre of working class politics, after being written off by the extra-Parliamentary left a decade ago? These are some of the questions we will be grappling with at the Preparing for Power conference.

Laurence Scott

The left's lack of political independence follows from its lack of theoretical independence. For the past two years the Labour Party has fixed all the left's horizons. In the case of the far left in the Labour Party, Labour's manifesto, mandatory reselection of MPs, and the election of the party's leader have been the three major preoccupations. In the case of those activists who are still outside the Labour Party, debates on inner-party democracy have become of 'vital significance' too; moreover work on unemployment, Ireland, racism and international issues has been left for the Labour Party to initiate and control.

The left never faces up to the most important problem — its relationship to the Labour Party. In recent issues of *the next step* we have discussed the adaptation of the radical left to the labour bureaucracy on the People's March, the Tony Benn Campaign and on the summer riots. In this issue we focus on the left's opportunism in the Laurence Scott occupation and the Irish hunger strike.

The workers at Laurence Scott and Electromotors were evicted from their factory on 18 August after a four-month occupation (see pages 4 and 5). The labour bureaucrats dictated the terms of the occupation: they were opposed to closure and to enforced redundancies, but accepted that there would be many job losses as the price of keeping LSE open. John Silkin, one of Labour's aspiring deputy leaders, visited to give his blessing; and not to be outdone at this crucial stage in the run-up to the party conference, Tony Benn made sure he sent his message of support. Things went smoothly until the activists at the factory started to disrupt the whole LSE chain with flying pickets. Then the bureaucrats moved swiftly, fixing up a sell-out package with the managing director and, when the workers rejected this, withdrawing recog-

nition (and strike pay) from the occupiers. They stood aside and let the court bailiffs smash the occupation.

However LSE has a broader political significance. Supporters of *the next step* on the factory floor fought consistently for defence of *all* jobs and more militant tactics to prevent the sell-out. Meanwhile local SWP and IMG activists consistently adapted to the strategy of the bureaucrats — a strategy that threatens to lead ultimately to the loss, not just of some jobs, but of all 650 at the factory. This is the inevitable consequence of the radical left's inability to differentiate itself politically from left-reformism.

Who's imperialist now?

On the question of imperialism the left's theoretical weakness has particularly damaging consequences. The radical left has adopted the traditional reformist prejudice that imperialism is not a general stage of capitalist development but a particular set of policies pursued by bourgeois governments. They have wrongly identified imperialism with colonialism — and the decolonisation of the post-war period confirms their view that imperialism no longer exists. These issues were the themes of our first international conference in September 1980.

Take the CP. The CP Executive Committee's resolution on 'peace' to its forthcoming congress denounces 'US imperialism' while wholly ignoring the home-grown British variety. It asks coyly 'can Britain break from US domination?'. Britain, one of the most rapacious imperialist powers in the world, has now become an oppressed country! The resolution contains obligatory paragraphs on national liberation struggles in Palestine, Iran, South East Asia, Namibia and South Africa, but *nothing* about the national liberation struggle against British oppression in Ireland. The *Morning Star* has recently been trying to explain why it supports the ANC in South Africa at the same time as it condemns the IRA in Ireland by inventing major differences in the political character of these anti-imperialist guerrilla groups. The real reason is much simpler — the ANC attacks the South African state 6000 miles away; the IRA attacks the British state at home.

The impotence of the left in supporting the Irish hunger strikers is directly related to its reformist understanding of imperialism. It sees Margaret Thatcher's Irish policy as the product of her peculiar personality rather than as reflecting the needs of British imperialism. The British ruling class is intransigent in Ireland because it must contain the threat to the stability of the United Kingdom the Irish liberation struggle represents.

Marching for Irish freedom

'We are not looking at an impending railway strike but at part of an armed insurrection' commented the editor of *The Times* on the H-Block hunger strike on 11 August. And he was right. The

ruling class can compromise on industrial action but not on a challenge to its right to rule in part of the United Kingdom.

Yet while the British bourgeoisie knows precisely what is at issue in the H-Blocks, most British socialists don't. To avoid backing an armed insurrection against the British state they pretend that it isn't really happening. They ignore the way Britain brands Irish freedom fighters as criminals and psychopaths so it can deny legitimacy to the national liberation struggle. Having obscured the issues, they plead with Margaret Thatcher to be more flexible, but British imperialism cannot afford to deal flexibly with those who deny its right to rule in Ireland.

We know that the only people in Britain who will support the hunger strikers are workers who support the armed insurrection against British rule that led to their imprisonment. That's why we launched the Workers' March for Irish Freedom. It has four objects:

- To declare support for the Irish hunger strikers and their demands for political status.

- To condemn the backing the official labour movement — TUC and Labour Party — gives to Government policy on the Six Counties.

- To condemn the TUC's proscription of discussion and debate on Ireland.

- To win British workers' support for the Irish national liberation movement.

The March has caused some consternation on the British left. While prominent individuals like GLC leader Ken Livingstone, *Daily Mirror* journalist Paul Foot and Hammersmith Trades Council leader Mick Martin have given their support, many other members of the Labour Party and other left groups have refused to back the march. The SWP for example doesn't know what to do. Torn between endorsing a campaign against the TUC in support of the Irish liberation movement and sectarian hostility to the RCP — compounded with loyalty to the labour bureaucracy — some SWP members have voted for, some against and some in abstention at various trades council debates on the Workers' March. *Socialist Worker* censored from our advertisement on the March the fact that the Burnley SWP and the Building Workers rank and file group have agreed to sponsor it.

However as the hunger strikes continue support for the march grows. The Troops Out Movement recently assembled 300 people to march in *Belfast* on the tenth anniversary of Internment — more than it has mobilised on any occasion in support of the hunger strikers in *Britain*. Let's see how many people TOM can mobilise to challenge the official labour movement's backing for Thatcher's stand!

Preparing for power means developing the theory of the working class movement — and breaking workers from the politics of the Labour Party on the key issues of the moment. The Revolutionary Communist Party is the only organisation seriously preparing to take state power in Britain. It's time to join us.

LAURENCE SCOTT

A HISTORIC OCCUPATION

Deadly 'realism'

THE TERMS on which the bureaucrats conducted the LSE occupation, and finally sold it out, were clear right from the start. At his first meeting with the LSE workers to discuss Snipe's decision to close the factory AUEW full-timer John Tocher propounded the 'realistic' approach that finally sent 650 workers down the road. Tocher advised that the workers should fight to keep LSE open but should recognise, realistically, that there would have to be substantial redundancies. When challenged on this by angry LSE workers he modified his position to appease the Manchester workers by saying that the redundancies should come from the LSE group as a whole. But this hint at the transfer of sackings from Manchester to Norwich or Blantyre altered nothing in the basic argument (it simply revealed the divisive consequences of the bureaucrats' strategy within the LSE claim). Tocher's approval of 'substantial redundancies' was the thin end of a wedge that was driven slowly home during the long weeks of the occupation.

The local bureaucrats' first move was to commission the Engineering Research Unit at Manchester Polytechnic to provide some economic justifications for keeping LSE open. The academics also took a realistic view:

'The unions accepted short time working as preferable to redundancies and if the factory stays open they realistically accept that if orders do not increase then they will have to negotiate redundancies, exploring fully ways of obtaining reductions in the size of the workforce by voluntary means. The main point remains that keeping open at a reduced level means that the factory remains to provide work locally, and would be there to take advantage of any future up-turn in the economy.'

The professors were right to point to the unions' consistency in accepting short time working in October 1980 and their willingness to endorse redundancies six months later. Short time work not only meant wage cuts, it was also divisive as it was operated differently in different sections. Yet only supporters of the *next step* — who put out a factory bulletin at the time — opposed the short time scheme. For Snipe it tested out the workforce and gave him the confidence to go for all out closure.

The Engineering Research document with its message of realism and compromise was distributed to every LSE worker. It became the charter which guided the bureaucrats' resistance to closure.

The central message of the bureaucrats' charter was that Snipe's Manchester operation was vital to his own commercial interests and the wider needs of the country. The proposed shutdown was a big mistake:

'Though much of the production of mining machinery could be transferred to Norwich it can be made profitably at Manchester, and given the long-term importance of adequate coal supplies, retaining the capacity at Manchester is crucial.'

The logical weakness of this argument simply reflects the fact that the union officials and their friends at the Poly are not successful businessmen like Arthur Snipe. But they have loftier concerns than making profits — the defence of the realm:

There have been many occupations of British factories over the past ten years. Laurence Scott and Electromotors' plant at Openshaw, Manchester itself played a leading role in the wave of sit-ins in the area in support of the 1972 engineering pay claim. In recent years many workers have occupied their workplaces in an attempt to save jobs. The significance of the LSE occupation, which ended after 116 days on 18 August with the forcible eviction of the workers, was that two fundamentally opposed ways of resisting redundancies were clearly put before the workers.

On the one side were those who stood for defending jobs through compromise with the employer; they identified with management's concerns about viability and profitability and called for voluntary rather than compulsory redundancy, for running LSE with a drastically reduced workforce rather than total shutdown. In this camp were the trade union officials at every level from the council chamber of the AUEW to the convenors and shop stewards' offices at LSE and many of the workers.

On the other side were those who stood for defending jobs by fighting the employer; they rejected all consideration of the firm's financial position and insisted that the workers' needs were their sole priority. They demanded that all jobs should be maintained and that workers should make no concessions on pay and conditions to help the company make higher profits. In this camp were supporters of the *next step* at the factory led by RCP member Dave Hallsworth — and a steadily growing body of rank and file workers. Pat Roberts assesses the occupation.

'There are four Polaris subs based at Faslane, and at any one time one is in dock being refurbished after a six-month tour of duty. Each time this occurs the electrical motors are taken out and sent down to LSE, Manchester to be overhauled. As each sub has only one set of spare motors, the twelve plus months delay that will occur could mean that one or more of the Polaris submarines might have to be taken out of service.'

Thus the bureaucrats tried to reconcile LSE workers' need for jobs with Snipe's hunger for profit and the nation's need for coal and an effective nuclear strike force. (The sentimental attachment of trade union officials and radical academics for nuclear disarmament seems to have been suspended for the course of the dispute.) Unfortunately for the bureaucrats — and even more unfortunately for LSE workers — Snipe knows how to maximise his profits, and LSE Manchester no longer has a place in Mining Supplies' corporate plans.

From the start the local officials narrowed the objectives of the occupation to keeping LSE open with a greatly diminished workforce. They did not oppose all redundancies, but Snipe's insistence on making everybody redundant and his way of going about it. The arguments provided by the Research Unit, backed up by affirmations of the LSE unions' record of co-operation with management, were repeated by the shop stewards as well as by the full-time officials throughout the occupation.

Revolutionary realism

Supporters of the *next step* began the fight against the LSE sell-out last October. Our bulletin clearly put the needs of the workers above any consideration of the viability of the company:

'We have to tell whoever runs Scotts that we are not accepting a worsening of our conditions just so that their position can be bettered.'

After the closure was announced in April we immediately put out another bulletin to repudiate the bureaucrats' argument that mass redundancies were an alternative to closure, and to call for an

immediate occupation. (Some of the officials were in favour of occupying — but in July when existing orders were completed.) The occupation began.

The conflict between what was realistic from the point of view of the company and what was realistic from the point of view of its workers recurred at every turn in the occupation. Regular articles in the *next step*, factory bulletins and constant discussions at meetings, on shift duty, on pickets and delegations to other factories — all emphasised our stand against all redundancies and opposition to the apologetics of the officials. We had to take on the right-wing leadership of the AUEW, the local Broad Left officials and the leading factory representatives because when it came to the crunch their positions were the same.

Early in June the terms of the final sell-out were already emerging. Union representatives including Tocher met Snipe for negotiations. They proposed 'rationalisations throughout the group, discussions on early retirement and work sharing' (*Morning Star*, 3 June). Snipe, sensing that victory was within his grasp, rejected this offer of partial surrender and went for the kill. A month later he got it at negotiations in London with Confed officials and LSE convenor Bob Penchion.

The first provision of the 10 July 'conditions for reopening the Openshaw factory' was that 'the unions agree that some redundancy is inevitable'. Ruthlessly exploiting this fatal flaw in the militant defence of jobs at LSE, Snipe's deal with the bureaucrats offered a minimum two-day week for three months when 'the future position will be reviewed':

'The company intention will be to ensure a viable future for the Openshaw establishment. This may necessitate operating the company on reduced premises.'

Nobody is in any doubt that a viable future for Snipe means no future for most, if not all, LSE workers. This deal was rejected by the stewards and the convenor resigned, but the fact that most stewards accepted its basic premises weakened their position. The bureaucrats

were able to stop strike pay, isolate the occupation and allow the state to go through the process of returning the factory to its owners.

Every left-wing paper condemned the sell-out and the role of the right-wing national officials like Terry Duffy and Ken Cure in enforcing it. But only the *next step* and its supporters inside and outside the factory challenged the political strategy that united Manchester Broad Left officials and LSE shop stewards with the Confed leaders. Members of the Socialist Workers Party and the International Marxist Group, who played a supportive role to the local trade union officials in the dispute, never questioned their political strategy. Furthermore they endorsed the conservative tactics that followed from this strategy.

Flying pickets

Our first bulletin during the occupation proposed flying pickets:

'We have to go on the offensive and bring more pressure to bear on Snipe... We need to organise groups of workers to go out from Manchester to his other factories. Mining Supplies in Doncaster and Laurence Scott at Norwich are particularly important.'

But the leadership of the occupation plodded along, reluctant to up the stakes, and refused to organise pickets. It proceeded through official channels to hold fruitless discussions with convenors at Doncaster and Norwich.

The bureaucrats' great hope was to mobilise Arthur Scargill's Yorkshire miners against Snipe's operation at Doncaster. Scargill was all talk and no action. He said he would black Mining Supplies when the factory itself and the entire LSE group became involved in the dispute — in other words when there was no need for blacking. Scargill was safe enough because the Doncaster plant was cowed by past victimisations; Norwich was reeling from 90 recent redundancies. The Yorkshire miners' token donation to the LSE occupation fund was meanwhile celebrated in the radical left press.

Towards the end of June Dave Hallsworth and some of the more militant shop stewards, impatient at the slow progress of the occupation, formed an Action Committee. Dave's proposal of sending teams of pickets to Doncaster and Manchester was initially opposed by local SWP and IMG organisers who attended the committee: they condemned it as adventurist and favoured further approaches to the AUEW and NUM officials. When they discovered the extent of support for the pickets among the LSE rank and file they backed down. In the event the flying pickets which began in early July, whilst they did not bring Snipe's empire to a standstill, did cause considerable disruption. They were also a boost to flagging morale at the Manchester factory.

Defying the courts

In the closing stages of the occupation the question of how to deal with the bailiffs and the police became a pressing one for the LSE workers. Snipe's first reaction to the rejection of the Confed deal by a mass meeting was to apply to the courts for a re-possession order. We urged the need to resist eviction — and the need to win wider support to make

resistance effective:

'For us the occupation of the factory is crucial to our holding together. The fact that we held the factory as a hostage for our jobs gave us the base from which to carry the fight to Doncaster. Without that base the fight would be a thousand times more difficult. The holding of the factory is a hostage to the unions as well as to Mining Supplies. It has been the basis of the tremendous support throughout the trade union movement. . . . They have been quick to nail the writ to the door. It is another thing altogether for them to enforce it.' (LSE occupation bulletin, No 5, August)

Once again the officials urged caution and moderation. Through the agency of local Labour MP Charles Morris some of the stewards, in association with the SWP, made informal arrangements for a peaceful evacuation when the bailiffs arrived. But the 10 August mass meeting that voted to continue the occupation also voted, after a speech from Dave Halls-

worth, to resist eviction right up to the end.

Running an occupation

Supporters of *the next step* waged a constant battle inside the occupation against the bureaucratic way it was conducted. The officials ran the occupation as a small clique: they never convened a meeting of all the shop stewards and only called occasional mass meetings when obliged to. We called for regular mass meetings to ensure the widest possible political discussion and assessment of the experience of the occupation. The officials tried to blame their conservative approach on the backwardness of the rank and file. 'If we have a mass meeting' said one, 'they'll vote to call off the occupation.' The radical left groups - whose members largely fraternised with the bureaucrats rather than the rank and file - echoed this prejudice. But as it proceeded the

occupation itself proved them wrong.

The occupation threw the workers into a political turmoil. Many had worked at LSE for 20 years and more: they now had about as little chance as the young apprentices of getting another job in recession-struck Manchester. Workers were bitter about Snipe from the start - they were bitter too about Duffy and Tocher by the end. And it was the rank and file workers who were more open to considering an alternative to the official AUEW way of defending jobs. Thus while the shop stewards tended to echo the arguments of the full-time officials and follow their political lead, the rank and file workers were more prepared to take up an independent stand.

The presence of Dave Hallsworth as an exponent of working class politics on the factory floor at LSE provided a constant counterweight to the bureaucracy. It helped to ensure a solid core of support

for militant tactics. The response of many workers to the Doncaster pickets was 'we should have started these weeks ago'. And many more responded positively to the call for an aggressive stand against the bailiffs and the police. The bureaucrats in reality did not fear that the rank and file would respond to greater democratic control over the occupation by calling it off. They feared that they would step it up and possibly take it out of the constraining hands of the bureaucracy.

The LSE occupation began to draw lines that will be of increasing importance in the months ahead - between bureaucrats and radicals who stand for class compromise and revolutionaries and workers who see that the only way forward for workers is through the class struggle. The LSE occupation may be over but it stands as an example of how - and how not - to fight for jobs today.



LSE workers at AUEW HQ with a clear message for the bureaucrats. The policeman Duffy called to throw them out is in the background - where he stayed.

Snipe's adversaries

Of the 650 workers at LSE's plant at Openshaw in Manchester more than 400 work on the factory floor and about 200 are staff employees. The majority of shop floor workers are members of the engineering union (AUEW); the rest are electricians (EETPU), boilermakers (ASB) or in the TGWU. The white-collar workers are organised by TASS, APEX and ASTMS. Most LSE workers - around two-thirds - are skilled.

There is no overall trade union organisation in the plant but the manual workers' shop stewards are represented on a joint shop stewards committee which elects a convenor. All told there are around 30 shop stewards in the plant which has operated closed shops in all departments since 1972.

The key union at LSE is the AUEW. Its local full-time regional secretary John Tocher is a prominent figure in the union's Broad Left as is North Manchester district secretary Douglas Daniels; both played important parts in the occupation.

The AUEW played the decisive role in selling out the LSE workers at a national level, both through its own offices and through those of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions which brings together all the unions represented at LSE. The key hatchetman was Ken Cure who is a member of both AUEW and Confed executives.

Occupation diary

7 April	Closure announced for 10 July
24 April	Workers vote by 292 to 198 to occupy
29 April	Snipe threatens to sack all workers if occupation not ended by 5 May
3 May	Workers vote by 313 to 247 to continue occupation
mid May	Snipe offers to withdraw redundancy notices, negotiate redundancy pay and maintain full wages till closure: offer rejected Snipe formally sacks all Manchester workers, sends out redundancy money
May & June	Delegations to Norwich, Doncaster and other factories around the country. Collections and messages of support - but no action
6 July	Mass picket at Mining Supplies, Doncaster: factory blacked for next four days against instructions from Sheffield and Manchester AUEW officials
10 July	Deal negotiated by Snipe, Confed officials and LSE convenor in London: two-day week for three months while redundancies negotiated - for returning factory and redundancy money to owners
11 July	Confed deal rejected by LSE stewards 18 to 3 (the convenor and two ASTMS management representatives)
14 July	Workers vote to reject Confed terms by 579 to 21
21 July	Mining Supplies seeks re-possession order - adjourned for one week LSE workers lobby AUEW executive and occupy council chamber in protest against sell-out
23 July	Workers reject appeal from Confed's Ken Cure to accept settlement at meeting at Manchester Free Trade Hall - only 12 in favour AUEW stops strike pay Snipe granted re-possession order
5-7 August	Bailiffs' attempts to regain possession blocked by LSE occupiers Confed withdraws all support - APEX/TASS benefit stopped
10 August	Workers vote by 335 to 15 to continue occupation - and to resist eviction
18 August	Factory seized by 50 bailiffs armed with pickaxes and sledgehammers and workers evicted

Snipe's empire

Apart from being a master of the Yorkshire Hunt, Arthur Snipe is the hard-headed boss of Mining Supplies, a Doncaster-based mining machinery and forgings group. He acquired the Laurence Scott and Electromotors group in October 1980 for the knock-down price of £5.8 million (value £18.7 million). The group makes high quality electrical machinery; its main customers are the coal board and the Royal Navy - LSE manufactures and services motors for Polaris and other submarines and warships. When Snipe took over, LSE employed 3000 workers at plants in Manchester, Blantyre, Norwich, Aylesbury and Wolverhampton.

Snipe's response to the recession and overcapacity in electrical motors is to rationalise and concentrate production in Norwich. His first step on taking over was to use the Government's Temporary Short Time Working Compensation Scheme to put the Manchester workforce on short time. When that reached its six month limit he announced the closure of the factory with the loss of all 650 jobs. But he did not reckon on the fighting spirit of his Manchester workforce which defied his profit-seeking plans with a four month-long occupation.

BLACK WORKERS

RACIAL OPPRESSION IF THE CAP FITS...

A TUC CHARTER FOR EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

A TRADE UNION can be an important weapon in the fight to defend the independent interest of the working class. But a trade union that seeks to defend one section of the working class against another section weakens the working class as a whole. The British TUC has a long record of seeking to defend its members at the expense of foreign workers. Over the years the official leadership of the trade union movement has been a consistent advocate of the slogan 'British jobs for British workers'. This narrow chauvinist attitude has often crystallised into a racist response to immigrant workers.

In 1893 the TUC took the lead in a campaign which culminated in the enactment of Britain's first immigration laws, the Aliens Act of 1905. A resolution passed at the 1893 TUC conference demanded restrictions on the entry of 'pauper aliens':

'In view of the injury done to a large number of trades and trade unions by the wholesale importation of foreign destitute paupers, this congress calls upon the government to take the necessary steps, either by Bill, official inspection, or order in council, to prohibit the landing of all pauper aliens who have no visible means of subsistence.'

Since that time whenever immigrants have been seen as a threat to the position of organised workers the TUC has approved government restrictions on the entry of 'aliens' — Jews at the turn of the century, East Europeans after the Second World War and blacks in the 'sixties and 'seventies.

The TUC's closed door policy

The TUC was alerted to the immigration issue in 1954 by the Ministry of Labour Staff Association — a union of civil servants involved in the administration of labour exchanges. The MLSA warned that the number of immigrants was rising but that they were often unsuitable for the skilled jobs available: the British

government should be pressed to limit the influx of immigrants by agreement with the relevant authorities in the West Indies. In 1955 the TUC General Council reported on its meeting with the Minister of Labour where it argued that as the government had the responsibility for maintaining full employment it should ensure that immigration was controlled. In 1956 the NUR added its voice to the demand for restrictions on entry which was now accepted without significant opposition by the TUC leaders.

Reformist trade unions are always concerned, not only with their members' wages and conditions, but more broadly to preserve the stability of the labour market within which they negotiate with employers and the state. Trade union organisation is not only directed against employers but also against competitors for jobs from outside union ranks. Trade unions have generally been hostile to the unemployed, to women workers — and to immigrants — because they threaten the stability of the labour market. Thus the TGWU conference in 1957 declared that it could not afford to allow 'these people unrestricted access to Britain' because it 'would lead to a reduction in the union's industrial bargaining power' (TGWU *Record*, August 1957). This narrow defence of the interests of trade unions before the interests of the working class as a whole has prevailed in the British labour movement ever since.

Don't rock the boat

The TUC leadership also has to take into account the disruptive effect of racism on industrial relations, the existence of black workers and the anti-racist sentiment of sections of the working class. As a result the TUC has come out against formal colour bars in industry and has spoken out against the excesses of racism.

Thus when Jim Leask, TGWU Midlands organiser publicly proposed a colour bar in industry in 1957 many of

On 13 June the Greater London Association of Trades Councils (GLATC) launched an interesting debate on the fight against racism. Unfortunately this debate took the form of an organised witch-hunt against East London Workers Against Racism. A small clique of labour bureaucrats, influential within the South East Regional TUC (SERTUC) and closely associated with the Communist Party and the Broad Left decided they had had enough of ELWAR. They promptly moved to expel ELWAR from the GLATC anti-racist sub-committee and prevailed upon GLATC to alert all London Trades Councils and other union bodies to the 'danger' of ELWAR.

To justify their witch-hunt the GLATC bureaucrats have made numerous allegations against ELWAR — but the one accusation that comes up constantly is that ELWAR is anti-trade union. Many circulars from the offices of GLATC, SERTUC and Tower Hamlets NALGO quote extensively from ELWAR publications which criticise the unions for not fighting racism. In reality the GLATC and SERTUC mafia have unconsciously initiated a debate about racism and the unions. What's really at issue is their approach to fighting racism and ours. Let us state

our position clearly. ELWAR does not believe that trade unions are racist, nor are we anti-trade union. This said it is also the case that the unions have done next to nothing about fighting racism, that many union officials have turned a blind eye to racism in their midst and that a number of unions have adopted a racist course of action. We have denounced the trade union movement's record on racism not because we are against unions but because we believe that it is vital for them to play a leading role in the anti-racist struggle.

Helen Swift surveys the attitude of the British labour bureaucracy towards racism in the past and more recently. She focuses on the conflict between SERTUC's token gestures against racism in East London and our fight to build workers' defence. And we look at the labour movement's reaction to riots past — Nottingham and Nottingham Hill in 1958. On pages 8 and 9 we survey the activity of the Workers Against Racism groups around the country in the recent riots. We also look at events in Liverpool 8 today and back in 1919.

his colleagues spoke out against it. Numerous attempts to establish colour bars on the buses (in London, the Midlands and North) and in other jobs in the 'fifties and 'sixties were similarly rejected by the trade union leaders. This did not stop them from acquiescing to informal discrimination against blacks, often enforced through closed shops. The virtual absence of blacks from many areas of employment — docks, printing, council manual departments — is testimony to the scale of this sort of discreet racism in the labour movement.

The TUC leadership is also sensitive to the problems created by the alienation of black workers from the trade union movement. The TUC was quick to respond to the recent spate of riots. Its document *Regenerating our inner cities* is a publicity exercise designed to demonstrate concern with the plight of black youth. Since the riots the TUC has speeded up its programme of unemployed workers' centres to help get young blacks off the streets under the supervision of trade union officials. And the same junior Congress House officials who promoted the People's March are now organising a National Youth lobby and festival for the autumn to defuse the anger of the young unemployed. The TUC's cynical anti-racism is particularly manifest in East London. Sooner or later it was bound to come into conflict with ELWAR.

A distinguished record

In 1978, after a series of violent attacks by racists in Brick Lane, Len Murray told the local Bangladeshi community:

'The trade union movement in the East End has a distinguished record of working for equal opportunity for all workers of whatever religions or ethnic background. We hope that they in turn will, by joining and working in their trade unions, help us to help them combat the evil they are facing.' (*Race Relations in East London*, statement by Len Murray, TUC general secretary and Bill Keys, chairman Equal

Rights Committee of the TUC, 1978)

In the same statement Murray warned against taking 'violent action' and reminded the community 'the police have a difficult job' to do. The TUC's slogan was 'Don't fight back — join a union'.

More than a year later the South East Region of the TUC got around to launching 'a major campaign against racism' — a recruiting drive aimed primarily at ethnic minorities. Len Murray himself helped to launch the campaign run by TUC race relations supremo Maurice Styles, the up and coming Jack Dromey and local bureaucrats John Dar (SOGAT) and Arthur Hillier (Tailor and Garment Workers). Tens of thousands of leaflets in various languages were to be distributed and a recruitment film screened in Asian cinemas. Dromey told the *Morning Star* that 'immediate dramatic success was not expected — the unions had in mind a programme covering three or four years' activity' (26 October 1979). The first two years certainly vindicate Dromey's initial pessimism.

Unemployment in the area where the SERTUC initiative was concentrated is now approaching 20 per cent — and the level of unionisation is, if anything lower than that in 1979. Roughly half the Asian workers in Spitalfields earn less than £60 a week before tax. We do not blame SERTUC for the collapse of the garment trade, the main employer of ethnic minority groups in East London. But we do blame the local trade union bureaucrats for not fighting to defend jobs in this sector and for not demanding that national and local government act to maintain jobs and wages. Tower Hamlets Trades Council even vetoed the proposal of a demonstration against redundancies raised by ELWAR supporters last year.

What's worse is that the local trade union movement has condoned the

ghettoisation of Asians in the worst paid jobs and their virtual exclusion from the public sector. A recent report has revealed that in the area with the highest concentration of Bangladeshis in Britain, scarcely a single one is employed by central or local government (Spitalfields Survey, SHAPRS, 1981). Yet one fifth of the local workforce is employed in the public sector. This cannot be news to the trade union officials: the secretary of Tower Hamlets Trades Council is also president of Tower Hamlets NALGO. He and the SERTUC functionaries must be aware of the informal apartheid that prevails in the public sector. But it persists.

Blood on the streets

What about racist attacks — the issue that first brought Len Murray down Brick Lane more than three years ago? There is a deeply ingrained prejudice in the British labour movement that recording events — or better still inquiring into or investigating them — is the same as doing something about them. Thus Tower Hamlets Trades Council refers to its detailed account of beatings, stabblings, stonings of black people and their families in *Blood on the streets* as evidence of its concern about racial violence. But the publication of *Blood on the streets* has not stopped blood being spilt on the streets. The Newham 'monitoring project' has now taken up Tower Hamlet's faith in the mystical

power of recording incidents of racist violence.

It is not the case that local trade union bureaucrats have done nothing about racial violence: they have done worse than nothing. They have participated with the local authority, community relations professionals and police community liaison officers in a series of race relations committees with representatives of the minority communities. The latest of these are the Community Alliance for Police Accountability and the Tower Hamlets Association for Racial Justice ('copper' and 'charge' as they are known locally). Their object is to contain black militancy.

Trade union leaders, like David Basnett and Ken Gill, don't mind admitting that they've done very little for black workers — as long as they're doing the criticising. But once criticisms go beyond the level of moralistic generalities and start to challenge the racist policies of the labour bureaucrats, then the fur soon begins to fly.

The ELWAR witch-hunt

ELWAR criticised the do-nothing attitude of the local trade union leadership. At first these criticisms were ignored as the work of insignificant sectarians. But as the work of ELWAR began to get off the ground and attract widespread support the East London clique around SERTUC and GLATC began a campaign of slander and abuse. The aim of their

campaign was to isolate ELWAR and to sabotage the Workers Against Racism conference planned for 18 July in East London.

Tower Hamlets Trades Council was used to launch the anti-ELWAR campaign. Despite opposition from a vocal minority of trades council members, the executive pushed through its motion denouncing the anti-trade union character of ELWAR. The Tower Hamlets hacks worked in a frenzy sending out circulars and letters trying (unsuccessfully) to persuade people to boycott last month's WAR conference in the borough and lobbying trade unionists and representatives of ethnic minority organisations. Considerable pressure was placed on individuals to disassociate themselves from ELWAR.

In the past two years SERTUC's anti-racist recruitment campaign has achieved scant results. The fact that ELWAR is growing from strength to strength has exposed the bureaucrat's pretensions to fight racism. The struggle against racism is being taken out of the hands of the labour bureaucrats. The labour bureaucrats have responded in the only way they know — bureaucratic manipulation and slander.

Many trade unionists in the London area recognised the Tower Hamlets witch-hunt for what it was — an attempt by the bureaucrats to stifle working class politics. Already four trades councils — Hackney, Camden, Greenwich and Waltham Forest — have thrown out

the anti-ELWAR campaign. We're confident this will be the response in many other trade union bodies.

Black organisations in East London were not taken in by the anti-ELWAR campaign. They weren't too impressed when the secretary of Tower Hamlets Trades Council wrote to them, demanding they withdraw their support for ELWAR. The Bangladeshi Welfare Association — the biggest Bangladeshi organisation in Britain — wrote back defending ELWAR and telling the trades council to do something for the Asian community for a change, instead of undermining the work of anti-racists.

The reason behind the launching of the witch-hunt is not because ELWAR is anti-trade union but because the bureaucrats fear ELWAR's determination to take the anti-racist struggle into the trade union movement itself. The struggle for workers' defence against racist attacks is anathema to a bureaucracy which subsists on a diet of petitions, inquiries and monitoring racist attacks. They understand that a working class that is prepared to take responsibility for the struggle against racism will not allow a clique of bureaucrats around SERTUC to get away with resolution mongering and petitioning.

The battle between ELWAR and the SERTUC clique continues and it will continue until the trade unions have been transformed into a power weapon in the anti-racist struggle.



Notting Hill, Nottingham 1958

IN THE SUMMER of 1958 white thugs, some influenced by fascist groups, launched a series of attacks on West Indian communities in London and the Midlands. Many blacks were beaten up, several were stabbed and windows were broken as gangs of hundreds of white youths went on the rampage. The police moved in — and arrested blacks who fought back!

The response of the labour movement was instantaneous. Labour MP for Nottingham James Harrison called for immediate immigration controls:

'The policy of allowing people to come freely into this country was practical in the nineteenth century. It is completely impossible under present conditions.' (*The Times*, 27 August 1958)

Notting Hill Labour MP George Rogers responded to the greater seriousness of the London disturbances with a more lengthy attack on the local black community:

'The main cause is...housing...people

living in overcrowded conditions. To add to the difficulties some West Indians make no effort to adapt themselves to the way of life here. Whilst thoroughly condemning the riots and violence, naturally there is resentment that West Indians can buy homes here.'

Rogers issued three demands:

- 1 There should be planned restriction of entry.
- 2 Immigrants should be given adequate housing and employment if they come to this country and should be deported if they were violent.
- 3 Legislation on prostitution should be tightened up so that a lot of the immoral clubs run by immigrants could be closed. (*Kensington News and West London Times*, 5 September 1958)

This was not all. A pioneer in the concept of community policing, Rogers proposed that the CID should launch a recruitment drive among West Indians 'as they would make plain-clothes work in the coloured communities that much easier'. He was backed up by the North Kensington Labour Party which the

following week produced suggestions for dispersing black ghettos and for restricting entry from the West Indies (*Kensington News and West London Times*, 12 September 1958).

The trade unions were not far behind. Kensington Trades Council offered its sympathy to the black victims and condemned the Tory Government — whose response was muted by comparison with the Labour Party. One delegate blamed the 'lack of colonial education' for the disturbances. When the riots were discussed at the TUC soon afterwards calls for immigration controls were tempered with paternalism. A delegate from the Clerical and Administrative Workers Union argued that the TUC 'as one of the most powerful organisations in the community' should undertake its 'responsibilities' and give 'what leadership and guidance' it could 'in order to try to help'. He urged the General Council to promote 'integration' and suggest positive action to prevent violence in the future.

Helen Simons

Who said 'you can't reform a riot'?

WAR AGAINST POLICE

THE LABOUR PARTY's quite prepared to attack Thatcher for not spending enough on the inner-cities. But when it comes to defending rioters against the police there's nothing to choose between Labour and Tory. Things went very quiet in the House of Commons when they debated how to protect the police. Labour MPs expressed a few reservations about CS gas, water cannon and rubber bullets — but only because they might be used against 'peaceful trade unionists' one day. The Labour Party's not prepared to defend the black youths who are getting it now.

In Brixton and East London **Workers Against Racism** has launched a campaign to put the police in the dock. We're prosecuting the police for their crimes against the black community, before, during and since the riots. Here's why.

GIFFORD BARRY was still in his bedroom slippers when he appeared in Highbury magistrates court on Wednesday 22 July. He'd spent the night in Stoke Newington police station. When he was released at daybreak he was charged with assaulting two police officers, resisting arrest, driving a stolen vehicle and driving without proper documents.

The story began around midnight the night before. Gifford was about to go to bed when a friend called to ask him if he'd drive his girlfriend home to Crystal Palace, as the buses had stopped running. Gifford agreed. As he came out of the house a cop approached him: he wanted to know if Gifford lived there, where he'd come from and where he was going. Then a second cop turned up — we have his number. They both started talking at once, insisting Gifford had just abandoned a stolen Austin 1100 up the road. By this time Gifford's dad and his friends were all outside the house, demanding to know what was going on.

Suddenly the police made a grab for him, pulling him into a headlock and dragging him away. As Gifford struggled the police radioed for help. Within seconds they were joined by up to 60 reinforcements. They dragged Gifford down the steps shouting 'black bastard' and 'nigger' at him. As he fell to the ground one of the cops grabbed his head and tried to bang it on the concrete. Then he was thrown in the police van and beaten up all the way to Stoke Newington nick.

WINSTON ROSE never got out alive from the police van he was thrown in. Police say he died due to suffocation from inhaling his own vomit. But what was he doing vomiting in the back of a police van?

On 13 July Winston Rose — who has a history of mental illness — was 'restrained under the Mental Health Act' by 11 police officers. They claimed he was a super-human giant, weighing over 18 stones and six feet, six inches tall. In fact Winston weighed 13 stones and measured just six feet! There was no psychiatric nurse or doctor, not even an ambulance officer present when Winston was carried away. According to eye witnesses he

We did, last month. And we were right. Since the massive inner-city disturbances in July, hundreds of youths have been rounded up in Brixton, Toxteth, Moss Side, Bradford. Many have already been sent down or received crippling fines. Others are still being held in custody or are under curfew.

Below we show how the big stick's being used to deal with rioters and how WAR is fighting back. But we also take a look at the carrots being served up by the Labour Party, the TUC and every do-gooding agency in the land. They want to head off any more trouble, particularly in Liverpool which is still on the boil. Judy Harrison and Jenny Graham report.

COVENTRY Copy cat cops

THEY CALL THEM copycat riots, in Dalston, Wood Green, Leicester, Luton: a big white lie of course. In Luton, for example, black youths 'copied' Southall alright — but that was because their town was invaded by skinheads in just the same way.

The real copycats were the police. In Coventry there were only minor disturbances in July. About 60, mainly white, youths were involved in skirmishes with the police in Hillfields — a working class suburb with a large black population. But the police made-believe they'd had a real riot, led by blacks. They arrested seven youths, all of them black. They weren't involved in the fighting, but never mind: they were charged with threatening behaviour and possession of offensive weapons, and refused bail. In court, the prosecutor explained why: the situation in Coventry was 'volatile' and people 'might be tempted to join in further outbreaks of violence' unless he made them an example.

On 21 July the seven appeared in

court again. They were remanded in custody. One was pressed into pleading guilty and got three months imprisonment. The police had got themselves a rioter!

The rest of the youths eventually got out on bail, but only on condition they stuck to a curfew and reported daily to the police.

Local Labour MP William Wilson didn't want to know when COVWAR and the boys' relations approached him for help. Eventually, and reluctantly, he agreed to contact one of the youth's employers to try and save his job. But he stopped short at getting at all involved in legally defending the six.

COVWAR's been organising pickets of the court appearances and building support for the defendants. This includes assisting one of the youths in making a formal complaint against the police for head injuries sustained when he was arrested. Coventry's cops didn't have themselves a real riot, but they did have their little bit of fun.

looked like he was dead when they threw him in the back of the van outside his home in Leyton. East London WAR members are actively supporting the Winston Rose Action Committee's campaign to expose the cover-up of this racist police murder in Waltham Forest.

MERVYN MARTIN's bringing action against the police for wrongful arrest. They've arrested him three times in the past year on 'Sus' and threatening behaviour charges, and tried to plant drugs on him in the street and at his home. Last time they arrested him — in Leicester Square, on a drugs charge that was later changed to 'Sus' — he was acquitted. But he's not content with being cleared of the charge. He's determined to put an end to being harassed by the police, and put them on the run instead.

ALVIN SWABY lives with his wife and three sons in Rattray Road, Brixton. During the April revolt the police raided his home twice. On 11 April they smashed into his house and took away two of his sons. News of the raid spread quickly around Brixton. Next day reporters started appearing at the house.

The police decided that the only way to silence the Swabys was to hammer them into submission. That night they returned in force, kicked down the door and smashed the windows. A vanload of policemen marched into the sitting room, partitioned the room with their riot shields, smashed up the furniture and broke Alvin Swaby's arm. They dragged his youngest son out of bed and into a police van where they beat him savagely.

Both Alvin and his son Conroy decided to press charges immediately. They want their cases to be used to build a big campaign against the police in the local community and in the labour movement.

The BEAUMONTS have suffered a long history of harassment from the police. Charlie Beaumont is 14 years old. He was recently fined £20 for supposedly assaulting a policeman, despite the fact that there was overwhelming evidence from friends and neighbours that he did not. His mother still faces assault charges arising from the same incident. Her 'crime': she tried to protect her son from a beating at the hands of two plain-clothed police thugs.

TONY BEAUMONT was arrested by the police on the night of the first Brixton riot. In the days that followed he was continually abused and provoked by the police on Stockwell Park Estate with comments like 'what did you say, you black monkey?'. Two weeks later the Beaumonts' flat was raided before dawn. The police took away stereo equipment, food and other household goods and arrested the two teenage sons even though they produced receipts for the goods.

The Beaumonts have a major battle on their hands. They want to appeal against Charlie's conviction and prosecute the police for wrongful arrest, assault and damages.

Many black families in Britain could tell similar stories about police brutality against them, or their friends and relations.

If you want to help us turn the tables and expose the police as the real criminals, contact: WAR, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, E8. Or phone: 01-274 3951 (24 hours).



Liverpool 8

KEN OXFORD, Merseyside's notorious police chief, has never been too hot on building good community relations. Back in 1978 he described Liverpool's black community as 'the product of liaisons between black seamen and white prostitutes'. After the July riots in Toxteth he just kept on repeating it was all the work of 'black criminals'. Since July Oxford's goons have killed one man and nearly castrated another. No wonder everyone's calling for 'Oxford Out!'.

But does Liverpool 8 just want a nicer, smoother police chief, more 'bobbies on the beat' and a democratically accountable police force? That's what Mrs Simey, Labour chairman of Liverpool's police committee seems to think. Mrs Simey caused an uproar when she said the Toxteth community would be apathetic if it *didn't* riot. She's also made some very strong statements about Ken Oxford. But don't get Mrs Simey wrong. It's not that she's anti-police: she just wants to see them do a better, more sensitive job.

WORKERS AGAINST RACISM visited the LIVERPOOL 8 DEFENCE COMMITTEE just before their 3000-strong demonstration against police repression. We talked about the riots, the police backlash — and what they think about community cops.

Liverpool 8 kept going long after the riots had subsided in other British cities. Local youths bombarded the police with missiles for days and there's been outbreaks of violence ever since. As far as Ken Oxford's concerned he's going to make these 'criminals' pay for their bravado. Arrests have run into the hundreds. The charges range from arson, grievous bodily harm, looting, possession of petrol bombs. Eighty per cent of the first batch of defendants are still in

custody in Risley remand centre and Walton jail.

The Defence Committee headquarters are in the basement of one of the few buildings left standing in Upper Parliament Street, the Charles Wooton Education Centre. Wooton, a black man, was killed by a white racist over a century ago. The authorities refused to hang his murderer. The building's stood as a memorial ever since. JOE FARRAG, Committee member and local activist, described how during the riots the police tried to kick Charles Wooton, even in his grave. They tried to get the rioters to direct their missiles at the building by deliberately withdrawing towards it. Only it didn't work. Just one window at the Charles Wooton centre got broken during that week in July.

Joe went on to describe the harassment he and other Defence Committee members are getting. They're being threatened with eviction from the building. They get abusive calls day and night. The police are trying to arrest committee members all the time on trumped-up charges. The police are desperate to get their hands on the defendants' and witnesses' statements collected by the Committee. A raid on the Centre is on the cards at any time.

Six weeks after the riots police harassment of the community is worse than ever. It's the same story in Toxteth as Brixton or Moss Side: the police systematically rounding people up on burglary and stolen property charges, to up the number of convictions.

We asked why Liverpool 8? Why not Vauxhall, or Netherley, or other working class areas with high unemployment, poverty and slums? The answer was clear-cut: the lid blew off in Liverpool 8 because that's where the *black* community is concentrated. Yes, the cops kick white kids around too, but they kick blacks around more. White unemploy-

ment's high, but not as high as for blacks. In Toxteth black and white youths fought together — but that didn't mean the riots weren't to do with racism.

Joe explained in more detail. He described how the police had been desperate to contain the unrest within Liverpool 8, to keep it within the ghetto. That's what Toxteth is, just as much as Brixton. Police brutality has always been more intense here — and hatred of the police that much stronger — because its population has been oppressed for so long. Community relations officers like to think that because Liverpool blacks are fourth and fifth generation, almost 'British', the area could become a model for racial harmony. Not so. Toxteth's black community gets on fine with most of the whites in the area, who are amongst the poorest on Merseyside. But not with the police. Or, for that matter, with the rest of Liverpool.

Time hasn't produced integration. There were race riots in 1919 (see below) and 1948. Nearly 40 years later Oxford's talk of 'half-castes' and 'black hooligans' is still getting a hearing. Liverpool 8 has been successfully isolated. Fascist influence is growing rapidly in areas like Edge Hill, Netherley, Wavertree and Kensington. They're active on the dole queues. There are numerous racist attacks on the streets and housing estates, and in local schools. The authorities are directly responsible: it's they who are working overtime to criminalise black youth. It's inevitable that blacks will be the scapegoat for the city's economic decline.

Committee members told us too how the police are working subtly to foment racism within Liverpool 8. One example: a white friend of Joe's was arrested for abusing a policeman. When he got to court he found the charge had been changed to verbally abusing two black girls!

The Defence Committee may be certain about what caused the riots. But many who support them see it differently. It's not only Heseltine who's worried about urban deprivation. The local Labour Party also puts the riots down to bad economics — to Thatcher's mad monetarist policies. It's moved onto the scene, and offered support to the Defence Committee. Unlike the Tories, the Labour Party makes some lukewarm criticisms of the police. But the answers they offer are worse than useless.

We asked the Committee what they thought about the Labour Party's proposals for more community cops on the beat. The idea didn't go down too well:

'They'd use it to watch us, contain us and divide us. They want to play football on the streets with the kids, and take them off on adventure trips to talk about how decent the police are really. But nobody believes that around here.'

Nobody believes it, but still the idea's taking off. Michael Foot may have had a rough time on his walkabout recently, but the *local* Labour Party is talking more radical than Foot. The Defence Committee has got a difficult job on its hands. Its got to defend the hundreds who've been arrested and detained. That means fighting against Oxford's criminalisation policy, building up working class support throughout Liverpool — and preparing the community for worse to come. It's got to stop the Labour Party lulling the community to sleep with its phoney job-creation promises, and ideas about reforming the police force.

Toxteth leaves a lasting impression on the mind. One image that sums it all up: a local cop, trying hard to look relaxed — smiling and talking to the locals. But he's got his long baton at the ready, and coachloads of reinforcements round the corner.

Fran Eden

Liverpool 1919

RACISM is nothing new in Liverpool. Those who see unemployment as the root cause of the Toxteth uprising evade the real issue — racial oppression. A brief overlook at the 1919 riots in Liverpool reveals the deep roots of racism in British society.

After the First World War a large number of blacks — especially West Indian sailors — settled down in Liverpool. By 1919 the black population numbered around 3000. No sooner had they arrived than they were confronted with racial discrimination in all aspects of life. However, their fellow workers were far from sympathetic to their plight: the trade unions regarded blacks as competitors for scarce jobs and as a source of cheap labour which would allow wages to be

driven down.

In June 1919 white thugs launched a series of attacks on the black community. On 10 July a full scale race riot erupted in Toxteth. The black population was in a state of terror: hundreds fled to police headquarters for protection.

Black people who fought back were promptly arrested and jailed for assault and threatening behaviour. *The Times* described the ugly scenes:

'White men appear determined to clear out blacks, who have been advised to stay indoors. This counsel many of them disregarded, and late on Sunday a large body of policemen had to be requisitioned to prevent serious consequences. Whenever a negro was seen he was chased and, if caught, severely beaten. These scenes continued until an early hour of this morning, when rain cleared the streets. Four negroes had to be taken to hospital. Two white men were also attended to at the hospital for stabbing wounds.' (11 July)

The Times disapproved of 'the inter-marriage of black men and white women',

which, not to mention other relationships, had 'excited much feelings' (10 July 1919).

In those days racism was entirely respectable and a race relations industry had not yet emerged to soften the blows of repression. When the Lord Mayor met the chief constable and a labour ministry official on 12 July to discuss the race riots, their solution was to expel the blacks: 'It was decided that coloured men should be removed quickly from the Bridewell and other places in the city and placed in an internment camp pending repatriation, which will be expedited' (*The Times*, 13 July 1919).

While the victims of racial oppression were being rounded up and deported the labour movement remained silent. The Labour Party newspaper ignored the racial aspect of the riots. In an article titled 'Race riots: the root cause', the *Daily Herald* called for immigration controls: 'Firemen and soldiers, who were specially concerned, had the gravest fear as to the effect which the coloured influx

was likely to have upon the rate of wages, and they said that unless checked in time it would spread to other industries and dominate the labour market' (13 June 1919). Foreign workers were seen as competitors and economic arguments were turned into apologies for racial violence. The leadership of the labour movement allied itself with the state against black workers.

In far-off 1919 the TUC had no time for the now mandatory hypocritical resolutions denouncing racism. The following *unanimously* approved motion put its position straight: 'That immediate steps be taken to abolish the underpaid Asiatic labour in the mercantile marine, and that preference of employment be given, first to British white, and secondly to British coloured, in preference to Chinamen'.

As far as racism and the labour movement is concerned the only thing that has changed is that today the labour bureaucrats are more discreet.

Mark Kane

An 'equal opportunity' employer

HACKNEY COUNCIL is an 'equal opportunities employer'. What's more it's a Labour-controlled council: 51 Labour Party councillors versus one Liberal and lone Joe Lobenstein, the local Tory. When the council took on WINSTON BREWSTER back in 1976 his job, in the Social Services department, was to represent black interests within the community. The trouble is, once he started doing that he got into deep trouble.

Winston has been disciplined three

times so far. He first fell foul of his superiors when he took up the case of a West Indian boy who was discharged from St Matthews Hospital and sent home, only to die hours after. Then he exposed the case of a West Indian woman left at home to die by health officials from Hackney Hospital. In both cases he was told he was acting beyond his job description and warned he'd be vetted constantly.

In fact Winston was carrying out his job description to the letter. He was revealing the extent of racist discrimination in health, housing, education, employment and calling for action — something the equal opportunities legislation was never designed for. Because Winston refused to just be the token black representative, he made a lot of enemies.

The final straw came when he com-

plained to the London Electricity Board on behalf of black tenants who'd been cut off at random. On 9 September Winston will face disciplinary hearings yet again, and has been seriously threatened with dismissal. The disciplinary board is the usual kangaroo court, comprising personnel officers from the Council and the social services directorate. But this time they'll have to reckon with a mass picket by local black organisations, ELWAR and Winston's supporters in his union, NALGO. There's already been one very successful protest outside the Town Hall and a campaign to defend Winston's job is underway.

The most important place to build support is inside NALGO. If Hackney Council is faced with opposition from one of its major unions it will have no choice but to back down. ELWAR

members in Hackney NALGO are arguing for all the charges to be dropped and the disciplinary slate to be wiped clean. They're also calling for a full investigation into the racist practices that Hackney Council tries to hide beneath its 'equal opportunities' facade.

This campaign is important. Not only for Winston, but also because it can help isolate the racists in the Council and build up trade union solidarity with the black community in Hackney. DEFEND WINSTON BREWSTER!

Demonstrate outside Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street, E8.
Wednesday 9 September, 6pm.

For more information write to ELWAR, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, E8. Or phone 01-274 3951.

GERMANY CAN CLASS PEACE CONTINUE?

THE MOST striking feature of post-war West German society has been its social stability. The German working class has been well integrated into the capitalist system. Three factors account for the passivity of the German labour movement. First, the total annihilation of the organised labour movement by the Nazi regime meant that once the war was over the working class was demoralised, fragmented and disorganised. Second, the division of Germany and the concentration of the Cold War on this region provided the basis for an extraordinarily powerful anti-communist ideology. The reactionary role of Stalinism, particularly in East Germany, played into the hands of imperialist, anti-communist ideologues. Anti-communism has been used to legitimise attacks on left-wingers and trade union militants. Third, the German 'economic miracle' created an unprecedented standard of living for the working class and provided the basis for its integration into the German state.

The end of the boom

West Germany has been able to weather the capitalist crisis more successfully than its European competitors. But recently the recession has begun to hit working class living standards. During the last year unemployment has risen dramatically, reaching 1.1 million in May 1981, an increase of 44.7 per cent over the previous year. Unemployment among those under 20 has grown by more than 50 per cent.

The trade union movement has responded to attacks on the working class with remarkable moderation. Last year strikes fell sharply (by 42 per cent) and the 128 000 days lost were less than 3 per cent of the days lost in 1978. In March 1981 the construction workers' union signed a wage agreement on behalf of its 1.2 million members. The terms of the agreement — a pay increase of 4 per cent — represented a major departure from the past. For the first time in 25 years a major German union had accepted pay increases lower than the rate of inflation. A month later, I G Metall, the largest German union agreed to a 4.9 per cent increase.

Union leaders have justified their acceptance of reductions in real wages on the grounds that they are more interested in saving jobs. A leading official in the construction workers' union noted:

'We are confident, that this kind of responsible moderation will keep construction costs at bay and prevent excessive price rises at a time of spiralling lending rates for mortgage loans, so that money will be available for job-securing building orders.'

The union leadership has faced little opposition to its preoccupation with the

state of German industry rather than its members' welfare. Workers at the large electronics firm AEG have agreed to accept cutbacks in future pension entitlements in order to save the company from financial collapse and to save jobs.

The conservative response of German unions to the crisis is not at all surprising. Its past history and the high level of prosperity enjoyed by its members have provided the foundations for class truce. Even today, despite the recently announced cuts in the public sector, the crisis is still at an early stage. There will be no major change in class relations until the destructive momentum of German capitalism has been exposed to the working class.

SPAIN LEFT RETREAT -REACTION ON THE MARCH

FORTY FIVE YEARS ago on 19 July Spanish workers and peasants rose up in arms to establish their organs of power to fight the military coup against the republic. However, neither the socialists nor the communists did anything this year to commemorate this important milestone in the Spanish revolution. Yet a day earlier on 18 July the fascist party Fuerza Nueva was out on the streets commemorating Franco's crusade launched 45 years previously. This contrasting response of the left and the right to the anniversary of the start of the Civil War sums up the state of affairs in Spain today.

Ever since the re-establishment of bourgeois democracy in Spain after the death of Franco, the communist (PCE) and the socialist (PSOE) parties have gone out of their way to placate the bourgeoisie. These leading parties of the working class have agreed to one anti-working class measure after another in the national interest. They have used the threat of a right-wing coup to justify their conservative policies. After the farcical attempt at a coup earlier this year the two reformist parties have gone further in their slavish praise of the monarchy and the political institutions of Spanish capitalism.

The tenth congress of the PCE in July provided an occasion for the Stalinist leadership to bring the party further under the wing of the Spanish state. The theme of the conference was straightforward: Spanish democracy is under threat therefore the working class must keep its mouth shut — any radical demands would only play into the hands of the right. General secretary of the PCE Santiago Carrillo called on the congress to



THE WORKING CLASS SLUMBER I

During the years 1968-73 the working class in Western Europe managed to score a number of important victories. A wave of strikes, occupations and other forms of industrial action boosted working class organisations and led to an impressive rise in living standards. Ever since the onset of the recession the ruling class has tried to reverse this process. And not without considerable success. The labour leadership throughout Europe agreed to most of the austerity measures required by the ruling class. Parties calling themselves communist and socialist accepted the need for austerity in principle while quibbling about the terms on which the counter-crisis measures were to be imposed.

The collaboration of the labour bureaucracy and the harsh environment created by the recession put the working class on the defensive. Although unemployment rose and inflation ate into living standards industrial militancy declined. Since 1978 the ruling class has stepped up its attack on the working class. They have used the threat of unemployment to reduce real wages and attack social services and unemployment benefits. These measures have been pushed through against little resistance. As unemployment has risen and union membership declined, workers have tended to resort to strike action only as a last resort.

The ruling class has been careful not to go on an all-out offensive lest it should provoke a major fightback: it has continually sought the

demand stronger military preparation against a coup and boasted:

'With the coup of 23 February against a right-wing government, the political leaders of this country have become convinced of the fragility of democratic institutions, vindicating us communists who had been conscious of this since the beginning.' (*La Vanguardia*, 28 July 1981)

This sentimental attachment of the PCE to 'fragile' democratic institutions is in sharp contrast to the ruthless determination of the far right. The leaders of the PCE would rather tie the future of the working class to the sinking ship of bourgeois democracy than prepare the ground for the struggle against capitalism. Fragile bourgeois democracy is not an alternative to fascism but a preparatory phase for more vicious blows against the Spanish labour movement.

Workers pay the price

Unemployment stands at 13 per cent in Spain. Workers are increasingly restless about the steady decline in their living

standards. At the end of April farm workers in Andalucia launched a series of hunger strikes in protest against the iniquitous position of the rural proletariat. Pressure has been building up among rank and file trade unionists in Euskadi and Catalonia against the do-nothing approach of the union leaders.

The union bosses are more concerned with the fragility of bourgeois institutions than with the standard of living of their members. Discussions between government, the employers' federation (CEOE), the UGT union federation linked with the PSOE and the CCOO, the PCE-dominated workers' commissions, led to the signing of the National Employment Pact on 9 June. This new Spanish social contract was presented as the outcome of a desire for unity against the right-wing threat.

In reality the aim of the social contract is to keep wage settlements below inflation. Under the terms of this pact wage increases in the private sector have to be limited to between 9 and 11 per



CLASS IN EUROPE

THE RISING GIANT

co-operation of the labour bureaucracy with its plans. This strategy has been very successful. In Spain, Germany, Italy and elsewhere union leaders have been happy to co-operate — so long as they were consulted rather than forced. In Italy the unions have formulated their own voluntary codes of discipline for strike action. In Spain the unions have drawn up a social contract with the bourgeois government. In France the election of President Mitterand has resulted in an unprecedented degree of collaboration between the unions and the state. Everywhere the union leaders call for more consultation and more collaboration. In France the Communist Party-backed union federation, the CGT, has recently demanded a 'tripartite' approach to wage negotiations. The aim of the union leaders is to sit out the harsh effects of the crisis through collaboration and put the class struggle on ice until the return of prosperity.

This survey of the European working class shows that despite national variations the class struggle is at a standstill. The ruling class retains the initiative, and despite its sell-outs the labour bureaucracy faces little political pressure. This gloomy outlook should not obscure the tremendous potential that exists for the building of a revolutionary movement. The fine balancing act of the labour leaders can only postpone the class struggle. Revolutionaries must organise now to seize the time.

cent and to 8 per cent in the public sector. In return the government has made vague promises about creating 350 000 jobs during 1982. Despite protests from union militants in Catalonia and Euskadi the social contract is likely to be implemented. The labour leadership has successfully demobilised workers through its fear campaign about threats from the right-wing.

However, the working class cannot eat fragile political institutions. The situation remains fluid and Spanish workers are far from demoralised. Indeed the right-wing shift of the PCE has created space for the development of proletarian organisations to its left. On the shop floor the leadership of the two main union federations face considerable resentment and suspicion. Recently these unions have been stunned by the victory of the Basque nationalist union ELA-STU, which won a majority of votes in trade union elections in Euskadi.

The key political task today is to transform working class militancy into a

direct challenge to the fragile bourgeois state and those in the labour movement who are fighting to preserve it.

ITALY SOCIAL CONTRACT ITALIAN STYLE

THE MASS STRIKE movement in the hot autumn of 1969 transformed the Italian working class. The trade unions grew strong and won important concessions from the state in the social and economic spheres. One important concession was the *scala mobile* — a sliding scale of wages — which adjusted wages upward in line with price rises. Despite these

important gains the Italian proletariat was saddled with a leadership whose conservatism was second to none. The leadership of three large union federations — the communist influenced CGIL, the socialist UIL and the Catholic CISL — institutionalised an informal social contract.

The reactionary character of this social contract was revealed when the capitalist recession began to take its toll in Italy. The union leaders inspired by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) began to preach the message of sacrifice. So pre-occupied was the labour leadership with the running of the economy that it began to lose touch with the rank and file. By 1979, unofficial action and the growth of new autonomous unions indicated the growing strength of rank and file pressure.

The union leaders responded with militant rhetoric to the growing threat of unofficial action. But this shift came just at a time when the employers stepped up their offensive against the working class. The bosses had had enough of consultation and wanted to teach trade unionists a lesson. They knew that years of collaboration had sapped the strength of the unions. The official strike at Fiat in October 1980 became a showdown between unions and bosses. The union leaders were stunned when they were met with suspicion and hostility by the workforce. The collapse of the Fiat strike marked a turning point: now the union leaders were prepared to collaborate at any price.

Sectionalism grows

One symptom of the widening gap between leadership and rank and file has been the growth of new autonomous unions, particularly in the public sector. The three union federations have tended to ignore workers in the public service and civil service. Workers in these sectors began to organise new independent unions. When the autonomous pilots' union ANPAC called a series of wild cat strikes in April this year they faced not only their employer but the hostility of the labour bureaucrats. Underground railway workers in Milan faced the same problems.

The ruling class has been able to use inter-union rivalries for its own ends. CISAL, the autonomous union with more than a million members in the public sector, has received support from bourgeois politicians who are interested in weakening the labour movement as a whole.

The ineffectiveness of the labour bureaucracy has sparked off protests from technicians and lower management members. This privileged stratum, the *quadri* want higher differentials and have threatened to form their own separate unions. There are more than one million mainly right-wing *quadri* in industry.

The militancy of the *quadri* and autonomous unions is in sharp contrast to the vacillations of the official union federations. Whereas the official unions agreed to draw up voluntary codes preventing strikes in the public sector the auton-

omous unions have refused to accept any self-regulatory codes. Unfortunately this militancy is sectional in character. In present conditions sectionalism only increases the power of the bosses over a divided working class.

The scala mobile

The employers want to scrap the *scala mobile*. In April the UIL and CISL were prepared to accept a 'reform' of the *scala mobile*. The CGIL was not opposed on principle but wanted concessions in return. Working class hostility to the proposals forced the CGIL to change its tune. In May however the three federations agreed on a ten point plan. The first nine points were unanimously approved while point ten relating to the *scala mobile* did not get the CGIL's approval.

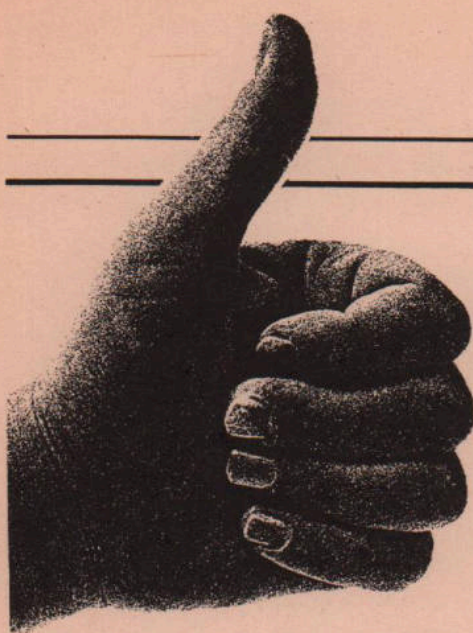
The ten point plan is indicative of the official union's rapprochement with the bourgeoisie. The first six points are demands for reforming and reflatting the capitalist economy. Points seven and eight advance a new fiscal policy and a reform of the system of social security. Point nine demands a temporary reduction of taxes on basic commodities like milk and sugar. The plan entirely accepts capitalist rationality. All three federations argue that wage rises are at least in part responsible for inflation.

The ten point plan was an indication that the CISL, UIL, CGIL federations were prepared to demand sacrifices from their members and even consider abandoning the *scala mobile*. It was only the weakness of the ruling class that prevented a sell-out. The P2 scandal leading to the fall of the government slowed down the anti-working class offensive. Nevertheless the new Spadolini government got what it wanted. A joint meeting of the Confindustria (the employers' federation) and the unions chaired by Spadolini on 29 June agreed to extend the *scala mobile* for another year. In return the unions gave a commitment to look into the 'structure of labour costs' and discuss the question of wages in relation to the profitability of Italian industry.

So the struggle around the *scala mobile* has just begun. The unions are set on the road to more collaboration. As general secretary of the UIL Giorgio Benvenuto noted in his review of his union's prospects: 'We had already seen what the limits of having a policy of antagonistic labour conflicts without proposing concrete political action were... The UIL wants to build a union that will really propose concrete planning, that will provide the tools for carrying out this policy' (G Benvenuto, *UIL '80: from antagonism to protagonism*, p10).

The labour bureaucracy has become one of the central pillars of Italian capitalism. While one government after another collapses the union leaders are always there policing the working class. The Spadolini government has indicated that it wants a social contract as soon as possible. Rank and file workers will have to fight their leaders to prevent the im-

continued on page 12



continued from page 11

plementation of this anti-proletarian measure.

FRANCE

THE UNIONS APPLAUD -AS MITTERAND CALLS THE SHOTS

IN CONTRAST to most other imperialist bourgeoisies the French ruling class in 1981 has opted for a policy of integration and reform. Just weeks before President Reagan started locking up striking air traffic controllers, the French Minister of Labour Jean Aroux made a remarkable statement:

'Workers prosecuted and convicted of offences during industrial disputes will benefit from a very liberal attitude. This will be stricter with regard to offences committed by employers.' (*Le Monde*, 22 July 1981)

Aroux was responding to the demand of the CGT, the largest of the union federations (and closely allied with the French Communist Party, PCF) for a complete amnesty for workers arrested in

industrial disputes under the existing civil and penal code. Aroux could not go so far as to interfere in 'the contractual relation between employer and worker' but nevertheless made clear his intention to reform the relation between wage labour and capital. Aroux unlike his predecessor claimed to be in sympathy with the objectives of organised French labour.

Why the change?

The autocratic regime of Giscard D'Estaing ran the risk of creating serious social unrest. Giscard refused even a pretence of consulting the unions and put the power of the state unreservedly at the disposal of the employers. With 1.8 million workers out of work and unemployment rising fast the Giscard regime risked provoking working class militancy. Mitterand on the other hand holds out the option of social consensus and the neutralisation of the labour movement.

The newly elected President Mitterand acted promptly. He immediately arranged with the trade unions to establish consultation procedures. This was a major departure from past practices. Now the labour bureaucracy was treated as a legitimate partner in the management of French capitalism. At the same time Mitterand announced a number of well-publicised but not very significant reforms.

The minimum wage was raised, nationalisation proposals were outlined and on 23 July the Council of Ministers launched their 'War on unemployment'. This war turned out to be proposals for reducing the working week to 36 hours by 1985. In the meantime the working week was cut to 39 hours and a fifth week's paid holiday was introduced. In fact these proposals merely formalised the state of affairs in most sections of French industry. One business publication noted that the managers it had consulted regarded the proposals 'as a symbolic gesture and agree that it will have little or no impact on either job creation or productivity' (*Business Europe*, 24 July 1981).

But these cosmetic changes had the desired effect. They provided the foundations for joint collaboration between the unions and the state. They legitimised the state in the eyes of workers and at least temporarily eliminated the need of the bosses for coercion and overt class conflict.

EUROPEAN WORKING CLASS

The unions rally behind Mitterand

The union leaders welcomed the new 'left' government with open arms. The CFDT union federation, allied to the socialist party, was convinced that a new era for trade unionists was on the horizon. Even the CGT greeted the end of its 'long ostracisation' by the state and pledged to be 'constructive partners with the government of the left' (*Le Monde*, 9 July 1981). CGT general secretary Georges Seguy observed:

'Today we are at last able to play our role as trade unionists in a positive and cooperative way with the government. We are now in a position to attempt to settle a certain number of outstanding social issues which have been continually ignored by the outgoing administration.' (*Marxism Today*, August 1981)

The union bureaucrats look upon the Mitterand government as the guarantor of their position. Their aim is to convince the new regime to formalise industrial relations and provide legal protection to the unions. In return the union leaders have promised not to embarrass the 'left government' with radical demands.

Since the election the Mitterand Administration has enjoyed remarkable popularity in the French labour movement. Although unemployment and inflation continue to rise the trade union leaders have absolved the government of any responsibility. With the unions behind him Mitterand faces little opposition from the organised working class.

The recent dispute at Boussac-Saint Freres textiles is symptomatic of the present relationship between state and trade unions. The parent company — the Agache-Willot group — of this textile plant is going bankrupt and 20 000 jobs are at risk. The owners, the infamous Willot brothers, have a reputation for dishonesty and corruption. The government has seized on this case — the unacceptable face of French capitalism — to show its concern for fair play. Mitterand has forced this industrial-commercial giant into receivership, stripped the Willot brothers of control and demanded their personal wealth as collateral for government loans. Industry Minister Pierre Dreyfus told Parliament: 'We are going to make the Willot brothers cough up the money'. The government could take these

steps without upsetting the bourgeoisie for the Willot brothers are popularly seen as shady characters who have been previously imprisoned for illegal transactions.

The unions reacted predictably. In 1978 during a previous dispute at Boussac-Saint Freres, workers barricaded the streets and stopped all traffic around the plant for three days. This time the response was different. As a local CGT spokesman explained:

'We have a left-wing government and every reason to have confidence in it. Now we must remain vigilant.' (*Le Monde*, 4 July 1981)

Workers at the plant have been reduced to the role of spectators while the union officials cheer on the government.

Future prospects

The new left government still faces many problems. Unemployment — particularly in chemicals, shoes, textiles, printing, motor components — continues to rise. And this in turn has stimulated shop floor militancy. As *Le Monde* noted: 'protests are multiplying against the threat of redundancy' (12/13 July 1981). In some factories the fightback has been well-organised and successful. In a number of plants occupations have forced the employers to rescind closure schemes and wage restraint.

The full impact of the Mitterand regime's reflation programme has not yet been felt by the labour movement. Although the price index rose by another two per cent in July and trade union leaders expressed their concern, the massive inflationary effect of the government's programme will only manifest itself towards the end of the year. The prospect is growing unemployment and rising inflation. More cosmetic reforms will not be able to hide the anti-working class direction of government policy.

Will Mitterand be able to keep the trade unions under his thumb? The labour bureaucrats are unlikely to do anything that will threaten their new found role as intimate partners with the state. The working class on the other hand is militant and ready to fight for its interests. What the French working class lacks is a revolutionary party that could challenge the collaborationist role of the socialist and communist parties.

PREPARING FOR POWER

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

Chancellor Geoffrey Howe talks hopefully about the 'end of the recession'. Michael Edwardes says no wage rise for 71 000 British Leyland workers. The TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee calls for trade union 'participation' in Labour's plans to overcome the crisis. Labour-controlled Lothian Region council agrees to wide-ranging cuts in spending. What's the way forward for the working class? To find the way out you have to know where you are and how you got there. This is the aim of the *Preparing for Power* conference. 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 past and present. 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.

For more details phone 01-274 3951.

Revolutionary Communist Papers No 8 Prolonging the death agony

When Labour lost the last General Election it was hard to find anyone prepared to hold up the Social Contract as a great achievement. Labour's wage cutting and service slashing made most workers sceptical of the value of this much-vaunted deal between the government and the trade union bureaucrats. But today we see a new Social Contract in the making, proposed not only by Labour's right wing, but also, and more explicitly, by the left. The Labour Coordinating Committee makes no bones about calling for a wages policy and for the trade unions to get involved in 'managing the economy'.

The major article in the next issue of *Revolutionary Communist Papers*, 'Prolonging the death agony: the rise, fall and reconstitution of social democracy' analyses the resilience of reformism. Frank Richards' study of the politics of the European labour movement in the twentieth century explains the changing character of the trade unions and the parties of the working class, and their role in today's crisis.

Was Lenin right about 'the aristocracy of labour' and the collapse of the Second International? How did the socialist parties manage to survive the slump of

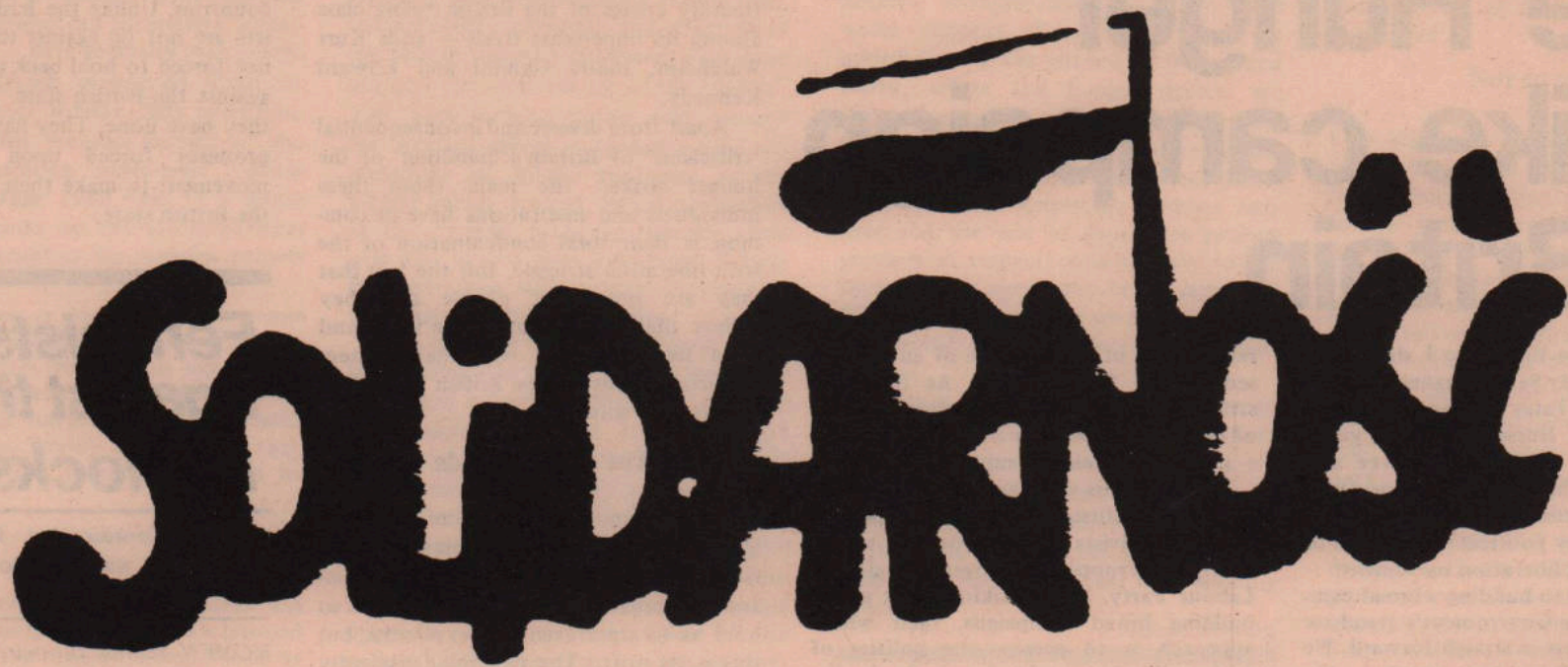
the 'thirties? After becoming marginalised in the years of the post-war boom, how have the reformists adapted to the current recession? *RCP8* examines social democracy's relationship to the trade union bureaucracy and the working class, and shows that we are now witnessing the revival of reformism as the principal barrier to the class struggle.

RCP8 also contains a discussion article by Bob Radcliffe on 'Entrism and the Labour Party: British Trotskyism in the 'thirties'. Drawing extensively on hitherto unpublished material, the article examines the relationship of the early British Trotskyists to the Labour Party. By looking at the experience of the entrism tactic, first in the Independent Labour Party, then in the Labour Party itself, the article brings out how Trotsky's followers came to lend reformism credibility. Since entrism once again is all the rage, this clearly contains important lessons for us today.

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WHILE PARTY AND SOLIDARITY NEGOTIATE THE QUEUES GET LONGER

Changing of the guard

THE CONGRESS continued with the well-established tradition of the Polish bureaucracy: every time there is social unrest, get rid of a few unpopular politicians, indict a hapless party boss for incompetence, and promise things will be better in future. This time they really went to town. 80 per cent of the near 2000 attending the Congress were new delegates. Only 18 of the former party leadership managed to get re-elected onto the 200-strong Central Committee, and only four remained on the 15-member Politburo.

The scale of the purge indicates the severity of the crisis facing Polish society. Poland's economy is a monument to the bureaucracy's inability to plan. National income this year will fall for the third year running — by 15 per cent. Industry is in chaos and agricultural production is in decline, both sectors hit by a shortage of spare parts. And the regime owes \$27 billion to Western governments and banks. So there was no shortage of scapegoats. The bureaucracy, however, will have to come up with something more than 'socialist renewal' if it is to feed the population and maintain social order.

Western commentators have given much prominence to the alleged differences within the PCP. But neither the Stalinist hardliners nor the soft-spoken liberals have a convincing solution to the problems Polish society faces. In this situation, Kania, who personifies the non-descript, mediocre bureaucrats who lack the power to run Poland in the old way, remains as leader. Kania is now pushing ahead with the strategy on which all sections of the PCP rely for salvation — 'economic reform'.

Economic reform is a euphemism for attacking the living standards of the working class. It is a prelude to getting rid of as much of the framework of economic controls as possible without undermining the position of the Polish bureaucracy. The proposed measures are straightforward: austerity and labour discipline. Subsidies for food and other products, which constitute 25 per cent of the state's budget, are to be phased out. Shortages will be 'overcome' by cutting consumer demand. Bread prices will rise

The special July Congress of the Polish Communist Party was advertised as the start of a new era. Even in the West, press and television commentators enthused about the 'genuinely free and democratic' party elections. The Financial Times, remarking on the 'unprecedented situation', went so far as to claim that the outcome of the Congress was a 'party and government which enjoy far more legitimate authority than any other Communist government, hedged around by the sort of checks and balances which are normally associated with democracy' (21 July 1981).

The big fanfare about a democratic renewal in the party had a purpose. It was an attempt to endow with legitimacy a ruling party which has little support in any section of Polish society. But the party's promise to be more responsive to social needs could not obscure the general indifference which met the proceedings. The real concerns of Polish workers were further cuts in their meat rations, growing shortages of essential goods and the profound crisis which grips all aspects of society. When the speeches were over, Polish people took to the streets as if the Congress had never happened. Hunger marches, demonstrations and strikes showed the growing politicisation of the struggle in Poland.

by 400 per cent, butter by 312 per cent and milk by 230 per cent.

Economic reform also means increasing the mobility of labour. Workers are going to be drafted into the mines to boost coal production for export. The more inefficient factories will be closed down, and the threat of unemployment used to stimulate productivity increases. During the planned 'transition period' up to 2 000 000 workers could be made unemployed. Leading bureaucrats have even suggested that Polish workers should be encouraged to migrate to Western Europe to find work.

Western bankers and the Polish petit bourgeoisie approve of this sort of 'socialist renewal'. Austerity in combination with a greater reliance on the market mechanism and economic incentives drive Poland towards the restoration of capitalist social relations. Only the insecurity of the Polish bureaucrats and the threat of working class unrest are so far preventing it.

Solidarity with the party

The bureaucracy stands on two legs: one is the threat of Soviet invasion, the other is the Polish reformist leaders. During the past year the new trade union organisation Solidarity has emerged as the most important bulwark of the system. Solidarity grew out of the strike wave that erupted in the summer of 1980: it expres-

sed the basic aspirations of Polish workers to enjoy a reasonable standard of living free from bureaucratic despotism.

The emergence of Solidarity was a positive development in that it expressed working class opposition to the Stalinist regime. The union soon passed from economic issues to taking strike action to force the removal of corrupt officials and to demand the punishment of bureaucrats and police agents responsible for intimidating workers.

But Solidarity does not simply express the interests of the working class. Its leadership is influenced by other forces — the Church, the petit-bourgeois liberals and intelligentsia — that want to use the strength of the working class to create a bourgeois democratic Poland. That's why Solidarity has become so conservative in its outlook. Its leadership spends as much time talking workers out of taking action as it does in working out compromises with the bureaucracy. Solidarity's calls for realism and moderation echo the deeply felt concerns of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Solidarity leader Lech Walesa has warned his members to keep out of 'politics'. He has sabotaged strike action on numerous occasions. But every time he stabs one group of workers in the back a new struggle breaks out. A growing number of Solidarity activists has chosen to ignore the instructions of their leader-

ship. The demonstrations organised during the first week of August went ahead despite calls for moderation from the Solidarity leadership.

Poland's prospects

The Polish bureaucracy on its own is incapable of restoring social stability. A massive overhaul of the party and the democratisation of its proceedings have changed nothing. The gravity of the economic crisis requires the bureaucracy to make concessions in exchange for the support of the petit bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia.

The Soviet bureaucracy and its troops fear a workers' uprising more than the most far reaching economic reforms. But an invasion is not the immediate threat. The Church, the petit bourgeoisie, the managers and the professional people are solidly behind the economic reforms. They will do everything in their power to keep Solidarity on the path of moderation. Their aim is to make Solidarity less responsive to proletarian pressure. What happens next in Poland depends on what happens to Solidarity. If the present leadership retains its position it will turn Solidarity into a pillar of the establishment and draw workers behind the programme of economic reforms. If, on the other hand, workers kick out Solidarity's leaders and professional advisors and change the unions into real fighting organisations then the collapse of the system will be close at hand.

Political stability is out of the question in Poland today. Polish workers have not fought hard and bitter battles to be put on rations. They know their strength and understand that they are more than a match for the unpopular bureaucracy.

Whatever happens one thing is clear. The implementation of the new austerity measures will clarify the contradictory interests of different social groups. Workers will see that their erstwhile advisors are more interested in rationalising the economy than defending their living standards. As the class struggle intensifies the way forward for the working class will emerge more and more clearly, not only in antagonism to its old rulers in the Stalinist bureaucracy, but in conflict with its new leaders in Solidarity.

Tony Allen

Ireland Solidarity movement

The Hunger Strike campaign in Britain

As we go to press the H-Block death toll stands at 10. Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, Ray McCreesh, Patsy O'Hara, Joe McDonnell, Martin Hurson, Kevin Lynch, Kieran Doherty, Thomas McElwee and Michael Devine have all been murdered by a British government intransigent in its refusal to give any political recognition to the Irish national liberation movement.

Our approach to building a broad campaign against the Government's stand on the hunger strikers is straightforward. We begin by identifying our target — the broadest movement in the world and the only one with an objective interest in fighting the British state — the working class. Then we identify the problem in winning the support of this constituency — the fact that most workers support the Government's stand against the hunger strikers because they approve of British rule in Ireland and strongly disapprove of the armed struggle against it. We thus aim to convince working class people that they should support the hunger strikers because they are fighting for the political

recognition of the struggle of an oppressed people for freedom. As this is a struggle directed against the mortal enemy of every British worker — the British state — it deserves their full support.

Contrast this clear and simple strategy with the confused and devious approach of Irish activists in the women's movement, the Troops Out Movement and the Labour Party. While talking a lot about building broad campaigns, their whole approach is to narrow the politics of Irish solidarity in the hope of winning the support of exclusive groups such as feminists, prominent people in bourgeois politics, the Church and the arts or, in the case of the Labour Party, trade union bureaucrats. Not only are these campaigns opportunist, they are totally ineffective. As the hunger strike continues in Ireland, radical left activity in Britain has virtually ground to a halt. Meanwhile the Workers March for Irish Freedom is attracting a growing body of support for its protest at the TUC in Blackpool.

'Prominent people' against the H-Blocks?

Liz Curtis, *The H-Blocks: an indictment of British prison policy in the North of Ireland*, Information on Ireland, 1981.

LIZ CURTIS is a leading activist in the Troops Out Movement and other Irish solidarity campaigns in Britain. Her new pamphlet reveals a lot about the approach of the British left to the Irish War.

Criminals or delinquents?

After a brief introduction *The H-Blocks* outlines 'the British view and the Irish view' of the conflict behind the hunger strikes. The British view is clearly stated: republicans are criminals and should be treated as such. The Irish view is presented, without introduction, in the form of a long quotation:

'The death of Raymond McCreesh exemplifies the cruel dilemma in which northern Catholics are caught. ...

'Raymond McCreesh was born in a community which has always proclaimed that it is Irish, not British. When the northern troubles began he was barely 12, a very impressionable age at which to learn of discrimination. Those who protested against it were harassed and intimidated. Then followed Burntollet, the Bogside, Bombay Street and Bloody Sunday in Derry, all before he was 15. These events gave rise to very deep emotions in nationalist areas. ...

'I repudiate unequivocally this recourse to arms, but I well remember how easy it was in the mid 'seventies for many young men on both sides to become convinced that this was the best way to defend their own community.

'Raymond McCreesh was captured bearing arms at the age of 19 and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. I have no doubt that he would never have seen the inside of a jail but for the abnormal political situation.'

Two things are worth noting about this presentation of 'the Irish view'. First,

its content. It explains the heroic behaviour of a soldier in a national liberation army as the delinquent response of an impressionable lad to an 'abnormal situation'. But what was so abnormal about McCreesh's experience? Consistent discrimination and periodic pogroms have been the norm of politics in the Six Counties for decades. But using radical criminology theory to explain away a national liberation struggle is popular on the British left. This brings us to the second noteworthy point about the above quotation — the author's choice of spokesman for 'the Irish view'. In fact the words are those of neither a sociologist nor a socialist, but of the Catholic Primate of All-Ireland, Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich.

Why O'Fiaich? The choice is no idle or random selection. He is quoted extensively and referred to repeatedly in this short pamphlet. And a TOM leaflet for a recent anti-H-Block demonstration in London reproduced more quotations below a large photograph of Ireland's top priest. Is O'Fiaich known as a campaigner in the cause for which McCreesh and many others have given their lives, the struggle against criminalisation and all other aspects of British rule in Ireland? On the contrary, he condemns the fight to oust the British occupiers at every opportunity.

The object of *The H-Blocks* is to win progressive representatives of bourgeois opinion to the O'Fiaich view that there is a better way for the Government to administer its prisons and rule Ireland. The pamphlet quotes a succession of respectable authorities — professors and lecturers, well-known journalists and authors, *The Guardian* and the European Commission on Human Rights. It ends by listing a selection from 'the host of prominent people' who have 'criticised the British Government's intransigent policy towards the prisoners in the North of Ireland'. This roll call of the famous includes 30 Labour MPs, the general secretary of the Communist Party and personalities from 'the arts'. There is a special Irish honours list including O'Fiaich (of course) and Bishop Daly, as well as Charles Haughey and Garret FitzGerald, the Loyalist Ulster Defence Association and the leader

of the discredited Peace People; and 'many Irish people prominent in the arts'. The 'international community' — the friendly critics of the British ruling class among its imperialist rivals — adds Kurt Waldheim, Indira Gandhi and Edward Kennedy.

Apart from diverse and inconsequential 'criticisms' of Britain's 'handling' of the hunger strikes, the main thing these individuals and institutions have in common is their total condemnation of the Irish liberation struggle. But the fact that they are prominent people and they believe that Britain could rule in Ireland in a more humane way makes them important allies of the British left. What then is their solution?

'The five demands'

As an alternative to Thatcher's intransigence *The H-Blocks* proposes that the Government concede to 'the five demands'. (Actually the pamphlet is never so bold as to state even this explicitly, but this is its drift.) The pamphlet discreetly acknowledges that these demands arise out of the prisoners' rejection of the British strategy of criminalisation and their claim for political status. But it then deftly switches the argument to avoid endorsing the national liberation struggle; instead it pleads for a programme of liberal prison reform:

'The prisoners obviously have a political motivation for wanting these particular reforms, in that they reject those elements of the prison regime which symbolise criminalisation. But at the same time these reforms are already in existence in liberal prisons.'

It concludes, invoking the prominent people again, that Britain can meet the five demands without conceding political status: 'Thus, as has been widely recognised in Ireland and elsewhere, there is room for the British Government to meet the demands without having openly to concede that they are political prisoners'. These few sentences sum up the theme of the radical left's hunger strike campaigning in Britain. This approach is justified by the claim that it provides a way out of the impasse that will save prisoners' lives.

The argument is specious. The Government (with solid bourgeois backing) has always agreed with the hunger strikers that the five demands were tantamount to political status: both the real protagonists in the War know that the issue at stake in the H-Blocks is Britain's right to rule in Ireland. The procession of coffins out of the Kesh confirms that the left's way out is a dead end. But the argument over the five demands is more to do with the campaign in support of the prisoners outside the Kesh than with the battle inside the H-Blocks.

People who want to turn the struggle for political status into quibbles about prison conditions are not seeking a loophole for the prisoners, but essentially for themselves. Liberals cannot face the stark choice raised by 12 years of war and now focused on the H-Blocks — for or against the national liberation struggle? So they look for ways out, and end up asking brutal British imperialism to be more humane instead of trying to force the Government to recognise the political legitimacy of the national liberation struggle.

British socialists' favourite apology for their approach to Irish solidarity activity is that this is the approach endorsed by the H-Block prisoners themselves. They confuse anti-imperialist strategy in an oppressed country and that in the imperialist country itself. Those in the front line of the mortal conflict between the Irish republican movement and the vastly superior forces of British imperialism are sometimes, inevitably, forced to compromise. If presented openly and clearly explained to the oppressed people, such compromises preserve and even strengthen

en the anti-imperialist movement. But these considerations do not apply to the solidarity movement in the imperialist countries. Unlike the Irish, British socialists are not up against the wall; they are not forced to hold back in their offensive against the British state. Yet this is what they have done. They have used the compromises forced upon the liberation movement to make their own peace with the British state.

Mick Kennedy

Feminists against the H-Blocks?

Armagh Coordinating Group, *Women behind the wire*, London, 1981, pp42, 45p.

WOMEN behind the wire is a collection of documents from the campaign in solidarity with the Armagh women. The bulletin reproduces several contributions to seminars in Dublin and Belfast around this year's International Women's Day protest. In Belfast there were some heated exchanges:

'What was perhaps the major point of debate emerged between the — mostly English — feminists on the one hand, and the women active in the republican movement in the North on the other. "What about contraception, abortion and other basic women's rights?" was the central question phrased in many different ways. The answer given by the republican women was that feminists who genuinely wanted to support Irish women had to recognise the importance of the national liberation struggle, and the fact that many Irish women had made their participation in that struggle a priority over what women in England and other Western countries have identified as their priority.'

The problem of the relationship between the fight against women's oppression and the struggle against imperialist domination has constantly recurred in the women's movement in Ireland. Feminists counterpose 'women's issues' to the fight against British rule to the detriment of both struggles in Ireland — and to the detriment of the Irish solidarity movement in Britain.

Reactionary feminism

The most lucid contributions to the Armagh discussions came from Sinn Féin's Rita O'Hare and Naomi Brennan of the Irish Republican Socialist Party. Brennan rightly insists that 'the over-riding political struggle in Ireland is the struggle for national liberation'. Quoting from the Women Against Imperialism group she correctly locates the intensity of women's oppression in Ireland and other reactionary features of Irish society — such as the strength of religion — in the domination and division of the country by Britain:

'Irish women's position today cannot be simply reduced to the failures of the republican movement to take up the question of women's oppression. On the contrary it can only be from an understanding of Ireland's specific history of colonisation and imperialist domination and through the struggle for Irish freedom that Irish women's liberation can begin. For as long as Ireland remains a dependent and deformed country women's position will also be defined by that dependence.

'The major obstacle to the development of the feminist movement there is Partition. The strength of the churches, North and South, and the backwardness of the economy are all a direct effect of Britain's presence in Ireland.'

O'Hare and Brennan — and women active in the day to day fight against British rule in the Six Counties — are right to insist on the priority of the anti-imperialist struggle. It is only through the defeat of British imperialism that women's rights can be extended in Ireland.

Ireland Solidarity movement

Feminism in Ireland has generally been even more middle class and right-wing than feminism in Britain. Irish feminists — even those who call themselves 'socialist feminists' — have generally been hostile to the republican movement. Take for example *Scarlet Women*, 'the newsletter of the socialist feminist current of the women's liberation movement', which devoted its June 1980 issue to a whole series of attacks on the anti-imperialist struggle — including the Armagh protest — by Irish feminists.

'The problem is that because the women in Armagh support the republican cause, feminist support for them will be seen and acclaimed as support for the nationalist movement which is reactionary, male-dominated, party-dominated, heavily influenced by Catholic morality, and altogether bad news for women.'

The argument is laced with bourgeois feminist rhetoric:

'Can we condone the use of bombs and bullets to destroy the flesh women have laboured to bring forth and struggled to rear? Should we be identifying with the death orientation of men?'

Irish feminists have isolated particular aspects of women's oppression — lack of nurseries, legal restrictions on divorce, contraception and abortion — from their origin in British rule. Instead of seeing the fight for women's rights as part of the anti-imperialist struggle, feminists condemn the republican movement in terms borrowed from the right-wing British press and pursue their own campaigns in isolation. There can be no doubt that this approach has been reinforced by the poor record and political weakness of the anti-imperialist movement on women's issues. However, this narrow feminist response cannot advance women's interests — it has led to a series of ineffectual campaigns.

The People's Democracy group tries to build a bridge between women in the anti-imperialist movement and anti-republican feminists. Anne Speed's contribution to the Armagh discussions is a confused and contradictory paper from an organisation which, while claiming to be a left-wing influence on the Irish struggle, in practice acts as a transmission belt for bringing the liberal petit-bourgeois politics of the British radical left into the Irish context.

Speed pays lip-service to the link between women's oppression and imperialist domination but asserts that 'it is fundamentally true that the impact of independent organisation by women against their own oppression is the single most important factor in the changing consciousness of women'. In fact this is fundamentally untrue; as Naomi Brennan comments: 'it was only after, and alongside their involvement in the anti-imperialist struggle that women emerged as a strong force and took up women's oppression allied with the national question'. And how could it be otherwise?

If it is to realise its own objectives the women's movement must be subordinated to the anti-imperialist movement. Speed's fetish about 'autonomy' is an adaptation to bourgeois feminism that can only weaken the fight against British domination while contributing nothing to the cause of women's liberation.

Armagh in Britain

The Armagh Coordinating Group (London) has played an active part in the campaign to build support, not only for the Armagh prisoners, but for all the prisoners and especially for the hunger strikers. Its small group of activists has rightly criticised the British left organisations for their failure to take seriously the initiatives around the hunger strike. However the Armagh group itself has conspicuously failed to draw in any wider support for the Irish struggle in Britain. According to one of the group's most active members,

Anne Rossiter, 'it goes without saying that efforts over the past few years to challenge the predominantly middle class, individualistic attitudes and practice of the British women's movement have done nothing but melt the tip of the iceberg'. This 'goes without saying' only because the Armagh group in general shares the prejudices of British feminism: as the Belfast debate showed, British supporters of the Armagh campaign identify more with the narrow preoccupations of Irish feminists than with women involved in the national liberation struggle.

The problem facing the Armagh group is the same one that has faced successive campaigns over the past decade — how to win support for the Irish liberation struggle, of which the Armagh protest is one aspect. The Armagh group has tried to resolve this problem in the traditional style of the British left: by narrowing the issue and narrowing the target of the campaign. It has focused on the Armagh prisoners — not as one section of the national liberation army — but as particularly oppressed victims of the British prison regime. Their emphasis has been on the peculiar intensity of the oppression in Armagh — detailing the medical conditions and menstrual problems resulting from prison treatment. The Armagh group's orientation towards improving prison conditions, rather than defending the right of the women in Armagh, like all republican prisoners-of-war, to political status, has come to dominate its work. The bulletin gives an account of a meeting sponsored by the Armagh Coordinating Group as recently as April on the theme 'why political status is an issue for feminists'. But by July the group was refusing to participate in events in support of political status.

The real reason for this shift of emphasis was not to acquiesce to the demands of the republican movement (although this was its justification we have seen that feminists are little inclined to follow the dictates of republicanism) but to make the issue of the Irish prisoners more acceptable to British feminists. Many feminists, the argument runs, who are hostile to the national liberation struggle can be won to sympathise with the plight of women brutalised in Armagh. Whilst not prepared to support the demand for political status, they could be persuaded to approve reforms in the prison regime. This attempt to squeeze past the anti-republican prejudices of British feminists has of course failed to gain their support.

Tending to give up on the women's movement, the Armagh group has begun to look elsewhere. The bulletin contains leaflets attempting to establish a common cause among blacks in Britain, liberation movements in the backward capitalist countries and the Irish struggle.

But British feminists are filled with petit-bourgeois contempt for the only section of society that can link up with all the struggles of the oppressed — the working class. Because only the working class has the social weight to destroy imperialism, all movements against oppression are reliant on the working class to achieve their own liberation. The Armagh group follows the path, heavily trodden by the radical left, of trying to create spurious links among the oppressed whilst avoiding the key task of winning the working class to the defence of all oppressed peoples.

The trouble is that this approach doesn't work either. Despite the presence of black community politicians on H-Block/Armagh platforms, blacks have not flocked to back the Irish cause. The dominant posture of the Armagh group today is a response in frustration to this experience. Its members now substitute demonstrations of personal commitment for campaigning to get others involved. This leads to their endorsement of endless

silent vigils and their hostility to using incidents such as the deaths of hunger strikers *propagandistically* — to gain wider support. Such tactics may be appropriate in the ghettos of Belfast and Derry, where the hunger strikers are known personally and already have mass backing. In Britain where they are neither known nor popularly supported, silent vigils and demonstrations without banners and the sale of papers are phoney gestures of respect, counterproductive in terms of the needs of a broad campaign. Silence is the last thing we need in Britain in response to the deaths of Irish hunger strikers.

Women behind the wire is testimony to the energy of a small group of women and their commitment to raising the Armagh issue in Britain. Unfortunately their radical left and feminist politics are a barrier to building the broad working class based movement that is so urgently needed.

Niamh Eardley

Labour Party against the H-Blocks?

Labour Party NEC policy document, Northern Ireland, Labour Party Publicity Department, 1981.

THE LABOUR PARTY's Irish policy has been subjected to detailed critique in recent issues of *the next step* — see 'Labour's Irish solutions', June 1981, 'Sixty years of shame', July/August 1981. The publication of the National Executive's study group document on Northern Ireland after 'eighteen months serious consideration' brings no surprises. Claimed to be a 'clear, credible, socialist policy', it is in fact none of those things: it is a garbled and cynical attempt to conceal the party's total commitment to British rule in Ireland with a lot of waffle about alternative constitutional structures, human rights, prison reforms and Labour's solution to all social problems from riots to hunger strikes, the alternative economic strategy.

Unity — but not just yet

While fully approving Direct Rule, Labour would like to see yet another attempt at 'power-sharing'. The NEC seems to have forgotten the fate of the last serious attempt to set up a 'power-sharing' assembly (see page 17). The object of the Labour Party's constitutional proposals is to 'attract the support of the minority community for the institutions of the state and ensure its involvement in constitutional politics'. In other words Labour wants to try to persuade the nationalist people in the Six Counties to accept British rule and stop fighting back against military repression.

To make its approval of British domination more palatable the Labour Party has tentatively added on its endorsement of Irish unity as a long-term goal. The referendum proposed earlier to decide this issue (see *the next step*, July/August 1981) has now been dropped in favour of a vague formulation about 'unification by agreement and consent'. But the agreement and consent of whom? The Irish people? Never! The British people? More likely. The population of the Six Counties with its gerrymandered Loyalist majority? This is the status quo.

The NEC document is evasive and contradictory in an attempt to satisfy the conflicting forces on the party, from Loyalist trade unionists on the one hand to Irish nationalists and British socialists on the other. The study group is clear about only one thing: 'a long and arduous process of discussion' on this issue is

required. As long as Irish hunger strikers are dying by the day, the longer the better as far as the Labour leaders are concerned.

Not so special

One argument in support of the Irish prisoners popular among British radicals is that because they were the victims of special judicial procedures, they should be entitled to special category status in prison. The NEC document confirms the ineffectiveness of trying to use a play on words to avoid a political argument.

No matter how firm a person's convictions are about 'human rights' and 'civil liberties', anybody who accepts the right of the British to rule in Ireland will have no qualms about accepting the denial of basic democratic rights that is an unavoidable part of British rule. The members of the Labour Party's study group are no doubt fervent defenders of human rights in Czechoslovakia and Chile but, as they see 'Northern Ireland' as part of the United Kingdom, they 'do not see any prospect of a return to ordinary rules of trial by jury so long as paramilitary and terrorist activity continues on the present scale'.

This acceptance of the need for special methods of interrogation and trial in no way implies political recognition of the struggle against British rule. On the contrary, *denial* of special category status in the prisons is fully consistent with *approval* of special methods of dealing with republican activists: both follow from the needs of British imperialism. Thus the Labour Party states unequivocally that it does 'not support political status'.

To persuade people to support the prisoners' demands for political status it is necessary to persuade them to oppose British imperialist strategy in Ireland — it is general support of that strategy that leads people to tolerate the gross infringements of democratic rights of the nationalist people in Ireland. Puns on the word 'special' do not advance this task.

Class politics where?

The Labour Party document concludes with a section entitled 'options for class politics'. The Labour Party apparently wants to promote class politics in the Six Counties. Now this is an interesting departure: ever since its foundation the Labour Party in Britain has repudiated the class struggle and claimed to be a party of the whole nation, not simply a working class party. But in Ireland, where the class struggle takes the form of the national liberation struggle against British rule, the Labour Party now wants to help initiate 'a class-based party of labour'.

In reality 'class politics', which for reformists always means narrow trade union politics, in Ireland signifies the rejection of the struggle against British imperialism. The NEC has endorsed a proposal from the Militant Tendency that the British Labour Party should support a conference of Six Counties trade unionists to consider the prospects for launching a new Northern Ireland Labour Party. (The old NILP has degenerated into a Loyalist rump and the Stalinist Workers Party-Republican Clubs has not managed to fill the void.)

If it is ever formed, the new party will be as irrelevant to workers in the Six Counties as was the old. Nationalist workers identify their interests in opposition to British rule; Loyalist workers are loyal to the British state. The working class in Ireland will not be united until British domination is ended. This is the vital task for real class politics in Ireland: Labour's 'class politics' proposal is simply a feeble attempt to win support for British imperialism among nationalist workers in the Six Counties.

Annie Dillon

What about the Protestant working class?

ORANGE AGAINST GREEN

Nowhere was last month's royal wedding more enthusiastically celebrated than in Belfast's Shankill Road and in all the other working class Protestant areas in the Six Counties. The Loyalist workers are a peculiar phenomenon: Irish workers whose basic allegiance is to the British crown. During 12 years of war the Protestant workers have formed a solid bloc with their employers and the British state: a million strong, highly armed and organised, an implacable barrier to Irish unity and independence.

The British left retains the prejudice that it is possible to unite Protestant and Catholic workers around 'bread and butter' trade union issues. To refute this notion (dismissed by James Connolly as a 'doctrine almost screamingly funny in its absurdity'), and to illustrate the theme developed in the latest issue of Revolutionary Communist Papers (see box), we look at two events to show that Protestant workers' militancy cannot be transformed into anti-imperialist politics.

The 1932 outdoor relief strike is often referred to by the British left as the outstanding example of Protestant and Catholic unity around elementary economic issues and quoted as a model to be emulated today: a closer look reveals that it is the exception that proves the rule. The 1974 Ulster Workers Council strike, by contrast, is never mentioned. It was however a much more significant event, showing the concerted deployment of Loyalist working class power in support of unalloyed British imperialist domination.

'We want bread'

IN BELFAST in 1932 there were 50 000 people out of work. Endemic unemployment in the Catholic areas was supplemented from the late 'twenties onwards by rapidly increasing Protestant joblessness. The world crisis devastated Ulster's traditional industries: Harland and Wolff shipyards had employed 20 000 in 1924 – by 1933 they had only 2000 men on their books.

The unemployed received 'outdoor relief' in return for two and a half days enforced labour in public works schemes. (The alternative was 'indoor relief' in the humiliating austerity of the workhouse.) The rates were eight shillings a week for a married man plus rigorously means tested benefits for dependants. Single men and women, orphans and widows got nothing. These rates and the terms on which they were received were well below British standards. The unemployed masses of Belfast – Protestant as well as Catholic – were condemned to grinding poverty.

The leading political organisations among the unemployed were the Revolutionary Workers Groups, the nuclei of the Irish Communist Party. Initially based in the Catholic areas, the RWGs drew more and more Protestants under their influence as they swelled the outdoor relief schemes in 1932. In October the RWGs called a strike for higher rates of benefits. Strike leader Tommy Geehan summed up the driving force behind the stoppage: 'the fight basically was an elementary fight for the right to live: a fight against death by starvation' (*Daily Worker*, 18 November 1932). The main slogan was 'we want bread'.

The strike was solid. Enormous demonstrations took place: when they were met with police baton charges they

turned into united Protestant and Catholic riots. Geehan was ecstatic:

'the past fortnight will be recorded as a glorious two weeks in the history of the working class struggle. We saw Roman Catholic and Protestant workers marching together and on Tuesday last we saw them fighting together.' (*Belfast Newsletter*, 13 October 1932)

Some Protestant workers moved into a broader alignment with the Catholics: delegations even appeared at the traditional annual republican commemoration

at the Bodinstown grave of Wolfe Tone, the leader of the United Irishmen rebellion of 1798. But unity in Belfast proved short-lived.

The outdoor relief strike was brought to an end by a combination of repression and concessions. The Army was called in. The police banned all marches, drafted 700 extra men into Belfast and equipped them with armoured cars with mounted machine guns: their energies were concentrated in the Catholic ghettos. By the end of the second week 100 people – including two strike leaders – were in jail. Two people were shot dead by the police, and more than 50 suffered gun shot wounds. Then the local administrators of the relief schemes, the Board of Guardians, offered to double the relief rates, modify the means tests and allow benefits for the single unemployed. The strikers voted to accept the offer and returned to work.

The Orange card

The Unionist leaders devoted their energies to destroying incipient working class unity. They used the Loyalist workers' most precious asset – their privileged position on the labour market – which was being eroded by mass unemployment. In 1931 the Ulster Protestant League was set up to 'safeguard the employment of Protestants'. At the height of the outdoor relief strike Stormont premier Lord Craigavon, in a dramatic gesture at a meeting of Belfast Loyalists, read out a telegram from Mr W Straker, managing director of a shipbuilding firm, stating his anticipation of orders which

would mean employment for many workers. He meant of course Protestant workers (*The Times*, 13 October 1932). The Grand Master of the Belfast Orange Order proposed the simple slogan 'Protestants employ Protestants' (*Northern Whig*, 28 August 1932).

The call of Loyalism prevailed. Labour and RWG candidates were vanquished by Unionists in the 1933 elections both to the Belfast Corporation and the Board of Guardians. And sectarian conflict was never far beneath the surface. When employment began to pick up again in the mid 'thirties the Loyalist workers returned to their traditional allegiances. They celebrated the jubilee of King George V in 1935 in an orgy of sectarian violence leaving a dozen dead and hundreds more homeless.

The outdoor relief strike was a response to conditions of exceptional deprivation. It was possible for Protestants to participate because it did not challenge the constitutional link of the Six Counties with Britain. Moreover, it took place at a time when the republican movement, although moving left, was disorientated by the accession of DeValera's Fianna Fail party to power in 1932. In the north in particular there was no serious threat to Partition.

The British Communist Party at the time already tended to exaggerate the significance of the short-lived working class unity:

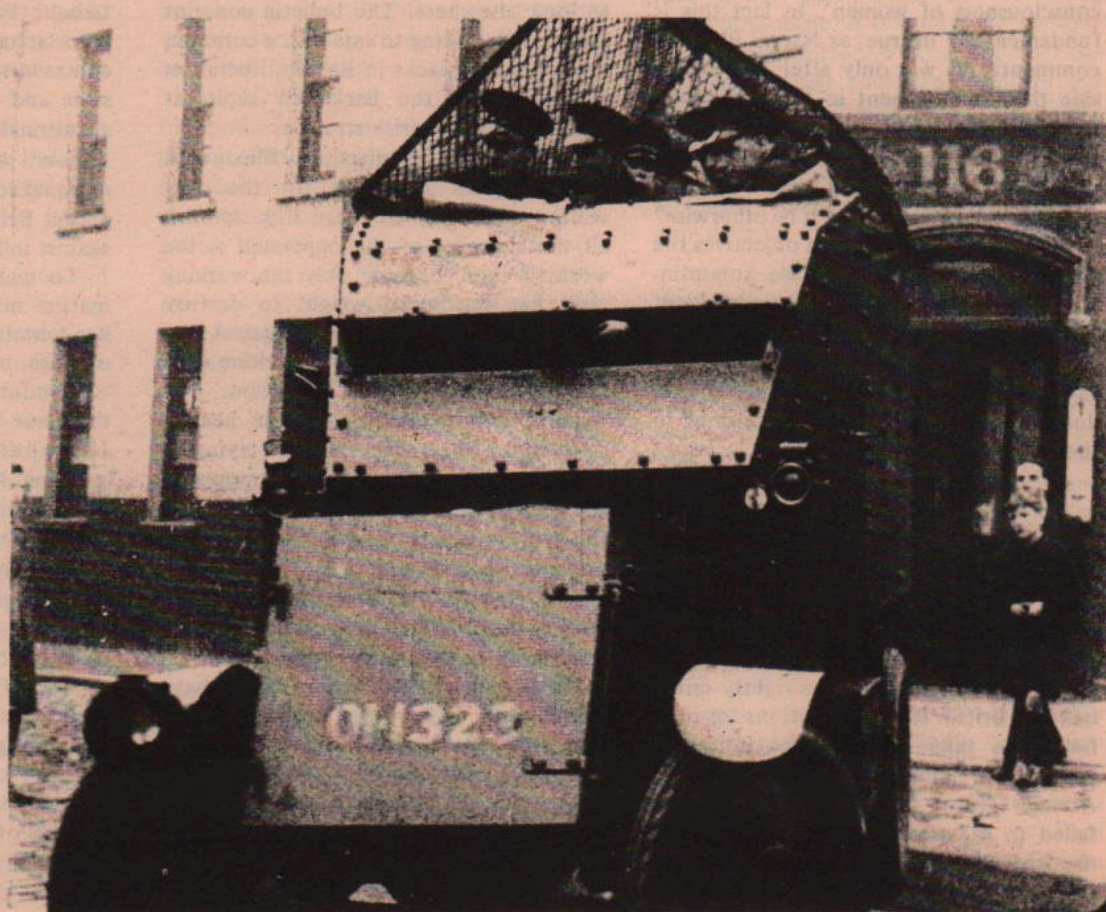
'The big significance of the struggle is that the workers are overcoming their divisions and are fighting unitedly against capitalist robbery and imperialist oppression.' (*Daily Worker*, 12 October 1932)

This was not quite true. The Belfast unemployed did unite to fight against the 'capitalist robbery' of the starvation relief scales. But they did not unite against the 'imperialist oppression' of Ireland by Britain: indeed the strikers' demand was for parity with British rates of benefit. The real threat of starvation forced working class unity – not against British rule – but to get better terms within it.

However, the CP's conclusion was right:

'The chief way to help is by declaring in every town and village the firm determination of the British workers to fight for the independence of Ireland and the complete driving out of British imperialism.'

How different from the view of the British left today on the 1932 strike! For groups such as the Militant Tendency, the SWP and the Spartacist League the strike



Belfast 1932:
The state moved in hard against unemployed demonstrators; Loyalism soon prevailed over class unity.

THE LOYALIST WORKING CLASS



THE LATEST ISSUE of the RCP's theoretical journal carries a discussion article on working class Loyalism. It identifies Protestant control of the labour market, established in the nineteenth century, as the key factor in preventing the differentiation of Loyalist workers as a class from the Orange bourgeoisie. This qualitative difference in the position of Protestant workers (compared with the Catholics) is sustained by the British connection: this is why the defence of the Union is the top political concern of Protestant workers. Their trade unions, organised more against Catholic workers than against employers, are subordinate to Loyalist politics in the Six Counties. Written jointly by Phil Murphy and Andrew Clarkson, 'The Loyalist working

directed against the Catholics and anybody who makes concessions to them, and that's what matters to Loyalist workers. Loyalist politicians by contrast are not allowed any deviation from unequivocal support for the Union. Bill Craig's Vanguard Party launched a campaign for an independent Ulster and quickly fell into political obscurity.

No surrender

The UWC rapidly became an alternative government. All requests for exemption from the strike, all arrangements for emergency services, all the day to day control of the economic life of the Six Counties shifted into its hands. In recognition of their new status the leading shop stewards designated themselves 'Minister of Agriculture', 'Minister of

class' is an important contribution to the debate about this implacable barrier to Irish unity and independence. Its conclusions challenge the orthodoxy of the British left about the possibility of promoting Protestant-Catholic unity before the defeat of British imperialism in Ireland. Buy it, read it and send us your comments.

RCP7 also includes a major survey of 'the world in recession' by Tony Allen and a polemical reply to Alex Callinicos of the SWP by Mike Freeman entitled 'Self-activity makes you blind'.

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Fuel and Power', 'Minister of Propaganda', etc. But the UWC had no intention of seizing state power: its only object was to restore the status quo before 'power-sharing' — untrammelled British Direct Rule. As its military wing put it: 'if Westminster is not prepared to restore democracy... then the only other way it can be restored is by a coup d'état' (Fisk, p33). The British Army was unable and unwilling to break the UWC strike. Fearing that the instability in the Six Counties might increase and spread, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson capitulated and abandoned the whole Sunningdale enterprise.

The UWC strike was a tremendously effective display of rank and file Protestant working class militancy. Like virtually every major mobilisation of Loyalist workers its object was to defend the Union and assert Protestant loyalty to British imperialism. British reformists always point out examples of Protestant trade union militancy and Protestant support for protests against the cuts. But such demonstrations are dwarfed by Orange parades, Paisleyite rallies and marches demanding more repression of the Catholics. The UWC strike confirms that Protestant trade union militancy cannot be transformed into anti-imperialist politics: its whole aim is to sustain imperialism as the force that preserves Protestant control of the labour market in the Six Counties. Even in the exceptional conditions of 1932, Protestant militancy fell short of challenging British rule: this is always the limit to radicalism in the Loyalist alliance.

Individual Protestants can be won to support the anti-imperialist struggle: many have in the past played a heroic part. But the Loyalist working class will not identify its class interest with Catholic workers until the force that maintains sectarian divisions — British imperialism is defeated. Our job in Britain is the same now as in 1932 — to win British workers to oppose imperialist oppression — not to chase the chimera of 'class unity' in the Six Counties.

Suki Gray
Carol Taggart

shows, not the need to win the British working class to oppose imperialism, but the possibility of building Protestant and Catholic unity around elementary economic issues. The UWC strike confirms the bankruptcy of this perspective.

The Loyalist coup d'état

The strike called by the Ulster Workers Council in May 1974 was a response to what the Loyalist workers perceived as a threat to the link between the Six Counties and Britain. Following the introduction of Direct Rule in 1972 the British government sought ways of making Westminster's authority more acceptable in the Six Counties. The proposals drawn up at the Sunningdale conference in 1973 for a 'power-sharing' executive, bringing together moderate Protestant and Catholic politicians, and a toothless Council of Ireland to involve the Dublin government, were the result. When this scheme was finally endorsed at Stormont against Loyalist resistance the UWC immediately called for a general strike. At a time when the war against British rule was raging with considerable ferocity, the Loyalists perceived 'power-sharing' as the thin end of a wedge leading to the ultimate removal of the Six Counties from the United Kingdom and the loss of the Protestants' privileged status.

The UWC was a coalition of shop stewards, paramilitaries and Loyalist politicians. (For a full account of the UWC and the strike, see Robert Fisk, *The point of no return*, London, 1975.) The key trade unionists were Billy Kelly (power station convenor in East Belfast), Harry Murray (shop steward at Harland and Wolff), and Tom Beattie (from the Ballylumford power station). The paramilitaries included Andy Tyrie (Ulster Defence Association), Ken Gibson (Ulster Volunteer Force) and several other leaders of ex-B Specials and local vigilante squads. The politicians were Ian Paisley (Democratic Unionist Party), Bill Craig (Vanguard) and Harry West (Independent Unionists). Nobody took much notice of Harry Murray's general strike call on the evening of 14 May. But within a fortnight the Six Counties was at a total standstill. Official Unionist leader Brian Faulkner had resigned and 'power-sharing' was in ruins.

The UWC strike was an impressive display of working class Loyalism. Billy Kelly boasted about the leading role

played by the trade union rank and file activists:

'The upper and middle classes are 100 per cent behind us. The ladies and gentry of Fermanagh and County Down are with us and we have professional people coming and shaking our hands.' (Jack Bennett, *Northern Ireland: fourteen days of fascist terror*, Connolly Publications, no date)

The strike brought to the fore a tradition of radical populism that had been growing in strength in the Loyalist working class areas in the preceding years. Working class Protestants put themselves forward as the most consistent defenders of the Union. They often condemned the bourgeois, petit bourgeois and even aristocratic Unionist politicians for their preparedness to compromise and make concessions to the Catholics. However, any Loyalist politicians who took this populist hostility against the Unionist establishment to the extent of fraternising with republicans were dealt with ruthlessly. Radical UDA men like Ernie Elliot and Tommy Herron were brutally assassinated in 1972 and 1973.

Politics however takes second place to military capacity in the organisations of the Loyalist working class. The shop stewards, especially those in the electricity supply industry who cut the power to industry, played an important role in the UWC strike. But the paramilitaries took the decisive part. On the first day of the strike the vast majority of Protestants went to work. It wasn't until the UDA and the UVF set up road blocks and pickets that the strike became effective. There was undoubtedly some intimidation; but there was equally undoubtedly general sympathy for the aims of the strike among Protestant workers.

It was their link-up with the paramilitaries that made the shop stewards so effective: their various attempts at political campaigning were a flop. The predecessor of the UWC — the Loyalist Association of Workers — had tried to initiate economic boycotts directed at the Twenty-six Counties — in imitation of a time-honoured republican tactic. But their choice of a campaign against Guinness and their encouragement of Protestants to burn Irish £1 notes, not surprisingly failed to win popular support.

As for the paramilitary groups, their politics are of little importance to Protestant workers. Thus the UDA may have a formal policy of support for an independent Ulster; in practice its guns are



Belfast 1974:
The shop steward and the paramilitaries: the Loyalist working class alliance that smashed 'power-sharing'.



Light shining from Buckinghamshire

E Bernstein, *Cromwell and communism: socialism and democracy in the Great English Revolution*, translated by H J Stenning, Spokesman, 1980, pbk £3.50.

F Brockway, *Britain's first socialists*, Quartet Books, 1980, hbk £5.95.

T Bann, *Arguments for socialism*, Jonathan Cape, 1979, hbk £5.95.

SINCE BERNSTEIN's time the extraction of historical lessons from the English Revolution has become a fashionable exercise. The publication of an English translation of his *Cromwell and communism* is a timely reminder of the nature of those lessons. It serves as a touchstone by which we can measure the degeneration of revisionist theory until it reaches the ahistorical absurdity to be found in the fireside reminiscences of Tony Benn.

The English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century took place on a dramatic battlefield of antagonistic class forces. The revolutionary bourgeoisie, strengthened by the advance of commercial capital, wrested power from the monarchy and a decayed aristocracy. To win this epochal struggle they were compelled to enlist the forces of the mass of the population. Not a proletariat, for none such existed; but small traders, journeymen craftsmen and peasant and landless labourers formed the backbone of Cromwell's New Model Army.

The political and economic demands of the yeomen and artisans came into direct conflict with those of the bourgeoisie. The accumulation of capital at this primitive stage demanded the end of the land rights held by the peasants under feudal tenure and the establishment of bourgeois property relations on the land. The nascent bourgeoisie represented by Cromwell had to deny access to the common land and enclose it for the most profitable cash crop, sheep.

A giant among pygmies

Bernstein's work is a thorough if unexciting study of this important period. Of the three under review it is only in his we learn why the Leveller and Digger demand for religious toleration became a central political issue. Religious toleration was directly associated with freedom from the payment of tithes to an established church. It was anathema to the bourgeoisie, not because they supported the episcopate, but because they saw the thin end of a dangerous wedge:

'Some of the members (of Parliament) observed that tenants who wanted to be quit of tithes would soon want to be quit of rent. Nine-tenths were due to the landlord on the same ground that one-tenth was due to the minister.' (Bernstein, p55, quoted from Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, Vol 3, p124)

Bernstein noted that the lower stratum of English workers elaborated a system of communistic doctrines far in advance of their contemporaries. Commenting on one of their leaders, Gerrard Winstanley, Bernstein insisted on the historical specificity of his outlook:

'It would be more than absurd to criticise, from our modern standpoint, his positive proposals, or to stress their imperfections and inexpediency. They are to be explained in the

light of the economic structures of society as he found it.'

Bernstein might turn in his grave as his modern camp followers pursue this very absurdity; but in his final section Bernstein himself rolled out the red carpet for them. He concluded that from the middle classes' observation of the distress of the poor, cushioned by prosperity and imbued with evangelicalism (whether rational or Quaker), a more powerful tradition arose: 'We have seen too how a new conception of the state gained ground, according to which the state, instead of being an organ of a dominant aristocracy or the tool of a dynasty, should become an instrument for promoting the welfare of all'. In Bernstein the English Revolution is already being observed through the pink-tinted spectacles of opportunism.

Fenner Brockway's book is presented as an innocuous coffee table introduction to the English Revolution. It is in fact a primer in state socialism. Brockway delights in anachronism and analogy. Thus the post-war shop stewards are the direct descendants of the revolutionary agitators in the New Model Army. Nor is he afraid of the bold stroke on the wide canvas. 'Indeed', he tells us, 'Julius Nyerere's village in Tanzania is close to the communities constructed by the Diggers on the wasted unenclosed heaths'. From the frozen fields of Surrey to the cracked plains of Morogoro: 5000 miles, 330 years, and lo and behold Tanzania has become likened unto seventeenth century England.

Why is Brockway so keen on his analogies? It is not to give an insight into the development of society at a time of exceptional class conflict. He has a different purpose — to counterpose the abstractions 'authoritarianism' and 'democracy'. As Trotsky said of Brockway's contemporaries in the Independent Labour Party and the Fabians, to make no distinction between the dictatorships of Robespierre and Cromwell and those of Hitler and Mussolini, is to make no distinction regarding the social classes that find their historical expression through any particular dictatorship.

Brockway seeks a justification for his own liberalism. The historic agent of this tradition is 'the people', a term which he uses to obscure the independent interests of workers and to deny their right to use violence:

'It is significant that the communist parties of Western Europe now accept democratic liberties, and the experiences of Portugal and Spain suggest that draconian suppression is not necessary even during transition from fascism. Democratic socialism is in the ascendancy.' The proletarian dictatorship is the real target of this veteran reformist's banal commentary on the English Revolution.

To be a pilgrim

In introducing Brockway's book Benn adopts his mentor's method. The Diggers are no longer dispossessed peasants heroically attempting to safeguard their position in the face of the ruthless attack of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. They have become embryonic 'green people' and prototype campaigners against the military-industrial complex.

In *Arguments for socialism* Benn's eclecticism achieves heights not dreamed of by Brockway: 'the origin of socialism can be traced back as far as the time of Christ himself and even to the Old Testament'. Little did they know it but the Levellers 'were speaking for a popular liberation movement which can be traced right back to the teachings of the Bible'. This must have been the popular front for the liberation of Judea (ML).

In the space of three pages the Levellers, the Chartists, the American colonialists, Tom Paine, the French Constituent Assembly, Sidney Webb's Labour Party constitution, and old Karl Marx are all thrown together into Tony's stew: 'that mysterious mix of Christian teaching, religious and political dissent, social equality and democracy' that he imbibed at his father's knee.

It is not that Benn is a bad historian, he is not a historian at all. He wanders through time like Billy Pilgrim, revising en route the history of the English Revolution to justify his political opportunism. He concludes that capital is as eternal as the democratic views of the Levellers, that the benefits of shareholder democracy must be restored and that 'investors there will always be'. Speak Winstanley!

reviews

'This buying and selling did bring in discontent and wars which have plagued mankind sufficiently for so doing. And the nations of the world will never learn to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and leave off warring, until this cheating device of buying and selling be cast out among the rubbish of kingly powers.'

'Is not buying and selling a righteous law? No, it is the law of the conqueror.' (from *The Law of Freedom on a Platform, or True Magistracy Restored*, London, 1651-52, p12)

Winstanley is unequivocal — 'the law of the conqueror' is bourgeois property relations. His view is constrained by the economic conditions of his time, his utopia is one of small-scale production. But their revolutionary spirit is as alien to Tony Benn as micro-chips would have been to Gerrard Winstanley.

Trotsky in the 'twenties noted how the British labour movement had absorbed bourgeois views of history:

'The British bourgeoisie has erased the very memory of the seventeenth century revolution by dissolving the past in "gradualness". The advanced British workers will have to re-discover the English revolution and find within its ecclesiastical shell the mighty struggle of social forces.' (L Trotsky, *Writings on Britain*, Vol 2, p87)

A recent wedding confirms that much of the work of the English bourgeois revolution remains uncompleted. But even this is too much for the Labour Party's radical historians. Abolish the House of Lords? Yes. But the monarchy? Never a word. Trotsky in his comments on another much-abused episode in British history — Chartism — outlined the first step that still needs to be taken:

'As the Chartists tossed the sentimental preachers of "moral force" aside and gathered the masses behind the banner of revolution, so the British proletariat is faced with ejecting reformists, democrats and pacifists from its midst and rallying to the banner of a revolutionary overturn.'

Alan Harding



The Palestinians

A Y Yodfat and Y Arnon-Ohanna, *PLO strategy and tactics*, Croom Helm, 1981, pp225, hbk £11.50.

E W Said, *The question of Palestine*, RKP, London, 1980, pp265, pbk £3.95.

THE PUBLICATION of these books, one written by two pro-Zionist Israeli academics and the other by a Palestinian intellectual exiled in America, are an indication of the growth of influence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in recent years. As Yodfat and Arnon-Ohanna note in the preface to their book:

'The PLO has developed in the course of 15 years from a small and marginal organisation totally dependent on the Arab states into an independent organisation granted international status and recognised by Arab states as "the sole representative of the Palestinian people".' They present in their book useful empirical

material showing the development of the PLO from its foundations in 1964 at the behest of the Egyptians (the PLO was at this time sometimes referred to as 'the Palestinian branch of Nasserism') to its arrival on the international diplomatic scene.

Birth of the PLO

The formation of the PLO marked the beginning of a rapid change in the political fortunes of the Palestinians. It came about after many false dawns. The old leadership of the Palestinians, based around the aristocratic families grouped in the Arab Higher Committee had been thoroughly discredited by the disasters which led to the formation of Israel in 1948 and the expulsion of thousands of refugees.

Many Palestinians at first put their trust in the idea of the 'Arab revolution'. Palestine was seen as part of a wider anti-colonial struggle. But when Nasser's experiment in pan-Arabism, the United Arab Republic (a full union between Syria and Egypt), broke up in 1962 Palestinians began looking towards the liberation of their own country as a precondition for Arab unity. This view was strengthened by the immediate need to oppose the expansionist plans of Israel.

Following a decision of the Arab League summit in Cairo, the Palestine National Council met in Jerusalem in May 1964 and declared the formation of the PLO. It was based amongst the petit bourgeoisie and professional classes:

'The elected officials included members of the Jordanian Parliament and that of the Gaza strip, and mayors and presidents of urban and rural councils. The professionals consisted of categories as varied as clergymen, pharmacists, professors, lawyers, doctors, engineers, businessmen, bankers and industrialists. To round out the Council, farmers, labour leaders and representatives of refugee camps and women's and students' organisations were included.' (R Hamid, *What is the PLO?*, London, 1981)

The declared goal of the PLO was the liberation of Palestine, and the replacement of Israel by a 'secular democratic state', by force if necessary. Ahmad Shuqairy, the moving force behind the formation of the PLO, drew up a National Covenant — amended in 1968 — which put forward the Palestinian cause in nationalist terms. Resistance came from more militant groups such as al-Fateh and George Habash's Arab Nationalists' Movement which argued for less reliance on the Arab regimes and for a greater emphasis on armed struggle.

It was the guerrilla groups which made the running over the next few years, despite various diplomatic successes for the PLO. The failure of the PLO under Shuqairy to play any substantial role in the 1967 war strengthened the position of the guerrillas. In March 1968 the PLO, al-Fateh and Habash's re-named Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) eventually came together, signing an agreement whereby the guerrillas were allocated half the seats of a new National Council. This was in recognition of the support now enjoyed by the guerrillas. The first major joint military operation took place in the same month at Karameh.

The guerrillas quickly won political control over the PLO, resulting in the election of al-Fateh's leader, Yassir Arafat as chairman in February 1969. The structure of the organisation has not changed substantially since then. The principal constituent organisations which came under the umbrella of the PLO at that time were:

al-Fateh: formed in the late 'fifties. Largest grouping with nationalist politics.

Sa'iq: Palestine branch of the Syrian Ba'ath Party, formed in 1968.

PFLP: formed by George Habash in 1966. Radical pan-Arabist.

PDFLP: (Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) split from PFLP, led by Naif Hawatimah. Pro-Moscow, socialist rhetoric.

PFLP-General Command: split from PFLP, pro-Syrian, mainly military orientation.

Arab Liberation Front: small faction established by Iraqi Ba'athists in 1969 as a counterweight to Sa'iq.

While the separate groupings control their own guerrillas, the PLO is responsible for the Palestine Liberation Army, made up of three contingents based in Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Besides the organisation of the military struggle — over which it does not exercise complete control — the PLO's main responsibilities are in administering the refugee camps and providing education, welfare and health services.

Yassir Arafat has played a leading role in shaping the PLO into what is virtually a Palestinian government in exile. After the 'border'

conflicts of the 'sixties, the disruption caused by the expulsion from Jordan in 1970, and the terrorist attacks of the early 'seventies PLO forces are now organised along much more regular lines. But the major offensive today is on the world diplomatic front – winning international support for the rights of the Palestinians on such bodies as the IMF. Particularly important was recognition by the United Nations in 1974.

Academic – or Zionist

Said is well-known for his last book, *Orientalism*, which attempted to show that Western writing and study of the Middle East is imbued with racism and condescension. His latest book tries to show how the very concept of Palestine is under attack. He looks at how Zionism seeks to deny the existence of the Palestinians. However Said's account suffers from his academic, psychological approach:

'The premise of my discussion will be that as much in Palestine itself as in debate about Palestine, no serious attention has been paid to the full human reality of the Palestinian Arab as a citizen with full rights, someone who is not merely a symbol of the intractable, anti-Semitic terrorist refugee.'

Said discusses European views of Zionism and anti-Semitism, trying to show how the intellectual climate for the acceptance of Zionism came about. But he provides no clear assessment of the imperialist powers' reasons for backing Zionism. For example, Said speaks of imperialism as a 'political philosophy' and he explains European colonialism as the product of ideas about racial superiority.

Said's readership is largely American: much of *The question of Palestine* is devoted to picking out the logical inconsistencies of US

foreign policy. It is possible that his readable style may influence some Americans, but the bankers and generals are less likely to be moved by what are essentially appeals for fair play for the Palestinians.

Yodfat and Arnon-Ohanna comment perceptively on the fickle Arab backing for the Palestinians: 'It is thus clear that while nearly all Arab states pay lip-service to the idea of an independent Palestinian state, none of them with any effective means to help bring it about, want it'. But the book slides into accepting and promoting many of the standard Zionist arguments about the PLO. It spends one chapter trying to prove that despite all its statements to the contrary, the PLO in fact seeks the liquidation of the Jews – not just Zionism. This is a widely accepted view in Israel, where Begin has often compared Yasser Arafat to Hitler, but it has little bearing on reality. Even *The Times* could recently comment:

'The PLO has already tacitly and implicitly acknowledged Israel's right to the territory won after the 1948 war, and some PLO leaders have spoken of a mini-state (duwayla) within pre-1967 lines, rather than a fully fledged state (dawla) in the whole of Palestine.' (7 August 1981)

The only problem, as *The Times* observed, is whether the PLO leaders could sell this compromise with imperialism to the Palestinian people.

The PLO remains largely a nationalist organisation, although the more radical organisations have grown in influence in recent years. We give our full support to the Palestinian struggle against Zionism and imperialism, while looking towards the development of an organisation which can represent the interests of the Palest-

inian workers and peasants. There are signs today that this development is beginning to take place, news which will not be welcomed by Messrs Yodfat and Arnon-Ohanna.

Nick Jenkins

English socialism

G D H Cole, *Guild socialism restated*, Transaction Books, London, 1980, pp224, pbk £4.50.

K Coates, *Work-ins, sit-ins and industrial democracy*, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1981, pp175, pbk £2.95.

G D H COLE was one of the most prolific writers of the British labour movement. As a labour historian Cole was a perceptive commentator on developments in the working class. His book *The common people*, written jointly with Raymond Postgate, is still one of the most readable introductions to the history of British labour. Unfortunately Cole also fancied himself as something of a theoretician. In this respect Cole stands very much in the muddled tradition of British socialism.

Guild socialism restated attempts to give coherence to a peculiarly British brand of reformism. Guild socialists advocated the utopia of a society organised through a system of guilds which would bring together all the workers in a particular industry, including administrators, supervisors, office and manual workers. Unfortunately guild socialism was not simply a harmless utopia. It attempted to give expression to the anti-state sentiments prevalent among the more politically conscious

workers in the period around the First World War. Guild socialism was as much a critique of the proletarian dictatorship as the hobby horse of a few eccentric intellectuals. As Cole notes:

'Especially for guild socialists, who have not only a positive ideal but a definite evolutionary programme, it seems clear that the thing to aim at... is not early revolution, but the consolidation of all forces on the lines of evolutionary development with a view to making the "revolution", which in one sense must come, as little as possible a civil war and as much as possible a registration of accomplished facts and a culmination of tendencies already in operation.'

Today this notion of sneaking in a revolution through the takeover of different social institutions – parent teachers' associations, tenants' groups, community health councils – fascinates the leading lights of Eurocommunism. This strategy of revolution by stealth is about as realistic as trying to democratise the Labour Party.

So why reprint this time-worn 60 year old book? To find out why just read Ken Coates' latest offering. Today's reformists only lack Cole's passion and fervour. This reviewer sat down excited at the prospect of reading an analysis of the factory occupations of the 'seventies – some of the most important recent struggles of the British working class. The first 40 pages required two cups of coffee but coffee alone is insufficient to sustain the reader to the bitter end. Coates' cringing praise of the labour bureaucracy is drawn out to include incomprehensible cost-benefit analyses of projected plant closures to justify saving jobs. A reading of Coates makes Cole seem scintillating: there is obviously a small fortune to be made in republishing the works of Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald and even George Lansbury.

Francis Ruckholt

Community policing

Dave Butchere is a black community worker in Handsworth, Birmingham. He was framed-up on offensive weapons charges earlier this year. The DAVE BUTCHERE ACTION COMMITTEE wrote to us, asking for support and explaining how 'community policing' works in Handsworth:

The experiment of community policing in Handsworth is being used by the press as a shining example of how the police should control black working class areas and to prevent more riots.

The police in Handsworth under the supervision of Superintendents Webb and Leivesley, have one aim in mind – to beat down the resistance of the black community. Their methods are fairly simple.

First of all, Webb and Leivesley, posing as students, go along to university, where they have access to all the information on the black community which is stored up in the books and computers in places like the Research Unit on Ethnic Relations at Aston University.

Once they have the knowledge about the black community, they then need money, and plenty of it. So they go along to the Inner City Partnership and get a massive grant to finance their experiment. Once they have the knowledge and the money they can get to work.

Some of the money goes into building 'community centres'. Policemen posing as social workers take black kids swimming and play football with them. They go into schools in Handsworth and give the children lectures on how nice the police really are. The police organise discos and run sound systems so that people can dance away their frustrations. The police have taken control of the ganja trade so that they can blackmail people into giving them information about the community. They promise others that they will give them money to go back to Africa on condition that they pass on certain information about others or do certain things for the police. And to put the icing on the cake, the police and their paid agents organise a community festival.

This festival, organised by the 'Handsworth Festival Committee' (the chairman is Supt Webb) took place on 4 July in Handsworth Park. It was used to show those who wish to believe, that everything in Handsworth is cool and calm.

But the people of Handsworth know that things are far from cool and calm. The police haven't stopped framing and beating up black people, the police haven't stopped ignoring racist attacks, the police haven't stopped protecting the likes of the NF and the British Movement.

When Angus Williams is beaten with an iron bar by a racist milkman, instead of arresting the attacker, the police arrest Angus. When Glenford Reid is severely beaten by the police, they arrest Glenford and charge him with assaulting a police officer, then they throw him in a cell, handcuff him for 24 hours then remand him in custody for 'medical reports'. When Dave Butchere, a community worker drove his van into a petrol station in Lozells Road, the SPG surround him, search his van, take him to Thornhill Rd and charge him with carrying offensive weapons. Dave is also a political activist, the reason the police want to frame him is clear – he knows what goes on in the community, and the police know that Dave along with other political activists will expose the community policing for what it really is – A FARCE.

While black people are being beaten up and framed, the police go to the press and TV saying that everything in Handsworth is rosy.

YOU CAN CONTACT THE DAVE BUTCHERE ACTION COMMITTEE AT:

173 Lozells Rd
LOZELLE
BIRMINGHAM 19

letters

Letter from the Bogside*

As one who has known some of the hunger strikers personally, and most of their families with whom I became acquainted during the protest campaign, I find it impossible to convey the immense suffering endured by the protesting prisoners, and the daily torment associated with such, for their parents, brothers and sisters, relations and close friends. Whole communities have been affected personally by this multiple tragedy and intense suffering. The Westminster Government has much to concern itself about: political disaffection has now radically reduced any moderate middle-ground which they claimed existed within the nationally-minded populace. This is indicated by the thousands who have filed past the mortal remains of the hunger strikers, often waiting in queues for prolonged periods, and the hundreds of thousands who have participated in the final journey from their homes to their grave, often amid massive police and army intimidation. Most striking of all has been the effect on young people, who in long and sombre lines have



waited in deafening silence to pay their last respects to these young men, mostly in their early 'twenties, whose bodies were partly covered in the national flag and Starry Plough, a privilege reserved for soldiers and martyrs. On approaching the coffin these young people's faces reflected utter horror and lamentation on viewing at first hand the emaciated bodies of the strikers. That stretched prison-pale skin on skull-like faces, covering hands and arms indescribably thin, hammers home the full horrors of this deadly form of protest – a sight that few will ever be able to forget for the rest of their days. The purple and raw redness surrounding the eyes, gives more than a hint of the last sad days of agony in 'Europe's most modern prison'. Those sunken eye-lids closed now, no more would we see that penetrating look so often commented upon by prison visitors, and which the late Bobby Sands MP described as, 'that awful stare, of the pierced or glazed eyes, the tell-tale sign of the rigours of torture'.

If our eyes are the windows of our souls, then those eyes of the blanketmen, the hunger strikers and the gallant women POWs in Armagh, are the unshuttered, unveiled, curtainless windows through which we have seen the intense cruelties inflicted and endured, solely because our prisoners refuse to be criminalised by British imperialists.

The so-called 'political moderates' in the Catholic Church, SDLP and the Coalition government in the south, are feeling the disaffection of the mass of nationally-minded people throughout Ireland. This is reflected in pickets, demos, protests outside the homes of prominent figures in politics, people clattering out of churches when clerics air their pro-imperialist pontifications, and a growing willingness to openly express criticisms of these forces. Disaffection will be further illustrated in the forthcoming Fermanagh/South Tyrone election which is being contested by Owen Carron, the former election agent of the late Bobby Sands MP, who is standing on the same platform as other former hunger strikers who were elected to Dail Eireann and Westminster, or contested seats. The fact that the present Coalition government will soon be forced to 'go to the country' in the Twenty-six Counties is further proof of how high on the popular agenda is the plight of the hunger strikers and the political prisoners in the North.

Finn O'Foyle

*This letter has been shortened.



Lebanon

Lebanese reds and whites

The Lebanon, like most countries in the Middle East, was created in the course of negotiations between the imperialist powers in the aftermath of the First World War. Originally part of Syria, it was divided off in 1918 and put under French mandate. In 1926 four Moslem regions of Syria, including the Beqa'a Valley, were added to what was predominantly a Christian state. Until recently Arab Christians and Moslems, as well as Druzes and various other ethnic groups, coexisted peacefully in the Lebanon.

In 1975 civil war broke out between right-wing Christian Maronite forces and radical Palestinian and Moslem guerrillas. At issue was the increasing political impact of the 600 000 Palestinian refugees in the Lebanon, many of whom had been thrown out of Jordan in 1970. The Maronites saw the Palestinians as a constant threat to their own situation and feared being drawn into another war against Israel. The bloody civil war, in which thousands of Palestinian refugees died in camps such as Tel-al-Zataar, was eventually halted by a Syrian invasion in June 1976. Syria's intention was to extend its influence into the country, prevent partition and exercise control over the Palestinians.

Besides sending in the 30 000-strong Arab (mainly Syrian) Deterrent Force, Syria also made a secret deal with Israel. Syria agreed not to send infantry south of a 'red line' between Beirut and Damascus, not to operate its navy along the Lebanese coast (thus allowing Israeli attacks on Palestinian guerrilla camps), not to use its airforce over the Lebanon or station surface-to-air missiles there. Israel was allowed to control the Palestinians in southern Lebanon without hindrance, while Syria controlled the north of the country.

Syria showed just how much it respected this deal in March 1978 when it refused to move against the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon by 25 000 troops and the almost complete devastation of the border area. In the wake of this invasion Israeli-backed Christian forces under Major Saad Haddad were given a strip of territory along the border to act as a buffer between the Palestinian guerrillas and the settlements of northern Israel. Until recently this arrangement operated very effectively in preventing guerrilla incursions.

House of cards

While attacks and reprisals on both sides have continued, they have been kept within well-defined limits. The recent conflict, which exploded out of insignificant incidents, illustrates the growing instability of the area. Small events can have a devastating impact: a minor incident can quickly become international in scope and threaten to bring down the whole house of cards. Nobody could say with certainty that either Israel or Syria planned a war — but both have been trying to use each event as it happened to full advantage.

Over the past few months Israel has made the unwelcome discovery that America is prepared to readjust its alliances in the area in order to retain order. American diplomats have recently appeared as much in the company of Arabs from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, as with their old friends in Israel. The problem for the Washington-Jerusalem axis is that Israel has a vested interest in a degree of instability in the region. While the Lebanon remains in turmoil, it can justify its existence to the world as the civilised 'peacekeeper' or the 'innocent victim'. However Begin's fiery rhetoric and his government's aggressive actions have made this image increasingly difficult to sustain.

At the beginning of this year Begin's

Begin stopped in his tracks

A year ago things seemed to be going well for America in the Middle East. Israel's most powerful enemy, Egypt, has been neutralised by the Camp David agreement. The rest of the Arab world, while opposing Egypt's betrayal in words, was divided between moderates like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf States and the so-called Rejectionists of Syria, Libya and South Yemen. Although Camp David had run out of steam, proposals made at the EEC's Vienna summit held considerable potential for a middle way by drawing together moderate Arab and Israeli forces.

Today the outlook for imperialism is much bleaker. The success of Begin in Israel's June election has left the European initiative without much of a chance. The Arab states, in the face of the Israeli air-raid on the Iraqi nuclear reactor and its rocket attacks on the Lebanon, have rallied, albeit reluctantly, behind Syria's radical stand. Anger against the US is widespread. Egypt's President Sadat, made to look a real fool by Israel, has had to make a tour of Western capitals to seek reassurances.

Most importantly, the Palestinian guerrillas in southern Lebanon have shown they are a force to be reckoned with. Despite massive aerial bombardment they have not been driven from their positions. They remain capable of shelling and rocketing Israeli settlements just over the border. Attempted sea landings along the Lebanese coastline were met with such fierce resistance that Israeli troops were forced to pull back. Such was the panic this strong resistance caused that the US had to press Begin into a ceasefire which in itself gave tacit recognition to the PLO. Israeli public opinion can no longer dismiss the Palestinians as a few isolated gunmen.

Although the Iraq-Iran war continues, the Lebanon has become the focus of attention in the Middle East. The events of the last three or four months have once again pushed the Palestinian question to the fore. American strategists have been thrown into confusion. With military action between Palestinian and Israeli forces stopping only just short of full-scale war, the Reagan Administration's previous emphasis on 'containing communism' and 'Gulf-before-Palestine' has become more and more untenable. To keep the peace in the area the USA now has to come to some sort of agreement with the Palestinians.

Likud coalition government was weak and directionless. Shimon Peres' Labour Party was heavily tipped to win the June election. But as the election approached Begin made a play for the electoral support of the most hardline Zionists. He became more and more strident in his condemnation of the 'enemies of Israel'. He sanctioned dozens of new West Bank settlements, vehemently attacked German, French and Saudi Arabian leaders and stepped up bombing raids against Palestinian targets. It was Begin's encouragement to Christian Phalangist militias in the Lebanon that nearly precipitated war with Syria.

The Phalangists attempted to extend their enclave which stretches north and east of Beirut, into the Greek Orthodox town of Zahle, strategically situated at the head of the Beqa'a Valley. For the Syrians this was too much. They saw it as a challenge to their domination of the Lebanon and possibly the start of an attempt to surround the Palestinian positions. New roads under construction suggested the possibility of a major Israeli invasion from the sea through the Phalangist areas. Consequently Zahle came under heavy fire from Syrian troops. When Israeli jets retaliated and shot down two Syrian helicopters outside Zahle, in April Syria brought up SAM-6 missiles into the Beqa'a Valley. Suddenly war was a real possibility.

Palestinian offensive

Israel claimed that by using helicopters in the Lebanon Syria had broken the secret agreement the two countries had made in 1976. Begin's show of force was popular at home and helped rally voters to the polling booths. He demanded — and expected — a quick withdrawal of the Syrian missiles.

But Syria had its own compelling reasons for making a stand over the

missiles. Isolated in the Arab world, and facing trouble at home from Moslem fundamentalists, Syria's President Hafez al-Assad could not afford to lose face in the Lebanon. The Phalangist move into Zahle threatened Syrian control and presaged the break-up of the country. After the Israeli attack on the helicopters Assad shrewdly saw that he had more to gain by remaining firm than by giving ground. If Israel stepped up its attacks moderate Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, would be forced to take a stand behind the Syrians. Assad's isolation would end. If, on the other hand, Israel backed down, it would be a moral victory for Syria.

In southern Lebanon the PLO guerrillas sensed that the time was right to go on the offensive. Stronger today than at any time since the mid 'seventies, an estimated 22 000 guerrillas are based in camps in the area. Large-scale financial and military support from the Arab regimes and high morale give them the capacity to absorb any losses they incur. As the Israeli election approached the Palestinians launched a series of rocket attacks on Israeli border settlements like Kiryat Shimona. These attacks have continued since the election, showing the capacity of the PLO to sustain a high level of military activity. Large-scale evacuation of the Israeli border areas has led many Israelis to question Begin's strategy — during the election campaign he promised Kiryat Shimona would never be bombed again — and their assessment of the PLO. Begin's response, the bombing of Beirut, killing 400 civilians in July, further damaged his international prestige. Meanwhile the standing of PLO chairman Yassir Arafat has grown. The impact of the Palestinian offensive soon forced Begin to accept a ceasefire.

While the military conflict on the Lebanese border was welcomed for different reasons by the Israelis, the

Palestinians, the Phalangists and the Syrians, others were not so happy. In particular Saudi Arabia, presently pumping out half of OPEC's oil output, wished at all costs to avoid being pushed into taking sides against Israel and having to use oil sanctions against the West's strongest Middle East ally. Hence it played a significant behind-the-scenes role in negotiating the ceasefire. Egypt's leaders too have been wincing at the sound of every Israeli shell fired into the Lebanon. Afraid of upsetting Israel because the rest of the occupied Sinai is not due to be handed back until April 1982, but at the same time having to appease public opinion at home, Sadat has been looking very uncomfortable.

USA looks for a strategy

In the greatest difficulty of all has been the USA. Content at first to let the Israelis give the increasingly pro-Soviet Syria a pasting in the Lebanon, Washington has since had to change its tack. The moderate Arab regimes have scorned American pleas to forget Palestine and fight communism. Jordan's King Hussain in particular, once a staunch American ally, visited Moscow in May and supported Brezhnev's call for a Middle East conference to be convened with Soviet support. This is anathema to the USA. Begin's biggest electoral stunt — the Israeli raid of Iraq's nuclear reactor on 7 June — was almost the last straw for most of the Arab moderates. They see American pressure as the only way to restrain Begin and they are angry Reagan refuses to use his influence to curb the Israeli premier's excesses.

Reagan's emissary to the Middle East, Philip Habib, sent in to prevent the immediate outbreak of war in May, has found it hard to win the ear of the Arabs. He has not been able to play the same role as Henry Kissinger during and after the Yom Kippur war. When the ceasefire was negotiated at the end of July it was as much to do with the Arab League negotiators as it was to do with Habib.

The US Administration has lacked a coherent policy since it came to power in January, mainly because it was waiting for the Israeli election, in the hope that the Labour Party — more willing to do a deal over the West Bank — would come to power. Begin's narrow election victory has complicated things. The reliance of his coalition on the support of the fundamentalist religious sects exacerbate tensions in Israel itself: the vast majority of its citizens have little sympathy for the fanatical insistence on the Sabbath laws that has now become part of government policy as the price of keeping Begin in office. And Begin's belligerent posture towards the chronically unresolved Palestinian issue is forcing the USA to rethink its Middle East policy. Signs of this, while not conclusive, are already appearing. Reagan has authorised the delay in the delivery of ten F16 fighter-interceptor aircraft to Israel, while his lieutenants have questioned the direction of US policy. Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger has criticised Begin, and Haig has hinted at the need to discuss with the PLO. It is only two years since US Ambassador to the UN Andrew Young was sacked for doing just that, but two years is a long time in Middle East politics. It is highly unlikely that the USA will drop Israel and come out in support of the Palestinians. But it may move along the ground already prepared by the European initiative and seek to cut out the 'extremists' on both sides. America undoubtedly remains implacably opposed to the armed struggle of the Palestinians and must now be deeply concerned about how to break their strength. Whatever else happens this will remain the top priority for imperialism in the Middle East.

Nick Jenkins

the next step