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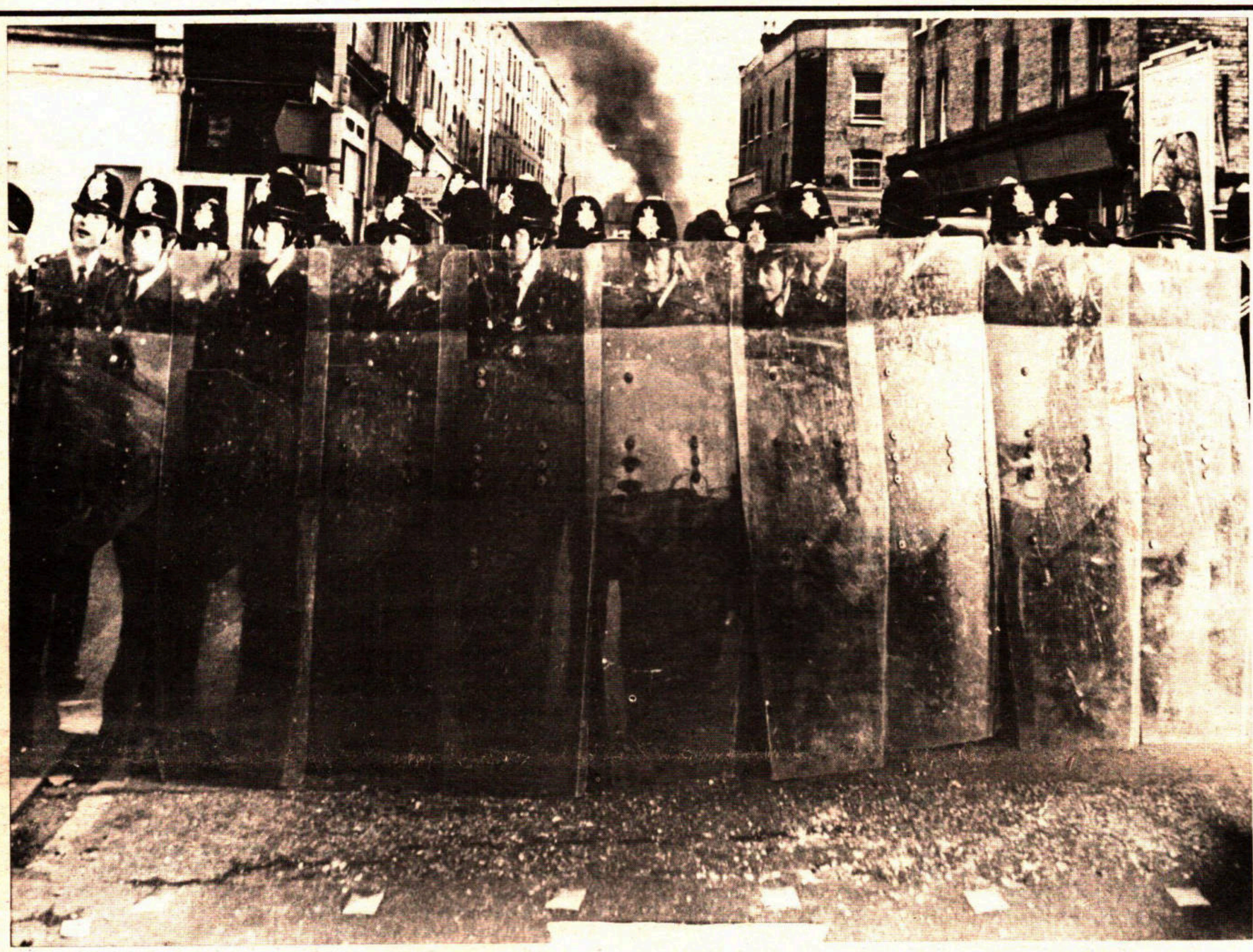
the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party 20p



No turning back!

1981 SURVEY 1981 SURVEY

British unions, French occupations
Russian workers, Polish generals
American labour, El Salvador massacres
Revolutionaries on the rise, radical left demise
Middle Eastern debacles

PLUS

CLEANSING OUR RANKS
a platform for anti-racist trade unionists

IRELAND • REVIEWS • LETTERS

RCP action: around the branches

COVENTRY

IRISH SOLIDARITY has always been a top priority for RCP members in Coventry. At the end of November local supporters of the Smash the PTA Campaign staged a public rally outside the town hall on the anniversary of the introduction of the PTA. More than 50 people heard speeches from Eddie Caughey of Sinn Fein, one of the very first PTA victims, and from Glyn Cohen who was picked up during the recent wave of arrests. Ajmer Bains of Coventry Indian Workers Association and Phil Murphy of the Smash the PTA Campaign also spoke. The rally was harassed by police and prevented from dispersing to join a council workers' demonstration by officers who said they feared 'an insurrection'!

While mobilising for the Bloody Sunday march in Coventry is the main activity for January (see p19), the council workers' strike became a national focus in November and December. RCP members and supporters gave their full backing. As Mike Wall reports, the willingness of workers to defend their living standards was undermined by the politics of the Labour Party and the long public debate it has sponsored in Coventry on how to manage reductions in local government spending.

Cuts or rate rises?

Back in August Coventry's Labour-controlled council held a referendum over the question of whether to economise through direct cuts in services or rate rises. Less than a quarter of Coventry's voters opted for cuts by a majority of seven to one. The fruits of this experiment in democracy were announced at the next council meeting: cuts worth £2 million – *and* a 15 per cent rate increase in April 1982. But Coventry's workers weren't going to take this lying down.

At the end of September cleaners at Coventry Technical College began industrial action against the proposed cuts. Throughout October there were sporadic protest actions. Early in November 4000 NUPE workers in Coventry went on indefinite strike against proposals from the council that they take a 10 per cent cut in wages and hours, and accept redundancies. Coventry schools closed on 8 November as a result of all-out strike action by the NUPE workers.

While leading councillors considered bringing in scabs to break the strike, union leaders were working on a deal. NUPE branch secretary Joe Little said at the outset that he saw 'natural wastage and voluntary cutbacks' as the solution to the council problems. After protracted negotiations NUPE agreed on a return to work early in December on the old terms, while the dispute was referred to the Government's Arbitration, Conciliation and Advisory Service, ACAS.

Many militants were dismayed that the strike was called off before the battle was won: they have little faith that ACAS will back them against the council. After a month on strike they have little confidence either in the much-vaunted alliance of public sector unions against the cuts. Although individual NALGO, NUT and TGWU members joined picket lines, their leaders followed the NUPE line of looking for alternative ways out of united industrial action.

But joining the party that's attacking them is no way forward for the NUPE workers. Only by rejecting the arguments of the Labour council that rate rises and cuts are necessary to 'balance the books', and by struggling hard in defence of working class living standards, will these attacks be fought effectively. This was the argument that RCP supporters took to the Coventry picket lines – and it's an argument that got a more and more positive response as the strike wore on.

EAST LONDON

THE CAMPAIGN for a monument to Bobby Sands in Hackney has been getting more and more support (see p20). Meanwhile East London Workers Against Racism has been in action again – against police harassment in Tower Hamlets and against fascist terror in Walthamstow. Judy Harrison reports.

Brick Lane cops blow their cover

'Community relations' in Brick Lane may never be the same again. After three years of a successful experiment in community policing, the local constabulary beat up, racially abused and arrested a well-known local Asian youth leader, Shoaib Chowdury. Shoaib had come to the assistance of some Bangladeshi women and children who were being attacked by 15 racist thugs. Clearly the police hadn't read their race relations manuals properly, otherwise they would not have told Shoaib to 'shut his fucking mouth', thrown him against a wall and kicked and beaten him up.

On Tuesday 8 December 300 people packed out the meeting called by the Bangladesh Welfare Association and local Asian youth groups to protest at the incident. The meeting unanimously voted to break off all relations between the local community and the police. Two former members of the community liaison committee resigned on the spot. The meeting also voted to stage a mass rally in Brick Lane, picket Old Street court when Shoaib's case came up and organise a one-day protest strike in Tower Hamlets.

All this is a blow not only for the police, but for those who've been carefully nurturing the idea of 'police accountability' in the area. At the public meeting members of 'CAPA' – the Committee for Police Accountability, a Labour Party initiative – noted that this was a setback for their work and tried to down-play the racist side of the police attack. 'They attack us all, black and white, and that's why we have to make the police accountable' declared one squirming apologist for state repression.

The brutal attack on Shoaib has highlighted the point that ELWAR and local Asian militants have been making for a long time: scratch a community policeman and discover a racist goon.

LEEDS

THE RCP's newest branch has only been in operation a few months. Yet it already sells almost 1000 copies of each issue of *the next step*. The branch has been actively involved in building support for the Bradford 12 (young Asians charged with conspiracy to make petrol bombs in the summer riots), especially for the national demonstration in Bradford in December. However, the first major event staged in Leeds was the Smash the PTA Campaign's northern conference at the beginning of December, writes Gary Simpson.

More than a hundred people attended from Yorkshire and the North East. In the morning session Dave Hallsworth talked about the role of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and urged British workers to oppose it, not because it was bad for Britain's image of justice and fair play, or even because it could be used against individual British trade unionists, but because British workers *as a class* had every interest in supporting the struggle the PTA was designed to suppress. He drew on the militant traditions of the British working class – and his own experiences in the Laurence Scott struggle – to show the inevitability of violent conflict with the state.

In workshops, Wear Valley trade union activist Dave Ayre introduced a discussion of the problems of raising the Irish question in the labour movement; Annie Dillon gave a first-hand account of recent developments in the Six Counties; and a number of students discussed the obstacles to Irish solidarity work in the students' unions. Manchester RCP member Kate Marshall opened the final plenary session with a detailed analysis of British strategy in Ireland and how we intend to fight it, provoking a lively discussion from the floor – a feature of all the conference sessions.

The conference concluded with a call to take the arguments and the action against the PTA to a wider audience. Challenging the PTA is a working class response to bourgeois anti-Irish hysteria. It should give a boost to Irish solidarity work in Leeds for months to come.

MANCHESTER

IN ADDITION to their active involvement in the Laurence Scott dispute (see p6), Manchester RCP members have been involved in a wide range of struggles in recent weeks:

- organising workers' defence of an Asian family suffering racist attacks
- mobilising for a demonstration to commemorate the Irish republicans hanged as 'the Manchester Martyrs' in 1867
- convening the first meeting of the Women for Communism group to discuss and organise activity against women's oppression from a working class perspective
- publicising the cases of Irish students picked up under the PTA at Manchester airport en route home from the National Union of Students conference, and organising pickets of the detention centre
- preparing for this year's Bloody Sunday commemoration march in Coventry at the end of January.

SOUTH LONDON

EVER SINCE IT was formed in response to the riots last April, South London Workers Against Racism has been committed to extending the fight against racism into the organised labour movement. The first meeting around the new WAR pamphlet, *Cleansing our ranks*, held in Lambeth Town Hall in December took this work another step forward.

Members of a wide range of unions attended the meeting at which Fran Eden outlined the campaign of action we need to fight racism in the unions (see p4). The discussion indicated the range of problems: an engineer reported on the widespread hostility to blacks in British Telecom; NUPE members and civil servants talked about the nationality checks that are imminent in hospitals and unemployment benefit offices; local teachers complained of mounting police harassment of black children at school. All left the meeting with a commitment to take on this challenge, together with other anti-racists inside the unions.

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Over the edge in '82?

IN 1981 THE protagonists in the great conflicts of our times squared up to one another, exchanged menacing looks and hostile words, but for the moment held back from a decisive combat. It was a year in which deepening recession world-wide intensified great power rivalries and class antagonisms, but did not push them over the edge into a final resolution. The countries of the Middle East were racked by internecine strife and plagued by Western interference; but so far they have averted the long-impending carve-up of the region. In Central America the war of attrition between liberation movements and the US puppet regimes has dragged on – but Reagan's marines have been kept at bay. Even in Eastern Europe, Poland has staggered through economic collapse to famine and martial law, yet still the Soviet army has not crossed its borders.

In Britain the recession has raised the stakes in the class struggle. While mass unemployment has put the employers in a strong position to hold down wages and cut living standards, the Tory Government has so far held back from a frontal assault on the working class. And the British labour movement, although it has shown its willingness to fight in defence of jobs and conditions, has not yet begun to challenge the ruling class' right to rule and the rotten system it upholds.

In this special extended issue of *the next step* we survey the class struggle in 1981, in Britain and abroad. There is no end in sight to the world crisis of capitalism. The major capitalist countries and the major social classes of capitalist society cannot postpone the resolution of their conflicts indefinitely. To survive the imperialist powers need to redivide and stabilise the backward capitalist world; and they need to discipline their working classes to pay the heavy price for restoring profitable accumulation. The beginning of a New Year reminds us that the time before major show-downs become inescapable is getting shorter. Yet a review of 1981 reveals the working class movement everywhere in a state of weakness and confusion, and poorly prepared for the urgent tasks that confront it.

The crisis of leadership

'The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership' wrote Leon Trotsky in the 'thirties, and his words aptly sum up the problem thrown up by today's recession. In the backward capitalist world, workers are fighting and dying in their thousands in anti-imperialist movements in which their interests are subordinated to those of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois forces. The tragic consequences of the failure of the working class to lead these struggles in a consistently anti-imperialist direction are particularly evident in Iran, where the hegemony of the petit bourgeoisie over the anti-Shah movement has led to a carnival of reaction as these forces try to stabilise a capitalist regime on the backs of the masses who put them in power.

In the Western capitalist countries the best measure of the lack of political independence of the proletariat is its failure to obstruct the barbarous activities of the Western powers in countries like Iran, El Salvador and through the whole continent of Africa. Indeed the past year has seen a strengthening of the identification of the fate of the official labour movement with the fortunes of its own nation state, a tendency most marked on the left wing of social democracy. Tony Benn's call for a national liberation movement to free Britain from the 'colonial' domination of the USA and the EEC expresses the chauvinist outlook that ensures the subordination of the British labour movement to the British bourgeoisie.

Throughout Europe, social democracy is being revived to cope with the danger of working class dissatisfaction with the capitalist system. In France and Greece, Mitterand and Papandreou have pulled the left behind a programme of capitalist rationalisation. In Spain and Italy, rejuventated social democratic groupings may yet provide the only way to save bourgeois democracy and salvage their feeble economies. Even in Britain, where the stagnation of the class struggle has created an opening for a bourgeois centre party, the long-term trend is towards a much more prominent role for the left wing of the Labour Party.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has set about building a revolutionary party as a genuine alternative to the existing leadership of the working class movement. Our progress in 1981 is reflected in our change of name, in May, from 'Tendency' to 'Party', and in our expansion, political development and growing influence. The events of 1981 have confirmed the importance of our identification of Ireland and racism as being the key issues in forging a distinctive working class alternative to Labourism in Britain. The violent response to the deaths of the Irish hunger strikers and the violent response of black youth to police harassment constituted the greatest threat to bourgeois order in Britain in 1981. However, it is important to note how the British ruling class has been able to use these threats to its own advantage. The main reason it succeeded in doing this was because it could turn the labour movement – an indispensable ally of any movement of the oppressed – into a sympathetic supporter of the state in its attempts to deal with resistance to its rule on the streets. Nowhere is the absence of revolutionary leadership more apparent, nor its consequences more serious, than in the response of the labour movement to last year's Irish hunger strikes and the inner city riots. It is significant that it was through building solidarity around these issues in the working class movement, that the RCP began to take off in 1981.

The year of the riots

The Labour Party plays a leading role in trying to maintain what it calls 'racial harmony': the acceptance by blacks of their oppression and the endorsement of this state of affairs by the labour movement. When angry Asians, together with ELWAR supporters, proposed organising physically against fascist harassment on a Walthamstow housing estate, it was Labour's chief front bench spokesman on race relations, Roy Hattersley, who repudiated any suggestion of breaking the law. The Labour Party wants to soften racial oppression and defuse the explosive situation in the inner city areas. The RCP wants to end racial oppression altogether, and to mobilise the working class to achieve this. The difference in these two approaches became clear during the riots.

Labour's response to the riots is summed up in the way the Party has embraced the Scarman Report. The Labour Party broadly endorsed the police, while criticising some of their excesses; it condemned the violence of black youth, while sympathising with their problems; and it proposed better 'communication' and 'liaison' between the police and the black community as the way to prevent future recurrences. The RCP condemned the police as agents of a state that has nothing but repression to offer young blacks; we defended their right to fight back; and we rejected all illusions in making the police more responsive and accountable in favour of organising to defend the victims of the riots and their aftermath against the courts and the police.

During the summer, Workers Against Racism groups were formed in Brixton, Manchester and Coventry – scenes of some of the most violent incidents. The RCP put forward a strategy that cut through the apologetics of the reformists to show a clear way forward with practical consequences for workers ready to act as members of a class.

The year of the hunger strikes

The first Brixton riot erupted the day after Bobby Sands, already more than half-way to his death on hunger strike, was elected MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. The campaign to win support for the hunger strikers' demands for political status was the single biggest claim on the resources of the RCP and its supporters in 1981. Just as the biggest obstacle to rallying working class support for black people was the politics of the labour bureaucracy, so too did the official labour movement act as a bulwark of the British establishment when it came under threat from Ireland.

The right wing of the Labour movement in the TUC and the parliamentary Labour Party backed the Government's stand against the hunger strikers unreservedly: its position is well symbolised by Don Concannon's visit to the H-Blocks to assure Bobby Sands before he died that he could expect no support from the Labour Party. The left wing was more equivocal: several MPs and much of the extra-parliamentary left expressed sympathy with the prisoners and urged the Government to deal with them less brutally. The logic of this position did not become fully clear until later in the year when the British state came under a much more direct attack from the Irish liberation movement in the form of a bombing campaign in London. Sympathy soon turned to condemnation as Labour's spokesmen capitulated to their own chauvinist instincts and the pressures of anti-Irish public opinion. The GLC's Ken Livingstone provided the most dramatic example of this transition. Hostility to the Irish liberation struggle unites the official labour movement from left to right in allegiance to the British state.

While condemning the republican movement, the Labour Party proposed, at its Brighton Conference, a programme for a more benevolent British administration culminating in 'withdrawal' at some unspecified date long in the future. The RCP, on the other hand, gave its unconditional support to the republican movement, and repudiated all British solutions as a denial of Ireland's right to determine its own future. Nor did we ask Britain to reform its concentration camps as the most radical British reformists did in their tentative support for the hunger strikers. We demanded that the Government recognise their status as political prisoners and we urged British workers to back them as soldiers in a national liberation army fighting the British state.

And we showed, through the activities of the Smash the PTA Campaign in 1981, that putting anti-imperialist politics to the fore was the only way to win wider support for the cause of Irish freedom. As a result of our initiatives, from the Coventry Conference in March to the Workers' March for Irish Freedom in September, Smash the PTA Campaign groups sprang up in many parts of the country.

Breaking the mould

1981 was a bad year for the fudgers. As the radical left drifted into the Labour Party, it increasingly gave up any pretence of independent activity on the key questions of the day. Often it's main concern became defending the Labour Party against the challenge of the RCP. Every time the Anti-Nazi League was relaunched, its activists had more difficulty explaining why rock concerts and the Right to Work Campaign were a better way of fighting racism than building workers' defence in the unions. And, as all the big radical left groups pulled out of the Troops Out Movement leaving only handfuls of members in various parts of the country, some of its remaining supporters seemed more concerned to defend Ken Livingstone and Ernie Roberts than to join in activities in support of the Irish struggle independent from the labour bureaucracy.

Unable to make any headway on issues that represent such a threat to the British state that only working class politics can push them forward, the radical left groups have taken refuge in non-issues. They have thrown their energies into the TUC's attempts to control the young unemployed through stunts like the People's March and the Jobs Express. They have rushed to mobilise the masses against the dangers of nuclear war in the future, while doing nothing to fight war and oppression in the present. And they have enthusiastically joined the campaign for democracy and Tony Benn in the Labour Party. As 1982 begins, the scene is set for a re-run of last year's great distraction in the form of a campaign to defend the left of the Labour Party from a witchhunt launched by the right.

In 1982, we aim to break the mould of British politics. Time is short to build the sort of party we need to win the battles ahead. It is too short to waste in the sideshows of the left and too short to spend on the sidelines of the class struggle. Join the struggle for revolutionary communism in 1982!

WORKERS AGAINST RACISM

Cleansing our ranks

A platform for anti-racist trade unionists

Workers Against Racism trade union activists stand for action against racial discrimination at the workplace, in trade unions and in the community. We stand for:

No racist employment policies!

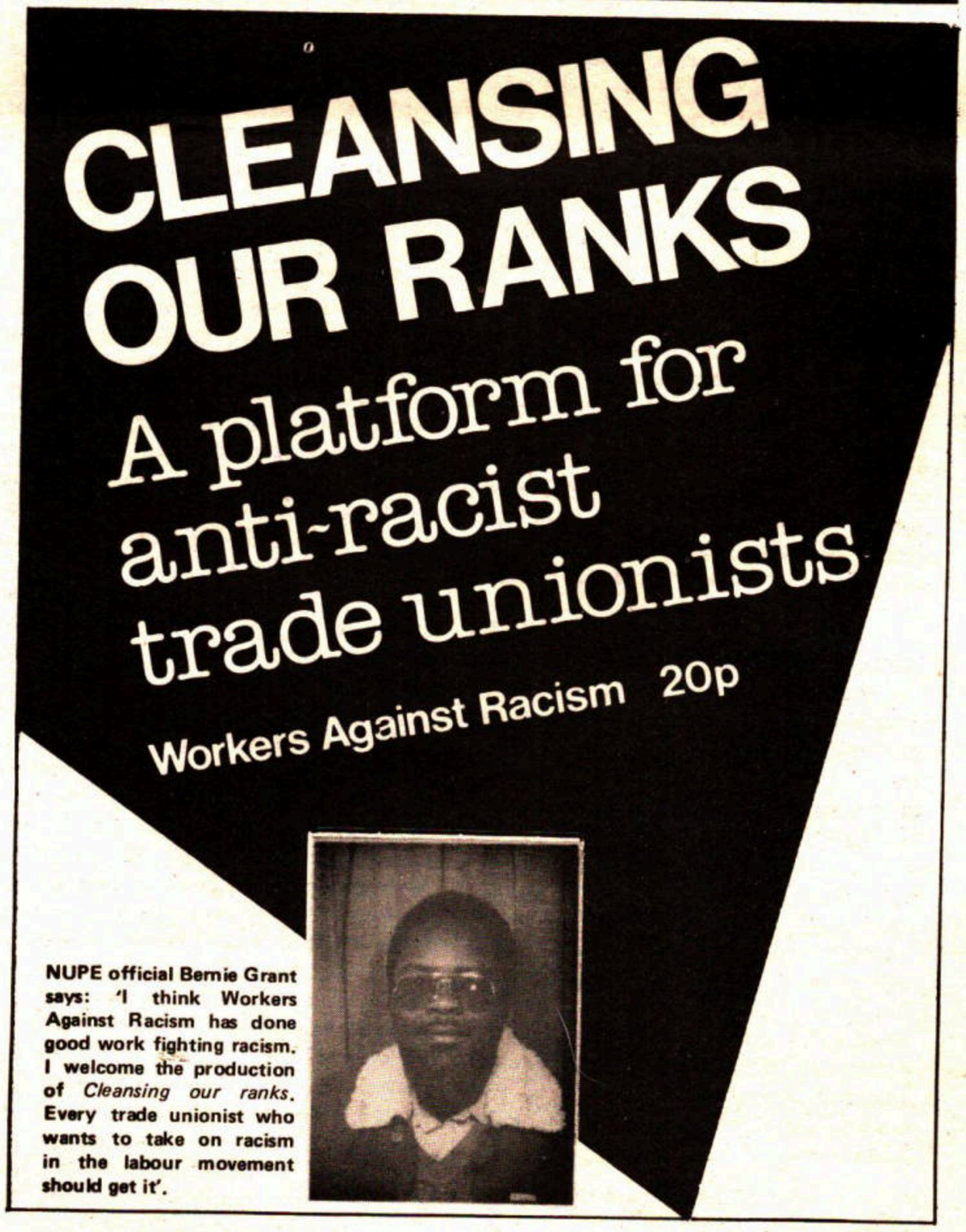
- resistance to discrimination in hiring, firing, apprenticeships, grading and promotion
- rank and file action for jobs and equality – not bureaucratic gestures such as 'positive discrimination' and 'equal opportunities'
- opposition to colour bars – to be led by the trade unions and the officials involved
- TUC action against racism at work, including support for anti-racist activists, the appointment of full-time anti-racist officials and the expulsion of officials who tolerate or support racist practices

No racist laws!

- opposition to all racist legislation and immigration controls
- non-cooperation with all racist surveys, inquiries and questionnaires
- full citizenship rights for migrant workers
- withdrawal of trade union backing from government work permit schemes

Workers defence!

- workers' discipline against racist workers – not measures taken by employers, the state or the bureaucrats
- workers' defence against racist attacks – at work, at home, on the street
- trade union action against racism among the unemployed
- trade union support for black people against police harassment



NUPE official Bernie Grant says: 'I think Workers Against Racism has done good work fighting racism. I welcome the production of *Cleansing our ranks*. Every trade unionist who wants to take on racism in the labour movement should get it'.

Why should black workers stand alone?

'UNITY IS STRENGTH' is one of the basic principles of trade unionism. Trade union leaders recognise that racism is divisive; the TUC condemns all manifestations of racism. Yet racism exists, not only outside, but inside the trade union movement. The basic principles of trade unionism do not apply to black workers. In numerous industrial disputes – at Imperial Typewriters, Courtaulds, Mansfield Hosiery, Red Scar Mill – black workers had to fight alone.

The TUC leadership has published a mass of pamphlets and leaflets urging fair and equal treatment for its black members. It even has its own guidelines: *Black workers – a charter for equality of opportunity*. But racism cannot be fought with paper declarations, only with action and organisation. For the past two years trade union supporters of Workers Against Racism have been monitoring racist activities inside the trade union movement. Our evidence shows a disturbing trend. Racism is widespread at all levels of the union movement. Moreover, it is institutionalised at the workplace in many industries. Discrimination exists in hiring, promotion, grading and working conditions.

We want to change this state of affairs for two reasons. First, because racism paralyses the working class. The more workers are at each others' throats, the easier it is for the employers to get their way. Second, the only class that can fight effectively is the working class. We believe the trade union movement can and *must* become an effective weapon in the anti-racist struggle. But we must put our own house in order first, *we must cleanse our ranks*.

Fighting racism in the public sector

Workers in the public sector have a special responsibility for fighting racism because they work for an employer – the British state – that puts considerable resources into the enforcement of racial oppression. State employees are called upon to execute government policies such as the regulation of the movement of immigrant workers and their internal control. The civil service monitors ethnic minorities and provides the forces of repression with valuable information. *Supporters of WAR, particularly in the civil service unions, should fight for union-wide support for a boycott of activities which assist the implementation of anti-immigrant policies.*

There is an even more pressing issue facing anti-racists in the public sector. To overcome the crisis of profitability the ruling class is prepared to cut back ruthlessly on government spending on education, health care and social services. The authorities are also determined to reduce the real value of pensions and dole money. To implement these cuts the state uses traditional divide and rule tactics. In the first place, cuts are often directed against unpopular 'foreigners' and 'immigrants'. Because attacks on immigrants have widespread support, the government can easily get away with these measures and they soften up public service workers to accept further cuts and reductions in services. Nationalism and racism are powerful levers for pushing through the strategy of the ruling class.

Higher education provides another example. For the past five years the state has campaigned remorselessly against overseas students: their fees were more than doubled, they were deprived of essential services and their position was made insecure. The unions, particularly the Association of University Teachers (AUT), restricted their response to verbal protests. Many lecturers were prepared to accept racial discrimination in order to save their own necks. But matters did not end with the overseas students. The recession deepened and the cuts intensified – and today thousands of lecturers and university staff face the chop. Their inaction over the victimisation of overseas students in the past renders them ineffectual today in defending their own jobs and conditions.

As the same approach extends to other sectors, higher education provides a cautionary tale. The Department of Health and Social Security leads the way. It hopes to bring in a set of racist criteria for reducing health service and benefit payments.

No pass laws in hospitals

The DHSS has authorised a survey of the nationality of people seeking NHS treatment in hospitals. A pilot project has been launched in 10 hospitals to survey patients as a prelude to introducing charges for overseas visitors. Patients with 'foreign-sounding names' or of 'foreign appearance' face rigorous checks. The three main unions involved – NUPE, NALGO and COHSE – have urged their members to boycott the racist survey. Unfortunately none of the unions has organised its members to make sure that the DHSS plans are wrecked. WAR has organised a successful boycott in the Wythenshawe Hospital in Manchester. But this is only the beginning. In early 1982 the Government has plans to publish regulations for introducing charges for 'overseas' patients of the NHS. *Hospital workers must organise a campaign for non-cooperation with these regulations. Racial discrimination in the hospitals will lead to even further losses of services to the working class.*

There is little time to lose. Officials representing the NHS unions have already accepted the new government policy. A special memorandum drawn up by ASTMS divisional officer Donna Harber shows that at the NHS General Whitley Council meeting most officials were prepared to allow the victimisation of foreign patients. To her credit, Donna Harber opposed this measure and circulated a report appealing for support:

> 'I am circulating a full report on this subject because I consider it an extremely important one, because I think members have a right to know how their representatives acted and what odds we are up against, and because I think it vital to the future of the NHS (as well as the fight against racial discrimination) that we take every opportunity we have in whatever trade union bodies we are represented to condemn and oppose the Government initiative.' (*NHS charges to overseas patients*, 28 October 1981)

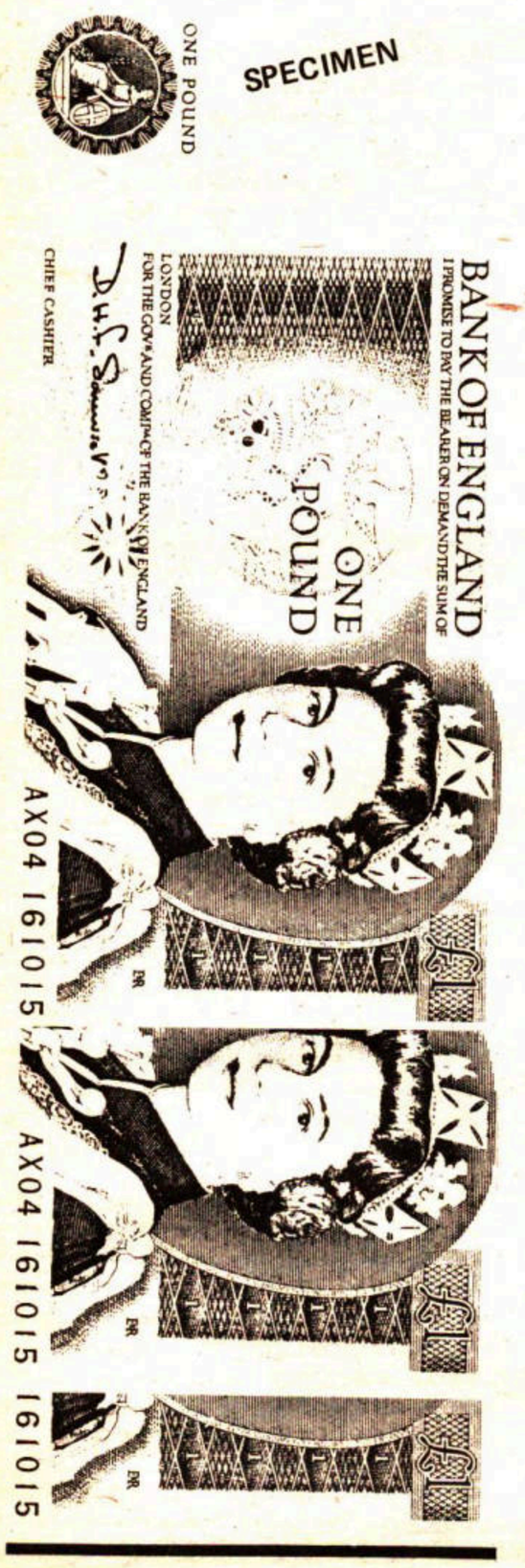
Stop the dole queue inquisition!

The DHSS has also been attacking the rights of immigrant workers to supplementary benefits. Recently an Indian woman was disqualified from obtaining supplementary benefits because she could not speak English. The DHSS decided that she was 'failing to make herself available for work' because she did not speak English. Now the DHSS has launched a more ambitious programme for reducing benefit payments. In conjunction with the Department of Employment, a plan has emerged for identifying the ethnic origin of unemployed people before dealing with their claim. A Department of Employment circular of 4 November 1981 claims that the survey has only a statistical significance. But everybody knows that if implemented it will put considerable pressure on immigrant claimants and potentially deprive them of their benefits.

The circular itself reveals that a major purpose of such statistics is to encourage civil service workers themselves to police immigrant workers. The Department of Employment nationality checks, like the DHSS checks in the hospitals, are part of the mechanisms the state needs to back up the new Nationality Act and set its seal on racial divisions in the working class.

The reaction from the civil service unions up to now has been muted. The Society of Civil and Public Servants, representing managers and supervisors in the unemployment benefit offices, has criticised the plan for being 'insensitive and likely to breed suspicion and alarm'. And that's about all.

Trade unionists in the public sector cannot turn a blind eye to the apartheid-style regulations now being imposed in the hospitals and dole offices. They cannot become accomplices to the institutionalisation of racial discrimination in the public sector and hope to save their own necks. Workers who refuse to defend the rights of their black fellow workers will be contributing to the destruction of services which are necessary for the survival of the working class.



WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM

Unlike the right wing of the British labour movement, *the next step* gets no support from the Committee for Trans-Atlantic Understanding, or any other NATO or CIA front. And, unlike the Stalinists, we cannot dump half our papers on the Eastern bloc, or even collect from trade union bureaucrats who want a mouthpiece for their views. We have no rich patrons or big business sponsors, no journalists on the Fleet Street payroll or wealthy film stars.

We rely on our readers. Since it began two years ago *the next step* has doubled in size and trebled its circulation. In 1981 we went monthly, expanded our political range and improved the presentation of the review. For workers fighting for their jobs and wages and workers who are moving to take on the ruling class on a broader political front, *the next step* has become an invaluable weapon. In 1982 we aim to make its coverage of major issues wider and more immediate. We want its polemics against the bourgeoisie and its apologists in the labour movement to be sharper and more forceful in advancing the working class alternative.

We appeal to our readers to send us whatever they can afford *now*! Only a genuine workers' paper relies on its readership. There is neither Moscow gold nor Washington silver available for the cause of real working class politics. Make cheques payable to RCT Association and send to BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX.

"QUOTES OF THE YEAR"

Collected by Paul Foster

FAIR COMMENT

'My politics have not changed.'
Communist Party student leader Sue Slipman on her conversion to the SDP
(*The Times*, 12 February)

BIBLE STUDY

'Jesus turned out the money-lenders out of the temple – I feel it is right and reasonable to object when a political money-lender seeks to use a church pulpit as their platform.'
A Young Communist League member on his local branch's heckling of Margaret Thatcher in church
(*Morning Star*, 7 March)

PRIORITIES

'At the moment we are showing more concern over the future of BS than the company is.'
CSEU general secretary Alex Ferry on his union's attitude to the defence of jobs and living standards at British Shipbuilders
(*Financial Times*, 9 October)

LOW-LIFE POLEMIC

'There are some revisionist political groups like the dubious Revolutionary Communist Party and its paper 'Next Step' (sic) who are so politically depraved and so utterly subservient to the petty-bourgeoisie (sic) that they accept the bombings without cavil or criticism. "British socialists", they unashamedly scream, "have no right to criticise the tactics of the IRA when that can only fuel British chauvinism." ('Next Step', November 1981).

'How pathetic! Should we not also stop criticising the Labour and trade union bureaucracy for fear of aiding the Tories or the Soviet bureaucracy for fear of aiding imperialism?'
WRP general secretary Michael Banda on the IRA's Wimpy Bar bombing
('Grave dangers of terror campaign', *The News Line*, 17 November)

PATRONISING PETIT BOURGEOIS AWARD

'Understandable, but not excusable.'
'Militant' member and aging Labour Party 'Young Socialist' Claire Doyle about the Brixton riots
(*New Standard*, 9 July)

WISHFUL THINKING

'The riots washed all that away.'
SWP leader Tony Cliff about the prevalence of racism among white youth
('Jobs not jails', *Socialist Worker*, 18 July)

BRAZEN IT OUT

'The council that cares.'
The News Line on Lambeth council, following its decision to raise rates on working class council tenants by several pounds a week
(28 February)

METAPHORS WE HAVE KNOWN

'We are not prepared to see this country bleed to death and this lobby is the first tourniquet.'
ASTMS supremo Clive Jenkins on a big rally calling for import controls
(*The Times*, 22 October)

'Tony Benn's defence of conference policy on renatrenationalisation (sic) without compensation has set the congealing fluids of Labour Party politics running hot and fast again.'
Socialist Organiser editorial on Benn's promise to expropriate the North Sea oil fields
(26 November)

'Ignorance spawns red herring on youth unemployment'
(*Morning Star* headline, 12 December)

NON-ANTAGONISTIC CONTRADICTION

'DEFEND BRITAIN – BAN THE BOMB'
Morning Star headline on the day of the 150 000-strong CND demo, 24 October

FIGHTING TALK

'The casualties will be the employers.'
Len Murray on Tebbit's new anti-union proposals
(*Financial Times*, 24 November)

TRANSFORMATIONS

'We've decided to change the way we describe our overall political outlook from socialist/feminist to feminist/socialist.'
(*The Leveller* collective, 'A new perspective', November 27-December 10)

COP OUT

'If the human dregs of the NF want to march, let them.'
(*The News Line*, 6 March)

WHERE THEY STAND

'We are not anti-police and they have to be protected.'
Eric Heffer, on the riots, at the Labour Party conference
(*The Times*, 3 October)

'Irresponsible'
Peter Hain, on the demand for Troops Out Now, LP conference
(*Morning Star*, 30 September)

'Criminal'
Spartacist Britain on the Wimpy bar bombing
(November)

'I support the Labour Party's official stand and that is as far as it goes. I do not condone acts of terrorism or violence.'
Peter Tatchell on his backing for Britain in Ireland
(*Daily Mail*, 4 December)

BACK-TRACKING

A. 'I pursue a left-wing policy in the name of socialism – which is not communism.'
Q. 'A policy which supported revolutionary movements?'
A. 'Yes, authentically revolutionary movements.'
Q. 'Was this also true for Africa?'
A. 'I do not confuse things. There are special cases.'
French Premier Francois Mitterand, interviewed at the Elysée Palace by *The Times*
(10 September)

BRILLIANT ORATORY

'I don't honestly know. I think again, until some place. . .all over the world this is being research going on, to try and find the defensive weapon. There never has been a weapon that someone hasn't come up with a defence. But it could. . . and the only defence is, well, you shoot yours and we'll shoot ours.'
Ronald Reagan, asked if a nuclear war could be confined to Europe
(*The Times*, 22 October)

WORDS, WORDS

'We do not "call" for a Soviet "invasion", though were a Soviet intervention to suppress Solidarity's pro-imperialist counter-revolutionary course, we would support this.'
Spartacist Britain on Poland
(November)

the next step

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CHRISTMAS ON THE LAURENCE SCOTT PICKET LINE

Victims of the courts - and King Arthur

the next step

Courtesy of the Sheffield and Rotherham steelworkers, every striker in the nine-month long dispute at Laurence Scott and Electromotors in Manchester was presented with a Christmas turkey and toys for their children. But thanks to Judge Blackett-Ord and miners' leader Arthur Scargill the strikers' strongest weapon – the picketing and blacking of LSE's parent factory Mining Supplies in Doncaster – has been rendered ineffective. Helen Swift reports on the latest developments in this bitter struggle for jobs.

ONE WEEK before Christmas Manchester Crown Court Judge Blackett-Ord granted LSE owner Arthur Snipe an injunction barring picketing at his Doncaster base. Six LSE workers, Denis Barry, Phil Penning, Billy Parthan, Peter Rown, Frank Stubbs and Dave Hallsworth now face trial in March. Under the terms of the new Employment Act they face the possibility of surcharge for Snipe's lost production, which could run into thousands of pounds.

However, the Judge's decision was only the final blow to the 'secondary' industrial action which aimed to hit Snipe's operation where it mattered, in Doncaster, and force him to preserve 650 jobs in the now boarded-up Manchester factory. The Doncaster picket had in fact been called off a few days before the court hearing, and the blacking of Mining Supplies' products in the coal industry had virtually come to a halt. Both the picketing and the blacking had ceased to have any effect on Snipe as a result of the machinations of the trade union officials at every level in the engineering and miners' unions, before the Judge finally put the boot in.

The Doncaster Liberation Army

The recent picketing of Mining Supplies began in mid November after Snipe used helicopters to get past the picket lines in Manchester and airlift vital products out of the besieged factory. The call for a picket came from a conference on LSE called in Manchester on 14 November by the International Marxist Group in consultation with some LSE stewards. The conference provided a platform for Labour MPs such as Michael Meacher to give the flagging Tony Benn campaign a boost. And it allowed local Broad Left trade union bureaucrats like John Tocher of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and Dougie Daniels of the AUEW to cover up their record of compromise and prevarication throughout the dispute with radical rhetoric. In the event no Labour MPs, IMG activists or trade union officials showed up on the picket line. It was manned by rank and file workers, supporters of the Right to Work Campaign and members of the Revolutionary Communist Party.

The pickets braved appalling weather conditions. Driving rain, bitter winds and finally heavy snowfalls at the beginning of December decimated their ranks. The pickets gradually shrank to a few hardy stalwarts. However, the biggest problem was not the weather, but the fact that fellow trade unionists kept crossing the picket line.

It proved impossible from the start to pull out the Mining Supplies workers in sympathy with the LSE workers. Earlier victimisation had weakened union organisation at the Doncaster plant; Snipe refuses even to recognise the convenor. Fearful of their jobs, the Doncaster workers accepted the propaganda broadcast from loudspeakers and posters around the factory: the LSE strike was unofficial and they should ignore the picket. Yet Snipe could still have been brought to his knees if the pickets had succeeded in turning away vital supplies – particularly of liquid oxygen – from the factory. But, although some lorries initially respected the pickets and turned back, when the pressure increased the drivers brought their supplies through.

Most of the pickets wanted to try to deal with this through the official union channels. But RCP supporters on the picket lines knew this was useless. They pursued drivers who went into Mining Supplies back to their depots and tackled them there. They discovered that the drivers knew nothing about the LSE dispute or why the workers were picketing Mining Supplies. In some cases their officials had offered messages of support and promises of solidarity; but they had never taken the argument to the workers who had to give the solidarity practical effect. Not surprisingly, the token gestures of the officials proved meaningless when the drivers were required to put their livelihoods on the line for a cause they had not been convinced was worth fighting.

Eyes right

It was the same with the decision of many sections of the miners' union all around the North Midlands to black Mining Supplies' products. The Brodsworth colliery near Doncaster, one of the largest in Europe, is a good example. The Brodsworth NUM leadership was one of the first to decide to boycott Snipe, and it generously offered the pickets its hostel and canteen facilities. But from the start the LSE workers noticed, in the way the miners in the canteen avoided meeting their eyes, a certain lack of conviction in the struggle at a rank and file level.

As with the drivers, the solidarity was all among the officials. The argument about why the miners should support the LSE workers, when they had been deserted by their own unions, had not been won among the ordinary miners. Thus, when they were threatened with lay-offs as a result of the shortage of machinery and spare parts provided by Mining Supplies, their support crumbled. 'Why should we risk our jobs, when the engineers won't even come out and support their own?', said one miner.

The bureaucratic methods of the union officials weakened the LSE struggle, both among the Manchester workforce, and in terms of winning wider support. The radical left groups sycophantically tailed after the Broad Left officials and backed up their tactics. It was left to the RCP to push the arguments necessary to fight a determined employer like Snipe and to broaden the support for the struggle among rank and file workers. The dangers of the strategy of trying to work through the official channels are nowhere more apparent than in the role Arthur Scargill has played in the LSE dispute.

Scargill's betrayal

Scargill had been tentatively criticised in the radical left press for his failure to mobilise the full weight of his Yorkshire miners behind the LSE workers. However, what Scargill has done is in fact much worse than what he has failed to do. Scargill's predecessor as president of the NUM, Joe Gormley responded to a request from the AUEW/Confed top brass by instructing all pits that blacking of Mining Supplies' products should stop because the LSE action was unofficial. Scargill modified this directive in early December to insist that only those lorries that had actually been seen crossing a picket line should be blacked, and that all other Mining Supplies' products should be used. In other words, he restricted the blacking to a small proportion of Snipe's products in a way which rendered it ineffectual and impossible to operate.

Scargill's directive coincided with the growing threat of lay-offs; it brought the blacking to an end around the same time the pickets were finally called off. It was a cynical betrayal of the LSE workers at a time when he feared to antagonise the big barons of the TUC and prejudice his campaign for power in the NUM. Yet the left's adulation of Scargill carries on unbounded. Only weeks after sending him an 'open letter' pleading for support for the LSE struggle, *Socialist Worker* reported his election victory in glowing terms without even a mention of LSE and his scabbing role (16 December).

Who needs a symbol?

Left-wing Labour MPs and the radical left camp followers are all agreed that the LSE struggle is a magnificent 'symbol of resistance' to the employers' attack on jobs. But the LSE workers are not much interested in being a symbol – they want their jobs back. Unfortunately the leadership of the strike is as far away from a strategy that could save all the jobs today as it was when the occupation began last April. This is how the Broad Left officials presented the LSE workers' case to the National Committee of the AUEW in December in a final appeal for the strike to be given official recognition:

> 'In spite of the hard-line position taken by Mr Snipe we feel he does want to re-open the Manchester factory and that the previous arguments for this by the stewards still apply. We feel sure a favourable decision by the National Committee to reinstate dispute benefit and official support could ensure a re-opening of talks to ensure the following three points are inserted in any agreement:
> 1 No enforced redundancies (with now 230 left in dispute this should not be hard to achieve)
> 2 Negotiations to be held on contracts and terms (as Mr Snipe has assured redundancy pay is not a problem)
> 3 A commitment to keeping LSE open for longer than three months, rather than the trial period stipulated in the memorandum.'

This cringing appeal sums up the approach followed by the Broad Left officials (who directly influence the convenor and the shop stewards) throughout the dispute. The bureaucrats constantly tried to justify saving jobs by the profitability of the company, not the needs of workers; they constantly approved voluntary redundancies, while baulking at closure or arbitrary dismissal. No wonder 'Mr Snipe' has retained the whip hand. And no wonder the AUEW felt free to reject the appeal. The strikers fight on alone.

To carry on the fight, and particularly to defend the six militants who face trial soon, the LSE workers more than ever need to reject the bureaucrats' arguments. They need to put to the fore their needs as workers and stop trying to solve 'Mr Snipe's' problems for him. The LSE workers have shown great courage and determination through a long and difficult struggle. But their leaders' politics have proven a symbol of how not to win. On the other hand, the politics of the RCP supporters have, throughout the struggle, indicated a consistent way forward in the fight for jobs.

To see the consequences of the left's 'symbols' the LSE workers only have to look across Manchester to Gardner's engineering works – a great symbol, indeed a symbol of victory in 1980. There, officials represented the acceptance of voluntary redundancies instead of compulsory redundancies as a triumph; and the radical left applauded lustily. In the past 12 months the workforce has shrunk from 2300 to 1850; now the bosses want 450 more redundancies – some of them enforced. When asked for his comment, Communist Party convenor Tom Macafee 'agreed that the market was depressed' (*Financial Times*, 11 December).

1981 Survey

In 1981 British workers backed down from Thatcher while French workers went on the attack against Mitterand. Workers in the Soviet Union had challenged the bureaucrats on a wider scale than for many years; in Poland they have had to send in the tanks in a desperate attempt to retain control. In the USA Reagan still has the labour movement under his thumb, which is more than he can claim for Central America where liberation movements battle on, at enormous cost, against imperialist domination. In the Middle East too the Western powers have yet to impose a final solution on the masses of the region. Our survey of 1981 includes a review of the activities of the RCP last year and concludes with a look at the state of disarray of the left in Britain.

The year of the trade unions in retreat

Employers on the attack

DESPITE A RELENTLESS onslaught on working class living standards over the past two years, the Tory Government has not yet succeeded in solving the problems facing the capitalist class. Early in 1981 *The Economist* lamented that 'for those who hung on to their jobs, 1980 was a fat year – too fat'. The ruling class has carried through its solutions – more unemployment, more wage reductions, more cuts – with devastating effect. By December the *Financial Times* could boast that the 'shake-out' would have 'far-reaching effects on Britain's industrial structure'. Manufacturing industry was particularly hard hit: crisis measures in the motor industry, engineering, docks, textiles and construction put hundreds of thousands of workers on the dole.

Mass unemployment and the general insecurity generated by the recession created a climate in which employers felt confident they could take on their workforce and win. The capitalist class has moved forward on several fronts. Employers have held wage rises down below the rate of inflation; some have even got away with cuts in money wages. They have reorganised work practices, weakened shopfloor organisation and sometimes eliminated workplace union organisation altogether. Whole sections of industry have simply been closed down.

Closures have generally not been actively opposed by workers. Where opposition emerged – at Staffa Products, Laurence Scott and Electromotors or Lee Jeans – the workers fought alone, with little official backing. Even the well-organised Talbot Linwood factory in Scotland gave in to closure without a fight. In September London dockers rejected strike action over the closure of the Royal Docks. The announcement of the closure of naval dockyards in Portsmouth and the Medway Towns was met with bitterness and resentment but no concerted action.

Take it or leave it

Fear of unemployment has given employers a free hand to force down wages. The state led the way with its four per cent cash limit on the public sector. The engineering employers got away with a five per cent wage settlement. Some employers went even further: more than 1000 workers at Pan Am were forced to accept a 10 per cent wage reduction and a wage freeze for 1982. At British Caledonian a 'voluntary' wage freeze was accepted and several thousand workers had to forego two previously agreed four per cent cost of living increases. At Hoover, management at first proposed a 10 per cent wage cut and then graciously offered to negotiate this 'offer' together with a reconstruction plan involving 2000 redundancies. All in all about 300 000 workers were forced to accept a wage freeze in 1981.

Management by ultimatum was not confined to the wages front. Press baron Rupert Murdoch suspended the entire *Sunday Times* staff because of a dispute with one print chapel. Other employers used the threat of a lockout to get their way. 'Accept our terms or we'll shut down' was a threat which many workers felt powerless to resist. At the Barker and Dobson sweet factory in Liverpool workers were asked to choose between a 90-day notice of closure or new working arrangements, including a reduced lunch break and continuous production. Rolls Royce has introduced 'Japanese style' quality circles – a management device for boosting productivity. Tea breaks, lunch breaks, rest-time, long-established working practices and arrangements mutually agreed between shop stewards and foremen have all been scrapped. And management has taken advantage of its position of strength to get rid of some militant shop stewards for good. Several leading 'troublemakers' have been isolated and successfully victimised. Mike Cooley at Lucas, Frank Curtiss at Evershed and Vignoles and Conway Xavier at Great Ormond Street Hospital are the most widely-known examples.

New industrial relations

The employers' offensive has drastically weakened shopfloor organisation. Shop stewards and combine committees have proved ineffectual in defending jobs, wages and conditions. In the motor industry shop stewards' committees are now often ignored by employers. The well-known Lucas Combine Committee has virtually collapsed. When workers at two Lucas factories in Birmingham went on strike in August against the introduction of new technology without extra payment, their picket lines were broken first by EETPU and then by AUEW-TASS members.

The employers have not confined their attack to shopfloor organisation: traditional forms of national bargaining have also come under pressure. The Government unilaterally abandoned the principle of establishing pay levels in the civil service by 'comparability' with workers outside the public sector. In September the British Steel Corporation announced that there would be no national wages award in 1982. By November the craft unions had agreed to suspend national negotiations in the steel industry and accept the Corporation's offer of decentralised, local bargaining.

In newly-established plants, management often dictates procedure from scratch. Unions have been forced to accept continuous production, 'flexible' working and punitive productivity deals. In some new plants unions have been kept out altogether. The new Marconi Space and Defence Systems factory in the Wirral has set up a non-union staff council to 'participate' in discussions on pay and conditions.

The Tories and the TUC

The Tory Government directs the employers' offensive. The state has used its power to inflict the maximum damage in the working class. As a major employer, the Government has pushed forward to curb the living standards of its own employees. The Tories have shown considerable skill in their approach to industrial disputes. In February a potentially disruptive miners' strike was averted when Margaret Thatcher announced the postponement of the pit closure programme. Thatcher did not want to fight the strongest section of the working class.

The Government has avoided the big battalions of the labour movement in favour of picking off weaker sections with the aim of teaching the whole working class a lesson. Thus the ambulance workers were crushed with the help of a well-orchestrated media campaign after a month-long dispute. But the biggest success of the Government was its defeat of the civil servants. The Government never wavered in its determination to smash the civil servants and show the rest of the public sector that the Tories will not be intimidated by industrial action.

The defeat of the civil servants gave the Government the confidence to impose its four per cent pay limit. This public sector pay policy has in turn strongly influenced settlements in private industry.

In November the Government announced more legal curbs on the trade unions. Employment Minister Norman Tebbit's proposals are designed to limit the effectiveness of trade unions without undermining the influence of the central union bureaucracy. The details of the proposed legislation are not very important. After all, the Tories' earlier anti-union law, the 1980 Employment Act, has scarcely been used. At present the Government does not need the courts to keep the unions in check. The aim of this new programme is to legitimise anti-union propaganda and to prepare now for the battles of the future.

Bureaucratic paralysis

The labour bureaucracy is in full retreat. In September the TUC leadership admitted that union membership had declined by 571 095 in the previous 12 months. These figures underestimate the real drop in union membership. The TGWU alone has lost more than 500 000 members during the last two years. The TUC's falling membership reflects its inability to look after its members' interests. Workers in struggle have found it virtually impossible to get official backing. Women workers who occupied the Lee Jeans factory in Greenock, Scotland had to wait more than six months before their union made the strike official. Workers who occupied Laurence Scott had their strike pay cut off by the AUEW at a crucial stage in the struggle. The fight against redundancies at Ansell's brewery, Birmingham was defeated in June because the TGWU withdrew official backing and negotiated a sell-out.

Even when disputes had official backing the labour bureaucrats spent more time policing the rank and file than fighting the employers. In the middle of the ambulance workers' dispute, NUPE insisted on its members providing emergency cover – thus reducing the impact of the action. At BL the unions used every opportunity to limit the scope of the November 'tea break' strike. The final deal cooked up by the union officials and BL meant accepting substantial reductions in rest-time and even worse conditions for night-shift workers.

The labour bureaucracy has been most prepared to fight when its own position was under threat. The union leaders in the civil service had no choice but to resist the Government's attacks. Not only did the Government want to drive down wages, but it was also bent on scrapping the Pay Research Unit, the traditional method of pay bargaining in the civil service. The series of official one-day strikes and selective action showed the outrage of the union leaders and their concern to retrieve the traditional forms of bargaining.

However, the civil service union leaders remained committed to restraining the militancy of their rank and file. Senior bureaucrat Tony Christopher warned the Government of the dangers of militant direct action:

> 'In some parts of the country there is a depth of feeling and militancy that I have never seen before. I am very worried that there could be some physical action. Of course, we would deplore such action by our members. We would expel them. But I do fear such action could take place. We have already had hints of it. The risk is there.' (*Daily Mirror*, 9 February 1981)

The union leaders worked overtime to limit the action to harmless selective strikes. When groups of civil servants, such as those in the Scottish dole offices and unemployment agencies, got fed up and launched a wave of unofficial strikes

continued on page 8

in Dundee, Aberdeen and the Livingstone computer centres, the bureaucrats clamped down. Full-time officials were sent in to sabotage the resistance. The ruling class noted with relief that, as far as unofficial action goes, 'the unions centrally have been able to contain it' (*Financial Times*, 26 May 1981). When it comes to a head-on conflict with the Government, the civil service union leaders would rather face defeat than risk unleashing the power of the rank and file.

The price of coal

Union leaders have tried to save their own skins by setting up common fronts with beleaguered British industrialists. Rather than rely on the mobilisation of workers, the union bureaucrats try to use their powers of persuasion over the employers. In 1981 scarcely a week went by without some joint union-management lobby of MPs, delegation abroad or representation to the Government. Close collaboration between the NUM and the National Coal Board was the keynote of the miners' dispute. When the Government announced the postponement of the pit closure programme, *The Economist* commented on the union's Ezra-Scargill united front: 'The Government has bowed down in front of the coal industry lobby. Sir Derek Ezra, chairman of the National Coal Board, is just as much a victor as Mr Mick McGahey. . .or militant Mr Arthur Scargill' (21 February 1981). In reality it wasn't class collaboration but *the strength of the miners* that forced the Government to make concessions. In industries where the rank and file was weaker, collaboration led to direct defeat. Even in the coalfields the NUM's collaborationist strategy only slowed the pace of pit closures.

On the railways the unions sought an alliance with management to press for more state investment. British Rail chief Peter Parker welcomed the unions' initiative. But at the same time Parker was ready to go on the offensive during negotiations on the annual wage award. He refused to accept an Industrial Tribunal recommendation of a 10.5 per cent wage rise approved by the unions. The unions threatened strike action for the end of August but gave in when they saw that Parker meant business. The final settlement gave the unions the 10.5 per cent – but only in exchange for productivity increases which mean more redundancies and more work.

Joint union and management initiatives work only in the interest of the bosses and the labour bureaucrats. This approach legitimises the measures that capitalists require to restore their profits and it places the future of the working class in the hands of the bosses. The union leaders may be able to strengthen their own position through collaboration with management, but only by becoming their stooges, rather than as fighting representatives of union members.

Paper tigers

The TUC leadership is reluctant to risk its resources in a fight against the employers. It has chosen a strategy of minimal action combined with rhetorical denunciations of the Government. Activities like the People's March and the Jobs Express are designed to show workers that the unions still count for something. Money spent on these public relations exercises is seen as a good investment for maintaining morale in the unions.

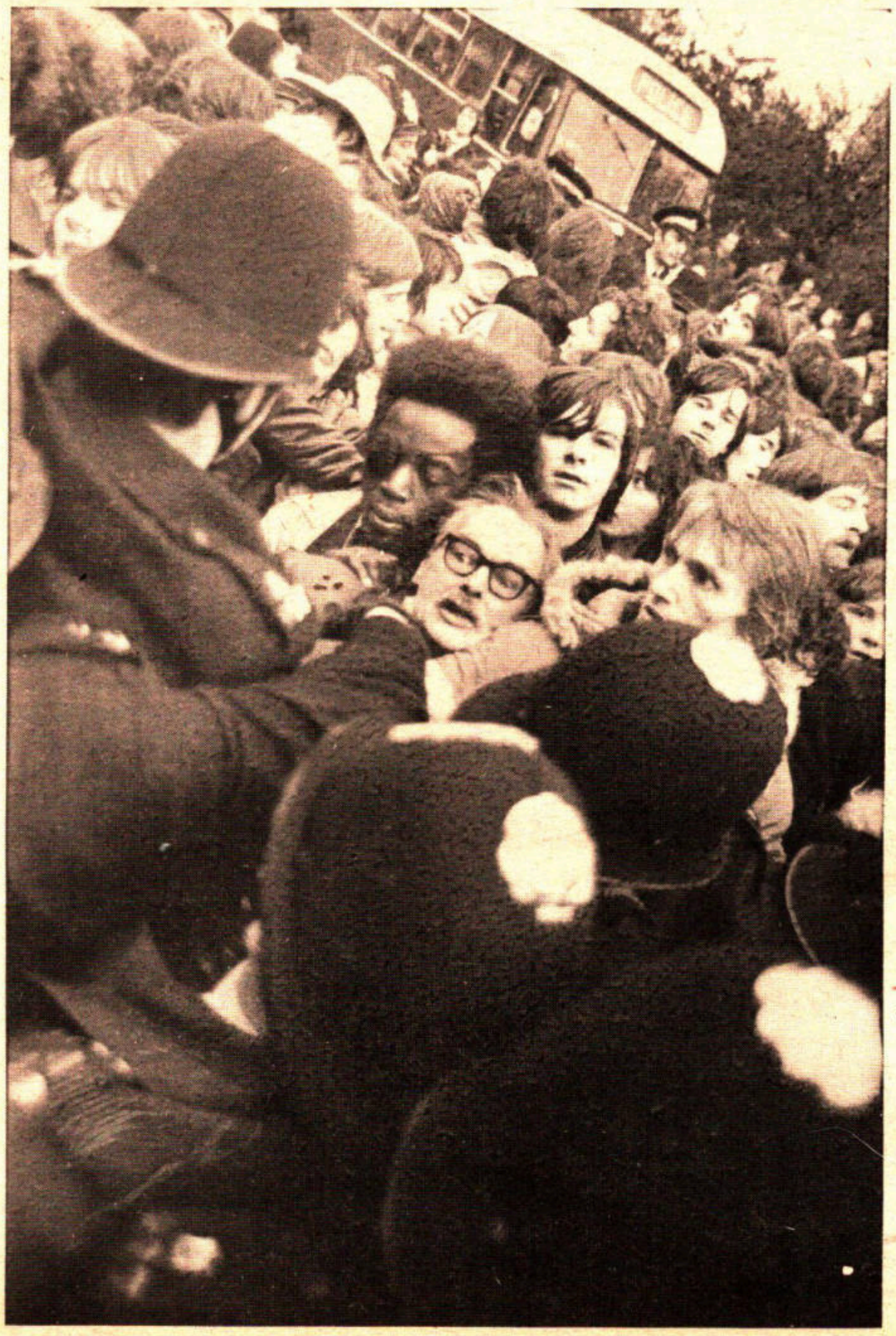
The TUC did little more than organise publicity stunts in 1981. It more or less vacated the field of industrial struggle. This craven approach is clearly seen in the public sector. When Thatcher announced the four per cent pay limit, the TUC and the public sector union leaders immediately responded with militant speeches and the threat of a united public sector industrial campaign. Within weeks the TUC climbed down and privately conceded that a united campaign in the public sector was 'unrealistic'.

When Tebbit announced his proposals for his anti-union legislation the TUC crawled. Len Murray warned that the union leaders might not be able to keep the lid on the rank and file anger:

> 'Successful actions against union funds for heavy damages could serve to weaken control from the centre. Extremists and unofficial groups might well welcome this.' (*Sunday Times*, 22 November 1981)

'An inexpensive ritual' aptly sums up TUC action.

Though the TUC has done nothing for its members it has done yeoman's service for the employers. Its class collaboration has weakened resistance in the unions; its reluctance to back workers in struggle has turned industrial action into an unrealistic proposition for thousands of workers.



David Hoffman

Barriers to workers' action

Strike statistics show a fall-off in industrial activity. During the first 10 months of 1981, 3.5 million days were lost through industrial disputes. The civil service dispute accounts for almost a quarter of the total: with the exception of 1976 it is the lowest for 14 years. However, these figures only tell half the story.

Workers have been ready to fight back. Numerous factory occupations have shown the will to resist. The strike over tea breaks at BL illustrates this trend: after several defeats, workers at Longbridge were still prepared to come out and stay out for more than four weeks. The vote to accept the compromise formula was only carried by 46 votes! Even traditionally conservative sections of the labour movement were prepared to go into action. During the civil service strike, the staff at highly secret government communications installations and Scottish Polaris nuclear submarine bases walked out. *The Times*' sombre tone reflected the concern of the bourgeoisie at this advance of trade union attitudes: 'So large a defection from duty by normally responsible public servants suggests that the habits and morality of trade unionism have now superseded any other public morality in the government of their conduct' (20 March 1981).

Divided loyalties

Time and again workers in struggle came up against the same problem: their leadership, institutions and traditions acted as obstacles to the successful realisation of their objectives. This is particularly transparent with the attitude of the central leadership of the TUC. Instead of assisting workers in struggle, it has fought to isolate disputes and bring them to a swift conclusion. The conduct of the AUEW leadership over BL, Staffa Products and Laurence Scott are illustrations of this approach and its consequences.

Unfortunately, even at the local level the struggles remained isolated. The local officials, many of them left-wing, backed the struggles in words but did little to mobilise rank and file support. Even shop stewards' committees and other representatives of the shopfloor workers proved ineffective when it came to the crunch. Workers who occupied Laurence Scott received many messages of solidarity from shop stewards' committees. But this support had little consequence.

During the picketing of the Doncaster plant of Laurence Scott it was difficult to organise blacking and to force lorries to respect the picket lines because no work had been done to mobilise rank and file miners, engineers and transport workers. Convenors approached convenors, shop stewards approached shop stewards and pledges of solidarity were passed on. But they neglected to discuss the dispute on the shopfloor and did not draw the rank and file into the struggle. As a result 'solidarity' had a bureaucratic character which could do little to overcome the isolation of Laurence Scott workers.

The class struggle in 1981 has shown that the institutions of the labour movement are ineffectual during a period of prolonged recession. When so much is at stake, even the best organised workplace is powerless to resist the barbaric forces unleashed by the capitalist crisis. When militants also face a labour bureaucracy closely allied to the employers and the state the difficulties they face become even more acute.

The collapse of industry and the general offensive against the living standards of the working class can only be halted by the united power of the working class. The official trade union movement is the institutional expression of workers isolated from each other and divided along industrial, sectional and craft lines. And yet this divided working class is united around the institutions dominated by the labour bureaucracy. These institutions are not only dominated by the labour bureaucracy, they are also instruments of collaboration with the state and the class that dominates the state.

The way to unity

The institutions of the labour movement are not independent of the capitalist class. But the problem we face is a political one, for these institutions express the politics of class collaboration. From the TUC down to local officials and shop stewards' committees, bourgeois politics influences workers in struggle. The capitalist objectives of competitiveness and profitability, productivity and viability, have been accepted as legitimate goals for workers to pursue. The realism of the employers dominates the labour movement and paralyses workers who want to fight for their own class interests, regardless of the consequences for their industry and their employer.

The example of the 1981 miners' dispute reveals the dangers facing the working class. The postponement of pit closures was justified on the grounds of the importance of coal as a source of energy for the British economy. But what happens in industries which are not important for the capitalist class? If workers base their actions on the economic arguments of the capitalists then they lose control over the destiny of the working class.

For many workers fighting for jobs or for better wages seems an unrealistic proposition today. The declining strike figures express this point of view. But industrial action is only unrealistic because the mass of the working class is wedded to the realism of the bosses. If we accept their argument that 'the money is not there', if we accept the realism of the capitalist accountant, then more jobs will go and more intolerable conditions will be imposed on us. It is their realism or ours. Their class interests or ours. A labour movement that can't fight for its independent class objectives will suffer the unrestrained brutality of its exploiters.

The potential for resistance exists inside the labour movement. But this potential will only be realised if we reject the narrow politics and institutions of the labour bureaucracy. The precondition for a successful fightback is to liberate our movement from the policies of the labour bureaucracy. The alternatives are straightforward: isolate the influence of the labour bureaucracy or they will isolate every group of workers that goes into action.

Frank Richards

WESTERN EUROPE

Workers against Mitterand

Recession in Western Europe has forced the capitalist class on to the offensive. In Spain, Belgium and Greece traditional centre parties are crumbling under pressure for more aggressive anti-working class politics. The labour bureaucracy has also shifted to the right. During 1981 the union bureaucrats of virtually every European country have collaborated with the employers and the state to rescue the capitalist system. In Greece and France they have been rewarded for their efforts and social democratic parties have been placed in government. In this survey we concentrate on developments in France where the labour bureaucracy stands ready to throw back the first wave in the new phase of the class struggle.

Class struggles in France

IN MAY the European left greeted Mitterand's election victory as a major step forward for the working class. Seven months later the reality of life under socialist rule is being brought home to French workers. Having rid themselves of Giscard, they are saddled with another government that is doing its best to make workers pay the price for the capitalist crisis.

Three months after it fulfilled its election promise of a 10 per cent rise in the minimum wage, the Government clawed back the money out of workers' pockets by raising taxes on alcohol, tobacco and petrol. And in November it increased workers' contributions to national insurance and imposed a tax on unemployment benefits.

While bad enough for the workers, this isn't good enough for the bosses. The French employers' federations and right-wing politicians are watching the new government with growing impatience. As unemployment soared past the two million mark, inflation reached 14 per cent, investment continued to decline and bankruptcies multiplied. Right-wing opposition to Mitterand and his crew grew increasingly vociferous. For the bosses the honeymoon with Mitterand is drawing to a close – they want to see the goods. The tenuous relationship between the socialist Government and the French bourgeoisie was best illustrated by the recent conflict between the Minister of the Interior, Gaston Defferre, and 'his' police force in Lyon. Arriving at the funeral of a policeman killed on duty, Defferre was met by a two thousand-strong police assembly who refused to give him the customary honour and accused him instead of murder.

'Tighten your belts!'

To save their necks, socialist ministers are doing the best they can to comply with the demand for wage cuts, speed-ups and redundancies in industry and for curbs on trade union rights. Talk about reflation as a solution to unemployment and industrial decline, rampant at the time of the election, has become a thing of the past. Today socialist and communist ministers talk the same language as their predecessors: 'statutory wage restraint', 'attack on inflation', 'productivity' and 'competitiveness'.

In November Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy announced that, if necessary, unemployment would be dealt with by measures 'that will obviously be stiffer, that is enforced retirement' (*The Times*, 11 November 1981). The trade union leadership backed him up. Socialist trade union federation leader Edmond Maire recently criticised the less outspoken members of the government for not being honest about the sacrifices workers will be requested to make:

> 'Some people are going to have to accept a stagnant or even falling purchasing power if employment is to be equitably shared. People are also going to have to accept more flexible working hours to provide a better service to the public in nationalised industries. At present they don't seem in a mood for this.' (*The Guardian*, 17 November 1981)

The Government's 'left alternative strategy', just like its British equivalent under the last Labour Government, boils down to this: wage restraint, cuts in social services and rationalisation programmes designed to make industry hold up to foreign competition. Its nationalisation programme, misrepresented by the radical left as a socialist policy, has the approval of such staunch representatives of the ruling class as the *Financial Times* as an 'effort to galvanise the nation's industry' (25 November 1981).

A central plank in this strategy is industrial relations reform: 'workers' participation' in industrial management. This is the aim of the Auroux Report on 'Workers' rights' recently presented by Labour Minister Jean Auroux. Its object is to establish effective institutions for class collaboration. For years Giscard tried in vain to introduce far more timid proposals to extend control over France's traditional militant rank and file. Mitterand's hope is that, coming from a socialist government and dressed up with phrases about democracy and national solidarity, Auroux's plans will be swallowed by the workers. Already both socialist and communist union bureaucrats have thrown their weight behind him. Faced with declining membership and a growing tide of unofficial action, the bureaucrats welcome industrial relations reform as a means of extending their control over the rank and file and enhancing their own importance in French society.

A rude awakening

The working class, however, has thrown a spanner in the works. Mitterand's honeymoon with French workers has been brief. In September it was cut short by a wave of militant working class struggles which continues to gather momentum. Thousands of workers in many different industries and services have taken strike action – against speed-ups, wage cuts, redundancies and closures. While the bureaucrats hoped to contain workers' resistance to the bosses' attacks through an official campaign to reduce the working week by an hour, workers up and down the country have taken direct action in the fight to defend living standards and working conditions.

These struggles have in most cases been obstructed and vilified by the bureaucrats and their friends in the Socialist (PSF) and Communist (PCF) Parties. What really shocked them was the strike at Renault – the state-owned car firm that is supposed to be a model of socialist industrial relations. Instead of relying on their leaders Renault workers took unofficial action against speed-ups on the production line. When the bosses responded with a mass lock-out of over 4000 workers at the main Renault plant in Paris-Billancourt in mid-October, the the bureaucrats worked overtime to get them back to work.

Communist union boss Henri Krasucki saw the strike as a direct affront to his plans for 'responsible' trade unionism in nationalised industries. For months he has toured the country recommending Auroux's proposals to bosses and workers. Dialogue and participation, he told them, would be 'profitable in the general interest' (*La vie ouvriere*, October 1981). For Krasucki Renault was to be 'the model of a new type of social relations that must now be established in our national industries'. When Renault workers told him to stuff it, Krasucki got vicious.

As the strike spread to involve not only the workers locked out but also other plants (Renault Nimes was occupied on 28 October), the communist union federation stepped up its efforts to force a return to work. Leaflets denouncing the strikers were put out – calling the strike the 'action of irresponsible adventurist minority groups who misuse industrial action in order to sabotage the process of social change' (*Informations ouvrieres*, 14 November 1981).

The bureaucrats used openly racist appeals to divide the mass of workers from the hard core of strikers. The workforce in the plant in which the strike started was composed mainly of North African and Jugoslav workers. On 5 November the bureaucrats managed to force a return to work which took place amid violent clashes between predominantly unskilled (and black) strikers and skilled workers. But the strength of working class anger against the bosses' attacks at Renault ensured that the bureaucrats' victory was only a temporary one. Within a matter of days workers at Billancourt were out on strike again.

Workers' unity

The Renault dispute is in many ways typical of the pattern of class struggle presently unfolding in France. Most strikes have been started by low-paid unskilled workers – in many cases blacks and women – who have been treated with contempt by the unions and political parties. The struggle at Orly airport against redundancies and regroupment involves mainly low-paid catering and maintenance staff. Some of the most militant struggles are being waged by black migrant workers in the Paris region. At least a dozen small and medium sized sweatshops have been occupied in the struggle to get regular work contracts. These struggles against the Government's vicious race laws – under which at least 300 000 workers are being denied legal residence – have received no union support whatsoever.

Indeed, most of the migrant 'sans papiers' (workers without a permit) are non-unionised. Their conditions of intense exploitation and state oppression are the responsibility of the reformist and Stalinist bureaucrats who have backed state racism to the hilt. Only nine months ago the PCF was leading pogroms against migrant workers' hostels as part of its disastrous election campaign.

Breaking the chains

The current strike wave shows that it is the most oppressed sections of the French working class that are presently giving the lead in breaking out of the stranglehold of bureaucratic class collaboration. It has also shown that as the attacks on the class as a whole intensify, the potential exists to break down racial and sexual divisions. Thousands of Renault workers joined the struggle started by the black workers.

Militant workers are also beginning to articulate their hatred for the bureaucrats both in word and deed. At Renault Stalinist officials were beaten up by striking workers. And at a mass meeting during the railworkers' strike in Paris in November, an old railwayman recalled the Stalinists' betrayal of the working class at the end of the Second World War when the official PCF slogan was 'tighten your belts'. He condemned the PCF Transport Minister Maurice Fiterman to thunderous applause from a railwaymen's mass meeting:

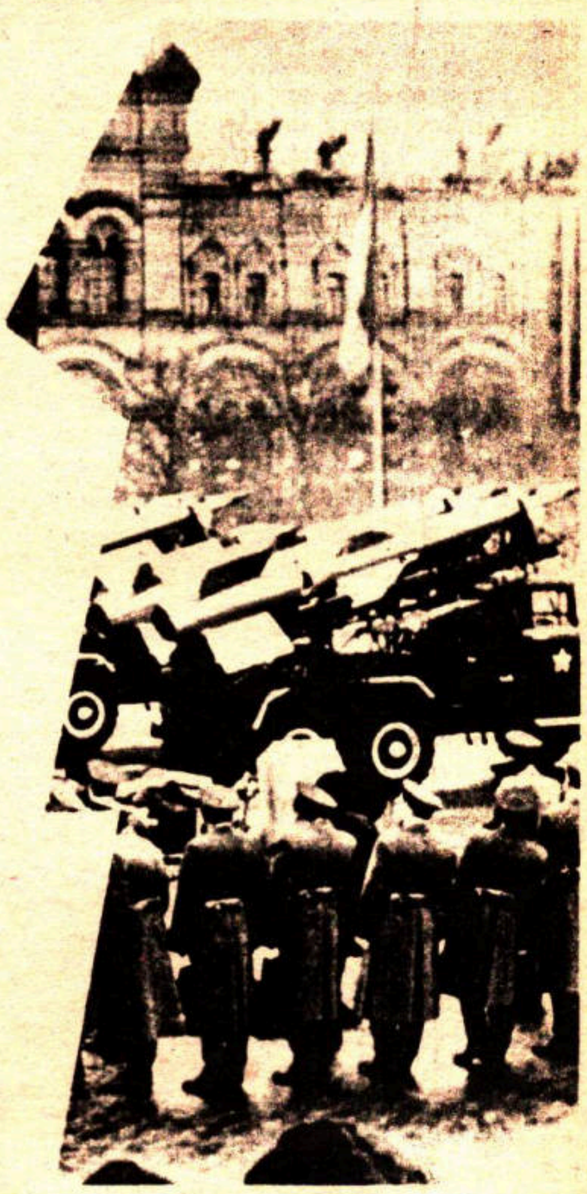
> 'If Fiterman believes he can make us "tighten your belts" again, he's got a rude awakening coming. He must come out straight and tell us whose side he is on. And he'd better remember that he only became Minister because *we* chased Giscard.' (*Informations ouvrieres*, 14 November 1981)

The urgent task for French workers and revolutionaries is to consolidate this movement towards class unity against the bosses and the reformists that is emerging among French workers. To achieve this a number of political problems will have to be pushed to the fore.

First, the spontaneous unity of black and white workers at Renault can only be shortlived and without substance until white workers join in the fight against racist pass laws and discrimination in the unions and workplaces. French revolutionaries must make this struggle into a priority for active workers.

Second, workers' contempt for the class collaboration of their socialist and Stalinist leaders must be translated into a conscious rejection of their political programme. That means fighting French nationalism, rejecting the reformists' plans to involve workers in discussions about how to increase profitability and competitiveness, and spreading the lesson that with friends like Mitterand and Marchais – who needs enemies?

Sabena Norton



The year the Soviet bloc began to break up

AT THE END of 1981 Poland plunged into chaos. Announcing the imposition of martial law on 13 December General Jaruzelski declared grimly that 'our country is on the edge of the abyss'. The upheaval in Poland is only the most dramatic expression of the political crisis that afflicts the entire Soviet bloc. From Romania to the Caucusus, as well as in Poland, workers have moved into action against the bureaucracy.

The Polish 'disease' in Russia

Political unrest in the Soviet Union in 1981 was more widespread than in any other year in the post-war period. Riots and strikes in Estonia challenged the authorities throughout the year. In October workers in Ordzhonikidze, a regional capital in the North Caucasus, fought pitched battles with police and the army and besieged the local Communist Party headquarters in protest against racist violence, police brutality and corruption. Even when tanks and tear gas were used against them, the demonstrators continued to pelt the police with bricks. Rioting was followed by transport strikes throughout the region.

The bureaucracy is concerned about the influence of the Polish events, particularly on the working class of the Ukraine, the Baltic states and the Russian Republics. It has tried to prevent the 'Polish disease' from spreading by conceding to workers' demands. Two strikes in Kiev over the summer were even led by official union and Party activists. In one factory workers objected to new work norms, in another they protested about the disruption of the local water supply. Instead of the usual repression, the authorities responded by improving conditions to avoid further unrest. In October Soviet Politbureau member Constantin Tchernenko aimed to forestall the emergence of Solidarity-style independent unions by insisting that the official unions do more to defend the rights of workers.

The bureaucracy is worried that deepening economic crisis and major shortages are worse than in Poland. During the whole month of November no butter could be bought in Moscow. The provincial towns fare even worse: fruit, vegetables, dairy products and meat are constantly in short supply.

Consumer goods of all sorts are difficult to come by. The extent of this problem was illustrated by an investigative journalist working for *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. He was sent on an assignment to Krasnodar (a city of over half a million people) with instructions to bring with him no toothbrush, soap, razor blades, shaving cream, underclothes, socks or writing materials, but to buy them on arrival in the city. After a full day in Krasnodar he couldn't find any of the items. In the end he had to purchase these basic commodities on the local black market.

The Soviet bureaucracy claims to be taking a hard line on black marketeers. The press is full of exposés of economic saboteurs, speculators and hoarders. But public relations exercises will do little to satisfy the public outcry for food and consumer durables.

The chaotic economy

Growing political instability is a result of the inability of the Soviet system to provide for the needs of its people. The Soviet economy declined steadily through 1981. According to official statistics, both industrial output and labour productivity fell well below growth targets for the year. The real situation is even worse as the published figures make insufficient statistical adjustments for price increases.

A better indicator of the state of the Soviet economy is the actual volume of production. If we examine increases in physical units for individual industries we find a small or negative increase. Thus, output of the following products has actually declined: coal, rolled steel, cars, lorries, timber, footwear and meat.

The crisis of the Soviet economy is above all due to the inability of the bureaucracy to plan the allocation, production and distribution of society's resources. Plans are drawn up and targets are proclaimed. But in the absence of workers' democracy these plans are simply bureaucratic decrees. Individual enterprises have no incentive to raise productivity – they just have to meet the targets set by the centre. Managers try to hoard as many resources and workers as possible, and give up as little as they can get away with to meet the requirements of the plan.

In a capitalist economy productivity increases benefit the individual capitalist. But in the Soviet Union productivity increases may mean higher targets and norms and a decrease in the allocation of resources for the enterprise concerned. Soviet managers often feel that the raising of output and the rationalisation of production techniques is actually against their interests.

A nation of gardeners

In the Soviet economy output figures are padded, shoddy goods are produced and resources wasted. In July *Partinaya Zhizn* reported one example of the Soviet economy in action. In February the Kalyona Hydroelectric Station was supposed to go into operation. However, upon inspection it was discovered that the Station had been turned over for use in an unfinished state to meet planning targets. In addition, the generator had major design faults. As a result the plant operated for 10 days at 10 per cent capacity. It was then shut down for four months so that construction could be completed.

Workers have no incentive to work. What's the use of higher wages if most essential goods are not available in the shops? Many large enterprises try to motivate their workers by offering their employees an allotment on which to grow food. It is estimated that in Leningrad alone there are more than 300 000 plot holders. Not surprisingly workers put little effort into their work and save their energy for their gardens.

The proliferation of city allotments is the result of the crisis of Soviet agriculture. Food shortages are a permanent feature of Soviet life, so people try to grow their own food. There are 33 million private plots in the Soviet Union – one for every two Soviet households! In 1981 the food situation deteriorated further. For example, according to the plan, collective and state farms were supposed to have sold 7.7 million tons of vegetables to the state; but by mid-August less than one million tons of produce had arrived at the marketing agencies.

Stagnation in agricultural output is above all due to the inability of Soviet industry to provide the inputs necessary for rational farming. Bad planning and transport and the lack of an efficient system of distribution and storage make things even worse. To prevent famine the Soviet Union has to rely on large imports of grain from the West.

Structural problems

The Soviet Union has come to rely on Western technology to run critical areas of its industry. But it cannot simply increase its technology imports without increasing its debts and its reliance on the capitalist world. The current five-year plan aims to limit imports of Western goods to an annual increase of 4.1 per

cent. Necessity has forced a revision of this figure: in 1981 exports to the Soviet Union went up by 27 per cent.

During the past year government experts have attempted to introduce reforms to stimulate production. There has been considerable discussion about restoring elements of the market mechanism and realigning prices with the real value of goods. But these reforms cannot be effective if they are introduced piecemeal. And any major reforms would lead to the restoration of capitalism – something that the bureaucracy is not prepared to accept.

The attempt to link enterprise management bonuses to the fulfilment of delivery contracts provides a good illustration of the impossibility of reforming the Soviet system. Enterprises are notorious for meeting the physical requirements of targets rather than producing what industry requires. Last summer the bureaucracy tried to overcome the problem of enterprises not meeting delivery deadlines by decreeing that bonuses would be paid to enterprises that came up with the goods on time. In response to the decree, managers at the Stankolit factory in Moscow started paying more attention to delivery contracts. This had a positive effect: managers stopped worrying about the total tonnage of the castings the factory produced and started making more of the lightweight castings that many of its customer plants wanted. However, the Stankolit factory was promptly penalised by the Machine Tool Ministry for falling short on the tonnage target. Deputy Minister G N Fedorovski chastised the Stankolit managers, explaining that 'you can't get by without tons in our business. They figure in the plan. Resources are allocated with them. And everyone's used to them'.

Reforms implemented in one enterprise immediately run into external constraints. Central targets are measured according to quantitative not qualitative criteria. And there are other obstacles. Deliveries of raw materials, machine tools and other inputs are unpredictable. Transport is another problem. Bottlenecks in distribution wreak havoc with plant level decisions. According to a recent study, underinvestment in roads in the Russian Republics has resulted in an average speed for lorries of 30kph.

Things falling apart

The prospects for the Soviet economy are not good. Western technology, bought with gold, oil and other natural resources, has so far prevented the collapse of industry. But without a major reorganisation things can only get worse. The restructuring of the economy, however, cannot be achieved within the present relations of production. And the Soviet bureaucracy will fight tooth and nail to defend the existing system.

The bureaucracy is fighting a losing battle. Because it cannot raise living standards it faces the prospect of growing instability. Chronic labour shortages give the working class some leverage against the bureaucrats. Despite widespread repression, workers are well placed to defend their interests. An upsurge in workers' struggle is on the agenda for 1982.

The Soviet bureaucracy also faces pressure from national minorities. Throughout the Soviet Union movements for national independence are pulling the country apart. From the Baltic Republics to Central Asia resistance to the Great Russian chauvinism of the Soviet bureaucracy is on the increase. At a time when the economy is disintegrating, national struggles are an important threat to the integrity of the Soviet Union.

The most immediate threat to the Soviet bureaucracy comes from Eastern Europe. The bureaucracy fears the consequences of unrest in the Eastern bloc for its internal authority, as well as the difficulties it will encounter in maintaining control over its satellites. While Poland poses the greatest problems, the economic crisis spares none of the Warsaw Pact countries. Romania faces a major economic crisis and virtual famine. Along with Czechoslovakia it has been forced to introduce a system of informal rationing. The wave of strikes in Romania's largest coal field in the Jiul Valley in mid-October shows the shape of things to come in 1982.

1981 marks an important turning point for the opposition movement in Eastern Europe. Until recently it was dominated by isolated groups of intellectuals and professionals. The events in Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union have shown that finally the oppressed workers of the region have moved into battle.

POLAND

The year the army moved in

THE DECEMBER COUP was precipitated by the inability of the bureaucracy to rule Poland. The working class was able to use its strength to prevent the functioning of the Polish state throughout 1981, but it could not go forward to smash the bureaucracy and take power in its own hands. The coup marks a setback for the Polish working class which, however, remains undefeated.

Solidarity's dead end

As far back as October 1980 *the next step* warned that the trade unionist politics of Solidarity represented a dead end for Polish workers. The leaders of Solidarity declared that they weren't interested in politics. In the summer of 1980 Lech Walesa said: 'I am a trade unionist, politics do not interest me'. This reformist perspective held workers back and prevented the emergence of independent working class politics.

We noted that trade unionism makes no sense in Poland. Many workers discovered that higher wages didn't stock the shelves of the food shops and began to look for political solutions. Even Solidarity intellectual Jacek Kuron, who in 1980 was the leading proponent of narrow trade unionism, was forced to retreat:

'We would be a sailors' trade union on a sinking ship, demanding wage increases rather than boarding up the holes that are making the ship sink. It is the overall situation of the state that forces us to undertake actions contrary to the normal functions of a trade union.' (*Sztandar Mlodych*, October 1981)

By the summer of 1981 workers had had enough of Solidarity's weak-kneed trade unionism. At its September/October conference, Walesa was barely able to keep control over rank and file militants. Throughout the conference workers denounced the political system of bureaucratic rule.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a distinctive proletarian perspective, the right-wing nationalists began to make the running. The reactionary KPN was not reluctant to denounce the Stalinist regime. As a result, right-wing nationalists began to build up considerable following among the militants.

In the autumn Solidarity began to disintegrate. A social democratic club was established to counter the influence of the KPN. At the local level Solidarity branches began to assume the form of political parties demanding political change. Splinter parties began to emerge throughout Poland. Most discussion and debate was focused on the coming local elections in February 1982. The main demand that emerged was for guarantees that the elections would be free and open.

The radicalisation of the Solidarity rank and file coincided with the decline of its leadership. The collapse of the Polish economy forced the Solidarity leaders to compromise further. On 29 October Solidarity made a dramatic appeal to workers to end wildcat strikes in the interest of the national economy. On 4 November Solidarity agreed to a three-month 'social truce' after a top level meeting of the union (Walesa), the Church (Archbishop Glemp) and the state (General Jaruzelski).

This social truce could not work. The harsh economic climate provoked the further polarisation of Polish society. Workers fought back against growing state repression. During a meeting of the national commission of Solidarity, held in the Gdansk shipyards hours before the military coup, Walesa finally lost control. The militants led by Jan Rulewski and Karol Modzelewski forced the commission to adopt far-reaching proposals – including the holding of a referendum on 15 January 1982 to decide on how Poland should be ruled. But it was too little too late. As delegates voted to launch a general strike, the bureaucracy's troops had already taken over Gdansk. Solidarity became a victim of its own moderation.

Behind the coup

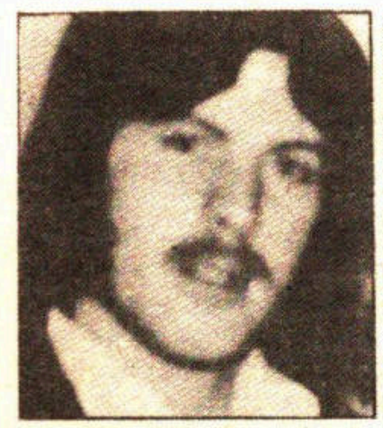
The Polish bureaucracy was reluctant to launch its offensive. Throughout 1981 it sought to avoid confrontation. Its strategy was to rely on the Church and the Solidarity leadership to control the mass movement. In early November, out of desperation it even toyed with the idea of establishing a 'front of national understanding' with representatives of the Church and Solidarity. But this move too came too late to avert a major confrontation between the bureaucracy and the working class.

Neither the Church nor Solidarity could retain control over the mass movement. The moderate oppositionists had outlived their usefulness. Once it became clear that the mass movement was out of control, the bureaucracy had no choice but to act.

Jaruzelski's Military Committee of National Salvation cannot solve the problems of the bureaucracy. Whatever happens in the next few months Poland will never be the same again. The last two years contain important lessons for Polish workers. The Church and Solidarity are no friends of the working class. Resistance which stops short of challenging the power of the bureaucracy can make no lasting gains for Polish workers. A political programme based on the perspective of destroying the bureaucracy and its state is the only foundation on which the future victory of the Polish workers will be built.

Pat Roberts

The year of the hunger strikes



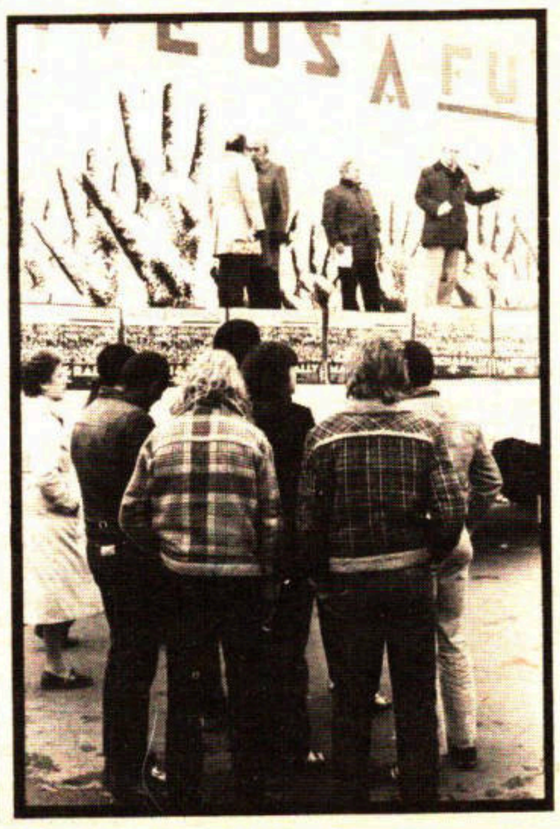
The year of the riots

The year of the fight for jobs

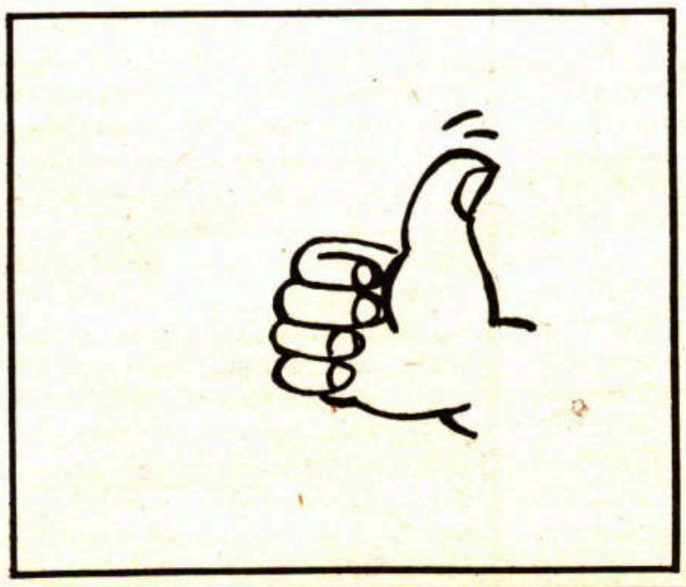
Building the PARTY

- The Smash the PTA Campaign labour movement delegation on the Derry Day of Action in April (far left).
- The Workers March for Irish Freedom (near left) on its 3-day march to the TUC at Blackpool in September.
- Pickets of the TUC headquarters at Congress House (below) drew attention to its complicity in the deaths of the hunger strikers.

- The New Cross Massacre in January (far left) was only the most extreme of many cases of racist violence and arson encountered by Workers Against Racism in 1981.
- During the July riots a WAR conference in London voted unanimously (near left) on a resolution pledging to take WAR nationwide.
- The fascist British Movement (below) didn't do much marching last year — but racist violence continued just the same.
- With the support of WAR, Tajinder Jit Singh (right) successfully fought off deportation in 1981; thousands didn't.



- The Smash the PTA Campaign linked the fight for jobs with the fight for Irish freedom, winning the support of many People's Marchers (far left) and the hostility of the TUC.
- RCP supporters took the lead in the Laurence Scott pickets, this time at the AUEW headquarters.
- 'Give us a future' said the TUC hacks; 'Give them the sack' we said, and many unemployed people agreed.



The year of Ronald Reagan

Combate

REAGAN'S November 1980 election victory was widely hailed as an opportunity for fundamental capitalist renewal in the United States. Fourteen months later, however, his administration was in a mess. National Security Adviser Richard Allen was forced to resign for accepting bribes from Japanese journalists, Secretary of State Alexander Haig proved a continual source of friction, and Budget Director David Stockman twice offered his resignation after calling for U-turns in economic policy.

Stockman, previously regarded as the main inspiration behind 'Reaganomics', had a grievance alright. By December 1981 unemployment was exactly where it was when Reagan took over from Carter – 8.4 per cent, or nine million workers, and rising. Inflation hadn't dropped below 10 per cent and was on its way up. The Dow Jones index of industrial share prices had fallen from more than 1000 in January to around the 800 mark. Bankruptcies were 40 per cent up on 1980's record levels, as companies wrestled with interest rates of 15 per cent and higher. And, most damning of all – since balancing the books was always considered the centrepiece of Reagan's doctrine – the USA's budget deficit for 1981-2 looked like rising to anything between $80 billion and $100 billion. This was largely the result of Washington's decision to make up in military hardware (cruise, Pershing and MX missiles, the Rapid Deployment Force) what it lacks in economic clout.

Reagan's bourgeois critics didn't disagree on the need for America to rearm rapidly. Nor did they differ with him on his measures to slim down welfare expenditure: they kept smiling as he lopped nearly $20 billion off food stamps, housing subsidies, grants for secondary/higher education and extended unemployment benefit, and they weren't at all upset at seeing 400 000 (about one in 10) public sector workers lose their jobs. What they were bothered about was whether Reagan's much-vaunted 30 per cent tax cuts would really put US industry back on its feet again. They were also worried whether Reagan's cuts, because of the reduced revenues they entail, would really be compatible with a balanced budget.

All the signs were that tax cuts would only produce inflation, not investment. Though Stockman & Co did not say so explicitly, that means that only higher profits will enable business to pick up once more. But higher profits mean more attacks on the American working class. They mean doing something about the fact, for instance, that labour costs on US cars are still some $1500 higher than they are on Japanese imports. That's a big job – but Reagan, unlike the dissidents in the White House, can justifiably claim to have started work on it already.

Ronald on the rampage

It wasn't just the air traffic controllers who got it in the neck last year. Section after section of the US labour movement received setbacks, as trade union membership went into steeper decline than ever and as unemployment made negotiations for higher wages almost impossible.

In steel, on the railways, everywhere the pattern is the same: cuts in money wages, intensification of labour, formal employee participation in the work of baling out bankrupt enterprises. There is another common feature: desperate attempts by union bureaucrats to sell enough workers' livelihoods down the river to be able to convince the bourgeoisie that, despite all its successes, it still has need of their services. However, ruling class attacks on the American proletariat do not stop with assaults on the labour movement. The capitalists are also working at deepening the divisions in the working class along racial and sexual lines.

On race, positive discrimination in the employment of blacks lost official support last year, while the Justice Department came out against desegregation in schools. This year America's Voting Rights Act, which gave hundreds of thousands of Southern blacks the right to vote when it was passed in 1965, is up for renewal – and it looks like being thrown off the statute books. As indigenous blacks go on bearing the brunt of manufacturing redundancies and welfare cuts, still more Latin American immigrants will be recruited to slave-labour factories in the South, there to be denied all legal, political and union rights. Meanwhile, Ku Klux Klan membership will probably go on rising, as will the incidence of racist murders – all over the USA.

Women too are under attack. America's Moral Majority is making considerable progress spreading the view that men and women should sleep separately unless they're married. Abortion rights have come under fire and the USA's substantial gay population has been singled out for harassment. Last year the District of Columbia became the twenty-fifth state to outlaw homosexual relations between consenting adults, and police harassment of gays in San Francisco, New York and elsewhere continued to mount. This year, a bill known as the Family Protection Act may well be passed: it will deny federal funds or pay to any organisation or individual going on the record as being pro-gay.

Labour on the skids

For 50 years the exploited and downtrodden of America have been held back by an alliance between the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. That alliance was smashed, however, when Carter was trounced in the elections of 1980. Now the labour bureaucrats are fighting for their very survival. Ignored by Reagan, they have placed all their hopes on the return of a 'left'-leaning, Democratic President in 1984.

This means three things. First, a new relationship with the Democrats. Lane Kirkland, president of the AFL-CIO – America's equivalent to the TUC – has done a lot here: unlike his predecessor George Meany, he has fixed things so that his organisation no longer takes a formally neutral line on the USA's two big parties, but comes out firmly against the Republicans.

The biggest unions have, for instance, pledged an unprecedented $2m to back Democratic candidates in the elections due to be held over the next three years. In return, however, the AFL-CIO has demanded a greater say in the nomination and selection of such candidates, and has set about getting it through stronger representation on the Democratic Party's ruling National Committee.

Second, the labour bureaucracy has begun to bring Democratic Party ideology more into line with workers' feelings – to make it a real alternative to Reagan's politics (Reagan won a lot of votes from blue collar workers in November 1980). The outline of its overhauled programme was made clear at the AFL-CIO national conference three months ago. It includes:

- restoration of some of the job creation schemes cut by Reagan
- a Reconstruction Finance Corporation to offer loans to industry
- temporary import controls
- limited personal tax cuts
- reduced taxes on investment.

(*New York Times*, 17 November 1981)

This amounts to little more than a half-century-too-late revamp of the old New Deal platform of Franklin D Roosevelt. Like the New Deal, its consequences will be entirely reactionary. The AFL-CIO conference made great play of not inviting Reagan to its proceedings and cheered Edward Kennedy when he denounced the man in the White House as 'the most anti-union President in modern history'. But Democrat stalwart Walter Mondale had previously made it clear what a different administration would entail. Speaking to the 500 000-strong demonstration that was held against the Reagan regime in Washington in September, he remarked:

> 'Sacrifice. . .will be needed. We must contain federal spending, and reduce it until we eliminate federal deficits. . .We must care for our defence needs. And we believe in free enterprise: we want it to work.' (quoted in *The Guardian* (US), 30 September)

The third offensive launched by the AFL-CIO is to give it and its Democrat allies a more solid organisational base in the working class. This was the aim of the Solidarity Day demonstration; it is also why the AFL-CIO has begun a number of expansion drives. Last year it re-admitted the United Auto Workers Union, and 1982 may see the United Mineworkers Union and the Teamsters back in. It has tightened up its own apparatus and made regional conferences a regular fixture as a means of sampling – and controlling – grassroots feeling. And it has embarked on major efforts to organise non-union cities such as Houston, Texas.

Not a Labour Party!

The union leaders are working overtime to save their skins. But the worst part of it is that the lower echelons of the labour bureaucracy – particularly in the public sector – are acting as a left cover for the AFL-CIO bosses. They do this by raising the demand for a Labour Party.

In 1982 the demand for a Labour Party can mean only one thing: a call on the labour bureaucracy to form a party representing its interests and its interests alone. At present there are no forces around to ensure that a Labour Party of the future reflects anything progressive. A Labour Party led by Lane Kirkland would be just as much bad news as a Democratic Party led by Teddy Kennedy.

The task of building a workers' party in the United States will be a long and difficult one. Much patient work must be done in reassessing the traditions of the American working class and especially the traditions of the American left. At the same time there is an enormous amount of immediate practical work that must be begun, especially as the labour movement stands by while the rights of women, blacks, migrants and gays are being taken away wholesale.

The picture is far from bleak. The labour bureaucracy's attempts to revive the New Deal are almost certain to fail. Despite the cynicism with which it was led, last September's demonstration shows how disgusted workers are with falling living standards and mass joblessness. Reagan's administration is wracked by just as much dissension as Carter's was. The American left could make a fresh beginning this year – if it puts 1981's prejudices behind it.

Kevin Green

Reagan vs PATCO

PUBLIC SECTOR? WHAT PUBLIC SECTOR?

WHEN THE 13 000-strong Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organisation (PATCO) came out on strike on 3 August 1981 Reagan knew he had to act. Other public sector workers had caused major disruptions to Carter's administration, and more than a million employees in posts, telecommunications, federal government and local government needed to be taught a lesson. Why? They're due to settle major wage contracts in 1982.

Along with the Teamsters, PATCO had backed Reagan for President. But when 80 per cent of its membership stopped work in support of their demands (for a rise that barely kept pace with inflation, slight improvement in conditions on the job, a shorter working week and earlier retirement), Reagan had no compunction in hitting his erstwhile allies hard. Public sector strikes are illegal in the States, and Reagan takes law and order seriously. He fined PATCO millions of dollars, clapped union leaders in irons (literally), froze strike funds, fined and dismissed every striker and put them all on an official federal blacklist, sent in army scabs and moved to have the controllers' union 'decertified' – stripped of its power to represent its members. All within four days.

That Reagan won and PATCO doesn't officially exist any more is hardly surprising. Like public sector unions the world over, PATCO argued that its members deserved special treatment because their skills were special. But they weren't – as the military controllers Reagan drafted in to replace them showed. Only a strike throughout the USA's vital but crisis-ridden air transport industry could have got the controllers what they wanted. The way forward for America's public sector workers is through class politics, not special pleading.

American correspondent

The year of massacres in Central America

1981 WAS THE YEAR in which El Salvador captured the attention of the world. Now more than 30 000 workers and peasants have died fighting the brutal US-backed junta. Yet, despite the opposition's losses, Christian Democrat President José Napoleon Duarte cannot win – and Ronald Reagan knows it. Indeed, Washington has now become frightened that what started with the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua in 1979 could spread through El Salvador to Guatemala. Even the unchallenged rightists who run Honduras and the parliamentarians who rule Costa Rica are unsafe in American eyes.

US imperialism has $3 billion of investments tied up in Central America. It's the USA's 'front yard': to the north lies oil-rich Mexico, to the south the Panama canal and a further $30 billion of investments – plus a lot of trade. In 1981, therefore, the Reagan administration decided to make the defeat of the anti-imperialist movement in Central America a priority. It drove 100 000 Salvadoreans out of their country as refugees and poured $100m of 'aid' and scores of military 'trainers' in. It let Somoza's supporters set up training camps on US soil, helped Duarte's forces operate out of Honduras, and threatened Nicaragua with invasion. And, to strengthen its hold over the whole area, it announced a package of favourable trade arrangements about which Secretary of State Alexander Haig could say 'we have never offered such a preference before to any region' (*Financial Times*, 5 December 1981).

But Central America is not just important to the USA. While Thatcher fully backed the White House's policies towards it (she authorised a £1m loan to Duarte last August and decided to maintain a strong military presence in newly-independent Belize), both British and Continental reformists proclaimed their support for the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the oppositional forces in El Salvador. Even *The Times* criticised Reagan's line on the region, advising that a 'solution' there 'can and should be reached by political and diplomatic means, not military ones' ('Jaw-jaw Si, war-war No', 3 December 1981).

With friends like these, the rebels of El Salvador don't need enemies. To win they need real solidarity from workers in Britain and other imperialist centres – and anti-imperialist politics.

Violence is nothing new to the people of Central America. Invaded by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, colonised by Britain in the nineteenth and dominated by the USA in the twentieth, the local Indian population has been driven from fertile territory to make way for coffee and banana plantations. In Nicaragua and Costa Rica, as in Panama, many have been exterminated, in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras the majority lived under the yoke of foreign landowners. Companies like United Fruit, formed in 1899, carved out enormous tracts of land and developed them as export enclaves using cheap peasant labour.

In these conditions only a weak indigenous bourgeoisie could develop in each country. Every native capitalist had to bow to the interests of US imperialism; and when those interests were threatened, America had no qualms about sending in the marines. It occupied Nicaragua almost continuously between 1912 and 1934 before handing over power there to Somoza, and it landed troops in Central America once a year, on average, between 1904 and 1924 to prop up or install puppet governments.

Profit-making in Central America has of necessity always been a ruthless business. Only Costa Rica has enjoyed the luxury of bourgeois-democratic rule. In El Salvador, the rural rebellion that Communist Party leader Farabundo Marti led against the government in 1932 was met with the 'Matanza' – the massacre of some 30 000 people. This, plus the execution of Marti, marked the beginning of 50 years of military rule.

Many times since, in Guatemala and elsewhere, the military has stepped in to crush mass revolts and to put a halt to the implementation of liberal policies.

The dynamics of struggle

In Central America, as in other backward capitalist regions of the world, the parasitic character of the native land- and factory-owners is clear for all to see. Their lifestyles are 'Western', their wealth conspicuous and their numbers few. In El Salvador, for example, the ruling class is known as 'los catorce' – the 14 families.

What this means is that the class struggle in Central America takes a particular form. It consists of a struggle by 'the people' against 'the oligarchy' – an oligarchy more or less clearly capitalistic in nature, more or less clearly tied to imperialism, but an oligarchy all the same. Urban workers, rural labourers and peasants participate in this struggle because they are oppressed; but so do small capitalists, small landowners and the middle classes, because they worry about the oligarchy's concessions to the USA, are jealous of the oligarchy's position and are angry that it denies them a parliament to express their interests. That is why, today, almost all of the opposition movements in Central America include the terms 'Popular' or 'Democratic' in their names, whether or not they claim to be based on the working class.

Now, since the mid 'sixties, workers have played a key role in the movements. Though it has been uneven in type, industrialisation in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala has led to a rise in the relative weight of the city-based proletariat. In El Salvador, for instance, the working class has conducted a number of important and unprecedented strikes against the regime. The problem, however, is that the growth of the working class as a social force has yet to be matched by the growth of independent working class politics. Populist, not Marxist, leadership has been the main feature of most of the anti-government struggles.

Stalinist populism

Although populist movements are ready to fight imperialism and its client regimes, their politics can lead them to compromise with the interests of their own bourgeoisie. The Communist Party of El Salvador (CPS) reveals the reactionary consequences of populism vividly. After forming an electoral alliance with the Christian Democrats in 1966, it backed Duarte himself in El Salvador's 1972 presidential elections and joined a US-backed junta in 1979. Many of its members have been shot by the very governments they have helped install: these have proved neither 'popular' nor 'democratic'.

Stalinism has a long record of betrayal of anti-imperialist struggles. But part of the tragedy of El Salvador is that more radical opponents of the Duarte regime have not made a decisive break from the strategy of the CPS. So long as this remains the case the tendency to establish alliances with 'progressive' elements in the bourgeoisie – whose objectives can only conflict with those of the oppressed – will persist. A glance at the organisation known as the Farabundo Marti People's Liberation Forces (FPL) confirms this.

The FPL was founded in 1972, three years after Salvador Cayetano Carpio, general secretary of the CPS, split away from his organisation. Today, with its broader front body, the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR), it is the principal force in the struggle against Duarte; its members are renowned for their dedication and heroism in battle. Influenced by Castro, Maoism and Vietnam's General Giap, it rejects the 'guerilla foco' theory – the idea (popularised by Regis Debray) that revolution will come to Latin America through purely military actions mounted from countryside hideouts. Instead, it favours a 'people's war' against the state.

Today's FPL leaders came out of the CPS because of its refusal to take up arms against the imperialists. Like many freedom fighters in Latin America, they rejected the consequences of Stalinism. But although they embarked on the armed struggle, they did not make a decisive break with the politics of Stalinism. They recognise that the Salvadorean bourgeoisie is too weak to consummate a democratic revolution, and they have polemicised with the constitutional cretins of the CPS for attempting, as they put it, 'to "rescue" the legal and "democratic" mask that conceals the exploitation and domination to which our people are subjected' (BPR, *El Salvador: the development of the people's struggle*, Tricontinental Society, June 1980). However they continue to identify the small capitalists and rich peasants as part of the *exploited*, and thus as consistent allies of the working class.

The class struggle in Latin America is bound to pit the petit bourgeoisie against imperialism – and British socialists must support that struggle. But in the end, capitalists, however small, fear the working class more than they hate the imperialists and the local ruling class. For the Salvadorean left to seek anything more than tactical blocs with the petit bourgeoisie is to court disaster when this unstable social force sells out to imperialism and turns against the masses.

However, the July 1979 victory of the populist Sandinistas against Somoza in Nicaragua has endorsed such a strategy. After the Salvadorean opposition united early in 1980 – later to form the FMLN, as its military wing, and the FDR as its political wing – Carpio made an important statement on the kind of revolutionary government he would like to see. It would not be a socialist regime, but rather a 'government of all social sectors except the 14 families'. This outlook dominates the Salvadorean opposition.

In reality, the experience of the Sandinistas should warn that such an approach is not able to withstand the pressure of imperialism and safeguard the future of the revolution. The Nicaraguan 'government of all social sectors' imprisoned 100 Communist Party members in November for criticising the new regime, and is having to defend the 'mixed economy'.

Solidarity with El Salvador!

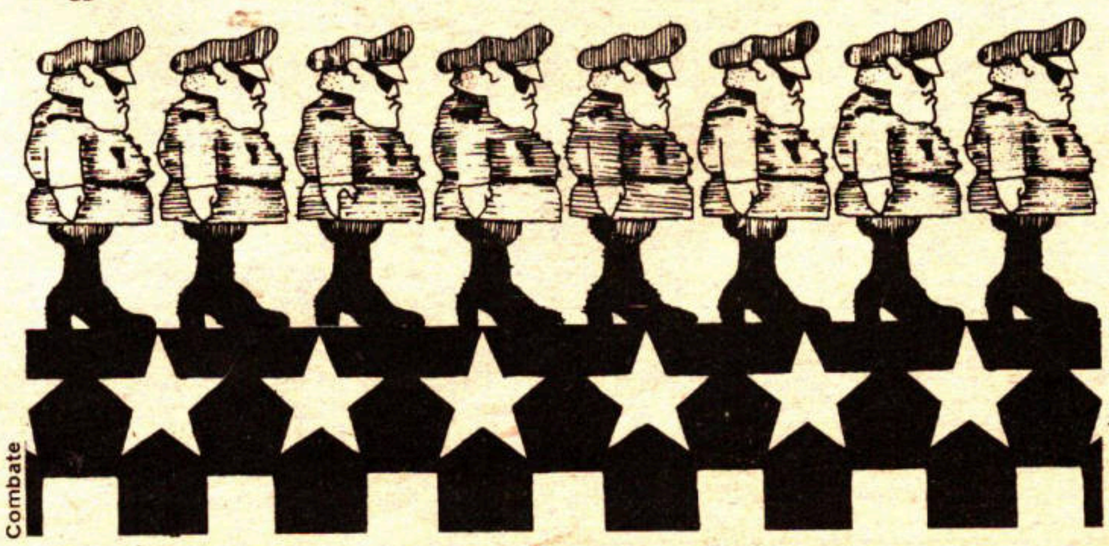
The big power in Central America is the USA. However, the other imperialist powers are eager to move in. But the masses in Central America, while they correctly identify the USA as their main enemy, will not tolerate oppression from anybody. To further their designs, therefore, the USA's rivals have got to be subtle. House-trained social democrats are their best ambassadors in the area.

Eric Heffer (Britain), Willy Brandt (West Germany), Felipe Gonzalez (Spain) – all sorts of reformists have spoken out against the USA's policies towards Nicaragua and El Salvador. These protests often express sympathy for the oppressed masses, but in reality they are of little use to the insurgents of Central America. They aren't just dishonest, vote-catching gibes against Reagan; they are gambits intended to curry favour with the oppositional forces, the better to prevent them from 'going too far'. They are, in a nutshell, attempts to ensure that the revolution in Central America does not disturb Europe's trade and investments there.

The recognition Francois Mitterand's regime has given the Salvadorean opposition is a sure sign of this. So is the support Mitterand's initiative received from more respectable quarters (see 'Common sense in Central America', *Financial Times*, 9 September 1981).

This year will see more attempts by Europe to arrange a 'negotiated solution' to the Salvadorean conflict. Workers must resist them at all costs. It is not enough to be moved by John Pilger's accounts of massacres in El Salvador; it is absolutely wrong to look to the British state or a future left-Labour government to give the liberation forces 'assistance'. Our unions must be rallied to give all possible practical aid to the masses of Central America. A blow against imperialism there would weaken the USA and help stop the schemes of Europe's rulers too.

Tony Allen


Combate

THE MIDDLE EAST

The year the diplomats reached the end of the road

IN 1981 the trends towards internal breakdown and external intervention became unmistakeable throughout the Middle East. Iran's domestic chaos deepened as the war with Iraq, backed by the West, dragged on. In Egypt, President Anwar Sadat was assassinated as he reviewed his own troops and the USA staged its biggest ever military manoeuvres in North Africa and the Gulf only a few months later. The annexation of the Golan Heights by Israeli Premier Menachem Begin in December showed that after another year of European, American and Arab 'initiatives', the Palestinian question is even further from any resolution than it was 12 months ago. The failure of super-power diplomacy around the Fahd Plan to settle relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours reflects the tensions that have torn the Middle East apart in 1981. The inability of the imperialist powers, particularly the USA, to control events in the area makes the interference of Western troops on a large scale in 1982 a real possibility.

Shoot first

Discussions between Egypt and Israel on the future of the West Bank have got nowhere, not least because Israel can find few Palestinians in the occupied territories willing to cooperate with its plans. Those who do usually meet the same fate as the prominent collaborationist, Youssef El Khatib did in Ramallah in mid-November. He was shot.

Incidents like these have prompted the USA to look very hard at its policy in the Middle East. They have brought home the fact that, as far as the Arab regimes of the area are concerned, rantings about 'the Soviet menace' are no substitute for progress on Palestinian autonomy. Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the two states most threatened by the Palestinians, simply won't buy Reagan's arguments about the Russians. They know that, unless the USA is seen to be doing something about Palestine, Arab nationalism threatens to sweep through the Gulf and overturn all the despotic governments that rule there.

Nevertheless, Washington is convinced that defending its oil interests and its investments is a more urgent matter than finding a political solution to the Palestine question. This first became clear when US Secretary of State Alexander Haig visited the Middle East last March. Since then the Reagan Administration has, to the dismay of its European allies, shown itself prepared to go much further than Carter in its willingness to intervene in the Gulf. It has shot down Libyan jets, mounted its 'Bright Star' troop exercises in Egypt, Somalia, Oman and Sudan, and sold lethal AWACS planes to the Saudis.

The more the West plays tough, however, the more it reveals its inability to stabilise things. The nuptials Washington held with Saudi Arabia last year are eloquent testimony to this.

The new errand boy

Renowned for its economic riches, Saudi Arabia made a meteroic rise to political prominence in 1981. Following the so-called Syrian 'missile crisis', it played a major behind-the-scenes role in negotiating a ceasefire between warring PLO and Israeli forces in the Lebanon. It could see that the PLO was not about to take a pasting, so it pressured Syria to persuade the PLO to pull back, offering Damascus £400m for troops stationed in Lebanon as a 'deterrent' force. In this manoeuvre the Saudis were aided and abetted by the USA. And, having completed it, they found themselves in a strong position to propose a general strategy for solving the Palestinian question – a Camp David for the whole of the Middle East, not just Egypt and Israel. In August, therefore, Saudi Arabia's Prince Fahd came up with a plan which proposed the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, in return for Palestinian recognition of Israel.

The crucial point was Palestinian acceptance of the Israeli state. Yet in fact this wasn't new: when Sadat spoke to the Israeli Knesset at the start of the Camp David negotiations in 1977, his remarks were much more radical. What was Fahd up to? Fahd knew his plan was unlikely to be accepted by many Arab states. But if they could be involved in a discussion on the rights of the Palestinians while the USA got on with the job of strengthening its military position and its alliances in the region, so much the better. In other words the USA, no longer able to put itself forward as a mediator on the Palestinian issue, would let Riyadh do its dirty work. With previous contenders for Arab leadership discredited (Egypt) or busy fighting on other fronts (Iraq), Saudi Arabia's time had come – and hard-pressed America was only too pleased. Once more, however, US imperialism's designs on the Middle East were frustrated.

The Fahd farce

Real interest in the Fahd proposals developed in the wake of Sadat's assassination. Then, with all hope of Camp David coming to anything having disappeared, the Great Debate was commenced. Thousands of column inches in newspapers and hours of airtime were devoted to the pros and cons of the Saudi initiative.

The Saudis wanted at least paper acceptance of their plan so that a 'dialogue' on Palestine could continue. They were helped by the chairman of the EEC's Council of Ministers, Britain's Lord Carrington. But things began to go wrong very quickly. Even Fateh, the largest and most moderate Palestinian organisation, split on whether or not to back the plan. And, while PLO leader Yasser Arafat announced that it had 'positive elements', the PLO executive committee outvoted him by fourteen votes to one – even though Arafat can usually rely on seven or eight votes.

Most Palestinians opposed the plan. Some argued that they had the right to return to the whole of Palestine, not just the West Bank. Others felt that it was foolish to make any concessions without getting something from Israel and the USA in return. Many believed that talk of a West Bank state was utopian anyway, as Israel would never allow such a thing to come into existence. For the thousands of Palestinians in refugee camps scattered around the Middle East, the only real choice is to fight.

It was probably Palestinian hostility to Fahd that convinced Libya, Algeria and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen to oppose the plan. However Syria, the leading member of the anti-Israel Steadfastness Front, had reasons of its own. Syria's ties with the USSR conflict with Fahd's clear exclusion of the Soviet Union from future negotiations on the Middle East, so Damascus had to come out against.

In any event the Arab summit that was called at Fez to discuss the Fahd plan turned into a farce. Only seven out of a potential 20 Arab states came out unambiguously in support of the plan, and all seven were notable for their financial dependence on Saudi Arabia. Even Iraq joined the opposition. Due to last for three days, the conference collapsed within six hours.

The future after Fahd

Fahd's failure to get his plan accepted by the Arab states has several important consequences.

First, Saudi Arabia and its 'moderate' allies were defeated politically, and the Steadfastness Front has come away with a major victory. When added to the Palestinian's military successes earlier in the year, this is likely to strengthen the hand of the leftist forces in the PLO and, consequently, the hand of the USSR.

Second, the Fez episode is a major blow to Arafat's prestige. Although he voted with the Steadfastness Front in the end, he has clearly left himself open to charges of compromise. In the longer term this could lead to a strengthening of the pro-Soviet Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) within the Palestine National Council and the PLO executive.

Third, the seizure of the Golan Heights is probably only the beginning of a new series of Zionist thrusts. While outwardly gleeful about the outcome of Fez, Israel would undoubtedly have preferred some commitment to peace on the part of the Arab regimes assembled there. Now that the USA is bereft of friends and influence in the Gulf, the Israeli hawks, already angered by the AWACS deal, will be on the ascendant.

There can be no peace in the Middle East until the Palestinian issue has been resolved by the achievement of full self-determination. While the USA understands this, it believes that it can play for time by intimidating the Palestinians and their supporters in surrounding countries. And, while Britain and the major EEC countries are more bent on compromise than the White House, they want to make sure they are not left out of the action. This is why they are pushing so hard for inclusion in the Sinai 'peacekeeping force' – something which five years ago they would have left to the Fijian or Malawian army.

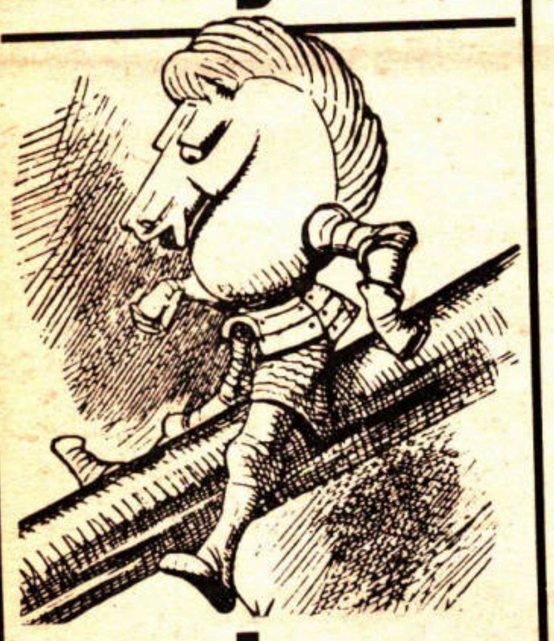
Nick Jenkins

Apartment blocks in Beirut destroyed in an Israeli air attack on 17 July 1981.

Beirut posters display the Palestinians' refusal to compromise with imperialism and its local allies.

The rise of Shirley,

fall of Tony...



and end of Tariq?

THE RISE of the Social Democratic Party in 1981 has exposed the weakness of the Labour Party. Mass unemployment has depressed trade union militancy and produced widespread political disorientation within the working class. Bye-elections, first at Warrington, then at Croydon and finally Shirley Williams' triumph at Crosby, have shown that the Labour Party can no longer rely on its working class vote. Tony Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party showed the strength of the left among the activists in the Party and the trade unions. His defeat, and Labour's losses to the SDP, reveal the left's narrow base of support: it largely consists of radical white-collar workers. The left has assumed the continuing allegiance of the working class to the Labour Party. The success of the SDP in national and local elections demonstrates that Labour candidates can no longer rely on traditional Labour voters to put them in office.

Workers have little confidence in the Labour Party. They have seen the consequences of Labour Party politics at national and local level and they have no faith that the left's 'alternative economic strategy' will be any different from the last Labour Government or any better than the Tories. Thus, even in some of Labour's most secure areas like Wales and Scotland, workers are drifting away to the Tories and the SDP. The recession has shaken the British working class but it does not yet, in any substantial number, see that the only way forward lies through a frontal challenge to the capitalist system. As revolutionary politics does not seem a viable alternative, workers turn to a party which is nothing more than the Labour Party of the 'sixties divorced from its trade union base. But the SDP-Liberal alliance promises something that receives some resonance among workers – to 'break the mould of British politics'.

Although there is considerable scope for the SDP to upset the delicate balance of the Parliamentary parties, it will never break the mould of class politics in Britain. As a middle class party whose programme assumes economic expansion, it can have little long-term appeal either to capitalists or workers in a period of recession. The rise of the SDP is a result of the persistence of the recession and a reflection of the downturn in the class struggle it has produced. Shirley Williams and the rest have inflicted a setback on Tony Benn and his project of reviving the Labour left. Benn may well return to centre stage when an economic upturn unleashes working class militancy on a scale which requires a radical Labour Party to play its traditional role of mediation between workers and the state. In the meantime the Labour Party has to adjust to the existence of the SDP as a serious competitor at the polls. This is why the success of the SDP means the demise (at least temporarily) of Tony Benn and the proscription of groups like Militant and activists like Tariq Ali and Peter Tatchell.

Pressures on Labour

The SDP's successes have compounded the anxieties of trade union leaders whose membership and influence have plummetted over the past two years. Led by GMWU chief David Basnett, they are determined to revive the Labour Party:

> 'Despite the divisions within the Party and the desertions at the polls, the trade unions are more determined than ever to remain with the Labour Party and to put the Party back into a winning position by the time of the next General Election.' (*Morning Star*, 14 November)

Basnett has expanded his Trade Unions for a Labour Victory campaign to include leaders of every major union. He has also coopted top Labour Party officials Alex Kitson (chairman), Eric Varley (treasurer) and Ron Haywood (general secretary). The aim of this high-power committee is to raise money and strengthen the Labour Party machine. At the same time Basnett acknowledges that 'there has been disillusion among Labour's former supporters, and doubts whether the Labour Party could in practice pursue a progressive social policy without imposing the major costs on average or low-paid workers, or whether it would be able to work constructively with the trade unions'. Basnett's answer to 'this widespread doubt and disillusion' is the new social contract outlined in the document *Economic issues facing the next Labour Government* in July, and currently undergoing further development in the top-level TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee.

The SDP itself has made little headway among the trade union leaders. Its hostility to state intervention is an obstacle to winning the support of some of the more right-wing bureaucrats – in the NUR or UCW for example – whose unions are reliant on the public sector. The strident anti-trade union postures of some of the SDP's more petit-bourgeois backers have further alienated trade union support. However, the SDP does serve a purpose for the bureaucrats – it is a useful stick with which to beat the left. The trade union leaders are more concerned to contain the left than to ban and proscribe it: they know they may need Benn & Co when the rank and file gets restive. Thus the union bureaucrats put the emphasis on unity, not witchhunts. As Basnett insists, 'it is absolutely essential that the Labour Party remains a "broad church" if it is ever to form a majority government again'. Leading trade unionists are happy to embrace popular radical causes, like CND and EEC withdrawal, while demanding that 'the wrangling and intolerance of the last couple of years must stop now'.

The Parliamentary Labour Party is, however, in no mood for compromise with the left. The SDP has struck terror into the heart of every Labour MP: the right-dominated PLP is the driving force behind the witchhunt on the left. The right has grown in confidence as a result of its successes at this year's Brighton Conference, its regained control of the National Executive Committee, and the disarray of the left following Benn's defeat by Healey in October, his showdown with Foot and subsequent expulsion from the shadow cabinet in November. Meanwhile, the SDP stormed on, picking up more and more defecting Labour MPs and destroying the very concept of a safe Labour seat. Late in the year the right decided to assert itself. It hopes, by forcing Foot to expel the extremists and curb the left, to restore Labour's moderate 'party of government' image in time for the next election.

The left has been in retreat ever since Thatcher came to power: 1981 marked a further convergence between the Labour left and the radical left outside the Labour Party, and a further shift to the right. The Labour left increasingly dictates the issues and the terms on which they are fought, whether it's 'Benn for deputy', Labour Party democracy, unemployment, or activity on racism and the Irish War. The close of the year finds the left on the defensive against a right-wing attack that puts Labour's time-honoured faith in Parliamentary democracy to the fore as the crucial issue of the moment. If the right says that the question of how the Labour Party is to take state power and retain it is critical at a time when the labour movement cannot even defend its own weak position – who is the left to disagree? The British left is today divided only over the degree of extra-Parliamentary pressure required to effect the transition to socialism and how and where this pressure should be built.

Over the year the left has divided into three camps over the issue of extra-Parliamentary struggle. The first holds that the People's March was fantastic and what is needed is to develop its apolitical populist style further. The second also thinks that the People's March was fantastic, but it needs the sharp political edge provided by a radical alternative economic strategy and a link-up with left MPs and trade union struggles. The third agrees that the People's March was fantastic but what really matters is building up the extra-Parliamentary struggle from the workplace. Let's take them in turn.

People's power

The moderate populist faction includes junior trade union bureaucrats like Jack Dromey and Pete Carter who supervised the TUC's schemes for side-tracking the young unemployed. It is supported by the right wing of the *Tribune* group of Labour MPs, the 'soft left' whose numbers have risen steadily as MPs deserted the Bennite camp under the pressure of the SDP and the right. It enjoys too the backing of the enfeebled Communist Party and the dominant factions of two Labour left pressure groups – the Labour Coordinating Committee and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy – both of which have become distanced from Benn since the events of the autumn.

The soft left has succumbed to leadership pressure to drop its campaign to transform the Labour Party in favour of 'unity' against the Tories and the SDP. Thus CLPD leader Vladimir Derer discerns a mood in the Party that democratic reforms have gone far enough and concludes that the struggle for further changes would only exacerbate divisions (*Socialist Organiser*, 12 November). CP executive member Dave Cook agrees, condemning 'that sectarian trend within the Labour Party' and the left's obsession with 'internal questions' (*Morning Star*, 10 December).

What is the soft left's answer? Cook counterposes 'a much broader conception of extra-Parliamentary mass politics to the still primarily electoral orientation of the Labour left'. The People's March is the model – 'broad, non-sectarian and tied to no particular party'. The 'broad' character of the People's March meant that its organisers extended open arms to churchmen, media personalities, Liberals and even Tories – and beat up anti-H-Block campaigners. The 'no particular party' that organised this 'non-sectarian' campaign like a borstal on the road was

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THE DEMOCRACY DISTRACTION

After claiming a series of spectacular conference victories ever since Labour went into opposition in 1979, the left and it's campaign for democracy in the Labour Party came to the end of the road at Brighton this year. The consensus on the Labour left is that now is not the time to continue the fight for accountability. But what are the results of more than two years of relentless activity at every level of the Party?

- Control of the *manifesto* still rests with the parliamentary party, in practice the party leader, after the major defeat of the left's drive to give the final word to the National Executive Committee at this year's conference.
- The party *leader* is now elected by an electoral college dominated by the trade unions (with 40 per cent of the votes) – the parliamentary party and the constituency parties share the rest of the votes equally. This replaces the old system in which the parliamentary party 'voted' for a leader approved informally by the senior trade union bureaucrats.
- All Labour MPs are now subject to *reselection*. While a handful of right-wing renegades has been ousted the vast majority of MPs have been reselected without difficulty – but left-wingers like Renee Short and Ian Mikardo now face tough opposition from the right.

In other words the great drive for democracy has achieved nothing – except to distract attention from the real political problems of the day, for which the Labour left has no answers.

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of course the Communist Party. The trade union bureaucrats and the Tribune MPs approve this sort of 'extra-Parliamentary mass politics' because it prevents working class politics from upsetting the schemes of the labour bureaucracy.

The soft left is a useful tool in the hands of the leadership against the rest of the left. Its leading members on Labour's executive – Neil Kinnock and Joan Lestor – have backed Foot's call for a witchhunt. Tribune members Frank Field and Jack Straw have led the clamour for the proscription of the entrists over the past few months. Labour Coordinating Committee executive member Nigel Stanley has appeared on television exposures of the Militant Tendency and has implicitly approved the rejection of Tariq Ali's membership application (*Tribune*, 4 December 1981). And the Stalinists can always be relied upon to back bureaucratic suppression of political differences – especially where it suspects 'Trotskyists' are involved.

Left-wing people's power

The radical populist faction is led by Tony Benn and a hard core of 15 to 20 Tribune MPs. It is supported by a section of the Labour Coordinating Committee and by radical left activists in the Labour Party around papers such as *London Labour Briefing*, *Socialist Organiser*, *Socialist Challenge* and *Militant*. For the Bennites the only way to fight the challenge of the SDP is by carrying on the battle to win the Labour Party to left policies, by strengthening the links between Labour MPs and constituency and trade union activists, and by boosting the extra-Parliamentary struggle.

The strengthening of the right and the desertion of the soft left have, for the time being, stopped Benn in his tracks. The plans for a 'Labour Representation Committee' or 'Labour Liaison Committee', proposed by Benn and his close supporters Reg Race and Bob Cryer, to connect the Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary struggles have disappeared without trace since the Brighton Conference. For Benn, however, there can be no going back: there is no future for him in a Labour Party under Peter Shore or Roy Hattersley. Thus he rejects the narrow approach that leads the soft left to prostrate itself before the Parliamentary leadership. 'It is not a sectarian indoctrination where you take people in crisis and you offer them only one solution', he told Dromey and Carter who resented his suggestion that socialist politics should have been presented to the People's Marchers (*Marxism Today*, December 1981). Benn has work to do, work in which he needs the support of the radical left.

First, he needs to promote policies that distinguish the Labour Party from the SDP and command some popularity – opposition to nuclear weapons and hostility to Europe are the most important. Given the lack of working class pressure on the Labour Party, the incoherence of the alternative economic strategy is not an immediate problem. Indeed, it is an advantage. As the editor of *Socialist Organiser* observed with typical grammatical precision, 'the AES lends itself ideally to fudging' (26 November). Another Bennite explains that:

> 'the struggle, then, is not to create, as the right allege, a party of "socialist purity" but merely a party of "socialist credibility" capable of defeating the SDP and which will prevent Labour from consigning itself to the wilderness for a generation.' (Nigel Williamson, 'The left response', *London Labour Briefing*, December 1981)

Second, Benn must try to extend his base of support beyond his present fan club of middle class constituency activists. Thus Benn appeared at several rallies with Arthur Scargill during his campaign for the presidency of the NUM. He visited the picket line at Laurence Scott and made sure he featured prominently as a supporter of workers in struggle against redundancy in the pages of the left press. The radical left is enthusiastic about promoting its newfound leader among militant workers, but its own trade union support is too sparse and too close to the bureaucracy to guarantee Benn anything more than a very limited audience.

Benn may have to bide his time, but his brand of traditional radical reformist politics is the only long-term hope for the Labour Party. With a dynamic extra-Parliamentary movement (such as existed in the 'twenties and 'thirties) in close association with militant trade unionists like Scargill, Benn and his Parliamentary allies would be able to reconcile the British working class to British capitalism in a way that the SDP and the Labour right could never achieve.

'Self-active' people's power

The third camp is occupied by the Socialist Workers Party. For the SWP the problem with the Labour left is its orientation towards Parliament when what is really required is action outside it. *Socialist Worker* warned the Labour left against trying to fight the witchhunt inside the Labour Party:

> 'If they turn instead to the militancy of the picket lines where sackings and wage cuts are being resisted; to the burgeoning peace movement; to the flickers of resistance among all sorts of people who feel that something must be done to stop the Tories now, then there is hope that Labour's vicious swing to the right will not engulf so many of the socialists who are its victims.' (12 December)

The SWP's criticism of the Labour left here is not of its *politics* but of its *tactics*: it justifies its existence outside the Labour Party by its commitment to working 'where power really lies – in the workplaces and not in Parliament'.

In reality, as Tony Benn has often observed, there is no contradiction here – simply a division of labour. Benn is very keen for left-wing activists to take up the battle against the right on the widest possible scale at all levels of extra-Parliamentary struggle. His whole recent campaign is based on this sort of activity. He argues his programme in Parliament and the radical left mobilises working class support for it in the workplace. As long as the left accepts Benn's politics, Benn is happy to accept its activism.

Although the reader of *Socialist Worker* might not appreciate it, the SWP does not in fact agree with Benn's programme. For an alternative explanation of its differences with the Labour left turn to *Socialist Review*, the SWP's monthly. (As one of its readers once noted, SWP publications – *Socialist Worker*, *Socialist Review* and *International Socialism*, its theoretical quarterly – are aimed respectively at ' 'O', 'A' and 'BA' levels of socialist comprehension'; he did not comment on the fact that they contain contradictory analyses of the same question.) Leading SWP theoreticians Chris Harman and Pete Goodwin now concede that Benn's politics are reformist, nationalist and explicitly supportive of class collaboration. Right. And they argue the need for 'a different sort of politics'. Right again. But what sort of politics? Here is their answer:

> 'It has to be an argument in *practice* as well as theory, basing itself upon working class struggles against the effects of collaboration, organising these struggles, giving them direction, showing that in the self-activity of workers there is an alternative to what the left Parliamentarians offer them.' (*Socialist Review*, December 1981)

The trouble is that the 'self-activity' of workers contains no alternative to the politics of the Labour left. In every working class struggle that takes place at present, militants are heavily influenced by notions of responsibility for the viability of their firm, of concern for the national economy and faith in bourgeois solutions like import controls and state intervention; in short, they are influenced by the politics of the Labour left. As we noted earlier this year 'the self-emancipation of the working class requires more than "self-activity". It requires Marxist politics':

> 'The dogma of "self-activity" represents the politics of fatalism. It is an abdication from the fight for revolutionary leadership. It means that the role of revolutionaries is reduced to encouraging others to be "self-active", while waiting for struggle to burst out. In reality it means the SWP "supporting" workers in their industrial disputes, while leaving Tony Benn to dictate the political terms.' (' "Self-activity" makes you blind: a reply to Alex Callinicos and the SWP', *Revolutionary Communist Papers*, No 7, July 1981)

The Socialist Society

The British left may be divided on how much extra-Parliamentary pressure on the Labour Party is needed and how best to exert it, but, as the year closes, its diverse factions join together on a new project in a truly seasonal spirit of unity and reconciliation. Prominent members of the Labour Party, the Communist Party, the SWP, the IMG and others have clubbed together in the 'working group for a Socialist Society'. A new Socialist Society 'dedicated to research, debate, education and polemic' is to be launched in the New Year.

The idea is to 'encourage socialist renewal inside the labour movement and help those fighting for socialist ideas in the Labour Party' (*Marxism Today*, December 1981). It's certain that 'those fighting for socialist ideas in the Labour Party' need all the help they can get. But is a new Socialist Society the answer? Its founders include members of the editorial boards of all the left's heavy journals – *New Left Review*, *New Socialist*, *International Socialism*, *Marxism Today*, *History Workshop Journal*, *International* and others. Given the failure of these periodicals to develop socialist theory independently, it is difficult to see how assembling their editors together could advance the cause of 'socialist renewal'. The commitment of British left groups and their publications to the peaceful coexistence of competing political tendencies and programmes in the labour movement means there is no tradition of debate or polemic among them. Again, it is difficult to see how gathering representatives of these trends together, around an inevitably vapid 'charter of socialist principles', could advance the clarification of socialist ideas.

Writing in the *New Socialist*, Cambridge professor and Socialist Society founder Raymond Williams explains the need to educate the working class to accept the sacrifices that will be necessary to restore British capitalism under a future Labour government (November/December 1981). He writes of the need to develop an understanding 'which includes the admission of all the unpalatable facts about the long-run crisis of the economy', in other words an acceptance that mass unemployment is permanent. He urges 'the widest possible processes of genuine information and discussion' which should 'specify and cost the real options, admit and above all share the very hard choices'. For Williams, the object of the Socialist Society is to pave the way for a new social contract.

For its more radical members the Socialist Society is a cosy retreat from the real problems of working class theory and strategy thrown up by the deepest recession for half a century. After a year of setbacks for the working class movement and especially for those most oppressed by British society, the 'working group for a Socialist Society' can only see 'encouraging signs':

> 'The dramatic rebirth of CND on a new European basis, and the widening scope of the women's movement and of feminist programmes, raise vital issues of socialist responsibility and commitment.'

As a matter of fact CND has not been reborn on a 'European basis'. What has happened is that in every European country an anti-war movement has grown and moved rapidly in a national chauvinist direction, under the influence of pacifist and social democratic politics.

Campaigns against nuclear war in the future have distracted attention from the political problems of the present, while channelling the anti-militarist sentiments of millions of young people into movements which can do nothing to prevent the capitalist powers going to war.

The 'widening scope of the women's movement' is simply an invention. The women's movement scarcely exists in Britain today as an organised force. It was last seen in the late 'seventies conducting the narrowest possible defence of abortion rights – by defending the restrictive terms of the 1967 Act against further legal curbs. While hospital cuts have further curtailed access to abortion, the women's movement has remained silent and inactive. The middle class 'personal' politics of *Beyond the fragments* (two of whose authors are founders of the Socialist Society) have paralysed the fight against women's oppression in the women's movement and beyond. As for 'feminist programmes', no such things exist outside the heads of a handful of academic feminists.

The real growth of pacifism and the imagined strength of feminism are the 'encouraging signs' for the new Socialist Society. This development at the end of 1981 has exposed the extent of the convergence of radical left and reformist politics. It may be an encouraging sign for a New Year in which the further degeneration of the British left will make it less of a barrier to the emergence of genuine working class politics.

TARIQ & TATCHELL

The witchhunt on Tariq Ali and Peter Tatchell is most unfair. They are indeed, as they constantly protest, harmless reformists.

Tariq Ali has recently taken up Neil Kinnock for 'suggesting that all those wishing to join Labour must buy the British state as it is today' (*The Guardian*, 2 November). For Ali, like Tony Benn, the House of Lords, royal prerogative and a Parliament 'which is antiquated in contrast to similar assemblies elsewhere and lacks real sovereignty to boot' needs some modernisation. This erstwhile student revolutionary just wants to settle down under a reformed Parliament, preferably one with real autonomy from the EEC. Foot should let him.

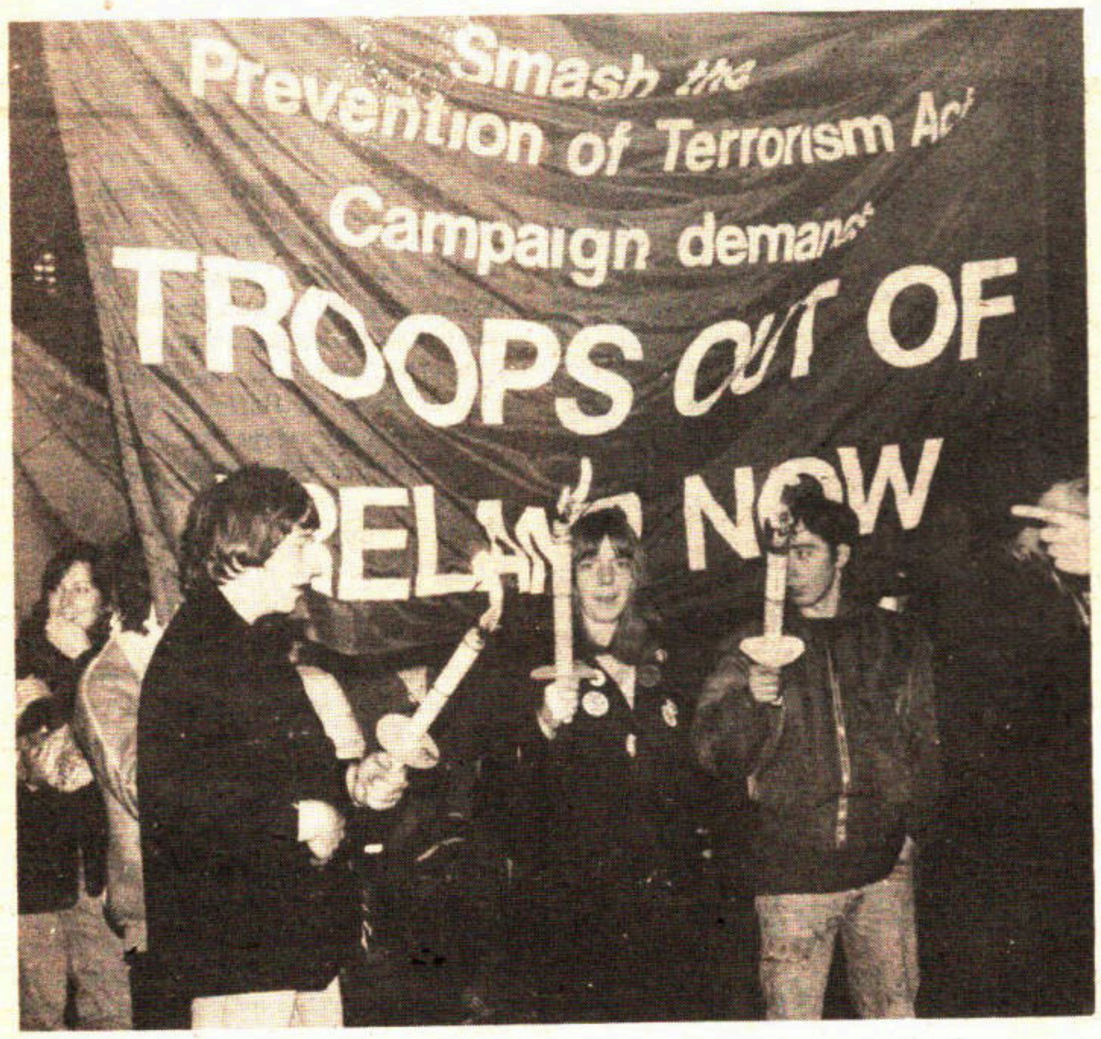
Tatchell's insurrectionary vision is of 'a march on the House of Commons led by 250 Labour MPs and a thousand Labour mayors and councillors and involving an afternoon's sit-down occupation of the Westminster area' (*London Labour Briefing*, November 1981). His other idea is for the GLC to sponsor a 'Tent City' of the unemployed and homeless 'within sight' of the House of Commons. Whatever next? How about all Labour's entrists jumping off Westminster Bridge 'within sight' of Parliament to see if their faith in bourgeois democracy will keep them afloat?

NO TUC BANS ON IRISH SOLIDARITY!

After the year of the hunger strikes the Irish War goes on. It rages in the ghettos of the Six Counties where Irish men, women and children are being regularly arrested, beaten up and killed by British troops and their paramilitary police auxilliaries. It rages too in Britain where the IRA's recent bombing campaign has provoked the usual patriotic backlash and a wave of arrests of Irish people in London under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The official labour movement continues to back Britain against the Irish people. Last year it proscribed the Smash the PTA Campaign's Coventry Conference in support of the hunger strikers. It also overturned the Southport Trades Councils' Conference's decision to support the hunger strikers' demands for political status. Now, in response to the success of the Smash the PTA Campaign's Workers' March for Irish Freedom to the TUC in September, the bureaucrats want to go even further in blocking Irish solidarity initiatives in the trade union movement.

The TUC has urged all Trades Councils to adopt a new rule banning individual members from sponsoring the Smash the PTA Campaign. 'Rule X' will allow a Trades Council executive to expel any delegate who personally endorses the Campaign. We urge trade unionists to attend our conference 'Ireland – time for British workers to act'. We urge Trades Council delegates to reject the TUC's bureaucratic attempts to stifle debate in the labour movement in opposition to British repression in Ireland. Oppose 'Rule X', sponsor the Smash the PTA Campaign Conference and stand up for Irish freedom!



North London march: 400 say 'Smash the PTA'!

ON 27 NOVEMBER the Smash the PTA Campaign gave its answer to the recent arrests and general anti-Irish hysteria – a 400-strong demonstration through North London, from Camden to Archway. The spirited march demanded 'Stop British terror – Smash the PTA!' and gave its full support to the Irish liberation struggle, calling for 'Troops out now!' and 'Self-determination for the Irish people!'.

As is usual on Irish demonstrations, the police harassed the marchers from the start. After agreeing to a torchlit procession they banned the use of torches. When they were lit up by stewards, police charged in and tore them from marchers' hands.

The march was followed by an indoor rally. Speakers from the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, the Troops Out Movement and the Revolutionary Gay Men's Caucus addressed the meeting. This march showed that it is possible to stand up in support of the Irish struggle and build wider support for it, at a time when the bombing campaign, and the reaction it generates, underlines the importance of building Irish solidarity in Britain.

National Union of Students: Reaction rules

THE LEADERS of Britain's student unions take their politics, on Ireland as on other issues, from their seniors in the trade union movement. For years the National Union of Students has been ruled by a clique of Communist and Labour Party hacks. Their major concern at the December NUS winter conference in Blackpool was to prevent any discussion of the Irish War taking place.

The bureaucrats successfully kept all motions on Ireland off the conference agenda, despite sustained pressure from Smash the PTA Campaign supporters and others in many colleges. And they blocked an emergency motion condemning the recent PTA arrests – several of which involved students. Support for a speaker from the Smash the PTA Campaign to address the conference fell just short of the required two-thirds majority.

Through a series of bureaucratic manoeuvres, the conference fixers also prevented Fermanagh and South Tyrone MP Owen Carron from speaking to the delegates. They produced a leaflet (signed by Labour, Liberal, Communist and Social Democratic Party students) pushing the familiar TUC line that any recognition of the Irish liberation struggle would damage the marvellous unity the NUS had built up around its solid backing for British imperialism in Ireland.

Owen Carron did, however, speak to several hundred students at Blackpool at a fringe meeting organised by the Socialist Worker Student Organisation. Given the reluctance of the bourgeois parties to voice their reactionary criticisms of republicanism in public debate, this service was provided by SWP student leader Pat Stack. He used his position on the platform to explain to a largely uncommitted audience why the SWP condemns the military tactics of the movement represented by Owen Carron. This sort of adaptation to British chauvinism can only weaken the cause of Irish solidarity in Britain.

Student supporters of the Smash the PTA Campaign are now turning their attention towards mobilising for the Bloody Sunday march in January and the labour movement conference in February. We will also be organising to win backing for an anti-imperialist Irish policy in student unions around the country. We want to make sure the NUS leaders don't get away with the same tactics at the next conference in Easter 1982.

Remember Bloody Sunday

10th Anniversary Commemoration March
Coventry
31 January, 1.30pm
Cobden Street
Stony Stanton Road

AT FREE DERRY corner on the afternoon of Sunday 30 January 1972, crack British assault troops of the First Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, began concentrated and extended fire on a dispersing crowd of unarmed civil rights demonstrators. The firing continued until 13 people had been killed and sixteen wounded, one mortally. The operation was directed in person by Battalion Commander Lieutenant-Colonel Derek Wilford, overseen in person by Commander of Land Forces in the North General Robert Ford, and authorised in advance by the British government at the highest level.

There was never any question of the Paras getting out of control. Neither was there any question of the military men taking decisions better left to politicians. The factor that governs all others in the Six Counties is Britain's ability to enforce its domination on the nationalist minority. By 1972, faced with open revolt, the imminent collapse of the Faulkner Government, and the prospect of outright civil war, the *only* political solution was to inflict a blow on the nationalist population that would break their morale. In a situation where Tory Northern Ireland Secretary Maudling spoke not of the defeat of the IRA but of aiming for 'an acceptable level of violence', Bloody Sunday was a necessary and calculated measure.

In Britain, the authorities put on the stiff upper lip and lied through their teeth. Given the strength of British chauvinism, the state was able to deploy its black intelligence procedures in the crudest fashion with relative impunity. The official account of what happened consisted in the first instance of a flat denial that the British had done the shooting. General Ford's 'information' on the day was that 'the Para Battalion fired three rounds altogether'. Provo snipers were alleged to have shot their own people. Later this was changed to 'forced retaliation against a crowd of snipers and nail bombers'.

Two months later, in March 1972, the British government was obliged to suspend Stormont and introduce Direct Rule from Westminster, as the only way of keeping order in Ireland. Following on from his success in covering up for Bloody Sunday, Home Secretary William Whitelaw presented the introduction of Direct Rule as a progressive move. He claimed, with the approval of the official labour movement, that more intense military coercion of the nationalist community was the way towards peace. As for Bloody Sunday, an 'inquiry' was set up under Lord Widgery; the affair was rendered safely sub judice, and after a decent period, all concerned were exonerated. Better than exonerated, Colonel Wilford got an OBE by way of a commemoration of Bloody Sunday.

In 1982 there are still more than 11 000 British troops in the occupied Six Counties. They are supported by 7230 Royal Ulster Constabulary officers and 4800 reservists and 8000 members of the Ulster Defence Regiment – a total of more than 30 00 soldiers and paramilitaries. Force of arms remains the only way that British imperialism can maintain its grip on Ireland.

On 31 January 1982, Sinn Fein has called a march in Coventry to commemorate those slaughtered on Bloody Sunday. Already the forces of the state are moving against the march. The right-wing *Coventry Evening Telegraph* demanded at the end of November that the police ban the march as a threat to public order. So far the police have not responded, but whatever action they take, the commemoration of Bloody Sunday will go ahead in some form.

The Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign fully supports Sinn Fein's call for a march through Coventry on 31 January. Accordingly, we have helped to set up mobilising committees in London (North, South and East), Manchester, Leeds, Coventry, Canterbury and Portsmouth. All political organisations have been invited to participate in them. If there is a committee in your area join it! This year's Bloody Sunday commemoration march offers an opportunity for all workers, students and socialists to stand up and be counted on the side of the Irish people.

Labour's hypocrisy

Hackney Labour Party has condemned the petition raised by the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign for the borough council to erect a monument to the Irish hunger strikers outside the Town Hall. Yet the local MP Ernie Roberts, his constituency party and the Labour group on Hackney Council have all expressed sympathy with the cause of Irish freedom. Their bitter attack on the Smash the PTA Campaign initiative exposes their own hypocrisy and their endorsement of the Labour Party's consistent stand against the Irish liberation struggle.

ERNIE ROBERTS has regularly put forward the view that the British Government should try to impose a 'political solution' in the Six Counties as a more effective means of defeating the republican movement than naked coercion. His first concern has always been the reputation of the British state and the stability of British rule in Ireland. During the hunger strike, Ernie Roberts

- opposed the immediate withdrawal of Bobby Sands' MP status after his election in Fermanagh/South Tyrone because 'to expel him with such indecent haste would earn international condemnation and undermine the authority of parliament' (*Morning Star*, 13 April 1981)
- criticised Labour's Northern Ireland spokesman Don Concannon because his repudiation of Bobby Sands' death-bed demands 'was not in the slightest bit helpful to a solution and. . .could have been sent by post' (*The Irish Times*, 7 May 1981)
- criticised Margaret Thatcher's intransigent stand because of his 'fear that violence will escalate as a result of the provision of more martyrs for the IRA' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 1981)
- proposed that the British Government improve conditions in its Six Counties concentration camps, but not concede political status to republican prisoners-of-war: 'I have never supported violence or assassination by either side' (*Hackney Gazette*, 11 December 1981).

The local Labour Party and the Labour group on Hackney Council follow Roberts' line on Ireland. It was only after an intense reaction to the deaths of the first two hunger strikers, in Ireland and abroad, that any discussion or activity took place in the Labour Party on the issue. Indeed it was not until 23 September – one week before the end of the hunger strike, when 10 men were already dead – that Hackney's Labour group wrote to Thatcher asking her to improve conditions in the H-Blocks. The Labour Party's concern throughout was not to build support for the hunger strikers to force the Government to concede their demands. Its aim was to try to get the Government out of a difficult situation, by means of what Roberts repeatedly described as an 'imaginative breakthrough'.

Real work in Hackney

The Hackney Labour Party claims that the Smash the PTA Campaign's work around the Council began after the Labour group passed its hunger strike resolution in September. This is simply untrue. When the hunger strike began back in March our supporters in the Town Hall put a motion to Hackney NALGO calling for support for the hunger strikers' demands for political status and support for the national liberation struggle. Although it was May before the motion came up it provoked widespread discussion and a packed union branch meeting of 350 people debated the issue. Out of this initiative emerged the group of Hackney council workers committed to taking this work forward.

Nor was the work of the Smash the PTA Campaign confined to debating resolutions. From the very beginning of the hunger strike we resumed the regular street activities we had been carrying out in the area during the last hunger strike. We held regular rallies outside the Town Hall, at Ridley Road street market and in Stoke Newington. Some members of East London Troops Out Movement and the Socialist Workers Party cooperated actively. Labour Party activists were conspicuous by their absence.

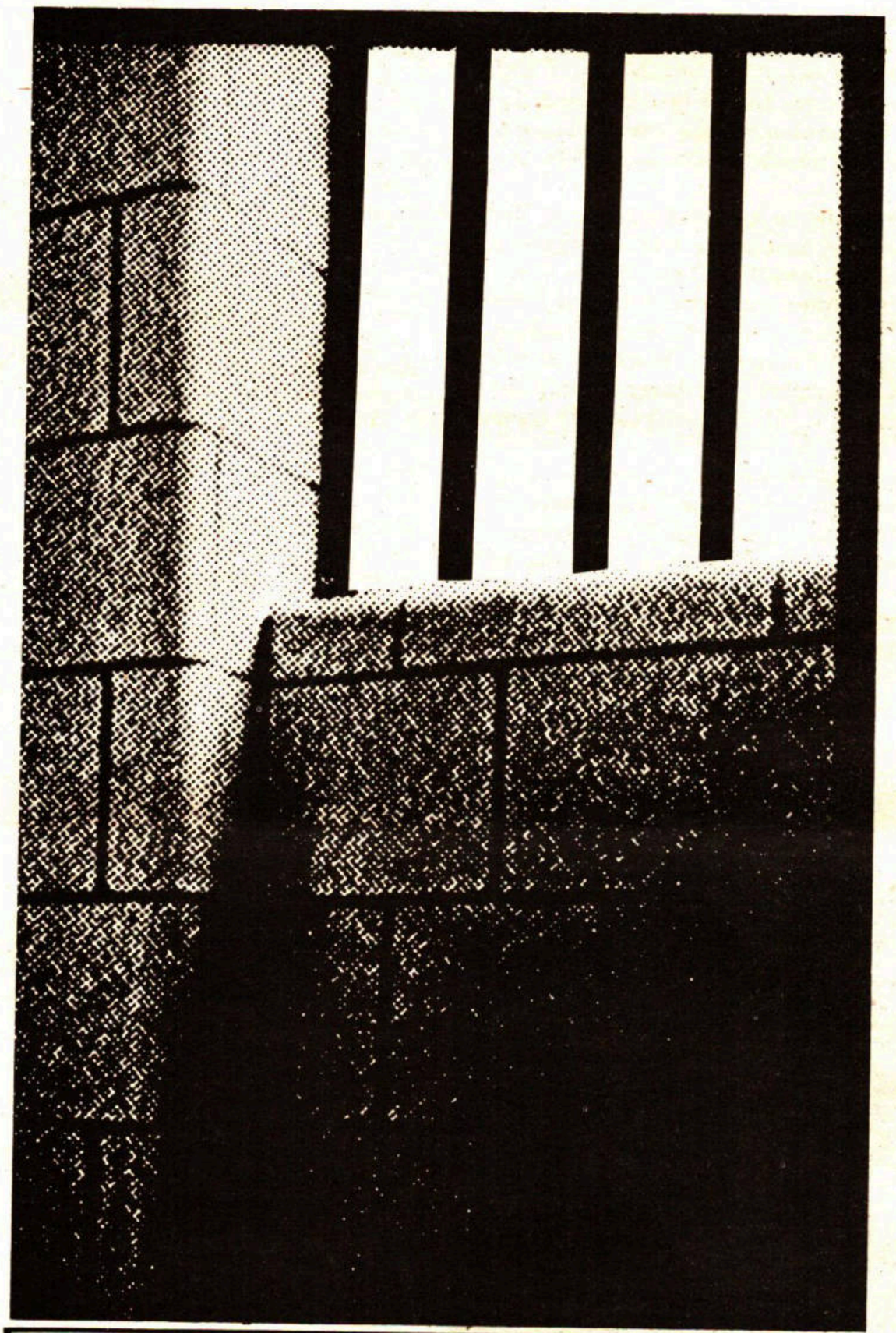
Delegations of Hackney trade unionists mobilised by the Smash the PTA Campaign attended numerous national events during the hunger strike: the Coventry Conference in March, the labour movement delegation to Derry in April, the Kilburn H-Block/Armagh march also in April, the Workers' March for Irish Freedom to the TUC in September, to name only the most important. Hackney supporters of the Smash the PTA Campaign played a central part in organising pickets in support of Irish republicans and socialists picked up in response to the current bombing campaign and in building for the November anti-PTA demonstration in North London.

The petition for a local monument to Bobby Sands emerged out of eight months' hard campaigning in Hackney and other East London boroughs. At a time when the Government (with the full backing of the Labour Party) was whipping up anti-Irish hysteria in response to the latest IRA bombing campaign, the petition aimed to rally sympathy and support for the Irish struggle around a clearly defined objective. And we didn't take our petition to the House of Commons bar or the committee rooms of the Labour Party – but out on the streets and onto the housing estates of Hackney. Already more than 1200 local people have signed it.

'Cynical and sectarian'

Why is the Hackney Labour Party so hostile to this initiative? Because it resents having to put its money where its mouth is, having to put its words of sympathy into acts of solidarity. The Labour Party in Hackney, as elsewhere, wants it both ways. It wants to win the support of Irish people and of British socialists who back the cause of Irish freedom. But it also wants to retain its allegiance to the British state and its accommodation to British chauvinism. Thus it likes to pass harmless resolutions on the quiet – but when it is pressed to take a clear stand against British prejudice on the Irish question, it responds with vicious public attacks on supporters of the liberation struggle. Labour councillors were happy to vote for a sympathetic resolution and even sign the petition for the monument – as long as they did not have to do anything or face up to any opposition. When the monument was condemned by the local right-wing press, prominent Labour representatives turned venomously on the Smash the PTA Campaign, some lying that they never signed the petition or were hoodwinked into backing it.

What is cynical about using a monument to Bobby Sands to rally support for the continuing struggle in Ireland? Sinn Fein is campaigning along similar lines in the north for a commemoration to the Manchester Martyrs. What is sectarian about trying to mobilise the widest support – including Labour Party supporters – around activities in solidarity with the Irish struggle? It is cynical to try to cover up the Labour Party's disgusting record throughout the hunger strikes with token resolutions. And it is sectarian to pretend that non-existent 'real work' by the Labour Party in Hackney has been undermined by the Smash the PTA Campaign.



Press statement from Hackney North and Stoke Newington Constituency Labour Party

HACKNEY NORTH and Stoke Newington Constituency Labour Party wishes to make the following statement on behalf of itself, its councillors, its MP Ernie Roberts:

The party has for many years taken a clear position on the need for a political settlement in Ireland and is opposed to solutions imposed by the British Government and the British Army.

In line with this policy, the party is in favour of pulling British troops out of Ireland, of giving political status to republican prisoners and is against the use of the PTA, which by allowing detention without trial undermines the basic civil liberties which every person has the right to expect.

The party wishes to make it quite clear, however, that it is in no way associated with the petition organised by the Revolutionary Communist Party under the name of the Smash the PTA Campaign, which calls for a monument to be built outside Hackney Town Hall.

As a party, we welcomed the resolution passed in September by Hackney Council Labour group and sent to Mrs Thatcher and Michael Foot, which in effect, called on the Thatcher Government to settle the H-Block hunger strike by granting the prisoners' five demands.

It was only after this that the RCP with its usual opportunism showed any interest in Hackney Council. The demand for a monument is an idiotic irrelevance which could do nothing to win sympathy and understanding for the problem of the Irish people. The main objective of the RCP members seems to be to discredit and undermine the real work done by others, in order to promote their own tiny organisation.

It is disgraceful that the memory of the dead hunger strikers should be so cynically used to serve narrow and sectarian interests which have nothing in common with socialism.

Reviews

DEAD MOLE?

Blake Baker, *The far left*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London 1981.

ENTRYISM AND ENTRYISTS are all the rage these days. On radio and television, in all the newspapers you can read how the Trots are taking over the good old Labour Party, booting out defenceless, loyal MPs and turning this venerable institution into a roaring Bolshevik party. Most left groups are either in the Labour Party or vigorously rooting for the left against the right. Red-baiting articles appear every other day in the press. This book is a typical product of today's heated atmosphere.

Former chief industrial correspondent on *The Daily Telegraph* Blake Baker is now a 'special writer' for its editor. He is extremely worried about the far left. He wants to inform all good patriots of what's going on and how this 'widespread and dangerous conspiracy' is intent on destroying British society as we know it. Baker's book is a predictable melange of true and dubious details on the left and the usual prejudices about socialism and socialists.

Baker's conception of socialist organisation is the typical one of an evil conspiracy led by shadowy characters – invariably of foreign extraction – aided and abetted by dedicated, humourless, ruthless zealots exploiting the fears of the young, the impressionable and, especially, the unemployed. Their aim is to impose a nightmare 1984-type society upon this green and pleasant land.

Baker sees nothing but a growing conspiracy slowly eating away at the foundations of this society, but in reality the 'far left' is not much of a threat to the Anglo-Saxon way of life. He claims the Workers Revolutionary Party 'represents a formidable, purely revolutionary force'. We too have seen its formal Marxist statements but we have also seen its support for rent and rate rises and cuts made by left Labour councils. Baker makes much of the People's March getting 'full colour treatment' in *The News Line* every day but he omits to say that this coverage was totally devoid of any criticism of the TUC's manipulation of the young unemployed.

He describes Militant as 'the most dangerous Trotskyist organisation'. Again, Baker takes an organisation's formal adherence to Trotskyism at face value. In the civil service a leading Militant sold out an anti-cuts strike in Glasgow in 1979 by arranging a back-to-work deal with management behind the backs of the strikers. Militant clones have consistently opposed any moves towards the blacking of work involving the deportation of immigrants. About the only accurate thing Baker says about them is that the 'Grantites' were 'the dullest, most repetitious and intellectually unadventurous, a reputation Militant Tendency supporters enjoy to this day'.

It's a bit much to reckon that the International Communist League was experiencing 'a strong resurgence and advance' at a time when it was frantically courting the Workers Socialist League in the hopes that a merger would stave off each group's terminal decline. And who but a paranoiac right-wing columnist could imagine that the Communist Party of Great Britain is a grave threat to the bourgeoisie?

Baker's conspiracy theories descend into farce when he encounters the Popular Front for the Liberation of the CPSA. It's so obviously a spoof organisation that it's hard to imagine anyone taking it seriously. Baker does. It's easy to tell that the PFL is a *Private Eye*-type set up. But Baker insists that its 'propaganda and constant conspiratorial tactics illustrate the relentless fight for control of the machinery of government'. He must sleep in dread fear of a guerrilla attack by the PFL's 'Peter the Painter Squad of the Fortress London Brigade'.

For a stalwart of a paper whose hatred of the Labour Party knows no bounds, Baker is really concerned about the future of that party. He details at great length the activities of the entryists, saying that they are using Benn 'as a figurehead to be manipulated or eventually replaced' in their efforts to make the Labour Party a revolutionary force. But it will be the Labour Party that will benefit from the entryists, not revolutionary politics. Despite its worthy intentions, the left is helping to rebuild the Labour Party so that it will hold back the working class in the future.

Baker concluded that 'the only moral which I would draw is the need for vigilance by those who still believe in freedom'. It's the same old song – capitalism means freedom, socialism means oppression. But capitalism has nothing to offer the vast mass of the world's population but insecurity, poverty and war. Deep inside Baker recognises this and knows that the desires of the masses for security, peace and a decent standard of living will bring them into sharp conflict with his class. Blake Baker is a worried man. We hope his worries will increase ten-fold in the New Year.

Paul Foster

MILES SMILES

Miles Hudson, *Triumph or tragedy? Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, Hamish Hamilton, pp252, £9.95.

IT IS APT that the title of this book is a question because the outcome of the class struggle in Zimbabwe is still uncertain. However, Miles Hudson (Sherborne, Trinity) and his class (British, ruling) are not dissatisfied with progress so far. This should cause some dismay to those British socialists who celebrated Robert Mugabe's compromises with imperialism – at the time of the Lancaster House talks in 1979, and after his election triumph in 1980 – as victories for the anti-imperialist movement. If nothing else, and it is only a potboiler put out to enable Miles to recreate his days at the Foreign Office while he 'farms' in Hampshire, this book should provide a lesson which even the most ostrich-like elements of the left should be able to absorb.

Hudson patronises the blacks ('they laughed easily and were tolerant to a fault') and indulges in nostalgia for the good old colonial days when 'the old-fashioned virtues were admired, the old-fashioned vices tolerated'. He takes pride in Britain's final intervention in the conflict in Zimbabwe to impose a favourable solution, confessing that 'it was embarassing for Britain to be saddled with responsibility for a situation over which she had scant control'. Britain's reluctant heroes were Alec Douglas-Home, Lords Soames and Carrington, and of course, Miles Hudson. It is to their undying credit that Zimbabwe emerged from a situation which 'could have continued for a considerable period before deepening chaos would have led to a total surrender under even worse terms and in a vastly worse atmosphere, than they eventually achieved'.

Britain's objective was to secure 'the establishment of a stable and viable Zimbabwe looking towards the West for help'. To achieve this the Government appreciated that it would have to integrate that section of the nationalist movement which still retained the support of the masses. The key to the diplomats' success was their recognition that Mugabe and his ZANU-PF represented the best hope for stability in a capitalist Zimbabwe. The only question that remained was – would Mugabe play the white man?

ZANU-PF plays cricket

The best people to answer that question are Mugabe's ministers themselves. Economic Planning Minister Tom Mswaba declared in a recent interview that guidelines for foreign investors were unnecessary:

'Our national track record is much more important and that's something people can understand and judge us by. Our first job, really, is to establish confidence between the government and investors.' (African Business, *December 1981)*

That's the sort of talk to keep the smile on Miles Hudson's face down on the farm.

But it's still a bit vague. Western commentators are still worried that Zimbabwe's potential will not be realised. Transport bottlenecks and a skilled labour shortage are major problems. But they are dwarfed by the worry that the regime will not indefinitely be able to suppress the Zimbabwean people. The last budget pushed up taxation and inflation is cutting real wages. More direct attacks on strikers – called 'traitors' by the Mugabe Government – have also taken place.

Squatters, impatient at the pace of resettlement, have moved to government and white-owned farming land and defied attempts to remove them. The euphoria of independence is vanishing but the militancy of the working class has not been dampened. Political meetings are on the increase. The regime has responded by breaking up rallies and campaigning for a one-party state. This has nothing to do with the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is on the one hand the resolution of the bickering over the spoils of power that characterises petit-bourgeois politics. On the other hand it is a clamping down on all forms of working class politics. Local Government Minister Eddison Zvobgo sums it up like this:

'Reorganised ZANU-PF would simply leave no room for right-wing parties or left-wing opportunist groups that may want to cash in on our present situation where the party has had to make peace with progressive elements whose views the party does not necessarily share at all.' (Africa Research Bulletin, *political and cultural section)*

The *Observer* recently reminded Rhodesian whites that their attempts to 'patch up' an anti-ZANU coalition are misplaced: 'they must be barmy; Mugabe is infinitely the greatest hope of stability Zimbabwe has'. While the bourgeoisie still fears the masses, it has high hopes for Zimbabwe in the 'eighties. Socialists should read Hudson's book and learn never to represent the sell-outs of what he calls 'the black elite' to imperialism as victories for the anti-imperialist movement.

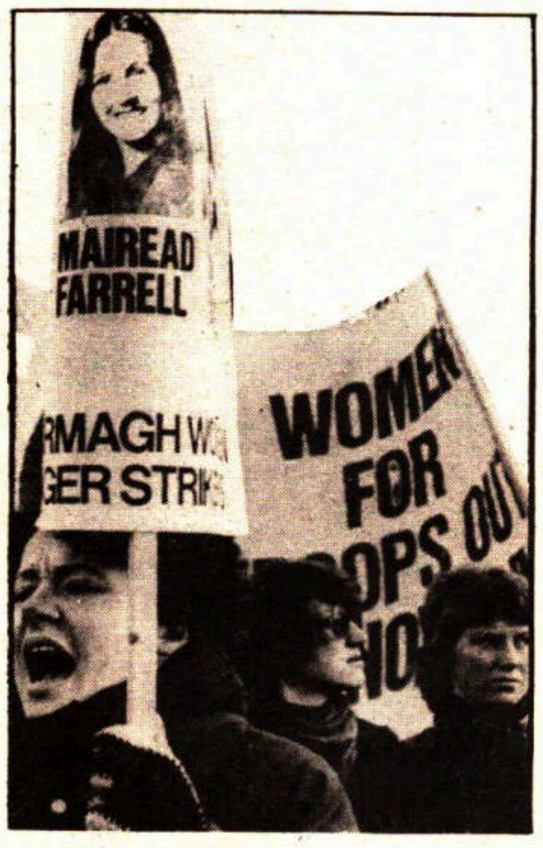
Alan Harding

ARMAGH ABUSED

Margaretta D'Arcy, *Tell them everything*, Pluto, London, 1981, pp127, pbk £1.95.

THIS BOOK has two subjects. One is the heroic struggle of republican prisoners-of-war in Armagh women's prison in the occupied Six Counties of Ireland. The women in Armagh have been through all the forms of protest for political status carried out by their male comrades in the H-Blocks. They have refused to succumb to Britain's criminalisation policy; they have refused to slop out in the prescribed manner and embarked on the 'dirty protest'; and they have gone on hunger strike to win their demands. They have all suffered terribly for their refusal to succumb to the barbarism of British imperialism in every aspect of their lives. Where the character of this struggle emerges from the pages of *Tell them everything*, the book is interesting, moving and it makes you angry.

What makes you even more angry is that the story of the Armagh women is throughout this book subordinated to its other subject – Margaretta D'Arcy. The author introduces herself with characteristic modesty as one of Ireland's 'few internationally-known playwrights'. She spent more time and energy trying to get into Armagh prison than many people have, no doubt, spent trying to stay out of it. The book gives a full account of the squabbles among feminists and republicans that led to her three-month sojourn inside for non-payment of a fine incurred as a result of a vicious police attack on an International Women's Day picket of the prison in 1979. Her discussions with the prisoners reveal an encounter between a bourgeois Dubliner and working class northerners, as much as any clash between feminism and republicanism. However, it is the self-obsession of bourgeois feminism and its voyeuristic preoccupation with the physical aspects of the Armagh struggle, at the expense of its political content, that permeates D'Arcy's tale.



It is a pity the Armagh women could not tell everything to someone who could tell their story without obscuring it with all their own petit-bourgeois prejudices. They richly deserve a better author than Margaretta D'Arcy.

Niamh Eardley

THE LIMITS OF SOLIDARITY

Denis MacShane, *Solidarity: Poland's independent trade union*, Spokesman, 1981, pp172, pbk £3.50.

THE SUPPRESSION of Solidarity in December will provoke many retrospective examinations of Poland's 'experiment' in free trade unionism. Denis MacShane's shallow apologia for Lech Walesa and the growing bureaucracy in Solidarity in 1981 unwittingly provides a useful insight into the limitations of trade union politics in Poland.

MacShane explains the economic crisis in Poland as a reformist would explain the crisis in the capitalist West: as the result of waste, corruption, wrong investments and the capitalist recession. By focusing attention away from the problems inherent in the economic system in Poland, MacShane tries to make it appear as though the economy can be reformed without challenging the power of the Stalinist bureaucracy – despite all the empirical evidence to the contrary which he presents in his book. For, like so many union bureaucrats in the West, MacShane is an apologist for Stalinism East and West. As Alex Kitson said recently about the Soviet Union, 'they have economic planning. And I want control of the commanding heights of the economy here too'.

In fact, 'they' do not have planning. Like the bureaucracies in the other countries of Eastern Europe, the Polish state has been unable to raise productivity because without either a capitalist market or workers' control of production it is impossible to allocate resources rationally.

This much is becoming more obvious to many on the left in this country. What is not so

continued on page 22

Reviews

continued from page 21

clear is how an alternative leadership can emerge. For example, the Socialist Workers Party's conception of how a revolutionary party could be built in Poland is for the radicals in Solidarity 'to start pressing for the structure of direct workers' delegates that makes up Solidarity to take over the running of the whole of society' (*Socialist Review*, November 1981). The SWP proposes a programme with three key points: an end to privileges enjoyed by the mass of bureaucrats; an end to wasting six per cent or more of the output of the economy on Warsaw Pact forces designed to put down Solidarity-type movements; and an end to sacrifices designed to help pay off loans to Western bankers.

Whether or not any of the 'radicals' in Solidarity's leadership would wish to join a revolutionary party, such a party must be built independently of the trade unions – and independently, therefore, of any responsibility for the crisis. Instead of campaigning against the misuse of resources, it should put at the centre of its programme the demand for workers to overthrow the Stalinist state and establish their own armed dictatorship. Moves within Solidarity last year to achieve decentralisation of economic decision-making to the level of individual enterprises were a diversion: central control of the economy, as of the militia and the armed forces, will remain in the hands of the Stalinist state until that state is overthrown.

MacShane is right to argue that part of the explanation for Polish workers' respect for the Church results from the example it set 'in how to resist incorporation by a one-party state' and that 'as in Ireland under British rule, the Church offered a spiritual national identity that provided solace to a people whose political self-expression was denied by the foreign occupier'. But in Poland the growth of the Church has also been a result of the bureaucracy's efforts to gain social support. In today's crisis Poland's rulers still rely on the Church to play its 'mediating' role.

The Stalinist regimes of the Eastern bloc have survived, despite the weakness of their economic systems, through continuous political and economic compromise with imperialism which ensured them a relatively stable place within the world division of labour. At the same time the bureaucrats were able successfully to put down opposition from the working class. But now things are cracking up. Capitalist crisis in the West means that the bureaucrats of the East have less and less room for manoeuvre in staving off the collapse of their own economies. And throughout Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, the working class is putting up increasing resistance to the austerity measures the regimes, backed up by the Soviet bureaucracy, are demanding.

Any new movement for workers' revolution in the countries of the Eastern bloc today must settle scores with the bureaucracy. In so far as Solidarity accepted responsiblity for the problems of the economy it became tarred with the sordid brush of Stalinism. Only a revolutionary party can free Poland of domination by the Soviet Union and guard against imperialism.

Gareth Evans

ENGLAND MAY KEEP FAITH?

Jack Holland, *Too long a sacrifice: life and death in Northern Ireland since 1969*, Dodd Mead, New York, 1981, pp217 (distributed in Britain by Colombus books, £7.95).

JACK HOLLAND is a journalist who was born and raised in Belfast. His family is predominantly Catholic, although a Protestant grandfather resulted in some relations across the religious divide. Holland's book is a journalistic account of the troubles, weaved around their impact on his own family as it traversed the sectarian geography of Belfast, from the Markets, to the Loyalist Rathcoole, to the republican Falls and finally to nationalist Andersonstown.

For the most part it is a well-executed book. Written for an American readership – Holland apparently could not find a British publisher – it contains a few curious Americanisms (power-sharing he describes as 'a kind of political affirmative action program'). However, *Too long a sacrifice* provides a useful introduction to the events of the last 13 years, covering developments in the War and British strategy, and the changing character of republican and Loyalist organisations. He communicates a sense of the poverty and harshness of working class life in Belfast and something of the deep suffering of its people through more than a decade of war. Especially poignant are the letters written to the author after he left Belfast from his parents still surviving in the city. 'Well, everything is quiet at home', concludes one note from his father, 'except for the assassinations which we are getting used to again.'

Who are the sectarians?

In one of the most interesting chapters of his book, 'Identity crisis', Holland examines the outlook of the Loyalist paramilitaries. Although his analysis is narrowly psychological, he does go some way towards explaining the peculiar virulence of Protestant sectarianism. The Catholic in Belfast can understand his poverty as a result of British oppression; but the poor Protestant cannot – hence the elements of self-hatred and hopelessness in the Loyalist mentality. The Catholic turns his anger against the representatives of the British state in the Six Counties – Unionist politicians, British soldiers, the RUC and UDR – as a means of bringing his oppression to an end. The deprived Loyalist's anger is turned on the Catholics, victims identified as deserving of their oppression, towards whom the Loyalist paramilitaries display a ritualistic brutality and a characteristic desire to degrade and humiliate.

Sectarian violence in Belfast is typically a Protestant response towards Catholics. Holland, who is currently working on a history of the Ulster Defence Association, exposes the direct involvement of that organisation in 400 sectarian murders in Belfast between 1972 and 1977. Undoubtedly there have been killings of Protestants by Catholics in Ireland; but sectarian assassination has never been the policy of any republican organisation. The IRA's attacks have always been directed at the Army and the police, and at economic targets. By contrast, random sectarian killings have, for long periods, been the central activity of the UDA. While the IRA numbers hundreds of enemy officers as its victims, the UDA can claim to have killed only one Provisional in its long and grisly murder campaign.

It is important to establish what 'sectarianism' really means in Belfast because of the widespread belief in Britain, not least on the British left, in the essential equivalence of Protestant and Catholic sectarianism. (It is also important to establish, as Holland fails to do, the dependence of the Loyalist mentality on the British occupation of Ireland.) Take the latest issue of the Communist Party's theoretical journal *Marxism Today*, which carries 'exclusive interviews with the UDA and the Provisionals' as though they were symmetrical organisations. In fact, the first is an organisation which has been responsible for the torture and barbaric killing of hundreds of ordinary Irish Catholics, for no other reason than their religion. The second is an organisation which is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of soldiers and policemen in the struggle to end British rule in Ireland. The fact that *Marxism Today* treats the UDA's Andy Tyrie and John McMichael sycophantically, while presenting Sinn Fein's Danny Morrison in an unsympathetic manner, only makes its interviews even more offensive.

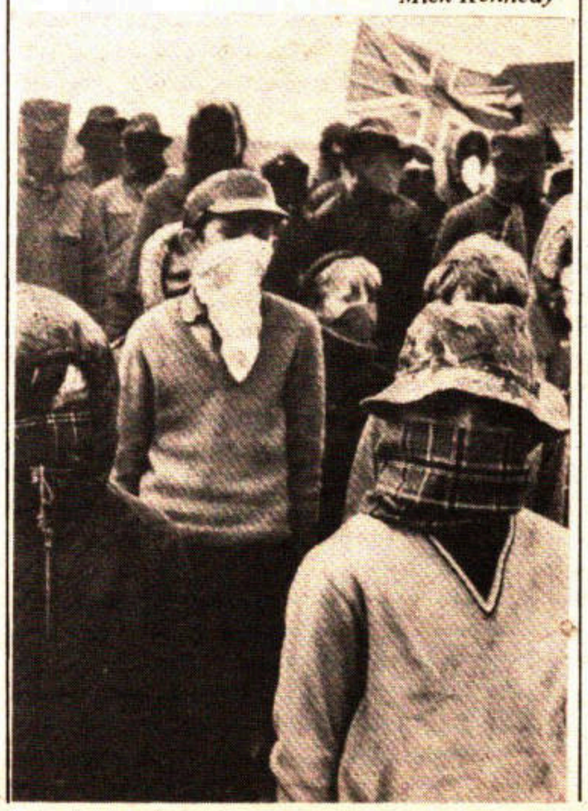
Brits Out!

British socialists should read Holland's account of the UDA and treat organisations which equate this pro-imperialist murder gang with an anti-imperialist army with the contempt they deserve. They should, however, be more suspicious of his political conclusions which are essentially those of a British liberal.

In his final chapter, Holland surveys the possible scenarios for a solution to the Irish War. His conclusion is that a British withdrawal is the only long-term hope. But because he misunderstands why Britain stays in Ireland, he underestimates what will be necessary to force it to withdraw. Britain has been fighting a war in Ireland since 1969, not because, as Holland thinks, it is concerned about what might happen in Ireland if it pulls out, but because it fears what might happen in Britain upon the break-up of the United Kingdom and the British state itself. Britain will thus fight in Ireland until it is defeated – either there, or at home, or, more likely, both. Holland's solution, he admits, is 'futuristic'; but by crediting Britain with the potential to play a progressive role in Ireland, his perspective undermines the struggle that must go on today to drive British barbarism out of Ireland.

'For England may keep faith For all that is done and said', wrote Yeats in the poem (*Easter 1916*) from which Holland has taken the title of his book. That England may keep faith with Ireland is a myth that has dogged the Irish independence movement far too long. Unfortunately, it is a myth perpetuated by Jack Holland's book.

Mick Kennedy



WAS MOSLEY A BENNITE?

Andrew Gamble, *Britain in decline*, Macmillan Press, London, 1981, pp279, pbk £6.95.

BRITISH ACADEMIC Marxism is famous for its diffuse argumentation and shoddy research. Perhaps that's why academic Marxism has become so popular in the social science departments of British universities. Gamble has turned inconclusive generalisations into an art form. In *Britain in decline* he presents the reader with numerous strategies to reverse the decline of British capitalism. Gamble faithfully presents some of the arguments for and against the different strategies. But where does Gamble stand? Here we need a private detective.

The facade of objective commentary absolves Gamble from taking responsibility for his point of view. Gamble supports the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES). Unlike many supporters of the AES, Gamble is fully concsious of its chauvinist character. He correctly links the AES with the tradition of the social imperialist movement of Joseph Chamberlain around the turn of the century and the British Union of Fascists in the 'thirties. However he doesn't openly argue for this tradition. He makes his sympathies known in little asides:

'The failure of first social imperialism and then fascism in Britain to change the liberal world orientation of the British state made the subordination of Britain to the United States inevitable after 1945.'

If only Britain had adopted economic nationalist measures she could still be Great. But there is still hope for budding economic nationalists: Gamble welcomes the AES as 'the first clear sign for a generation that serious strategic thinking about socialism has re-emerged on the British left. And in case anybody is worried about the AES's link with British reaction, Gamble assures us 'It is more radical than anything envisaged by Joseph Chamberlain or Oswald Mosley'.

This radical strategy turns out to be a rehash of economic nationalism combined with a good dose of corporatism. Through protectionism Britain would cut itself off from the world economy and foreign capitalists would be kept out. Patriotic trade policy is supplemented by patriotic calss consensus. There would be full employment and of course an incomes policy. And trade unions? Well, trade unions wouldn't be trade unions any more:

'Trade unions would have to be fully incorporated into the national planning system, surrendering their privileges and powers as independent organisations in return for participation in the making and implementation of economic policy.'

In other words, unions would become part of the civil service, not the defensive organisations of the working class. Gamble delicately adds: 'Whether such a transition would be an easy one is another matter'.

Having indicated where his sympathies lie, Gamble retreats into a confused discussion of what may or may not be possible and what may or may not be desirable. Emulating the Delphic Oracle, Gamble talks in riddles and concludes with the proverb 'The dogs may bark but the caravan moves on'. Too true.

Frank Richards

letters

Sad about the Bomb*

AS A READER of *the next step*, I almost always find myself in agreement with your policies and tactics. No Marxist could disagree with your analysis of capitalism in your recent article on CND ('No peaceful road', *the next step*, No 18, November 1981). But wrong conclusions have been drawn from this analysis.

The weaknesses and limited objectives of CND have long been recognised by the Marxists that work within it. Even its leaders make no claim to be able to achieve immunity from the effects of a nuclear conflict by striving for a nuclear-free Europe. Nevertheless, the appeal for a nuclear-free zone is meeting with a tremendous response and it would be foolish to ignore the fact that, by aiming for this, we can generate class conflict.

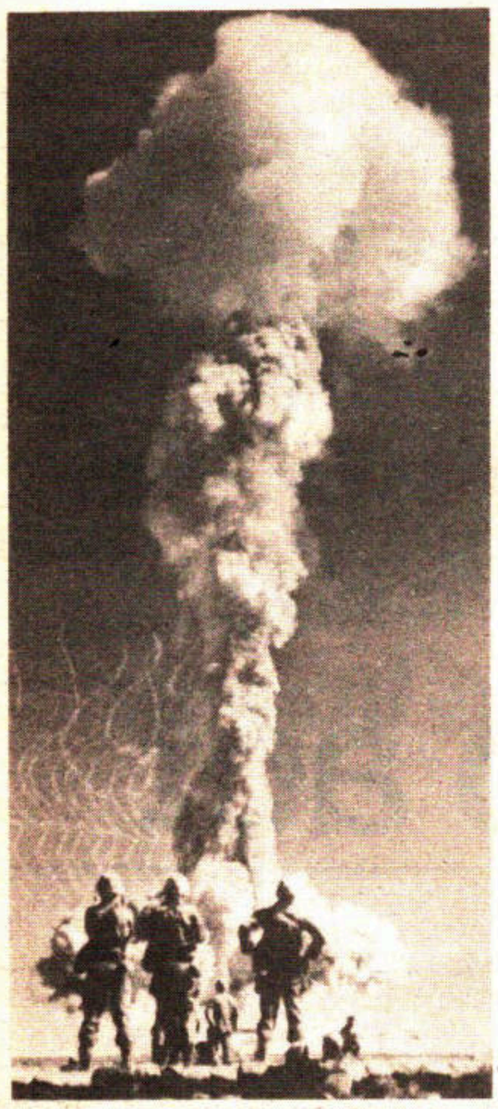
NATO is crumbling – and the fact that we cannot be assured of lasting world peace until capitalism has been destroyed does not mean that we must sit back and wait for another imperialist slaughter to break out. You suggest that the top priority is to unite the working class against unemployment and wage cuts. But this is easier said than done: unemployment is quite acceptable to many workers (particularly those over 50 years of age), and indeed workers can often be seen falling over one another to sack themselves and get redundancy pay. Moreover, as a result of media propaganda, many workers have demonstrated their willingness to accept wage cuts to 'save' their factories. Hardly a sign of working class resistance to capitalism.

The fact cannot be escaped that capitalism still offers a fat living for many millions of workers compared with that in the so-called communist countries. The only viable option we are left with is to generate class conflict on the basis of the genuine concern that millions of workers feel about the arms race, nuclear weapons and survival. Organise a demonstration against unemployment and wage cuts and one meets with a very poor response. On the other hand, a demonstration against nuclear weapons can bring half a million people onto the streets.

Is it correct for communists to remain aloof from the struggles of the peace movement, which is making rapid advances? Or would it not be better to join in and help whip up the struggle for the goal we all desire?

Neil Fisher
Newport
Gwent

*This letter has been shortened.



Helen Swift **writes:**
We don't agree that fighting for a nuclear-free zone generates class conflict. It's not just that such a zone is, as our correspondent hints, a mirage; it's also that disarmament is, by its very nature, about *reducing* conflict (and that includes class conflict).

'We can't sit back', our correspondent says. Precisely. But class conflict is in fact generated by today's recession – and, incidentally, in much greater measure than our correspondent imagines. Where we come in is to direct that conflict in such a way that workers prepare, politically and organisationally, to disarm the bourgeoisie and thus prevent a nuclear war. In contrast to the overwhelmingly middle class membership of CND, workers care more about their immediate livelihoods than about a future war. We therefore intervene on issues like jobs and wages, but we do so using propaganda that points to the need for a violent, internationalist struggle against the capitalists.

Insofar as workers remain unprepared to resist redundancies and cuts in living standards, that is the fault of their leaders – leaders whose public nightmares about the holocaust to come square only too well with their contempt for the rank and file, its 'apathy', etc. CND is part of the very problem our correspondent is so pessimistic about. It isn't part of the solution.

What's in a word?

THE NEXT STEP is the best paper I have read. Not only does it show up the left for what it is (and for what it isn't), it also provides an alternative to this milieu, by putting forward revolutionary communism in the Marxist tradition in a way that I and many other workers can relate to.

Political content apart, your journalistic presentation is on the whole to your credit, especially compared with that of other left-wing papers. But I do have some criticisms. There seems to be a temptation to display your obvious grammatical intellect, and to use unnecessarily obscure words. Take *the next step*, No 19: 'pusillanimous', 'obdurate', 'pernicious', 'erudite', 'amorphous', 'vignettes'. These may be words familiar to those who have had a good bourgeois education; but I can assure you they are not to those who your political message is ultimately aimed at, the working class.

I hope you take my point. Keep up the good work.

A reader
London

James Wood **writes:**
We refuse to talk down to workers. To organise a socialist society the working class must master all aspects of bourgeois culture – 'unfamiliar' words included. And any worker who has thought about life at all wants his or her children to have what our correspondent calls 'a good bourgeois education'.

Marxism is a science and, like all branches of natural science, has had to develop a specialised vocabulary in order to describe reality. There is no way round words like 'proletariat', 'labour-power' or 'imperialism'. However, what our correspondent objects to is not the use of the 'technical' terms of Marxism, but the employment of 'normal' words with which he is unacquainted. We take this as a compliment. The aim of *the next step* is to acquaint workers with things they don't know: our articles are written to be thought about, not digested in a minute and then forgotten. The same goes for our words. We don't try to be difficult, but if our paper makes militants go out and buy a copy of the Oxford English Dictionary, so much the better.

the next step

SWP tries harder, could do better

FOLLOWING THEIR initial refusal to support an occupation against cuts (see 'U-turn at PCL', *the next step*, No 19, December 1981), SWP students at the Polytechnic of Central London have continued to prevaricate over the struggle there. Once the Students' Union had, at the instigation of supporters of *the next step*, agreed to occupy, the SWP argued that action should be confined to shutting down the Poly's administration. Our proposal that courses should be closed too as a mark of our determination would, it said, 'antagonise people'. Likewise, when police raids on the occupation were in the offing, the SWP came out in favour of individual 'passive resistance' rather than disciplined defiance of the state (a militant, arms-linked departure from the building).

The consequences of the SWP line were soon clear for all to see. When the police broke the two-week-long occupation at 5am one morning – complete with roving video cameras – 'passive resistance' was of little use. Four Iranian students, the Union general secretary and a supporter of *the next step* were arrested. Now, too, the college Rector has taken a leaf out of the SWP's book and attacked the Union for closing the building down. Instead of closure being a thing to be proud of, it's now, thanks to the SWP, a source of guilt among many students.

Despite SWP sabotage, however, both a new occupation and a national campaign against the cuts at PCL have been planned for the new term. Sympathisers of the RCP will be arguing for an all-out strike; hopefully, after a rest at Christmas, SWP members will improve their performance next term.

Farouk
PCL

Bani-Sadr and the Kurds

YOUR ARTICLE on 'Khomeini's chaos' (*the next step*, No 19, December 1981) misses the fundamental point. It is no good trying to keep our politics 'pure' and intact. We all know Bani-Sadr's record from the past and he himself has recognised many of his errors.

The important point to see is that so long as Bani-Sadr is involved in the National Council of Resistance he cannot be used by the reactionary forces. It is utopian to criticise the policy of building such a broad front because if these forces are not with us, they will be with Khomeini.

As for the Kurds, at no time have they ever asked for independence. The Kurdistan Democrat Party, which is now in the NCR, has always put forward the slogan 'Democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan'. Nobody in Kurdistan supports your demand for self-determination.

Mansour
Liverpool

Inez Landa **writes:**
Even if we accept that Bani-Sadr has realised the mistakes he made in the past and has become a friend of the people, the Mojaheddin still call for an alliance with all sections of the population from the peasants through to the national bourgeoisie. And this alliance accepts the terms of the bourgeois forces. Of course revolutionaries accept the need for alliances with other classes – particularly with the peasantry and petit bourgeoisie – but not at the expense of their independent political standpoint.

The stand of the NCR over Kurdistan indicates that the Mojaheddin has accepted the view of the Iranian bourgeoisie on Kurdish autonomy. It is not for us to say whether or not the Kurds should have autonomy or separation – that is their choice. But revolutionaries have a duty to support the *right* of the Kurds to self-determination, even if they choose not to exercise it. Without accepting this right, the Kurds (and other national minorities) are being denied the possibility of exercising their full democratic rights.

They can't rub me out

Because I recently agreed to put my name plus the words 'Manchester Trades Union Council, in a personal capacity' on a list of sponsors of a Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign initiative, the executive committee of Manchester Trades Council has promised to use the Rule 12 against me should I repeat my crime. Rule 12 states that no Trades Council delegate 'shall be allowed to associate his or her name with any movement whatever' without permission, and that the names of those who do 'shall be erased from the register'.

This manoeuvre is clearly a trial run for country-wide attempts by Congress House to silence opposition to its policy on Ireland. Murray & Co have taken advantage of the fact that Manchester Trades Council already has a rule on its books that approximates to what they want every trades council to adopt.

I am going to carry on fighting for my right, as a British trade unionist to support the Irish struggle, and to campaign in the trade union movement to win others to do the same. I hope other trade unionists who come up against censorship will also reject it.

Alan H (TGWU, in a personal capacity)
Manchester

After Rule 12 – Rule 14

I AM WRITING in the aftermath of a Trades Council meeting in Middlesborough. The main topic was affiliation to Workers Against Racism. Briefly what happened was this. A WAR speaker skilfully put the case for affiliation and following the example of East London WAR (physical defence of blacks against racist attacks, resistance to deportations and police harassment, etc). He also – in my view *correctly* – stated that he was a member of the RCP. This woke the old hacks of the Trades Council up. They quoted 'Model Rules for Trades Councils' No 14, which states that 'in no circumstances' shall Trades Councils 'subscribe to the funds of any organisation whose policies or activities are contrary to those of Congress', ie the TUC. Then they got the issue of affiliation referred to the executive.

Personally speaking there is *no way* that the matter will end if the executive rejects affiliation. I will mobilise support on the Trades Council and among other trade unionists to keep the pressure up. A working class unable to defend itself on racism will be unable to fight the bosses when they go on the offensive more belligerently than they have done.

Gerald K (ASTMS)
Redcar
Cleveland

Bloody Sunday

COMMEMORATION MARCH
COVENTRY **31 JANUARY 1982**

BLOODY SUNDAY ACTIVITIES

LONDON

South London
Smash the PTA Campaign
Mobilising Committee meetings:
- Monday 4 January
- Monday 18 January

Lambeth Town Hall, Room 2, Acre Lane, Brixton. 8pm.

South London Smash the PTA Campaign film showing: 'THE PATRIOT GAME'. *Ritzy Cinema, Coldharbour Lane, Brixton.* Sunday 24 January. Phone 274 3951 to confirm venue.

Bloody Sunday coaches leave from Lambeth Town Hall (Brixton tube) at 9am.

North London
Smash the PTA Campaign
Mobilising Committee meetings
- Tuesday 5 January
- Tuesday 19 January

Camden Labour Club, 4 Carol Street, NW1. 8pm

Bloody Sunday social. Video of Bloody Sunday, music. Saturday 23 January, 8pm. Details from 274 3951.

Bloody Sunday coaches leave from Camden tube at 8.45am and Kilburn Square at 9am.

East London
Smash the PTA Campaign
Mobilising Committee meetings
- Wednesday 6 January
- Wednesday 20 January

Dalston Labour Club, Dalston Lane, London E8 (near Dalston Junction). 7pm.

COVENTRY

Mobilising Committee street rallies. Every Saturday 11–1pm.
- 9 January. *Bell Green shopping centre.*
- 16 January. *Gosford Green.*
- 23 January. *Four Pounds Avenue.*
- 30 January. *Foleshill Road/ Station Street junction.*

Public rally. 22 January, 7.30pm. *The Railway Pub, Boston Place, Lockhurst Lane, Coventry.*

MANCHESTER

Smash the PTA Campaign
Mobilising Committee meeting
- Thursday 14 January, 6pm. *Room 5, Students Union, Manchester University.*

LEEDS

Smash the PTA Campaign
Mobilising Committee meeting
- Thursday 14 January, 7.30pm. *Leeds Trades Club, Savile Mount, Leeds 7.*

For details of coach write to: Box LAP RCP, 59 Cookridge Street, Leeds 2. Or see *the next step* sellers.

Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign Public Rally
'Bloody Sunday — ten years on'
Thursday 28 January 1982, 7.30pm
South East Library
Essex Road, London N1

RCP ACTIVITIES

COVENTRY

Picket of Coventry Magistrates Court in support of youth in 13 July riots. Drop all charges! Stop the criminalisation of black youth! Thursday 11 February, 10am. *Bayley Lane.*

RCP public meeting. No to the Scarman Report. Smash all immigration contols! 14 January, 7.30pm. *Student Union building, Warwick University.*

EAST LONDON

Poland: the tanks move in. 13 January, 7.30pm. *Dalston Labour Club, Dalston Lane, E8.*

Film and discussion: Rosie the Riveter. 11 February, 7.30pm. *Dalston Labour Club, Dalston Lane, E8.*

IRELAND

Easter 1982 Youth Delegation to Ireland. Friday 9–Monday 12 April. Further details from: Box 33, Corn Exchange Building, Hanging Ditch, Manchester M4 3BD, or phone 01-274 3951.

RACISM

Manchester Workers Against Racism conference on fighting racism in the NHS and DHSS: 'Cleansing our ranks'. Saturday 13 March 1982. *UMIST, Sackville Street, Manchester.* Delegates: union: £2; individuals: £1.

Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign

National labour movement conference

Ireland ~time for British workers to act

Saturday 6 February 1982

Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19
10am–5pm
EVENING: Concert for Irish Freedom