

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency 20p



No jobs with the Tories Sold out by the Labour Party Now the fascists make their bid

FOUR PAGE SPECIAL FEATURE ON THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM

— East London Workers Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League

— You can't fight nationalism with nationalism!

Plus

After the Irish hunger strike ● Gardner's: the anatomy of a sell-out

Cruise missiles and the visions of E P Thompson ● The RCT: reconstructing the Marxist tradition

How the RCT campaigned for the hunger strikers

Political status now!

From the moment the H-Block hunger strike was announced in October, the RCT made the campaign in support of the prisoners' demands for political status the centre of its activities in the British labour movement. As the hunger strike continued, and was joined by women in Armagh jail, we stepped up our pickets, meetings and demonstrations to publicise it and build solidarity with the Irish people and their fight for freedom.

Strike for Irish freedom!

The ultimate success of the hunger strike depended on whether the British working class could be mobilised to force the Government to concede the prisoners' demands. The RCT pointed out that, in the end, only industrial action in Britain could press the state to back down on its attempts to brand fighters for national liberation as common criminals. This was the message we took to the British labour movement at every opportunity, nationally and locally, as the hunger strike dragged on. By putting the issue of political status to the fore and arguing that sympathy with the Irish prisoners means antipathy to the British state, the RCT prepared the way for the most effective solidarity with the Irish struggle.

● 15 November

At the national demonstration called in London by the Committee for Withdrawal from Ireland the RCT organised one of the largest contingents under the banner 'Victory to the H-Block men'.

● 29 November

RCT supporters went on mass to the Labour Party's Liverpool demonstration against unemployment and the Tories. We didn't go to hear Michael Foot's rhetoric, but to press the urgency of taking a stand for political status on the organisations of the British working class.

● 5 December

An RCT labour movement rally attended by 150 people in London heard a series of trade union speakers on the theme 'Industrial action to smash the H-Blocks, Victory to the hunger strikers'.

● 7 December

A national demonstration in solidarity with the Irish prisoners was joined by a large and vociferous RCT contingent.

● 21 December

'The hunger strike is over - the Irish War goes on' said the RCT speaker introducing a rally staged by the RCT in Kilburn Square shortly after the strike was called

off. Other speakers included representatives from Sinn Fein, IRSP, TOM, the SWP and other British groups.

Victory to the hunger strikers!

Throughout the hunger strike RCT branches in London and Manchester used all their regular street meetings, dole queue sales as well as workplace, college and trade union branch activities to raise support for the political status campaign.

In Manchester RCT supporters organised a week of action on Ireland at the Poly with films, discussions and meetings centred around the prisoners' demands. On 6 November over 100 people marched through the city centre to a torchlight rally. Two weeks later on 23 November a larger number attended a demonstration to commemorate the execution, 113 years ago, of the Manchester Martyrs - Irish republican prisoners held in a local prison.

East London RCT turned Saturday into Hunger Strike Action day. Our general approach was clear from the start when RCT supporters unfurled a 30 foot banner from St Pauls Cathedral as the Lord Mayor's procession passed through the City of London. The message: 'Smash H-Block'. For the duration of the strike we joined with the East London TOM supporters - as well as ELWAR activists - in a series of demonstrations through Hackney and Tower Hamlets. We toured street markets and shopping areas in a lorry broadcasting the prisoners' cause over a public address system and selling *the next step* to explain the politics of our campaign.

Smash the PTA! Free Maurice Ward!

The Smash the PTA Campaign had its part to play in the hunger strike - the British state made sure of that. On 14 November political status campaigner Liam Carlin, recently released from Long Kesh, was snatched off a plane at Heathrow and held at Rochester Row under the

PTA. SPTAC immediately organised a picket of the police station. Later in November SPTAC called a picket of the Labour Party headquarters on the anniversary of the party's introduction of the PTA six years ago. The most dramatic case for SPTAC arose in mid-December when we received news that Maurice Ward, an Irish republican prisoner held on remand for the last nine months in Brixton jail, had joined the hunger strike. From his bed in the prison hospital Maurice Ward confirmed to SPTAC that he intended neither to eat nor drink until the demands for political status were conceded. South London supporters of SPTAC immediately publicised Ward's courageous stand with a press conference, interviews on London radio stations and

pickets outside the prison. Every day in the week before the strike ended we gathered outside the prison to show solidarity with Ward and the Six Counties hunger strikers. On 18 December a demonstration including supporters of South London TOM and other groups assembled at Brixton Oval and marched to the prison. Police and warders, shaken by the escape of Gerry Tuite earlier in the week, gave us a hostile reception.

Some London supporters went further to put the prisoners' cause in the public eye. Loyal subjects of Her Majesty in Tooting were shocked to see her arriving for a walkabout in an open car wearing a white dress stained with blood, followed by people waving placards and banners proclaiming support for the H-Block protest. The real Queen arrived later as the red Queen was hustled away. Christmas shoppers at the exclusive Fortnum and Mason department store got a whiff of conditions in H-Block when somebody let off stink bombs in the food hall. These stunts, as well as the hundreds of stickers and posters put up by RCT supporters, all helped to stimulate opposition to British government policy in Ireland.

As we enter 1981 the War in Ireland enters a new phase. But whatever form the struggle takes the battle for the minds and hearts of British workers will play a decisive part in determining the outcome. The RCT showed where it stood in action during the hunger strike: we're in a better position than ever before to build an anti-imperialist movement in Britain in 1981.



photo: the next step

Unambiguous banners, unambiguous politics

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THREE MONTHS OF SHAME

ON 18 DECEMBER, after 53 days, the hunger strike waged by Irish freedom fighters came to an end. But in Britain solidarity action in support of the hunger strikers had barely begun. The response of the British left to the hunger strike provides important lessons for all anti-imperialists.

What's at stake?

The most important struggle in Western Europe at present is the fight for national liberation in Ireland. The Irish War is a direct threat to British imperialism. Victory for the Irish people would be a major defeat for the British ruling class. The storm caused by such a defeat would exceed the upheaval the Algerian liberation struggle brought to France, or the blow to Portugal that the battles for self-determination in its African colonies made.

The movements against French and Portuguese imperialism precipitated the downfall of the Fourth Republic in 1958 and the destruction of Salazar's fascist regime in 1974. But the anti-imperialist movement in Ireland is different from these two. The Six Counties of Northern Ireland are completely integrated into the British state. Irish unity therefore presents a threat to Britain which is even greater than that faced by France and Portugal in similar circumstances. This is why the British bourgeoisie is not prepared to give up the Six Counties: to do so would mean a fundamental challenge to capitalist class rule. The British ruling class has maintained a consistent commitment to its occupation ever since Partition. In 1949, for example, a paper produced for the Labour Cabinet made the bourgeoisie's position clear:

'So far as can be foreseen, it will never be to Great Britain's advantage that Northern Ireland should become part of a territory outside His Majesty's jurisdiction. Indeed, it seems unlikely that Great Britain would ever be able to agree to this even if the people of Northern Ireland desired it.' (*Cabinet Paper CAB 128/32*, quoted in *The Guardian*, 16 December 1980)

A part of Ireland must always remain within 'His Majesty's jurisdiction'. For the ruling class that's all there is to it. It is not sentimental about the desires of 'the people of Northern Ireland' and it means business. Indeed there is such unanimity in Westminster on Ireland that there is no need to debate the issue. Over the last decade the Tory and Labour Party have kept a gentlemen's agreement to refrain from arguing about the conduct of the Irish War. Agreements over 'law and order' problems like this are usually reserved for such major threats to British capitalism as the Second World War.

The importance which the bourgeoisie attaches to the continued partition of Ireland has been evident throughout the protests in Long Kesh and Armagh. The media poured out propaganda designed to depict Irish political prisoners as criminals: the *Sun* called them 'savages'. Newspapers and television spared no expense to get across the simple message — Ireland shall not be free.

The stakes are high for the British ruling class. They are high for the working class too. Ireland provides an opportunity for British workers to cripple the imperialist state and to throw off the legacy of the empire once and for all. British workers will never be able to speak with

an important voice so long as they tolerate the oppression of Ireland by the capitalists. This was the message which Marx, Engels and Lenin repeated time and again. Trotsky put the matter starkly:

'The British socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt and India against the London plutocracy, such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy if not with a bullet'.

The deathly silence

When four years of protest in the H-Blocks culminated in the hunger strike late last year some gesture of solidarity from those in Britain who call themselves socialists might have been expected. During the months of October, November and December 1980 tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Ireland in support of the struggle for political status. And in Britain? A national protest on 15 November attracted less than 3000 people and another held on 7 December drew only 5000. Otherwise small-scale pickets and marches involved less than 1000 people altogether. What happened to the organisations of the British socialists? Why could they not even mobilise their own membership? The figures tell the story. In October 15 000 people marched against the Tory Party conference. About 80 000 came out on the streets for peace at a CND rally in the same month. In November more than 100 000 people participated in an anti-Tory demonstration in Liverpool. It seems that it is possible to mobilise three, four or five times more people on any non-Irish issue as on the Irish one — even at a time when Ireland is front page news, the subject of regular editorials and government statements; even at a time when heads of state hold summit meetings and when last rites are being administered.

British socialists cannot claim that workers are apathetic or uninterested. Thousands were thinking about and discussing the hunger strike. Supporters of *the next step* reported that at the mass November demonstration in Liverpool, trade unionists expressed more interest and sympathy for Irish freedom fighters than ever before. We sold almost 1000 copies of our last issue that day, each with the banner headline 'Hands off Ireland!' on it.

Her Majesty's socialists

So why did the British left behave so disgracefully throughout the hunger strike? The answer is simple: Ireland, more than any other issue, polarises class opinion. When Conservative and Labour politicians say that 'Westminster can never give in to the terrorists' they express their concern with bourgeois legality, law and order and the legitimacy of the capitalist state. There can be no compromise on a matter which directly affects the very future of capitalist rule. But it is this very matter that the British socialists have tried to avoid.

The ruling class poses the Irish question in the sharpest possible way. It denies the very existence of the war. It portrays Irish freedom fighters as common criminals. It whips up chauvinist hysteria against the IRA 'terrorists' and continually nourishes the Great British consensus against Irish freedom. And just in case anybody steps out of line, it has drawn up special legislation — the Prevention of Terrorism Act

— to suppress domestic opposition to its domination of Ireland.

To support Irish liberation means more than protesting against the policy of repression and torture pursued by British imperialism. It means more than complaining about the lies and distortions spread by the British media. It means supporting the violence of the oppressed against the oppressor and fighting for the defeat of the British state. This is the only way to destroy the social consensus on Ireland so carefully nurtured by the state. The capitalists have stated matters bluntly: 'The Six Counties are part of the United Kingdom — the terrorists must be defeated'. Workers must reply to this from the point of view of their class interests. They must come out for victory to the liberation struggle.

Choosing sides in a war is always more difficult than expressing concern about the plight of the poor. But choosing to support the oppressed is the elementary duty of any socialist. Unfortunately British socialists are not sure which side they are on. This vacillation is not due to any temporary misunderstanding but is inherent in British socialism itself. The British left is socialist in the same sense as the Labour Party — it is socialist as long as it has the permission of the bourgeois state. To that state it concedes a full monopoly over violence. Should an Irish bomb go off in Britain, the socialist fraternity will produce its customary denunciations: 'Individual violence is not the way'. This fear of class violence was succinctly expressed by Ernie Roberts, Labour left MP and patron of numerous radical left campaigns on Ireland:

'In common with the vast majority of British people I do not condone the use of the bomb or gun in the furtherance of political objectives. I believe that the problem of a united Ireland can not be solved by bombs or by military means, but must be solved by political organisation and political action.' (*Time Out*, 18 December 1980)

Who is Ernie kidding? 'The vast majority of British people' (he's certain on this point!) 'do not condone the use of the bomb or the gun'. What about all the wars fought by British imperialism since 1939 for 'political objectives' which 'the vast majority' never questioned? Ten years of Britain's brutal war in Ireland show that the majority of British people do not share Ernie's pacifist prejudices.

Every class in history has been prepared to fight for its interests. But British socialists denounce violence and tell the working class to rely on moral conviction. In effect they justify the systematic application of violence by the British ruling class throughout the world. For the Irish people fighting an occupying army they propose 'political action'.

'It's not our fault'

Having established that 'the vast majority' do not condone violence, the British left can explain away its own inaction on Ireland. While the bourgeoisie went on the offensive, British socialists urged caution. 'Let's make our campaign reasonable, otherwise we'll get no hearing', they said. Seasoned campaigners warned against being 'ultra-left' and forcing the issue. And all this time everyone took sides on the hunger strike — the 'vast majority' lined up behind the violence of the imperialist state. 'No surrender to the demands of the hunger strikers for political status —

whatever the cost', they said. Is it any wonder that the reformist campaigns of the left evoke no response?

Of course, the left sees things differently. 'It's not our fault the issue is so complex', it pleads. True, bolder souls of the fraternity of British socialists will swear their support for the Irish liberation struggle, but ask: 'what can we do when the working class is so conservative?'

The absence of solidarity action for the hunger strikers was not the fault of a conservative working class. It was the inevitable outcome of British socialism. It is a product of a movement that believes that electing another reactionary Labour Government is more important than the cause of Irish freedom. And when workers become demoralised after the last sell-out by a Labour government, the left has the gall to blame the working class for being conservative.

The actions of British socialists spoke louder than their expressions of sympathy for the hunger strikers. They marched in their thousands to demand peace and disarmament — not in Ireland where there is a brutal war of oppression going on — but in the abstract, in the future, in general.

British socialists have shown in their refusal to defend the violence of the oppressed their incapacity to defend the working class. They will not be able to respond to the violence of the state in Britain either. The signs are already clear to see. Rather than fighting racism they ask the state to ban the fascists. They don't like the SPG, so they implore the state to exercise its benevolent discretion and implement good community policing.

Every class-conscious worker knows that the deathly silence during the hunger strike showed that the British socialists have indeed taken sides. They have chosen the side of the 'vast majority' who condone the violence of the oppressor and denounce the violence of the oppressed. This time excuses about lack of resources or the conservatism of the labour movement will not do. When it was a matter of life and death, when the interests of the international working class were at stake, the British socialists had 'prior engagements'. Soon the words 'British socialist' will become a term of abuse directed against the hypocrites and the traitors who are still inside the labour movement.

Let's make up for lost time

The last three months provide vital lessons for anti-imperialists. We cannot undo the harm that's been done during these months to the cause of Ireland by the disgusting behaviour of the British left. But we have been warned! Every anti-imperialist and every active worker can now see that the compromises and half-measures of the British left are realistic only from the point of view of the ruling class. Our tasks and objectives are that much clearer.

Whatever the outcome of the hunger strike the struggle of the Irish people continues. Extending the Irish War to Britain is more important now than ever before — not only because of our obligation to the Irish prisoners of war, but also because there is so much at stake for British workers. The most important struggle in Western Europe must be top priority for British revolutionaries.



If you believed even half of what *Socialist Worker* said about the Gardner's occupation you made a big mistake. About the only thing the SWP got right was the fact that L Gardner & Sons is a 2400-employee diesel engine plant based at Eccles, Greater Manchester, that belongs to Hawker Siddeley. For the rest, *Socialist Worker* spent the seven weeks of the strike covering up for the trade union bureaucrats behind it. Eventually it declared 'Gardner's win — at last a jobs victory' in banner headlines (*Socialist Worker*, 29 November 1980). We ask: what kind of 'victory' is it when hundreds of voluntary redundancies are agreed to?

OVER THE PAST YEAR engineering workers in Eccles have suffered a whole series of redundancies. So when Gardner's employees replied to management demands for redundancies by occupying the factory, it looked like a major turn for the better.

What happened was this: on 21 August the Gardner's works committee met with the employers to hear their response to a 20 per cent wage claim. The employers said they wanted 700 jobs to go, a five per cent increase in wages, speed-up (a new bonus scheme) and restrictions on shop stewards. A 5 September mass

meeting of the unions involved — the 1400-strong AUEW plus APEX, TASS and ASTMS — voted for a strike. Following further negotiations and mass meetings, the workforce agreed to conduct a round-the-clock sit-in. By 6 October a full-scale occupation had begun.

Prospects looked bright. The workforce was tough; much of it was young, too. When it took up the strike committee's slogan — 'Enough is enough' — it meant it.

The committee itself was determined and well-organised. It got almost half the workers out on picket duty on day one of the occupation and established a rota so

that everybody had to do a stint. It set up other bodies to service the strike, including a delegations committee (to send people all over the country to collect funds, which proved vital) and a social committee (to make sure that people didn't get bored). And it also instituted tight security arrangements: you had to sign in and sign out just to gain access to the factory.

All this showed the ability of the workers to control things how they wanted. For many the strike was their first experience of union activity, but they learned fast. People were confident: the management had been locked out and forced to set up shop at the local headquarters of the Engineering Employers Federation. Yet behind the discipline of the occupation lay aims that were feeble and wrong.

Flawed from the start

The unions at Gardner's struck from a position of weakness. Since the summer they'd been on a three-day week, with — under the Government's Temporary Short Time Working Compensation Scheme — only 75 per cent of basic rates for every day laid off. Their leaders had already agreed to what they euphemistically called 'work sharing' and to a wage cut so as to tide the company over the recession.

Of course, to read *Socialist Worker* on the occupation was to be unaware of this. The SWP was happy to give the impression that the people running the strike were out to get the unconditional reinstatement of all those threatened with redundancy. But this was not the case. Tom Macafee, convener of the joint shop stewards' committee and a member of the Communist Party, made this very clear on the first day of the occupation. While he declared overnight sackings unacceptable, he said he was 'prepared to accept work sharing and even continue a shorter working week until things improve' (quoted in the *Morning Star*, 7 October 1980).

As far as Macafee was concerned less work and less money was OK. Instead of defending his members' interests regardless of the consequences for the bosses, he and the other strike leaders felt compelled to acknowledge 'the facts of life' — that some kind of sacrifices had to be made. They therefore proposed sacrifices that seemed easier for the workers to bear than those put forward by the bosses. The bosses wanted redundancies; as an alternative, the leaders of the strike offered further reductions in the working week and in wages. For them the purpose of the occupation was to get management to agree to what appeared as the less painful option.

This is why AUEW general secretary Terry Duffy backed them. He quickly saw the sense in short time and lower living standards. On 14 October he and his executive committee made the Gardner's strike official.

By this time 110 jobs had already been lost by 'natural wastage'. Meanwhile *Socialist Worker* maintained its diplomatic stance towards the strike committee and told its readers that Gardner's should be an example to workers everywhere.

How one thing led to another

On 20 October management sent out redundancy notices to the 590 workers whose jobs still remained due for the chop — among them a large number of shop stewards and Macafee himself. The following day Macafee had a statement printed in the *Morning Star* indicating that the strike committee was prepared to countenance 300 early retirements if severance pay was sufficient. Management saw this concession for what it was and stepped up the pressure accordingly. Between 25 and 29 October it sent every Gardner's worker a ballot paper asking whether he'd participate in a secret ballot about a return to work. Then, needless to

say, it began crowing about the replies it received in favour.

The strike committee was really being squeezed. By now only 200-300 workers were actively involved in the occupation. With no tradition of committee decisions being reported back to mass meetings, many workers were in the dark about what was going on. Media propaganda against going on with the strike started to take its toll.

Still *Socialist Worker* stayed silent about the direction of the struggle: after all, the strike committee's moderation wouldn't have looked too inspiring in its pages. But SWP journalist Paul Foot was prepared to applaud that moderation in his column in the *Daily Mirror*. Noting that the Gardner's workers were on strike 'to share work and take a cut in wages', he commented: 'If anyone can give me a reason why Hawker Siddeley prefer to sack people rather than share out the available work I'd be glad to publish it' (*Daily Mirror*, 5 November 1980). A 'radical' story for one paper, a 'reasonable' one for the other.

The bosses get most of it their way

On 6 November management declared that it would go ahead with plans to ballot the workforce on a return to work. Seventy of the 590 workers served with redundancy notices had by this time left; and the next day Macafee proclaimed that there was 'room for negotiation' not only on the 300 early retirements he had earlier suggested but on voluntary redundancies too (*Morning Star*, 7 November 1980).

Certain from the start of the occupation that union compromises were in the offing, management now had almost everything it wanted on a plate. The week after Macafee dropped his hint in the *Morning Star*, the bosses arranged to meet the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions to discuss the 'terms' of a return to work. At the meeting they did agree to withdraw the redundancy notices they'd sent out; but they also saw the unions promise in person what Macafee had only promised on paper before.

It had started with a union-supported reduction in wages. It had ended with union-supported 'voluntary' redundancies.

Crawling to the officials

The struggle at Gardner's wasn't a cut-and-dried defeat: through their militancy, the workers had stopped management from pushing through mass sackings as fast as it would have liked. But the struggle at Gardner's did culminate in what can only be described as a sell-out. Even now it's not clear what will happen once the trickle of voluntary redundancies comes to a halt and 'overmanning' persists.

For the SWP to ignore all this, for it to announce that Hawker Siddeley had been forced to 'back down completely' (*Socialist Worker*, 29 November 1980) was bad enough. But it was the same story inside the factory too: SWP supporters could not help but go along with the strike leadership. Not only did they draw a veil over each and every retreat the strike committee made, they took their lead from the local AUEW bureaucracy. 'The attitude of the officials', enthused SWP member Mick Brightman, 'has helped a hell of a lot' (*Socialist Review*, 15 October 1980). Indeed Mick Brightman even had praise for the role that AUEW divisional organiser John Tocher played at Gardner's. Tocher was recently responsible for the loss — without consulting his workforce — of 200 jobs at Fairey Engineering just nearby, but that didn't bother Brightman. On the contrary, the man had had 'more successes over the last ten years than almost any official in the country' (*Socialist Review*, 15 October 1980).

That the SWP paid tribute to the left wing of Britain's trade union bureaucracy

in this way was not surprising. The SWP has no political answers to the problems facing workers on the shop floor. Its only answer is an organisational one: more unity. Ever since its 'Defend our unions' conference of June 1979 the SWP has argued for unity with the Communist Party and Labour left against the Tories (see 'Unity — behind the bureaucrats', *the next step*, No 3, March 1980). At Gardner's the character of that unity was made graphically obvious — it meant collaboration all along the line.

Bleak overview

At first sight the outcome of the Gardner's occupation seems little different from that of numerous other disputes in which trade union bureaucrats have driven through voluntary redundancies. But there is more to it than meets the eye.

All last year unemployment rose rapidly; and all last year the TUC spent time developing a strategy to deal with it. Eventually Len Murray and his friends came up with the goods. They decided that every union should write in a clause guarding against compulsory redundancies in every document it put its name to.

That clause was incorporated into the national agreement the POEU signed with the Post Office in April 1979. It was also in the TUC/CBI 'joint statement on technology', drawn up early in 1980 and since rejected by the employers' organisation. Its purpose is two-fold. First, it allows the trade union bureaucracy to save face with the rank and file, because it rejects outright sackings. Second, it allows the bureaucracy to keep on being 'consulted' by the bosses, because the only way the latter can get rid of workers is by getting the bureaucrats' help in making voluntary redundancies.

But the significance of the clause goes further than this. *Failure to adopt it — that is, failure to make union opposition to redundancies opposition to compulsory redundancies alone — means being left out in the cold.* When, for instance, five civil service unions recently told the Government they opposed all the 67 000 redundancies it had planned for their members, they were told by the employers that they were exceeding TUC policy. In other words, to go beyond resistance simply to compulsory redundancies is to risk being isolated by the official labour movement.

The workers at Gardner's learnt about the consequences of the TUC's new stratagem the hard way. The SWP learnt nothing. All it did was toe the TUC line. By hailing the sell-out at Gardner's as a victory, the SWP served to prevent workers from even absorbing the lessons of that sell-out.

Keith Tompson

The RCT and Gardners

From the beginning of the occupation the RCT tried to win workers to oppose the strategy of their strike leadership. Well before there was any open talk of voluntary redundancy, an occupation bulletin issued by supporters of *the next step* argued that continuing with the Government's Temporary Short Time Working Compensation Scheme would be dangerous. It said:

'What the Scheme means is that you are paid only 75 per cent of your normal wages for the days you don't work. In other words you take a wage cut. You pay for the bosses' inability to produce profitably. Agreeing to this is only the first step to accepting that you should sacrifice your job for the bosses when the Scheme comes to an end. The demand of the occupation should be for the unconditional withdrawal of all redundancy threats and for full pay for all employees.' (16 October 1980)

Short time work Short step to the dole queue



On 21 November Employment Minister James Prior announced his intention to spend £573m next year keeping people without jobs off the dole — almost twice the amount he spent in 1980. A lot of the money will go to fund the Government's Temporary Short Time Working Compensation Scheme (TSTWCS), introduced by the last Labour Government and extended by Prior for another year. Below, we look at how the Scheme works and what attitude trade unionists should adopt towards it.

IN WINTER 1979 one in every 60 manual workers in British manufacturing industry was on short time. Now one in every 12 is. That works out at getting on for 400 000, the highest figure since at least the late 'sixties apart from the three-day week of 1974. The sectors worst hit are motor vehicles (20 per cent of the workforce losing an average of 17 hours a week) and textiles (16 per cent, 16 hours). The regions getting the hardest hammering are the West Midlands (15 per cent, 14 hours) and Wales (10 per cent, 15 hours) (Department of Employment, *Gazette*, November 1980).

It's a familiar pattern — familiar because it's exactly the same as that shown by figures for outright unemployment. Employers put their workers on short time for the same reasons they put them out of work: because they're being hit, in varying degrees, by the falling profitability that's endemic to the capitalist system.

Of course management doesn't phrase it quite that way. What it says is that there's been a 'contraction in market demand' for the products it makes, or that 'unfair foreign competition' (imports) is squeezing it out. Then it tells the workforce that output will just have to drop as a consequence and that that means either redundancy or going onto short time work. And then — and this is the worst part of it — the unions representing the workforce say they'll take short time. Whereupon the management applies to the Department of Employment (DE) for assistance under the TSTWCS.

Their Scheme means our jobs

Demand for the Scheme is now so intense that there's a four-week backlog of applications for it at the DE (*Gazette*, November 1980). What it does is enable

the employer to pay his workers a minimum of £8 a day (before tax) or 75 per cent of their wage for every day of the week they don't work — for a period not longer than six months. It looks straightforward enough, but it isn't.

The point about the TSTWCS is, as one personnel managers' magazine put it, that it allows a firm 'to cut back production and reduce labour costs at the same time as retaining both its labour force and some goodwill' (Incomes Data Services, *Report*, July 1980). In other words it's a means of both holding onto workers until business picks up, and showing them that employers are concerned for their welfare. 'Holding onto workers' usually means holding onto skilled workers, so the Scheme can easily be used to set skilled against unskilled. But the second aspect of the Scheme is even more dangerous.

To the individual worker the provisions of the Scheme can look attractive. After all, you get paid money for doing nothing. But the 'goodwill' engendered by use of the Scheme softens up the workers as a collective body in face of more management attacks. *Accepting short time now means accepting the sack later* (just like accepting voluntary redundancies paves the way for compulsory redundancies, in fact). Saying yes to the Scheme now allows management to go to the unions and say 'sorry lads, we've tried everything' when the time for full-scale redundancies eventually comes round.

They breathe, we suffocate

It always does come round before long. When Hoover announced plans to put 8500 on short time in its Cambuslang plant in Scotland in August, it threatened to sack 400 workers at the same time. With nearly all of Talbot UK's workforce of 16 000 on short time in November, the

company pushed for 1600 redundancies at several of its factories. And so it goes on. Every time more workers are put on a one, two or three day week, or work three weeks out of every four, they're moving a step closer to the dole queue.

Nevertheless the trade union bureaucrats like the Scheme. They say it provides both firms and workers with a 'breathing space'. *But today's recession won't go away in six months.* Even Margaret Thatcher admits there won't be an 'upturn' before the end of this year, and most bourgeois economic commentators reckon it won't amount to much whenever (and if ever) it arrives. More important, to hope that, outside the factory gates, demand may improve or imports abate in six months is to ignore what management will get up to inside the firm in that time. It'll reduce recruitment, cut jobs by natural wastage, force through redundancies, introduce speed-up and take the opportunity of mass absences from work to try to destroy shop floor organisation. In short, it'll take all the measures required to solve the real problem it faces: low profitability.

Yet still the bureaucrats like the Scheme. Prior was only acting on Len Murray's instructions when he extended the TSTWCS in November, for the TUC general secretary had written to him back in August requesting this. It's the same at local level: a survey by the British Market Research Bureau of 140 companies using the Scheme found that most were 'working closely' with the trade unions and that they had encountered 'no objections' to it (*Gazette*, May 1980).

Perhaps the most striking examples of class collaboration over short time are being perpetrated by bureaucrats representing white collar staff. Because such staff don't usually have short time clauses written into their contracts, they're formally entitled to at least four weeks' notice, or pay in lieu of this, before they can be put on short time. But staff union leaders are so anxious to 'avoid redundancy' by getting their members onto short time that they're encouraging them to take the pay in lieu in order to get onto short time at once. Not only that: once their members get the 75 per cent wage, or the minimum £8 a day from the state, they encourage them *voluntarily to return to the bosses a percentage of the pay in lieu they've received* — as a gesture of 'good faith'!

Desperate straits

The reaction of John Carty, shop stewards' convenor at Talbot's Linwood factory in Scotland, to a reduction from three days to two in the working week typifies the trade unions' approach to short time:

'The measure was the only alternative to closure. I'm not particularly keen on the idea but it has to be regarded as a better situation than 8000 redundancies.' (Quoted in *The Scotsman*, 16 October 1980)

But short time work and the TSTWCS are not the only alternative to closures and mass redundancies. *Occupying* the factories is an alternative that workers will go for, especially if they realise that short time inevitably leads to redundancies.

Short time work and the TSTWCS are desperate measures for the bosses to take: commenting on Prior's endorsement of the Scheme, *The Times* noted 'that it should be extended in both duration and scope is a measure of the problems we face' ('Mr Prior tries to help the jobless', editorial, 22 November 1980). They're also desperate measures for workers to take. But the working class cannot afford to be desperate in the capitalist crisis. We have to say: we couldn't care less about your external demand, your foreign imports or your business 'picking up'. We're only interested in maintaining our jobs — and we won't sell them for £8 a day or even £8000.

Nick Jenkins



Reagan's landslide

THE QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN

Forget the jokes about his acting career — Ronald Reagan means business. We examine why he won, how American workers should interpret his win, and how they should start to counter-attack.

ALMOST ALL the pundits predicted a Reagan victory. What surprised them was its sweep — the fact that the Republican candidate grabbed 483 of the electoral college votes against incumbent President Jimmy Carter's 49. He took all but seven states, including the whole of the West Coast, all of the South save Georgia, the entire industrial Mid West and even once-staunch Democratic states such as New York. On top of that his Republican colleagues captured no less than 11 seats in the Senate — giving them a majority there — and 33 in the House of Representatives.

But these figures exaggerate the swing to Reagan. He secured a mere 51 per cent of the popular vote. The final ballot result wasn't so much a vote for him as a vote against Carter. Only 49 per cent of eligible Americans went to the polls, the lowest turnout since 1948. The first question posed by the American elections, therefore, is why did the Democrats lose their popular support?

End of an era

To answer this we have to understand the nature of the Democratic Party and its evolution over the last 50 years. Originally the party of Southern slave-owning landlords, the Democratic Party came of age in the 'thirties. After the Wall Street Crash of October 1929, Franklin Roosevelt developed an economic and political programme which not only met the needs of a crisis-stricken capitalist class, but also appeared to meet the needs of the working class and the oppressed. Its name: the New Deal.

The New Deal was a Keynesian policy. It meant raising state expenditure to boost demand and get investment going again by establishing better business confidence ('all we have to fear is fear itself', said Roosevelt). Not surprisingly, it also meant an all-out offensive against the working class; but playing on the meagre welfare and employment measures that Roosevelt promised, the bureaucracy at the head of America's trade unions managed to persuade people otherwise. So was born the modern Democratic Party — an electoral coalition of liberal capitalists, union leaders, workers, Jews, blacks, other ethnic minorities and the Southern poor.

The Democratic coalition held together throughout America's mild but almost uninterrupted post-war boom. The Democratic Party even managed to control the radical middle class movements that swept the USA in the 'sixties. But once stagnation returned to the American economy the party began to lose support. Only popular disgust with Nixon (Vietnam, Watergate) postponed the day of reckoning.

From the mid 'seventies on the Democratic Party was forced to drop what few expansionist economic commitments it had left. Carter repeatedly refused to fund the improvements to medical and social services he had made part of his 1976 manifesto. By November 1979 he had applied monetarist policies that were tighter than any other capitalist nation had dared introduce. Yet though his measures didn't go far enough for the bourgeoisie, they went too far for the working class.

The bourgeoisie needed a more consistent attack on the working class than Carter could deliver. Over the 12 months preceding the elections investment and productivity in the USA had fallen further and faster than at any time since the 'thirties. Profitability could only be restored by a vigorous assault on the workers. Carter had plans for this, but his proposals were neither as precise nor as far-reaching as Reagan's.

On the other hand workers had had enough of Carter. In 1976 he'd won 96 per cent of the black vote and 70 per cent of the union vote, but in November blacks

abstained by the million and only one in every two trade unionists came to the Democratic Party's defence. The reasons were simple: as Reagan himself pointed out, unemployment in some black ghettos stood at more than 50 per cent; a third of a million workers had lost their jobs in the car industry alone, and real wages had been falling almost throughout Carter's term of office.

The Democrats lost because Carter was identified with America's economic decline by both bosses and workers. But mismanagement of the domestic economy was not the only grievance. He was also held responsible for America's feebleness on the international political stage. Falling as it did on the first anniversary of the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran, the election only served to remind Americans that their country's role as world policeman was in jeopardy.

A dismal duet

The elections pose a second question: is the Democrats' defeat a defeat for the workers?

Not at all. Carter's economic programme was as reactionary as Reagan's — it just lacked the populist thrust Reagan brought in to cater for working class discontent. Carter offered \$27 billion-worth of cuts in corporation taxes; Reagan went one better, proposing a 10 per cent cut in income taxes and a 10 per cent reduction in federal spending. Carter had already planned to make the Government's health and safety regulations so feeble they only covered five per cent of US firms; Reagan said he'd dismantle them still further. Carter's home state, Georgia, boasts stringent anti-union laws and one of the lowest rates of unionisation in the country; Reagan hopes to extend this nationally by bringing legislation guaranteeing every individual's 'right to work' — the right to scab, that is.

On foreign policy there was nothing to choose between the two parties either. 'Man of peace' Carter jacked up arms spending, renewed conscription, strengthened the USA's 100 000-strong Rapid

Deployment Force and warned that he'd send it wherever he saw America's political or economic conquests threatened. Reagan simply took Carter's war drive further. His aim: to give the Department of Defense 'a structure of overseas bases and access rights able to assist ground, naval and air forces in supporting US interests anywhere in the world' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 14 November 1980). Once again it was unity all down the line. As for the liberals' darling Edward Kennedy, he no sooner finished stomping the country for Carter than he was called in by President-elect Reagan for what proved to be 'a very constructive, very positive talk' (*The Times*, 22 November 1980).

The election joustings only confirmed the thoroughly bourgeois character of the Democratic Party. There was never a time, as once there was with Britain's Labour Party, when supporting the Democrats was necessary to win a wider hearing in the working class. The ease with which American workers switched from Carter to Reagan confirms that the Democrats don't enjoy the sort of ties with the unions that Social Democracy does. This is a crucial point.

How US workers missed the party

Despite repeated outbursts of militancy, the American working class has never had a party of its own. Even the International Workers of the World (the 'Wobblies'), which unionised thousands of workers before and during the First World War, had what the communist Red International of Labour unions described as 'a purely anarchistic prejudice against politics and political action' (*Labour's new charter*, 1924). Similarly the strike waves of the 'thirties enabled central union organisations to be established (the AFL and the CIO), but — largely because of the Stalinists' efforts — did not throw up a political party independent of the Democrats.

Rising living standards after the Second World War ensured that previous impulses towards forming a separate party were

dissipated. Unemployment was low, demand for labour high; white workers, at least, looked after their economic interests with little difficulty and went along with the Democrat/Republican consensus on political issues. This was the period when George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO for 25 long years, could proudly boast he'd never been on, run or ordered a strike. It was the period that saw the American labour bureaucracy outdo the likes of Kennedy in anti-communism. It was the period when trade union leaders backed every military adventure abroad, from Korea to Vietnam.

Since the recession American workers have once more shown their preparedness to fight the bosses over wages, conditions and jobs. The miners' strike of 1978, in which men and their families took on pit owners and the National Guard with guns and their own union leaders with ballot-form burnings, shows the political potential that exists. But the conservative perspective of the labour bureaucracy remains unchallenged; and so long as this is the case a distinctive workers' party will not emerge.

Now is the time

Thus the third question posed by the elections is how to fight the labour bureaucracy.

It's not going to be done by telling working class militants what they already know — that their leaders have proved unable to resist the capitalists' drive to lower living standards and push through redundancies. What American socialists must do is give those militants insights they lack. The bureaucracy gets away with its betrayals on 'economic' issues because workers often share its political outlook.

Militants are isolated in the unions because the bureaucrats are able to justify each capitulation to the bosses by saying 'what's good for America is good for our members'. The bureaucrats tell rank and file workers that sacrifices are necessary if 'their' industry is to survive the threat of competition from Japan and Western Europe; and the militants look on as workers buy the argument. American socialists face a difficult task. They have to convince every militant that so long as he fails to hit back against the bureaucrats' nationalist influence in his workplace, he won't be able to give a lead when the next strike comes up.

Hitting back means combatting chauvinism wherever it appears. It means fighting chauvinism directed against America's imperialist rivals over trade and resisting the hysteria which the ruling class whips up against the backward capitalist countries of the world over their attempts to escape from American political and economic domination. It also means turning back hysteria directed against the Soviet bureaucracy. Import controls, Iran, Afghanistan — these are the issues to raise if industrial disputes are to be won.

Hitting back also means combatting racism in the white working class. Union discrimination against blacks over hiring and firing is rife, union support for immigration controls is widespread. White working class militants must be persuaded that the fight against both is not something to leave to blacks, but the only way to prime their fellow workers for action against the bosses.

To beat the Democrat/Republican consensus American revolutionaries will have to beat the labour bureaucracy. To do that they'll have to go to militant workers and get them to hate their country. That will not be easy; but with Reagan in power, thousands of workers reduced to welfare payments and the union bureaucracy running into the arms of the new Administration, it may not be so difficult after all.

Kevin Green



Workers shake hands with Roosevelt — and with Reagan. Now it's time to destroy America's all-class national alliance

ELWAR and the ANL

Two ways of fighting fascism

Black families on the Bow Bridge estate recently contacted East London Workers Against Racism. They have had their electricity cut off, their windows broken, their property stolen, their gas meters broken open, their car tyres slashed and their cars stolen. People have been verbally abused, cornered on stairways, threatened with violence, robbed at knife-point and stabbed — one in the chest, only a fraction from his heart. These are the sort of problems black people suffer in Britain today; the problem for the labour movement is what is to be done about it.

ELWAR's answer is clear. For the past year we have been organising workers' defence against racism and fascism. That means physical protection

against thugs, demonstrations against police harassment and fascist provocation and political pressure on the labour movement to recognise its class interests and start defending black people. Below we detail some of the recent activities of ELWAR.

After keeping the ANL on ice for almost two years, the SWP is trying to revive it. On 23 November the ANL held a demonstration against the British Movement in Paddington, and just before Christmas, it ran an all-star 'international rally against the Nazis' near Euston. After the first, it made scurrilous allegations against ELWAR supporters; during the second, it physically attacked them. For the facts, read on.

The price of success

AROUND the Mile End area a number of black families are living under virtual siege conditions, their houses boarded up against raids by racist gangs from neighbouring estates. ELWAR supporters have started patrols and, after canvassing local streets and estates, are building up a list of people to call on to defend blacks when necessary. Overseas students at Queen Mary College have also been targets of abuse and beatings, so ELWAR is setting up patrols between it and Mile End tube station. Again, because schools form an important focus of racism locally, ELWAR is beginning activity round them too — arranging escorts to and from school for black children who have previously been kept at home in fear of being beaten up. And we're stepping up our campaign in the trades councils and other labour movement bodies in the area, challenging them to take up the defence of blacks as a vital part of the tasks of the official institutions of the working class.

Many individual anti-racists in East London have come forward to support ELWAR initiatives. An ELWAR meeting at Aldgate at the end of November attracted more than 150 people. However ELWAR isn't universally popular. Local ANL supporters, especially the SWP, the Communist Party and the Labour Party have maintained a hostile and sectarian attitude to it. A few condemn our activities as 'individual terrorism'; most are so uneasy about their own organisation's inactivity against racism that they envy ELWAR's success.

Vigilantes and police

ELWAR's success has drawn the attention of fascists. Sellers of the *next step* have met aggravation from them throughout East London; several ELWAR supporters, for instance, were attacked by no less than 40 fascists on the tube home from the BM demonstration, one needing stitches to a head wound afterwards. The police are also out to get us. Newham's Police Commander Daniel Hunt has announced that ELWAR supporters will 'face the full rigours of the law' if they defend blacks with more than words ('Vigilantes are warned', *Newham Recorder*, 4 December 1980).

While the ANL now has policemen on its public platform, ELWAR is under direct threat of police repression. What better indication of two different approaches to the fight against racism and fascism?



NEWHAM RECORDER
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1980 8p

VIGILANTES ARE WARNED

'They full rig of the

THE TIMES MONDAY DECEMBER 1 1980

'Anti-racism' patrol

Karate-trained volunteers on call to counter harassment in London

White vigilantes protecting black families

by Lucy Hodges

White vigilante groups are setting up in the east end of London to patrol the streets and protect black families from what they allege is a wave of racist violence. They are organized by the London Workers Against Racism (ELWAR). It says it has 70 members on call to move in minutes to an estate where a black family is complaining about harassment.

Another speaker at the meeting, who was not a member of the organization, said that white thugs had to be deterred. "They should be mauled and scraped off the streets."

Last week I visited a Bengali garment worker, his wife and four children, one of seven or eight families being protected by the group.

They live on the second floor of an estate in Mile End, Tower Hamlets. They are aged seven and 10, have been kicked and punched on their way home from school. He now keeps his children indoors all the time when they are at home.

In the space of three weeks recently windows of his home were broken on four occasions, he said. The bedroom windows are still broken.

The family has also been harassed by regular hammering on the floor from the flat above, he said. That was happening almost every day, but the man said it had stopped since the organization had offered protection.

Mr Gareth Evans, a member of the organization, said that often the only way families could solve the problem was to move from the neighbourhood. That had been the case for a Pakistani family who had moved to a house in Canning Street where there were other blacks and the assult started. Eventually he had sold his house and moved.

The group has now decided to patrol the streets at certain times in the area.

The price of unity

THE NIGHT of the living dead. That was the theme of the new ANL's international rally. Chaired by SWP Central Committee member Paul Holborrow, the show attracted 800 born-again anti-fascists. Though addressed by respectable people from the official labour movements of Britain and Europe, it proved a turbulent affair. SWP stewards had their work cut out to subdue left-wing critics of the platform. Anarchists who objected to the speaker from the French police, supporters of the Irish liberation struggle who heckled Tony Benn and — predictably enough — ELWAR members who tried to speak from the platform were all man-handled, roughed up and kicked out.

An honest cop

Infiltration of the French police by the fascist organisation FANE has reached such proportions that more liberal flics have been forced to organise and speak out in defence of 'democratic' policing. This is what the Autonomous Federation of Police Unions does, which is why its secretary, Henri Buch, was invited.

Just as the ANL would like the British police minus the SPG, Buch wants the French police minus the FANE. So he was an obvious choice for the rally. The trouble is that the record of the ordinary gendarme in dealing with blacks in Paris (especially North African immigrants) is even worse than that of the British bobby in London. Still, the ANL is always happy to hold hands with a decent copper — as long as he says he hates 'the Nazis'.

Benn against the Nazis

To get Tony Benn a hearing Paul Holborrow was obliged to defend his record on Ireland. 'He has always spoken out for Irish unity' said Holborrow of the man who sat in Labour Cabinets that sent the troops into the Six Counties, withdrew political status from republican prisoners and generally fought the Irish War with even greater ferocity than the Tories. With Holborrow calling for unity and the SWP stewards hard at work, Benn eventually made his speech. His theme was unity too — the unity of 1941: the British people (and the Russians) united against the Germans.

This is the Anti-Nazi League's main message: if all British democrats pull together, like they did in the war, then fascism can be beaten. It's a message that goes down well with trendy radicals — they gave Benn a standing ovation. But it's a message that spells disaster for workers. As our centre page article shows, the struggle of 'democratic' Britain against 'fascist' Germany and Japan led to the death of thousands of workers in Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The BM demo

The tradition

IN THE OLD DAYS the radical left had a strong line in anti-fascist rhetoric. 'No platform for fascists', 'drive the fascists off the streets', 'they shall not pass' were the favourite slogans. Counter-demonstrations aimed to disrupt fascist marches and rallies. But the advent of the ANL changed this approach: the old rhetoric continued but the ANL's moderate sponsors demanded an end to violence. So the ANL stopped trying to get at the fascists and contented itself with assembling Labour MPs, trade union officials, Stalinists and churchmen — together with declining numbers of genuine militants — for futile tramps down roads well away from the fascists.

Cordial co-operation between ANL leaders and the police ensured that major confrontations were avoided. This became particularly clear in the summer of 1978. Then, during an NF march in East London, the ANL co-operated with the police to keep anti-racists at a carnival in Brixton — leaving the black community in the East End defenceless. At the same time the SWP prevented its activists from exploding in frustration by organising them in small squads to wander the backstreets in search of isolated detachments of fascists.

The new ANL has even dropped the militant rhetoric. Its only aim is to show the fascists that they 'cannot march without massive police protection' (ANL revival leaflet). It is, of course, successful in this project: Police Commissioner David McNee makes sure of that. When the British Movement announced a march through Notting Hill in November, McNee, anxious to save the fascists from the local black community, gave it massive police protection. Meanwhile the ANL helped to make sure that the counter-demonstration against the BM was treated to massive police harassment.

The action

On the morning of the counter-demonstration its organisers — a committee of local activists, the Paddington Labour Party and the ANL — met at Paddington Law Centre. They explained their plans, drawn up in consultation with the police, for a long and circuitous march ending in an easily blocked-off backstreet almost a mile away from the anticipated route of the fascist march. ELWAR stewards pointed out that the only hope of hitting the fascists would be to break away from the proposed route at some point before the whole demonstration was boxed in

(continued on page 10)

You can't fight national

History teaches us two lessons about fascism. The first is that when it comes to the crunch the leaders of the official labour movement allow the fascists to come to power rather than let workers make a social revolution. The second is that anti-fascist activity which is based on the politics of the official labour movement and leaves unchallenged its nationalist outlook is doomed to failure. This is as true for the left's Anti-Nazi League today as it was for the anti-fascism of the communist parties in the 'thirties. Fascist terror is on the rise in Europe (Bologna, Munich, Paris) and in Britain: we look at the struggle against fascism in Germany in the 'thirties and the problems we face today.

The fascist revival

'WE'RE BACK' read the fascist graffiti in London's East End. Blacks know that racist thugs have never left the streets of many inner-city areas in the last few years. But in recent months there is no doubt that things have got worse. The National Front has revived after a period of internal conflict and its rival, the British Movement, has grown in strength and confidence. Both have held marches, rallies and demonstrations up and down the country. Racist attacks have multiplied in London, Oldham, Leicester, Manchester and Birmingham.

The fascists have grown bolder and widened the scope of their offensive. Jews as well as blacks are now under attack; synagogues and mosques alike have been desecrated. The NF's recent national conference resolved to disrupt all manifestations of support for the Irish liberation struggle. This threat has already been carried out in South London, Manchester and Birmingham. Though Irish meetings and demonstrations have been attacked by fascists in the past, today no labour movement activity is safe. Fascists have broken up trades council and Labour Party meetings in Dagenham, Croydon and Cornwall.

The fascists' main appeal is to demoralised youth. The bulk of their demonstrations is made up of skinheads, mostly teenage boys, some at work, many unemployed and some scarcely out of junior school. The NF and the BM recruit in schools and youth clubs, exploiting the climate of violence, frustration and despair that is otherwise expressed on football terraces, in disco brawls and gang fights, and in the epidemic of teenage suicides. Fascists mobilise in depressed areas, taking their message of national pride and racial superiority to young people for whom capitalism offers no future.

Fascist barbarism is a product of capitalist society in decay. The fascist parties step forward in a time of recession and unemployment with their plans to solve the crisis by crushing ethnic minorities and destroying the organisations of the working class. At present they remain on the fringes of political life: the British ruling class is not yet forced to resort to such an extreme solution to its problems. But how have the fascists been able to grow in strength and influence?

Who's to blame?

The Anti-Nazi League blames the Tories; we blame the Labour Party. It says the Tories create the unemployment that allows the fascists to grow; but it was a Labour government that made mass unemployment acceptable to the labour movement in the 'seventies. The Tories

never claimed that they would defend workers against the capitalist system. They can't be accused of betrayal for collaborating with government and employers to reduce working class living standards. The Tories are an honest bourgeois party. Labour is a fraud workers' party: it has discredited the name of socialism with its reactionary policies in Parliament and its record of cuts and corruption in local government. Fascism arises as a possible solution to the capitalist crisis only when the working class is held back from imposing its own solution: socialist revolution. To contain the working class and secure its acceptance of the capitalist system is the role of the Labour Party.

And it is the Labour Party, not the Tories, that leads the chauvinist clamour for the protection of British industry against foreign competition. Labour's nationalism — its support for import controls and immigration controls — differs from that of the fascists only in its moderation. It is Labour's patriotism and hostility towards foreigners that opens up the working class to the extreme nationalism and racism of the NF and the BM. A generation of working class children has grown up with the bitter experience of the Labour Party in government in Westminster and in their local Town Hall: now in despair, some of them see fascism as the only way out.

Writing about the rise of Hitler to power in Germany, Trotsky noted that 'Social democracy has prepared all the conditions necessary for the triumph of fascism' (*What next?*, 1932). A look at the role of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) confirms this in two important respects. First, in the failure of the SPD to defend or advance working class interests in conditions of economic crisis, and second, in the concessions made by the SPD to German nationalism that paved the way for the extreme racism of the Nazi Party. Trotsky's warning remains relevant today.

Labour's record

The SPD held or shared power in the federal government of Germany for over a third of the life of the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933. For most of the rest of the time the party acted as a loyal parliamentary opposition. The SPD pursued policies of compromise and class collaboration while unemployment soared and workers suffered extreme poverty and repression. The fact that the SPD ran local government and controlled the police force in major cities such as Berlin did nothing to alleviate the catastrophic impact of the crisis on the working class. By March 1930, when the SPD was forced out of a coalition government with the main bourgeois parties, unemployment

National Front News

"1,900,000 JOBLESS"

"1,900,000 IMMIGRANTS"

NATIONAL FRONT MARCH in PRESTON, LANCs.

SUNDAY, 14th SEPTEMBER

Assemble: 2.30 p.m.

March Off: 3.00 p.m.

ASSEMBLY PLACE DETAILS FROM YOUR LOCAL NATIONAL FRONT ORGANISER

"BRITISH JOBS FOR BRITISH WORKERS - BAN FOREIGN IMPORTS!"

TEXTILE INDUSTRY IS IN RUINS

BRITISH JOBS FOR BRITISH WORKERS

TGWU general secretary Moss Evans abhors everything the NF stands for — or does he?

had reached three million. A year later four million were out of work.

The SPD feared the working class more than it hated the Nazis. Rather than mobilise the organised might of the German labour movement against the growing Nazi Party, the SPD supported a succession of increasingly dictatorial and militaristic ruling cliques in the dying days of the Weimar Republic. Fearful of unleashing a militant workers' movement that might pass out of its control in an assault on German capitalism, the leaders of the labour movement endorsed first Brüning, then Hindenburg, then von Papen, before finally capitulating to Hitler.

The SPD's crucial betrayal, however, came long before 1933. All through the 'twenties the party had been drawing on its chauvinist traditions to cover its flank against the far right. The SPD scorned African people in German colonies in the early years of the century. It led the patriotic fervour against France and Britain in the First World War. When French troops invaded the Ruhr in 1923 to collect war reparations, the social democrats cast imperialist Germany as an oppressed nation and revived its wartime jingoism. The German Communist Party was even more strident. It appealed to German workers to 'fight the French imperialist invasion' and called for 'the overthrow of the government of national dishonour and treason'.

The Nazi Party grew on this feeling

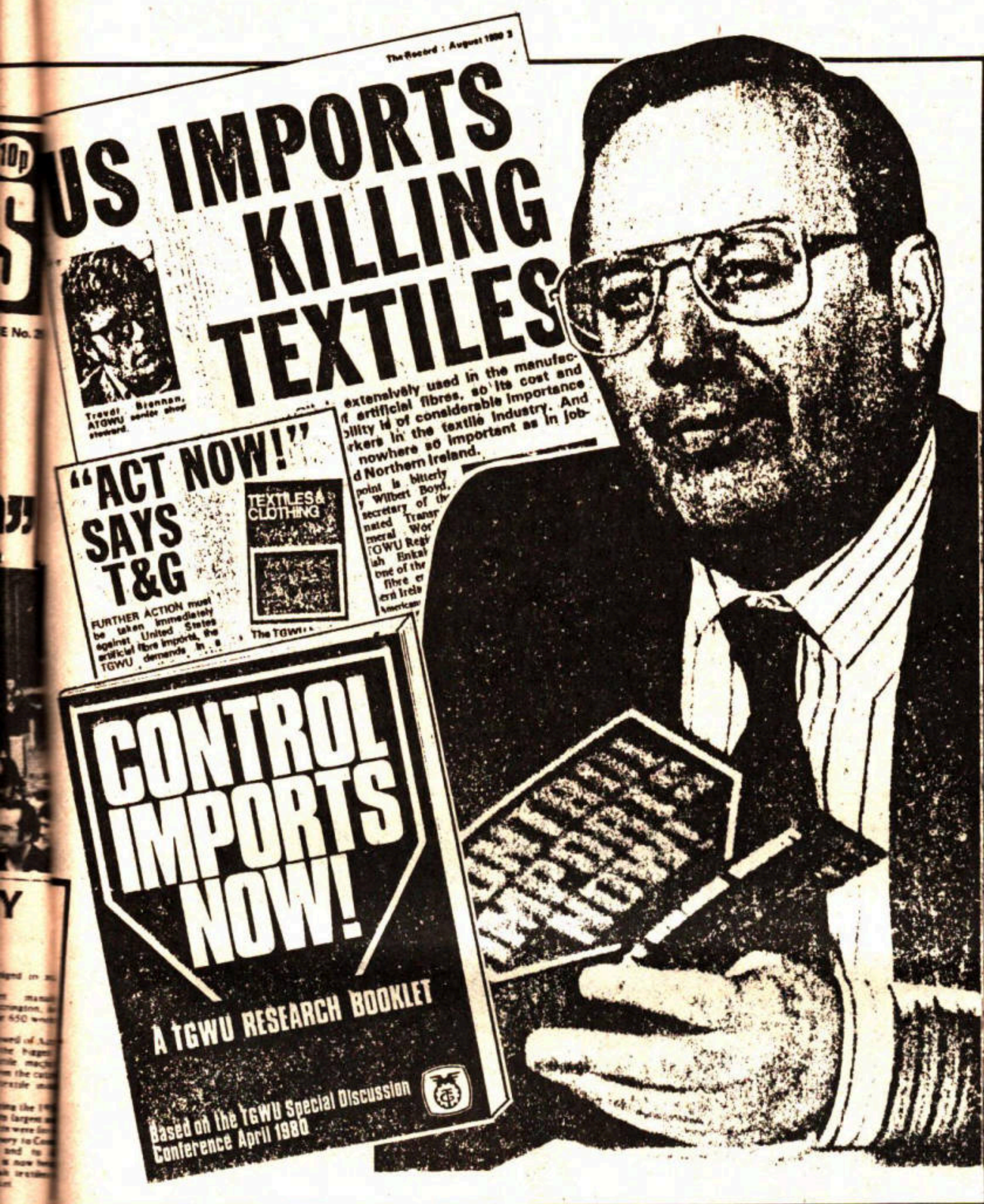
of wounded national pride at Germany's humiliating defeat by France. The official labour movement failed to challenge this mounting wave of chauvinism; instead, it adapted to it. Communist theoreticians explained that it was 'essential that we exploit this sentiment to avoid it being used against us'. But the labour movement's attempts to 'exploit this sentiment' served only to legitimise the more extreme nationalism of the Nazis. In the end this adaptation to chauvinism helped to make sure that it was 'used against us' in the holocaust after Hitler took power.

In 1933 the German trade union federation participated in Hitler's May Day parade. The labour leaders called on workers 'to recognise that the victory of National Socialism... is our victory as well'. The leader of the metal workers' union pledged that Hitler's Government 'will find no more enthusiastic collaboration than from German labour unions... collaboration based on mutual trust and solidarity' (*Metallarbeiterzeitung*, April 1933). The following day Hitler arrested the entire trade union leadership and subsequently liquidated the German labour movement.

British jobs for British workers?

The British Labour Party has never betrayed the working class on the same scale as the German SPD only because it has never had the opportunity. Its record of class collaboration and anti-working class compromises is too familiar to

nationalism with nationalism



readers of the next step to need repetition here. But it is not only in its failures that social democracy prepares the ground for fascism. It is the success of the reformists in propagating a nationalist approach to the problems of the crisis in the labour movement that renders service to the Websters and the McLoughlins.

Today, the Labour politicians are better patriots than the Tories. According to the Labour left, Great Britain is an oppressed nation — exploited by the EEC, dictated to by the IMF and imposed upon by the USA with its cruise missiles. Then it was the Treaty of Versailles. Now it's the Treaty of Rome and NATO. On all these issues the Labour Party and the National Front stand in complete agreement in defence of British national sovereignty. And that includes backing Britain against an Irish republican movement they both agree is made up of 'terrorists'.

The nationalist harmony embracing the Labour Party and the National Front extends over many of the points in the left's 'alternative economic strategy' for the revival of British capitalism. As the Communist Party's national organiser Dave Cook admitted candidly, the NF's 'demands on economic questions parallel, in a crude and distorted way, a number of those expressed in the left alternative policy' (Comment, 28 April 1979).

Too right. There are many areas of agreement. On import controls, on the call for bans on the export of capital, on

the evils of foreign bankers, on the need to pull out of the EEC — there is much common ground. The Labour Party and the CP are altogether more refined. Their import controls are to be selective, not total; the foreign bankers they object to are not necessarily Jewish. They call for the fiction of 'non-racist' immigration controls, not repatriation. But, fundamentally, they agree on putting Britain first.

This does not mean that the Labour Party is the same as the National Front. The difference lies in the fact that the fascists' programme includes the liquidation of the labour movement. But history tells us that we cannot rely on the reformists and the Stalinists to prevent the fascists from carrying through their final solution.

How not to fight fascism

One example shows the sort of concessions made by the international communist movement to nationalism in the 'thirties. Reporting a Nazi smear against the veteran German Communist Klara Zetkin in 1932 (she had been called 'a Jewish hag') the Daily Worker assured its readers that her photograph 'had been deliberately retouched in order to forge Jewish facial characteristics into Klara Zetkin's thoroughly German and non-Jewish features' (cited in R Black, *Fascism*, Vol 2). Of course, it didn't really matter 'a snap of the fingers' whether she was a Jewess or not murmured the Daily

Worker, but in case there were any lingering doubts the CP felt obliged to point out that 'in fact Klara Zetkin is the daughter of a Saxon school teacher, and has no Jewish admixture of any sort in her veins'.

It's worth citing this outrageous indulgence of anti-semitic prejudice because similar apologetics are widely used in 'countering the racists' arguments' today. The Anti-Nazi League and its supporters regularly reassure their followers that there aren't that many of them over here anyway, that they don't breed all that fast or constitute too much of a burden on social security. Of course, they say 'it doesn't matter a snap of the fingers' — but these defensive remarks only further isolate black people and appease the racists.

The lesson of the 'thirties is that you can't fight nationalism with nationalism: you can't confront racist propaganda with arguments which accept that they (Jews, blacks, foreigners) are the problem for us (the Germans, the British, the nation). Our starting point must always be that the only they is the bourgeoisie (organised along national lines) and the only us is the international working class.

The theoreticians of the SWP, the ANL's leading sponsors, have come to different conclusions about the German debacle. For the SWP's Colin Sparks the problem with the German Communist Party was this: the KPD's insistence on doctrinal purity led to the ultra-leftist mistake of refusing to form a united front with the SPD against the Nazis (see his book *Never Again!*). This is nonsense. The KPD diluted and distorted working class politics to the point where they were barely distinguishable from Nazi propaganda. By 1931, the KPD began to outdo the Nazis in its nationalist proclamations. It even published a review designed to attract nationalist ex-soldiers. 'We are the best patriots', it argued. 'Ideological purity' meant that the KPD prevented its Jewish members from speaking on public platforms lest nationalist sensibilities be offended!

The KPD could be ultra-left at times as well. But whether repudiating the SPD as 'social fascist' or uniting with the Nazis against social democrats in local government, the hallmark of the KPD was its capitulation to German nationalism.

It's fashionable in radical circles to accuse the RCT of following the sectarian, ultra-leftist errors of the KPD in our refusal to support the Anti-Nazi League. The reverse is the truth. In its adaptation to British chauvinism the ANL closely follows the direction of the German labour movement. We look at the disastrous defeats of the 'thirties and say Never Again! Resolute struggle against all manifestations of chauvinism is the only defence against the revival of fascism.

Judith Harrison

ELWAR Public meetings

National Front
— Bosses' Front

British workers' defence
against fascist thugs!



Edge Hill — Luton — Manchester — racist attacks are on the increase throughout the country. the next step is organising a series of meetings to publicise the work of ELWAR, to show what you can do in your area.

Speaker: Fran Eden

CENTRAL LONDON

Friday 23 January 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1 (Holborn tube)

MANCHESTER

Thursday 5 February 7.30pm
Manchester Polytechnic, Aytoun Street

COVENTRY

Lanchester Polytechnic, Priory Street
Phone or write for further details.

Filipino deportations FROM HOSPITAL TO AIRPORT

Gemma works as a chambermaid in a hotel just around the corner from Buckingham Palace. She lives with two other young Filipino women in a room at the back of the hotel. A few months ago Gemma had to go into hospital for a major thyroid operation. While she was recovering the authorities were checking her papers. They found out that her references did not match up to those given on the work permit issued when she arrived in Britain. Gemma was an 'illegal worker' — and before she left hospital the Home Office served notice that she was to be deported immediately on her discharge.

With Gemma the Home Office had it easy. It didn't have to get the British High Commission to hire spies in Manila. It didn't have to resort to publicity-catching police raids either. It just used standard DHSS procedures in hospitals where no blacks can be treated without their immigration status being investi-

gated. In the last few months hundreds of Filipinos have been picked up using this method and hustled onto the conveyor belt that leads via Heathrow to the Philippines. One victim wrote from Manila detailing the scope of the Government's behind-the-scenes deportations. He had, he reported, been flown out with 186 others — and they'd been rounded up in just one week.

So far Gemma has managed to hang on. Appeals by her union, the GMWU, have won a *stay of execution* during her convalescence. But legal arguments in 'false reference' cases stand virtually no chance of success. The courts recognise no rights for people like Gemma, not even the right to health care. As she waits for her case to come up Gemma is desperately trying to find work abroad — in Canada, Kuwait, anywhere. But with a record of deportation the outlook is gloomy.

Gemma's plight is not peculiar to Filipinos: workers from Colombia, Morocco,

Spain and Portugal have all come under attack. As she says, 'soon every immigrant worker will be afraid to go to hospital when they are sick'. The new Nationality Act will allow black people access to the NHS and other social services only on presentation of a passport or other proof of British citizenship.

Stop the deportations!

Supporters of *the next step* have had some success in winning trade union support for the cause of the Filipino workers. A growing number of active workers in the health service have committed themselves to organising resistance. A 23 November meeting called by the Migrant Action Group and attended by more than 400 trade unionists accepted the following amendment proposed by ELWAR supporters:

'This meeting deplores the increase in the number of removals of resident domestic workers by this government, and calls upon this campaign to oppose the deportation of all Filipino workers by rejecting all immigration laws.'

Unfortunately, unions have not so far translated resolutions like this into action. Yet time is running out. Health workers must organise to defend the Filipinos. Too many militants are reluctant to challenge racist procedures in the NHS. Only by confronting chauvinist attitudes to immigrant workers can we create the political climate that will prevent Gemma and other Filipinos from being deported.

Benn's appeal to blacks An offer we can refuse

The Labour left has a long tradition of supporting British imperialism. More than 30 years ago it had this to say about the Empire:

'We do not need to apologise for our mission in Africa. Whatever the reasons which took our forebears there we must stay.' (*Tribune*, 20 August 1948)

But today the Labour left has a different 'mission' to carry out — quelling domestic black resistance to racist attacks. How does it do this? By channelling black anger into the Labour Party.

It's for this reason that Tony Benn has recently suggested that black organisations should affiliate to the Labour Party. He hopes that the experience his party has acquired in containing the struggles of the working class may now come in handy in curbing 'extremists' in the black community. Before readers of *the next step* rush to send off for their membership cards they should ask Benn whether the various controls on immigration introduced by the last few Labour governments are non-racist. If he replies they are, our readers might care to ask the Right Honourable gentleman which kind of deportations he supports.



ELWAR marches against Filipino deportations



photo: the next step

...BM demo

by the police. The organisers nodded knowingly.

The march was a familiar ANL ramble. Ex-Labour MP Arthur Latham and other ANL dignitaries led the way. The ELWAR contingent was large and well-organised, its numbers swelled by people drawn to it through the accounts of ELWAR action given by a series of speakers at our pre-march rally. As the ANL procession lurched towards the police trap we put our alternative plan into action.

At a signal the ELWAR contingent turned to break through the police cordon to head towards the place where the BM rally was about to start. The attempt failed. Although we broke through the first police row, a second line of SPG officers together with reinforcements from all sides broke up our ranks, seized our banners and megaphones and arrested a dozen people. More ELWAR supporters were picked up a few minutes later when the police started harassing individuals on our contingent.

The march ended in characteristic ANL style. The police blocked off all access to the area where the fascists were marching and broke up the counter-demonstration. Confusion reigned as angry activists tried to find out what to do next. The ANL could only advise them to go home — or try and get to the fascist rally by tube. Meanwhile the police mopped up the few small groups

that had managed to get near the BM. More arrests took place.

The reaction

The BM demo had its sequel. Though ELWAR's strategy was supported by scores of marchers who'd had enough of ANL moderation, members of the Labour Party, the Militant tendency and the SWP were bitterly critical of our attempt to divert the counter-demonstration to confront the fascists. When ELWAR promptly started collecting money to pay the fines and legal costs for those arrested, criticism turned to smears about stealing money. Warning letters appeared in *Socialist Worker* (6 December 1980), and when — two weeks after the demo — the ANL got round to trying to raise funds, its supporters in Paddington announced that it and only it had the right to do so.

Obviously the SWP feels threatened by ELWAR's fundraising. But our supporters made up a significant proportion of those arrested on 23 November — and we know the ANL has a poor record of looking after even its own supporters who have been arrested. Our reservations were confirmed by the fact that it took the ANL 14 days to begin its collections. As one demonstrator said to us on the march, 'ELWAR fights racism — the ANL just rocks against it'.

ELWAR NEEDS MONEY

On 18 December Isak Ali of Corbin House on the Bow Bridge estate in East London was arrested by the police and charged with threatening behaviour. His crime? He made the mistake of contacting the police after he was robbed of £20 at knifepoint by two skinheads. Robbing Asians in East London is alright as far as the police is concerned. But for a black person to make a complaint is a crime! ELWAR is helping Isak Ali to fight back against police victimisation.

The ELWAR supporters who were

picked up on the anti-BM demo on 23 November and charged with various offences face the prospect of heavy fines and court costs in the new year. To defend victims of racist attacks, as well as activists who come into conflict with the police and the courts, for the day by day fight against racism and fascism in East London, ELWAR needs money.

Make cheques and postal orders payable to: ELWAR Defence Fund, c/o Box 22, Kingsland High Street, London E8.

Deportations...

Dear editor,

In Springfield Psychiatric Hospital in Tooting a member of the ancillary staff, Mrs Evangelina King, who is an immigrant from the Philippines, is facing the threat of deportation after Christmas. Mrs King has been deemed by the Home Office to be 'illegal'. Each week she has to report to a police station, just as if she'd been convicted of a crime.

The case arises because some categories of unskilled workers — eg domestics and nursing ancillary staff — were issued permits to enter the UK and work after the introduction of the 1971 Immigration Act. Foreign workers were brought in to do these jobs on the condition that they did not have children under sixteen. Thousands of workers, many from the Philippines, came to Britain. Many of them were in ignorance of the clause about children. A test case has now established that ignorance is no defence in these cases, and the Home Office has actively set about rounding up the 'offenders'. Mrs King is not the first and will not be the last. More than 150 have been summarily deported this year.

Like many others Mrs King was never asked whether or not she had children. Their existence became known to the Home Office when, in all innocence, she filled out a form applying for leave for her husband to join her in Britain. Not knowing any better she recorded that she had children — and was promptly branded an 'illegal'.

Mrs King has been working in this hospital for several years. We, her fellow workers, take the strongest exception to the Home Office

denying the right of Mrs King to continue to live and work in this country. We object to laws on immigration which allow the harassment of foreign or black workers. Immigration controls are an attack on their rights and an attempt to divide up hospital workers fighting the cuts today. The deportation must be opposed.

This is why we will defend the right of Mrs King to work at Springfield and all others like her in our hospitals. We want to show the British state that it cannot victimise workers with impunity. We urge your readers to send us information about other cases and letters of support.

Yours,
Glyn Jones
Chris Holford
Asad Ali Syed
and 25 trade unionists

...and racists thwarted

Dear comrades,

It's nice to report a success, and we've just achieved one here at the Crown Agents.

After management had successfully attacked the workforce (over office reorganisation, new terms and conditions) it decided to set about the many black workers here. A personnel division circular said that anyone taking extended leave (3-6 weeks) and who fails to return promptly would be summarily sacked.

The fightback was led by *the next step*

supporters. We wrote a hard-hitting article in the branch newsletter showing that these new rules were aimed specifically at Asian workers and would add to the climate of fear that the state and the right wing have created. Although the restrictions only affected one group *directly*, we said, we'd all get clobbered much easier in the future if we didn't oppose them. And we drove home this point at all the protest meetings and branch discussions.

Management modified the proposals, then withdrew them altogether. So far so good, but there's a long way to go. Despite our efforts there's been little opposition to its other attacks. Nevertheless, the fact that management retracted is a success, and a basis on which to build a fightback.

Fraternally,
the next step supporters in
Crown Agents CPSA branch, London

Mujaheddin under attack

Dear comrades,

I was surprised to find mentioned in the November/December issue of *the next step* about the participation of the People's Mujaheddin Organisation of Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, under the banner of the ruling regime.

In fact the PMOI, unlike some other organisations, has kept a separate revolutionary line in the war, by fighting alongside the people, with the view of forming a people's army. Its members have formed independent revol-

utionary defence committees and assistance and relief tents, and have fought in their own trenches.

This is why they have been attacked by the reactionary and monopolist forces, while fighting in the foremost trenches, in Abadan, Khorramshahr and Ahwaz. About 170 of them, charged with carrying illegal weapons, have been imprisoned in Abadan in a house under constant threat of being hit by Iraqi fire.

Yours fraternally,
J Mahmoud
Golders Green, London

Nick Jenkins replies:

It is indeed true that the People's Mujaheddin (PMOI) is organising and fighting separately in the war against Iraq. The statement in our article was based on an early, inaccurate report. It has since become clear that not only is the PMOI fighting independently of the Iranian regime's forces, but that it is being attacked precisely because of this.

A well-known PMOI leader, Seyyed Mohammad Reza Sa'adati, has recently received a ten year sentence for allegedly 'spying for the Soviet Union' in what was a blatant frame-up and show-trial. Other PMOI fighters have been taken from the trenches to face floggings and imprisonment. With such direct attacks taking place against leftist opposition forces in Iran it is surprising — to say the least — that groups like the Organisation of Iranian Peoples' Fedaii Guerrillas (Majority) can continue to 'oblige' their members to 'co-operate fully with the forces who are fighting the aggressors' (KAR, November 1980, supplement).

RCT activities in January and February

the next step conference, London
Saturday 21 February
One-day debate and discussion for
supporters of *the next step*
● The present phase of the class
struggle
● The anti-racist struggle: strategy and
tactics
For further information write to
BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX

LONDON

for more information ring 01-274 3951

CENTRAL LONDON

Public meeting

British Movement — bosses' movement
National Front — bosses' front
Build workers' defence against fascist
thugs!
Speaker: Fran Eden (ELWAR)
Friday 23 January 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1 (Holborn tube)

ELWAR defence fund
film benefit

'The Wobblies'
'Hunger strike in H-Block' (short)
16 January 7.30pm
London Film Makers' Co-op
42 Gloucester Ave
London NW1 (Camden Town tube)
Seats: £1

Regular sales

Tuesdays 6-7pm Warren Street tube
Fridays 5.30-6.30pm Goodge
Street tube
Saturdays 10.30-12.30 Camden
market

SOUTH LONDON

All meetings at Lambeth Town Hall,
(Lower Hall), Brixton Hill.

Public meeting

Ireland — the struggle continues
Speakers from the RCT and the
Republican movement
Wednesday 14 January 7.30pm

Regular sales

Mondays 9.30-11.30 Tooting Dole,
Brixton Dole

Wednesdays 9.30-11.30 Peckham Dole
Thursdays 5-6pm Brixton tube
Fridays 4.30-5.30pm Stockwell
tube
5-6pm Balham tube
Saturdays 11-1 Battersea market,
Balham market

Series of meetings

LAMBETH — THE FIGHTBACK
BEGINS. DON'T TRUST THE
COUNCIL!

No to the dole queues — organise!
Speaker: Frank Richards
Friday 6 February 7.30pm

Lambeth's services up for grabs — only
we can stop it!
Speaker: Sabena Norton
Wednesday 18 February 7.30pm

EAST LONDON

Ford Workers' Group meeting

Throw out the disciplinary code!
Defend all jobs!
Speaker: Dave Dougdale (AUEW Ford)
Thursday 5 February 7.30pm
East Ham Town Hall, High Street South,
E6 (near East Ham tube)

Rally Against Unemployment

No to the dole queues — organise!
Speakers from Ford Dagenham &
Halewood, West Ham Trades Council,
RCT
Wednesday 25 February 7.30pm
East Ham Town Hall,
High Street South, E6

Regular sales

Saturdays 10.30-12.30
Whitechapel market
Ridley Road market
High Street North, East Ham
Stratford Broadway
Watney Street market
Sundays 9.30-12.00
Brick Lane (near Aldgate
East tube)

ELWAR

East London Workers Against Racism
confronts the fascists every Sunday
morning in Brick Lane. Join us. Write to
us at Box 22, 136 Kingsland High
Street, E8. Phone us at 274 3951.

CLEAR THE FASCISTS OUT OF
BRICK LANE!

Rally Sunday 11 January
Meet 9.30am, top of Brick Lane
(Bethnal Green Road end —
near Aldgate East, Liverpool Street or
Old Street tubes)

BEAT THE BOW BRIDGE RACISTS!

Public meeting
Tuesday 27 January 7.30pm
Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, E2
Speakers: Fran Eden (ELWAR) and
from Brick Lane Bangladeshi
organisations

Lobby Tower Hamlets Council

Stop racist violence in Tower Hamlets!
Wednesday 28 January 7.30pm
Town Hall, Patriot Square, E1
(Bethnal Green tube)

THE NORTH WEST

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

MANCHESTER

Public meeting

British Movement — bosses' movement
National Front — bosses' front
Build workers' defence against racist
thugs!
Speaker: Fran Eden (ELWAR)
Thursday 5 February 7.30pm
Manchester Polytechnic, Aytoun Street

Irish events

Picket of Army Recruitment Office,
Fountain St (off Piccadilly Gdns)
Troops out now!
Saturday 17 January 12 noon

Mobilising meeting for 25 January

Bloody Sunday demonstration
in Cardiff
British murderers out of Ireland now!
Speakers: Alex Farrell (RCT), speaker
from Derry invited
Thursday 22 January 7.30pm
Moss Side People's Centre

Trade union supporters of *the next step*
meet fortnightly in Manchester.
Would you like to join the Trade Union
Activists' Group? Then write to us in
Manchester.

Regular sales

Tuesdays 9.30-11.30 Stretford dole
Alternate
Wednesdays 9.30-11.30 Aytoun Street
dole, Levenshulme dole
Wednesdays 12.00-14.00 Manchester
Poly, Aytoun Street
Fridays 16.30-18.00 Piccadilly
Gardens
Saturdays 11.00-13.00 Piccadilly
Gardens, Ashton-under-
Lyne Precinct

MIDLANDS

COVENTRY

Public meeting

British Movement — bosses' movement
National Front — bosses' front
Build workers' defence against fascist
thugs!
Speaker: Fran Eden (ELWAR)
Lanchester Poly, Prior Street. Phone or
write for further details.

SUPPORT IRISH POWs IN BRITISH
JAILS!

Picket of Gartree Prison
Market Harborough, Leicestershire
Sunday 18 January 1-3.30pm
Organised by Nottingham TOM

THE RCT: RECONSTRUCTING THE MARXIST TRADITION



FOUR YEARS ago a group of socialists formed the RCT because we could see the working class going from setback to setback as the recession loomed. We appreciated that overcoming the weakness and confusion of working class politics required an organisation built on a solid foundation of Marxism.

Our first step was to understand how Marxism had been destroyed. Luckily we brought with us a number of insights (see 'Our tasks and methods' [1975], *Revolutionary Communist Reprints* No 1, and the first article in *Revolutionary Communist Papers* No 1, 1977). We established that, right from the mid 'twenties onwards, Marxism had been discredited by what Stalin and his followers had made of it. We realised that workers and working class politics had then gone on to suffer major reversals as a consequence: the collapse of the Chinese revolution (1926), the defeat of the British General Strike and the rise of fascism in the 'thirties showed this all too vividly.

But that wasn't all. The Second World War saw 'Communists' everywhere settle their differences with bourgeois democrats, the better, they thought, to battle against fascism. And once capitalist regimes — fascist and democratic — had won the sacrifices they demanded of workers, economic stability ensued. As a result, Marxism came to appear as irrelevant in the post-war period.

So Marxism had been appropriated by Stalin, had rubbed shoulders with Churchill and, finally, had been left on the sidelines. It could not, the RCT felt, be resurrected overnight: the process had to be more painstaking than that.

Why we're so theoretical

It was clear that repeating textbook phrases would not be enough. Nor would impressionism. These were two errors that Trotsky had avoided but which those who assumed his mantle and set up various Fourth Internationals had not (see 'The question of the International' in *Revolutionary Communist Reprints*, No 1). We were intent on avoiding them.

The problem was how to begin reviving Marxism. We decided to tackle it in two ways. The first was to equip ourselves with the basic theoretical tools we needed to go about absorbing what had happened since Marxism's demise. The second was to embark on practical activities designed to help us sort out real Marxists from people who merely pretended to that title.

Our tools were largely composed of the most profound but least-read works of Marx. We used Marx's *Grundrisse* to help us trace the emergence of Eurocommunism in a scientific fashion (see the second article in *RCP* 1). We used *Capital* to determine the origins of the economic and political crisis in Britain (see 'The recession: capitalist offensive and the working class', *RCP* 3, 1978). And we used *Theories of surplus-value* to demolish the Stalinists' 'novel' case that capitalism can be reformed once the right people are put in charge (see 'Imperialism, revisionism and the state', *RCP* 4, 1979).

We took Marx's writings not as a bible, but as a key to his *method*, and we used that method to come to a proletarian point of view on topics of vital significance

Many people congratulate the RCT for its activism in opposition to the Irish War and in fighting racism. But they're frequently puzzled why we focus on these two issues above all others. And they're often irritated that we devote such energy to criticising and polemicising against the Labour Party and the left. Here, through a review of the development of our propaganda, we explain why.

to the movement. Moreover, we decided that, if Marxism was to be a dynamic force in the working class, then our members had to be trained in revolutionary theory. That's why we encourage all of our members to learn how to 'use the tools of Marxism. We go further too: we encourage all our members to gain experience in applying revolutionary theory through researching and writing about important issues and through studying the ins and outs of their trade unions and their place of work. This is how we advance our understanding of the capitalist world.

Why Ireland and racism?

Right from the word go we chose to agitate around Ireland and immigration controls. And for good reason. We knew that the British working class didn't need our advice about how to organise or about what tactics to employ in strikes for higher wages and better conditions. We knew it *did* need a lot of advice about the debilitating effect of nationalist politics on its struggles. We therefore focused on Irish freedom and black rights — two issues on which the absence of an independent working class outlook has had disastrous consequences.

If Marxism was no longer a living force in the movement, a popular cause or an enticing slogan wouldn't rally the masses to it. Our strategy was to get to the masses, but to get to them by first winning to our banner the most independently-minded workers. Our message to such workers was simple. Irish and black people didn't just 'deserve the support' of committed socialists. *By refusing to tolerate the oppression of the Irish and of blacks, all British workers would grow more politically intolerant of their own oppression.*

For us this was elementary. Lenin had demonstrated that, in imperialist, oppressor nations like Britain, a revolutionary party could only be built by backing the struggles of the oppressed. This was evident from his pamphlet *The right of nations to self-determination*. We therefore used Lenin's writings on national oppression as the starting point for a journal on Ireland (see 'British imperialism and the Irish crisis' and 'No equivocation!', *RCP* 2, 1978). This provided the framework for practical opposition to the Irish War through our Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign.

Instead of urging young workers to be more militant, we embarked on a campaign that would strengthen the working class politically: the battle against chauvinism. In this we were guided, not only by Lenin's writings, but by the essays Trotsky had written on fascism in the 'thirties. He had observed that chauvinism was not only the political property of fascist groups, but of reformist parties and trade unions as well. We took up these points in a pamphlet directed against the narrow political rabble-rousing of the Anti-Nazi League (see *Under a national*

flag, 1978), and they remain the inspiration for our campaign East London Workers Against Racism.

Why knock the Labour Party?

Eighteen months after founding the RCT we had the beginnings of a revolutionary theory and of a political orientation towards the working class. Uniquely on the left, we could show why wage rises were not the cause of inflation and why the withdrawal of troops from the Six Counties and workers' defence against racist attacks on blacks were in British workers' interests. But as the effects of the Government's Social Contract became more and more pernicious, we turned our attention to the organisation that obviously embodied all the weaknesses of the working class: the Labour Party.

Ever since the RCT's early days we'd appreciated the strength of reformism in the working class. We knew that the ideology of reformism had its roots in the capitalist system itself; we knew that it had gained particular impetus during the post-war boom, when Keynesian management of the economy by the state had seemed to bring benefits to all; we knew that it was most coherently expressed in the politics of the Labour left. We also had long accepted that *Tribune* group economic shibboleths — import controls, planning agreements and so on — were wholly reactionary. We were therefore suspicious of all the familiar left tactics towards the Labour Party. But we knew that we had yet to arrive at our own.

There was no point in trying to 'make the lefts fight'. They were fighting already — for a Westminster-imposed Bill of Rights for Ireland, for bans on the fascist marches that worked out as bans on left-wing ones. It was stupid to say that they 'didn't go far enough'. It wasn't too clever, either, to say 'vote Labour because it's the lesser evil': workers didn't need to be told that. What to do? Our critics had always suggested we grow out of our uncompromising, childish habits by reading *'Left-wing' communism: an infantile disorder*. And funnily enough, it was this very work which drove us to adopt the position 'No vote to Labour!' in the last election.

Lenin had enjoined the embryonic British Communist Party to affiliate to the Labour Party. But this was because he wanted the layer of revolutionaries that had sprung up in the wake of October 1917 to gain a hearing among the broader working class. Many of the workers' leaders were out-and-out communists; but they were falling down in making their ideas known to the rank and file. *That is not the situation today. None of today's working class leaders are communists. The few thousand socialists in the organisations of the far left have virtually no authority in the working class.* For this reason nothing could be more misplaced than for Marxists to imagine that they can 'expose' the Labour Party by voting for it and, in so doing, taking

the masses through the experience of betrayal. *The masses aren't listening.* They can only be made to listen if every worker already highly critical of Labour becomes its staunchest enemy and takes his hatred of it everywhere he goes.

Marxists can only expose the Labour Party if they do just that — expose it: all the time, relentlessly, without concession (see *Who needs the Labour Party?*, 1978). Denouncing Labour/Tory bipartisan policy on Ireland and immigration controls is an excellent means of doing this, as three of our recent pamphlets indicate (see *Workers against imperialism: the British labour movement and Ireland*, 1979; *Racial oppression: how to fight it*, 1979, and *Ireland's victory means Britain's defeat*, 1980). Showing that Labour politics render workers powerless to turn back the Tory offensive on jobs, pay and trade union rights is equally crucial. This has been a major theme in our paper from the very first edition we published (see *the next step*, No 1, December 1979).

Why criticise the left?

We took one more thing from the revolutionary Marxist tradition — the understanding that unity on the left could only be achieved by a fierce struggle for political clarity. In his *What is to be done?* and on numerous occasions Lenin expressed contempt for those who used the yearning of workers for unity to belittle the need for political clarity. Searching for unity at any price can only paralyse the working class.

Take the demand to 'Kick out the Tories'. Everybody left of the Liberal Party will agree with it; but in practice it only serves to unite militant workers who could be won to revolutionary politics with TUC leaders like Len Murray and Moss Evans. It lets the labour bureaucrats off the hook and allows them to present themselves as defenders of workers' interests. Anti-Toryism today means calling for the return of a Labour government. Appeals for unity against Thatcher are the means for harnessing workers' energies towards electing the party of the social contract back into power.

It is precisely because we want unity on terms which can defend our class that we relentlessly expose opportunist trends in the workers' movement. Unity will not come about through paper declarations. It will have to be fought for through a struggle against the present leadership of the working class and against all those who want to postpone this struggle for the future. As a result, many of our articles and publications are highly critical of the political outlook and the campaigns of other groups. They're polemical, because their aim is to polarise working class opinion around the camp of revolution or reform. Unless we draw class lines in this way, the labour movement will continue to stumble from one setback to the next and fail to learn from its mistakes.

A revolutionary movement will not be built without ideological struggle. The need for Marxism cannot just be declared: Marxism has to be fought for. So don't just say that the RCT has some good ideas — fight for them. Join us in making Marxism the dominant ideology in the British working class.

James Wood



How EP Thompson's visions help the Labour Party

You protest - they survive

At the end of October one of the biggest demonstrations to be held in London in recent years was led into Trafalgar Square by a handsome man with windswept face and greying hair. More familiar figures took their places on the platform behind him - Labour left leader Tony Benn, transport workers' chief Ron Todd and other dignitaries of the official labour movement. Our special correspondent moved among the crowd to find out more about the movement against cruise missiles and nuclear war, and its veteran leader.

The chiasm of despair

Who was this man? 'Why that's Squire Edwd Tomson of Wick Episcopi', ventured a dutiful police constable. It all started with a dream, he explained. 'The dream began in olden days when the Americans and the Russians possessed only strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles whose destructive power was so great their use was unthinkable'. Then the nightmare took over. 'Suddenly the ponderous H-Bombs spawned a family of more manoeuvrable, but equally lethal weapons. Most chilling of all they had minds of their own - and they grew up to be relatively autonomous of their parents and masters. The new wave of tactical weapons could think for themselves and all they thought about was the unthinkable: they were hellbent on mutually assured destruction. As the old man awoke all he could see was a vague shape before his eyes which he gradually recognised as poor Britain, our little island, in the form of an American aircraft carrier sinking under a cloud of nuclear fallout. An eerie voice echoed in his ears "Edwd arise, you are confronting an accumulating logic of process"'.

'The old man leapt from his bed in the tent pitched deep in the English countryside where he had retreated many years ago after getting wounded in a duel. Like a man possessed, he has not since ceased to preach his message of salvation for humankind against "exterminism", stomping the country stirring terror in huge audiences with his vision of Apocalyptic and rousing fanatical devotion to his utopia of world peace and European harmony'. The policeman concluded his strange tale. And how was the Squire hoping to prevail against 'the logic of exterminism'?

The young officer carried on patiently. 'He says he wants to generate an alternative logic, you know, confront the ideological imperative, that sort of thing. Basically, he wants to get a lot of people together to talk some sense into these crazy missiles.' What sort of people? 'Oh, broad-based human beings, members of the women's institute movement and its fragments, collectors of badges, campaigners against the contraction of the ionosphere and protestors against the inhumane treatment of cod by North Sea trawlermen, all sorts.' But how had this prophet of doom managed to attract this throng, tens of thousands in number?

Oxford windbags

A man who seemed to be a minor organiser of the march took up the story. 'I went to the same prep school in Oxford as Teddy Palmer-Thompson. He was terribly bright. Now he's acknowledged by everybody from Paul Foot to Conor Cruise O'Brien as a towering intellectual, a superb historian and a brilliant polemicist. People appreciate Palmer-Thompson in the great tradition of the Oxford Union where a good debater can put either side of the argument with equal conviction. It doesn't matter what a chap's politics are so long as he puts them well. Take Teddy's old chum Peregrine Andersthorpe: Perry's a seminal essayist, so whether he's writing for a daily newspaper or a bi-monthly theoretical journal he produces quality English prose and lots of high-powered ideas. Teddy still has great respect for the ancient centres of European civilisation at Oxford and Cambridge - he expects them to play a leading role in his nuclear disarmament campaign.' This man had played a part in many campaigns since his Oxford days: now he was industrial organiser for the Socialist Marxist League. What did he think of the anti-cruise demonstration?

'This whole campaign is a tremendously positive development' he enthused 'and all credit to Teddy for getting it going. It must be given every support.' Why? 'Well, take the basic slogan of this demonstration against cruise missiles - "I don't want to die". Now that may not be a pure Marxist, revolutionary demand, but it's highly concrete, and it rejects the insanity of the nuclear war system. It's a start. The most important thing is that it draws people into action - self-activity against the missiles - and it opens up a dialogue. It creates the possibility of learning from this experience and moving on from this basic point, A, to B, to C, etc towards more left wing positions.' So what's B? 'B is the slogan - "I don't want to die for Thatcher". This represents a much higher level of political generalisation, bringing in opposition to the Tory Government over arms - and then on other issues like the cuts and unemployment. This is how socialist consciousness develops in the course of the anti-war movement.' So what's C? 'Now steady on. Lenin said you shouldn't be more than one step ahead of the masses - B is far enough for now. And you have to understand united front

tactics. We are in a united front against cruise with the Quakers and the Ecology Party. Going further at this stage would be divisive and sectarian. What matters is that things are moving, people are out on the streets. Quite honestly since the downturn destroyed our trade union support we in the SML are happy to find a broad popular movement as an audience for our socialist arguments.'

Demagogues and martyrs

A youthful activist had been listening with growing impatience. 'I'll tell you what C is' he butted in. 'It's the demand "Return a Labour government committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from NATO". This is the only practical way of saving our country from the holocaust - and it shows the vital importance of the struggle for anti-nuclear policies in the Labour Party.' But hasn't the Labour Party in government always increased spending on nuclear weapons, despite the party's pacifist traditions? 'That's true - but quite frankly the anti-cruise campaign is transforming the Labour Party. After we lost the election 18 months ago we were in a very weak position. We had unpopular leaders who had doubled unemployment and broken strikes, and an uphill struggle to convince anybody that our alternative strategy could save jobs or defend wages. Now the cruise protest is building up the party's campaigning image, drawing in new members. Left-wing speakers like Benn and Heffer are packing in the audiences at public meetings around the country on a scale not seen for 30 years. Opposition to nuclear war unites the labour movement and the focus on *Tory* missiles confirms the Labour Party as the only alternative to save Britain. Edward Thoreson, the charismatic public speaker of the European Nuclear Disarmament campaign, has made a tremendous contribution to this revival of the Labour Party.'

This was too much for the SML organiser. 'The problem with directing the anti-missile movement into the Labour Party is that the Labour Party is only concerned with Parliament and elections - not with mobilising a mass movement. Now the SML is only a small party - but we try hard. The problem with the anti-nuclear war campaign at the moment is that it's much too middle class. We want to take it into the workplaces and the trade union branches and win solid working class support for the campaign.' The LP activist asserted that his party was indeed oriented towards mass working class support. But he willingly acknowledged the dynamism of the SML and welcomed its contribution to the campaign. The two marched off with arms linked, affirming the genius of Teddy Thompson and the sterility of sectarianism.

Rituals of mutuality

As the marchers filed into the square it was obvious that the trade unions were better represented by top brass on the platform than by branch banners or rank and file members. An unemployed car worker feeding the pigeons around the fountain saw through the bureaucrats' rhetoric about peace and disarmament.

'Take Ron Todd. He's chief of the motor section of the TGWU. For the last couple of years he's been negotiating redundancies, wage cuts and worse conditions. He's got no influence on the government and his remaining members are increasingly disgruntled. He needs some way of taking the pressure off. The cruise missiles issue is ideal. Nobody disagrees that they're a bad thing; so it's easy to get trade unionists' backing for the protest. At the same time the campaign is so harmless that it's no threat to the Government, so it doesn't spoil the bureaucrats' hopes of consultations or even U-turns. Frank Cousins showed how pacifism could be used by the bureau-

cracy - now his successor Moss Evans is taking it up to give the union some political prestige. This Ted Tommo and all the rest up there are certainly helping the trade union leaders through a sticky patch.'

The freeborn Englishman

Mingling with the marchers, distinguished by the sign of the crow's foot on their lapels, were onlookers with Union Jacks and swastikas on T-shirts and in tattoos. One CND supporter took exception to the presence of National Front and British Movement members on a pacifist demonstration. 'What's a fascist doing on a demo against nuclear war?' he demanded aggressively. 'Look mate', the fascist replied, 'we want to keep Britain out of capitalist wars too. We're against American cruise missiles - and the whole domination of Britain by US finance-capital.' The CND advocate was dumbfounded as the skinhead listed further points of agreement: import controls, withdrawal from the EEC, nationalisation of the banks.

One thing about the demonstration upset the fascist. 'Too many commies. Like this Ipi Tombi - he's a foreign agitator and he supports IRA terrorists.' This was too much for the CND man. Enraged, he seized the fascist by the scruff of the neck and screamed at him. 'Let's get one thing straight. Our leader is a true patriot - his great cause is to save Britain from destruction. And he has repeatedly, publicly, condemned the Irish struggle for national liberation.' That off his chest, the pacifist relaxed his grip. 'One more thing - these commies are a nuisance to us too. Our leader says that certain kinds of "revolutionary" posturing and rhetoric, which inflame extremist ideology and carry divisions into the necessary alliances of human resistance, are luxuries which we can do without. Get it?' The fascist was perplexed. 'But all the commies seem to be here - the ones taking over the Labour Party, the old Moscow Party and the Trotskyite SML. So who are the ones we can do without?' 'Aha', whispered the CND supporter, 'he says you must listen for the voices which pipe in shrill tones of militancy that the Bomb is a "class question" - these voices are only a falsetto descant in the choir of exterminism'. 'They are the luxuries we can do without' said the fascist slowly. 'You've got it' replied the voice of the broad popular movement.

Prophecies, prophecies

The rally was drawing to a close. Ed Tomlinson, DJ from Rock against Armageddon, played his last jingles, introduced the bands and acclaimed the vast crowds of young people now surging forward to confront the massed ranks of the Metropolitan Police blocking Whitehall. This was indeed old Ed's greatest achievement - to draw the youth into line behind the veteran pacifists, the tired leftists, the trade union officials and Labour Party campaigners, the whole wretched caravan-serai of Labourism. And in this moment a prophecy two decades old came true. In the summer of '59 old Ed had written (in the *New Reasonable Express*):

'The bureaucracy will hold the machine; but the New Left will hold the passes between it and the younger generation.'

The prophet's more precise earlier predictions point towards the squalid reality behind his crazy visions of exterminism. His New Left is now senile - but it, and its camp followers, can still man the passes between the bureaucracy and its mass base. It can still sustain the machine and invigorate the bureaucracy with an influx of workers and youth. EP Thompson and his acolytes now stand astride the passes between the revolutionary communists he can do without and the younger generation. Old Squire, we're coming through.

Edward Ludd



THE WAR AND THE WORKING CLASS

The victories won by the British ruling class in the 'twenties put government and employers in a strong position over workers as Britain drifted towards war with Germany. The first part of this series focused on the disputes and lockouts that culminated in the 1926 General Strike ('Prelude to the slump: the defeats of the 'twenties', the next step, No 8). Shortly after that blow the Government introduced legal curbs on trade union organisation and restricted union activity in the public sector. The miners — the most militant section of the labour movement — were singled out for special treatment. Mineowners tried to destroy the miners' federation with company-run scab unions: between 1923 and 1932 the national federation lost 350 000 members. Mass unemployment paralysed the working class as trade union membership slumped from 8.5 million in 1920 to

little more than three million in 1933.

The recession brought poverty and despair to millions of workers; but it brought new power and prestige to the leaders of the labour movement. Before the General Strike the leadership of the unions and the Labour Party had had to fight hard to restrain working class militancy. The slump enabled them to tighten their grip on the rank and file and reorganise their relationship with the capitalist class. By the time the Second World War began in earnest the top bureaucrats were firmly in control of their members and securely ensconced as invaluable members of the War Cabinet. In the second part of our series we examine the response of the labour bureaucracy to the depression and show how the working class movement was drawn into the war drive of British imperialism.



The labour bureaucracy in the slump

On the road to war

should seek the co-operation of the leaders of the labour movement. In 1927 the labour bureaucracy wanted the state to establish a system of industrial relations based on recognised forums of collaboration in which labour leaders would be consulted over matters concerning relations between employers and workers.

The labour bureaucrats saw the employers not as class enemies but as reluctant partners who needed some prodding from the state to make them aware of their true role. The real danger to the manoeuvres of the labour bureaucracy came from anti-capitalist workers. These militants threatened to destroy the system of production which gave the bureaucrats their mediating role and privileged position. To win the co-operation of the employers the TUC had first to demonstrate its determination to contain the subversive sections of the labour movement.

The labour leadership used the General Strike debacle as an argument against militancy and the class struggle. Because many workers were demoralised there was little resistance to the TUC's arguments. But just to make sure the TUC launched a vicious campaign against communists and militants. At the instigation of the General Council the 1927 TUC Conference withdrew recognition from all trades councils and union branches which were affiliated to the Communist Party-dominated National Minority Movement. The TUC leadership had free rein to smash its class-conscious opponents and expel dissident union bodies. When unofficial strikes and rank and file movements emerged between 1933 and 1935 the TUC replied with bans and proscriptions.

The third course

With the rank and file under its thumb the labour bureaucracy felt free to embark on its schemes of class collaboration. In the late 'twenties the bosses smashed shop floor organisations and kicked millions of workers out of their jobs

while the TUC appealed for class peace. The union leaders ignored the attack on workers' rights under the 1927 Trades Disputes Act; the TUC General Council lamely protested against lack of consultation.

The bureaucracy's answer was what TUC president Walter Citrine proclaimed as the dawn of a new era of trade unionism, 'the third course between the purely businesslike and revolutionary attitude' (cited in H A Marquand, *Organised labour in four continents*, 1939, p127). Citrine's 'third course' was in fact an offer to collaborate with the captains of industry in the drive to raise productivity and sharpen the competitive edge of British business. TUC general secretary Ben Turner explained that it was 'for the trade union movement to say boldly that not only is it concerned with the prosperity of industry, but that it is going to have a voice as to the way industry is carried on, so that it can influence the new developments that are taking place' (*TUC report*, 1928).

The TUC approved this third course. From now on it treated the interests of workers and capitalists as the same: 'the prosperity of industry'. The TUC prided itself in the conviction that it understood the needs of British industry better than the capitalists. As far as the working class was concerned, capitalist prosperity would mean jobs and high wages. Anything else was as unrealistic as the 1926 General Strike.

The Mond-Turner talks

In 1928 the TUC attempted to implement its third course. In response to an initiative from Sir Alfred Mond, a leading industrialist, to discuss matters of mutual interest to 'both sides of industry', the TUC agreed to hold a series of meetings to explore ways of institutionalising class collaboration. The Mond-Turner talks were designed to educate the working class in the realities of capitalist industry. The seven subjects proposed by Mond for

discussion indicate their scope:

- 1 Rationalisation of industry, including arrangements for the transference of labour
- 2 Status of the worker. Works councils
- 3 Housing, health, unemployment insurance and educational schemes in relation to the modern needs of industry
- 4 Effects of taxation on industry
- 5 Causes and methods of avoiding trades disputes
- 6 Preparation of the worker in industry as a person who is interested in its prosperity
- 7 Possibility of creating a permanent consultative committee dealing with topics affecting industry.

The TUC's acceptance of these issues for discussion indicated that it was fully prepared to place the needs of capital above the interests of workers. The Right Honourable Jimmy Thomas, Labour MP and leader of the railway workers' union, pontificated that these talks were

'a recognition that the country's interests are greater than those of any section, whether it be employers or employed. ... It was a recognition of the fact that in the great industrial problems that we are face to face with today, in the struggles of this country to compete in the world's markets, conflict at home, whoever is responsible for it, must inevitably lead to disaster.' (*Daily Herald*, 21 January 1928)

The labour leaders stirred up patriotic sentiments to persuade workers to back Britain against foreign competition. But it was all to no avail. In 1928 the devastation caused by the crisis was sufficient to discipline workers. The bosses were strong enough to attack the working class head-on without making concessions to the labour leaders. They told the TUC to mind its business; the Mond-Turner talks were abandoned.

A plan to beat the crisis

In the early 'thirties the TUC was forced into a holding operation. Its offer of

THE ORGANISATIONS of the official labour movement emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries out of the struggles of the working class. As the trade unions grew into an acceptable part of capitalist society the labour leadership became recognised and respected by the capitalist state. For their part the trade union leaders became more and more preoccupied with their own narrow interests and increasingly ignored the aspirations of the rank and file.

After the General Strike

In Britain the unions grew as the capitalists prospered. In times of low unemployment the trade unions strengthened their bargaining position and extended their influence. The labour leadership came to view any threat to social stability — including the class struggle — as a threat to its own position. The labour leaders' moderation and conservatism stemmed from their desire to maintain stability. Once the unions achieved recognition from employers and the government and collective bargaining was institutionalised, the trade union leaders preferred to lobby the government for reforms rather than wage the class struggle against the state.

The intense social conflict of the 'twenties confirmed the bureaucrats' view that the best course for labour was co-operation with the capitalist class. After the defeat of the General Strike the labour leadership did not abandon the use of strikes or other militant tactics. But working class action was now used to impress upon the bourgeoisie that it

industrial collaboration had been rejected. Worse, prolonged mass unemployment and employers' attacks on unions were beginning to erode the social base of the bureaucracy itself. All this did not lead the TUC to reconsider its cap-in-hand strategy. On the contrary, the labour bureaucrats became even more hostile to working class action and redoubled their efforts to win concessions from the bourgeois state. From 1928 onwards almost every important strike was unofficial as the TUC ignored the attacks against the rank and file. The millions of unemployed fared no better. The TUC simply absolved itself of any responsibility towards those out of work and attacked those who dared to organise them.

The labour bureaucracy's aim was to restore capitalist prosperity, to save the nation and thus to create new jobs. The essential features of the TUC's economic programme were subsidies for declining industries; public works, education and pension reforms designed to reduce the size of the army of unemployed and stimulate demand; and the creation of a protected empire trade bloc. Like today's Left Alternative Strategy, the TUC's programme was a mixture of Keynesianism and economic nationalism aiming at the phantom of an enlightened organised capitalism. Every issue was approached from the point of view of capitalist rationality.

Instead of defending the unemployed the TUC worked out proposals that would limit the cost of employment for the state. The Retirement and Pensions Committee investigated the possibility of shuffling workers from the dole queue to welfare by raising the school leaving age and lowering the age of retirement. For the TUC education and old age pensions were important because they could be used to strengthen the bargaining position of the unions against the unemployed. As Ernest Bevin put it, raising the school leaving age provided for a 'planned contraction of the working population'; he assured the bosses that the 'high standard of health and efficiency' that would be gained as a result of increasing the school leaving age to 16 would be 'worth more to the state than the cost involved' and demanded a state assisted emigration scheme to rid Britain of the unemployed (E Bevin, *My plan for 2 000 000 workless*, 1933).

Since the labour leaders accepted the premises of capitalist rationality they were forced to accept the barbaric cost that the restoration of capitalist production entailed for the working class. They never rejected the need for workers to make sacrifices — they merely wanted them to be distributed fairly and democratically. In response to the MacDonald Government's 20 per cent cut in unemployment benefit in 1931 the TUC protested against 'lack of consultation' and offered its services in the administration of the new measures. On the initiative of the General Council a joint union/government Unemployment and Benefit Board was established to administer the payment of benefits 'on democratic and businesslike lines' (*TUC General Council Report*, 1931).

This is how the labour bureaucracy co-operated with the social administration of the capitalist system. The labour leaders legitimised the attack on the working class. And most important of all they won the acquiescence of the working class to the measures required for capitalist rationalisation.

Behind imperialism — all the way

Throughout the 'thirties the TUC leadership tried to suppress and restrict the independent activity of the rank and file. Until 1935 the TUC had few problems in policing a demoralised working class. But in the late 'thirties when the economy picked up and unemployment fell, the TUC needed more than victimisation to keep its grip over the working class. The bureaucracy's antidote to class politics was British nationalism. The labour bureaucrats saw the expansion of British imperialism as the answer to workers' problems.

The programme of economic nationalism advanced by the TUC required support for Britain's imperialist policies abroad. Thus in 1930 the TUC demanded that British imperialism defend its sphere of influence abroad by establishing a Commonwealth Trade Bloc:

'The common-sense policy is surely to look ahead and to determine how best Britain, in the light of present-day tendencies, can build up close economic bonds with those nations whose interests appear to be complementary to our own. The two main factors that have to be considered are raw materials and markets.' (*TUC conference report*, 1930)

The TUC did not put its reactionary policies forward as the crude pro-capitalist schemes they were. TUC leaders instead portrayed economic nationalism as the harbinger of socialist planning. Import controls and a strong interventionist policy in the colonies were presented as a progressive alternative to capitalist anarchy.

The labour bureaucracy exploited workers' anti-fascist sentiments for its own chauvinist ends. It used the fear engendered by German and Italian fascism to justify the imperialist policies of Britain. Nationalism was now dressed up as a progressive force because Britain's imperialist rivals happened to be fascist. TUC support for British capitalism's fight for survival could now be pursued in the guise of a democratic crusade against fascism. During these years the TUC performed an important service for British imperialism — before long the working class was actively participating in the greatest imperialist conflict of all time.

The bitter fruit of collaboration

In 1928 the British ruling class had rejected the social contract which the TUC offered. By the late 'thirties things had changed. To pursue its war effectively — on the economic and military fronts — the capitalists needed the full co-operation of the labour movement. The time for 'consultation' had come.

The labour bureaucracy seized its chance: the heightening of imperialist tension was an opportunity to extend its influence. Even the economic programme of the TUC now made sense. Economic nationalism was required by an economy under siege. British imperialism now had no hesitation to launch a programme of public works: rearmament was a matter of urgency. The drive towards war provided the basis for the implementation of the TUC's 'third course'.

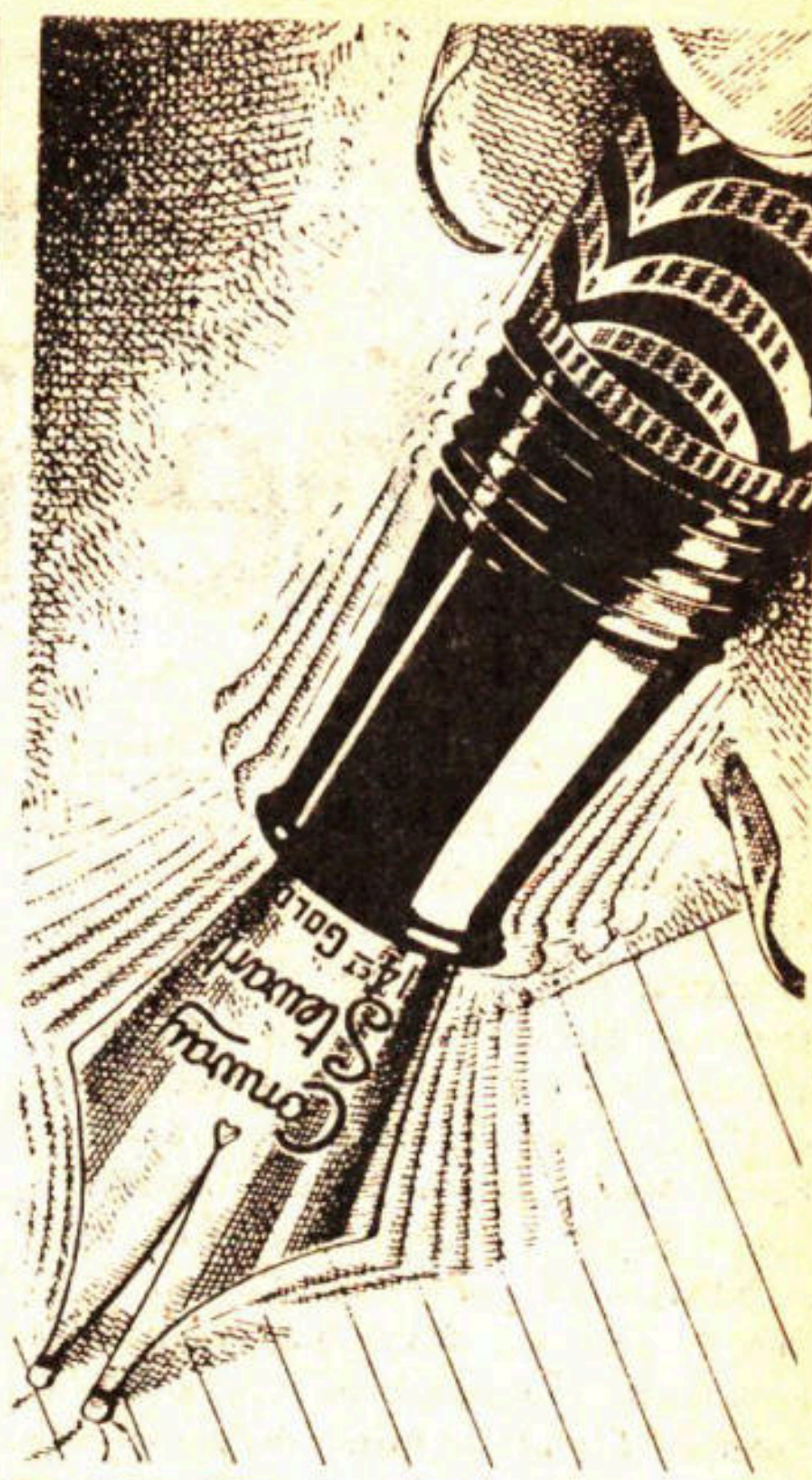
In 1936 the engineers' union began to consult with the Government on rearmament. In response to the Government's White Paper the union issued a statement arguing that the proposed rearmament plans necessitated 'the most careful organisation and the willing co-operation both of the leaders of industry and of the trade unions' (*Amalgamated Engineering Workers' Union, Monthly Journal*, October 1936).

By 1938 industry as a whole was convinced that co-operation with the TUC was the best course of action. In March the Chamberlain Government formally asked for trade union co-operation to assist its war preparations. This was followed up by a meeting between the Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence and representatives of the engineering unions. These talks, however, had no immediate consequences: the employers were not yet prepared to give anything in return for trade union co-operation.

The lack of urgency demonstrated by the employers stood in sharp contrast to the labour bureaucrats' determination to press ahead with the war effort. They utilised widespread hatred for fascism to win working class support for the war. It was an indication of the reactionary role of the labour bureaucracy that its main ambition was to acquire a consultative role in the pursuit of an imperialist war.

Finally in October 1939 the Government institutionalised consultation with the unions. It integrated the trade unions into the state machinery, and for the duration of the war gave them a free hand to organise the labour market. The co-operation of the unions ensured that force was rarely necessary to speed up work and increase the exploitation of the workforce. The ruling class could stand back and allow the labour bureaucrats to get on with the job of uniting the British people in the imperialist war effort.

Sabena Norton



ENTRY DIARY

Inside Chilham Labour Party the struggle continues

Last month's Annual General Meeting showed the kind of success that consistent work in a constituency Party can bring, especially in the light of recent Conference decisions which gave Chilham Party activists a tremendous boost.

Under correspondence the secretary reported that we are still receiving 25 copies of the Morning Star a day — despite our letter of June last year informing Peter Pink that none have been sold in the Kent area since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Consensus was that it would be sectarian to pursue the matter further and in any case this was an improvement on 1979 when we received 39 Communist Party membership cards by mistake.

It was noted that we have not received any correspondence from Transport House (or Walworth Road) since the election. A minority of comrades insisted that this was not the case as the Socialist Organiser circular 'What we gave and what we got' constituted official correspondence. A motion demanding the nationalisation of 250 monopolies was amended to read 'the top 252' and passed overwhelmingly. Another demanding the eight-hour day was ruled out of order. The AGM unanimously supported the petition on peace sponsored by Socialist Organiser, Socialist Challenge and Socialist Press. During the meeting comrades sold four copies of Militant, four copies of Socialist Organiser and four copies of Socialist Challenge: a small blow against the millionaire press! The meeting voted to raise £10 to reward the caretaker of Chilham Unitarian Church for his efforts to recycle back copies of the Morning Star.

Next time — Entry Diary looks at the fight against the right wing in Ascot CLP.

Chauvinism and pacifism mix well in this 1934 Labour Party poster. 'No more war!' — yet this sort of propaganda prepared workers for the imperialist slaughter.



AFTER THE HUNGER STRIKE

The Irish War goes on

The struggle for political status

In 1976 Labour Party Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Roy Mason initiated the policy of 'Ulsterisation'. Its aim was to create the impression that the Irish liberation struggle was no more than an internal problem of 'law and order'.

Ulsterisation had two key components. Firstly Mason put the loyalist dominated police forces – the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment – in the front line against the republican movement and reduced the open activity of the British army. Secondly, he decided to 'criminalise' the republican movement. It was this latter move that set in motion the sequence of protests that led in October 1980 to the hunger strike. In March 1976 Mason withdrew the 'special category' status which had previously been granted to captured republicans. The British have since treated convicted freedom fighters simply as criminals with no right to associate freely among themselves, organise their own education or wear their own clothing.

Mason's aim was to isolate the republican activists from the Catholic community in the Six Counties. All he succeeded in doing was to provoke prison protests and ever larger demonstrations of popular support. In September 1976 the first republican prisoner to be denied political status, Kieran Nugent, rejected the criminal label. He refused to do prison work and dress in prison uniform – and was obliged to wear only a prison blanket. Since then more than 400 republicans have joined the blanket protest. Early in 1978 the prisoners rebelled against constant harassment from warders during washing and slopping out times and began the 'dirty' protest.

While the National H-Block Committee organised demonstrations in support of the prisoners during 1980, the men in H-Block decided to go on hunger strike for a final showdown with the authorities on the political status issue.

No surrender

The British were little concerned for the lives of the seven men in Long Kesh, the three women in Armagh jail or the 30 other republican men who joined the strike as it progressed. After all, the British security forces have murdered hundreds of Irish people in the last 10 years and will probably kill many more until they're driven out of Ireland. But the Government was concerned that the deaths of the hunger strikers would provoke an upsurge of popular resistance to British rule in the Six Counties.

The British Secretary of State's right hand man in Belfast, Michael Allison, recalled the circumstances that forced earlier Tory Northern Ireland Minister, William Whitelaw, to introduce political status in the first place:

'Special category status was won not just by a hunger strike, it was won by the enormous outburst of lawlessness, concentrated like a dam bursting into a particular moment in history which made it impossible to build in our prisons, to introduce a normal prison regime.' (Quoted in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 4 October 1980)

As the hunger strike continued the British Government became increasingly concerned that it might lose control on

The hunger strike by men in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and women in Armagh jail was the heroic culmination of a four year battle by republican prisoners for political status. During the last eight weeks before the strike was called off in mid-December a wave of demonstrations and strikes in towns and cities throughout Ireland showed the strength of popular support for the national liberation struggle.

In Britain, however, the official labour movement stood staunchly beside Margaret Thatcher and Humphrey Atkins as they prepared to sacrifice more Irish lives to the cause of British rule in Ireland. The organisations of the British left proved incapable of mobilising even their own members to challenge the intransigence of the British state (see editorial, page 3).

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency made the Irish hunger strike the main focus of activity in the last three months of 1980 (see page 2 for details). We enter 1981 with a determination to take this work forward, to expose mercilessly the pusillanimous approach of the left to the Irish War and to transform the present pro-British outlook of the labour movement into anti-imperialist pro-Irish politics.

the streets of the Six Counties. Mass demonstrations were held in Belfast, Derry, Armagh, Newry and other towns. Workers downed tools in towns and cities throughout the Six Counties on a day of action in solidarity with the hunger strikers. Young people rioted in Derry and Armagh, forcing Britain to deploy its military forces in a much more overtly coercive way. Meanwhile loyalist leaders fulminated against the slightest hint of concessions to the republican prisoners, threatening to unleash violent reprisals.

The British had tried to forestall the hunger strike by offering concessions on prison conditions. But Atkins' early offer of additional letters, visits and recreation, limited association and compassionate leave were rejected by the prisoners. At the eleventh hour he offered to allow them (and all prisoners in the Six Counties) the right to wear civilian-type clothes. But the republicans insisted on political recognition of their struggle. Once the hunger strike began in earnest, the British remained adamant – there would be no surrender on the issue of political status.

The British monolith

Margaret Thatcher put the position of the British bourgeoisie with characteristic clarity:

'There can be no give on political status. Murder is a crime, causing explosions is a crime, maiming is a crime and it must stay that way. Murder is murder is murder. It cannot be a political crime. There can be no question of political status.' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 1980)

For the ruling class it is vital to deprive the struggle for national liberation in Ireland of all political legitimacy: branding republicans as 'criminals' helps to ensure that they don't build up support in Britain that would cause problems for the state's oppression of Ireland.

The Tories have a vital ally in their propaganda war against the Irish: the Labour Party. As the right-wing *Daily Telegraph* commented during the hunger strike: 'the Ulster Secretary who best understood the problem was Mr Mason' – he favoured a more coercive approach than the Tories (20 November 1980). The popular press is preoccupied with the divisions in the Labour Party. But when it comes to the Irish War, especially when the British state is under unusual pressure, the ranks of Labour close. The British political machine from Enoch Powell to

Tony Benn presented a monolithic face of implacable hostility to the Irish hunger strikers. Labour left leader Benn told RCT hecklers at a public meeting in Hackney that he did not support the hunger strikers. 'Ireland has had enough martyrs for a thousand years' he said (*Hackney Gazette*, 5 December 1980). Benn ought to know about the last 10 years if not the last 1000 – he passed more than half that time in Labour cabinets that directly supervised the creation of hundreds of Irish martyrs in the struggle for national independence.

The left helps out

While Thatcher and her Labour allies pushed the issue of political status to the fore in their campaigns to maximise public backing for the Government's stand against the prisoners, the left helped out by not taking on this question directly but instead concentrating on humane prison reforms. The left declared its sympathy with the prisoners but was not prepared to build support for the Irish liberation struggle. The SWP's Charter 80 campaign was not even prepared to back the demand for political status:

'Charter 80 does not ask its supporters either to agree with the declared political objective of the prisoners or to approve of the actions they are supposed to have done in pursuit of this. It does not even ask its supporters to support the prisoners' right to political status.' (*The H-Block Hunger Strike and the Struggle for Political Status*, SWP, November 1980)

Charter 80 and other radical left initiatives around the hunger strike played right into the Government's hands. The Government said 'concessions arising out of humanitarian concern over prison conditions are negotiable, political status is not'. The left emphasised humanitarian reforms and gave political status a much lower priority. The result? The Government was allowed to get off the hook by making some concessions on conditions but standing firm on the central issue of political status.

The propaganda war

The hunger strike tactic was designed to advance the national liberation struggle by putting pressure on the British Government – in the Six Counties, in the Irish Republic, and internationally. One of the most important factors on which the success of the hunger strike depended was the scale of opposition to the Government it aroused in Britain itself. If the British

Government had been seriously embarrassed by a campaign of strikes and demonstrations at home, it might have been forced to concede political status.

This is why the Government was so careful to win the propaganda war, publicising its side of the H-Block protests, ensuring that Labour MPs, liberals and churchmen all condemned the hunger strikers. Most importantly, the Government made sure that the organised labour movement remained loyal to British interests. This is where the approach of the left was decisive. It was the duty of socialists to mobilise the working class in solidarity with the hunger strikers. But the left backed down on the political status issue, made pious statements of sympathy with the hunger strikers and pleaded with the Government to be merciful. It delivered the working class to the Tories with scarcely a whimper.

Just one example shows the different approach of the RCT. Our supporters in the NALGO chapel of the National Union of Journalists called for strike action in the event of the death of any of the hunger strikers. They won the argument in support of political status after many earlier discussions of the Irish War. In this and other union branches RCT supporters showed the connection between the arguments needed to win endorsement of the hunger strikers' demand for political status and the industrial action needed to impose this demand on the Government.

Stop TUC collaboration!

The unions' pro-British stance on the hunger strike follows from their long established policy on the Irish War. For five years the TUC's programme for the Six Counties has been the Better Life For All Campaign. This campaign endorses the government's murderous proscription of the republican movement while calling on the same government to bring peace, jobs and progress to the Six Counties. The TUC backs imperialist oppression but pleads, very softly, for it to be exercised more leniently.

The Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign is holding a labour movement conference on the Irish War in Coventry at the end of March. We aim to carry forward the assault on the TUC's Irish policy that began at Tameside Trades Council last year. In 1981 we need to make sure that next time the Irish people turn to British workers for support solidarity action is not prevented by the pro-British politics of the labour bureaucracy.

Sponsors so far include (in a personal capacity):

Dave Hallsworth AUEW
Secretary Tameside Trades Council
Jimmy O'Hara National Executive TGWU
Jim Monaghan FTAT
Chairman Todmorden Trades Council
Bob Montgomery Sheet Metal Workers
Write now to SPTAC:
BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX

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