

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party 20p



WOMEN AND LABOUR

Rape, positive action, abortion, 'sexism'

Poland - NATO's divisions, Solidarity's problems
Ireland - Tory policy, Labour's non-alternative
Ken Livingstone; Arthur Scargill; the NUT
No NHS pass laws! No dole checks on blacks!

Plus Reviews, letters

LABOUR COUNCILS PREPARE FOR DEFEAT



FARES FIASCO

KEN LIVINGSTONE'S winning promise in last May's GLC elections was to cut bus and tube fares. Now that the supplementary rate levy required to finance the cuts has been declared illegal, the Labour group has collapsed and the GLC has agreed to a massive fares increase in March. Thousands of jobs on London Transport are now at risk as the GLC sets about making it an 'economic' concern.

Cuts and rates

The recession means higher state spending on unemployment benefits, aid to industry and other crisis measures. Desperate to control and curb its expenditure, the Government must cut somewhere: local authority spending has been the Tories' target ever since they came to power in 1979.

Despite cuts of one-fifth since 1975-76, when the Labour Government first began the process, local council spending still accounts for a quarter of all state expenditure, at around £30 billion per year. The Government has to provide about £14 billion through the Rate Support Grant to finance it – the rest comes from loans, rents and other charges (£5 billion), and rate revenue (£11 billion). Domestic ratepayers pay around £5 billion, or 44 per cent of the total rate revenue, but businesses pay £6 billion, 56 per cent. This is what angers the Tories most of all. On top of this councils have debts totalling £37 billion – nearly three times the sum Poland owes the Western banks! Heseltine has to wield the axe on spending and control rate increases to reduce the burden of local government on an ailing British capitalism.

Heseltine has done two main things. First, he penalised councils which had overspent in relation to government-set targets by withdrawing some of their Rate Support Grant. But this only led to higher rates. So now his Bill going through Parliament aims to ban supplementary rate levies. This will put more pressure on councils to cut back spending – and cut the jobs of their three million employees.

The Tories are determined to cut local government spending, slash services and enforce large-scale redundancies. Labour's pathetic resistance, its juggling of cuts and rate rises, its grovelling before the Law Lords and its inability to mobilise working class action in defence of living standards has undermined the fightback and given the Tories and the SDP an open field.

So far Heseltine has had considerable success. Instead of fighting the Government's strategy to make workers pay for the crisis, Labour councils have gone along with rate increases and cuts – all the while protesting that it was Heseltine, not themselves, who was really doing it! Now Heseltine can gloat over the fact that Labour's record of hypocrisy has helped him make a record of his own in the number of local authority jobs eliminated in a single year. His successes last year have encouraged him to embark on even more drastic austerity measures in 1982.

Labour's tendency to collapse

In the past, Labour councils have given in to Government strategy. Now Heseltine is going in for the kill. Can we expect any effective resistance from them now? Let's look at the Labour GLC's opposition to the attack on its transport policy.

The Law Lords' two rulings against Livingstone's 'fares fair' policy brought a common Labour response that the fares subsidy made economic sense. After all, many other major cities in the world give an even bigger subsidy to the transport system. But the bourgeoisie knows better than Labour's planners whether it can afford the extra expenditure; and the sensible economic argument was dismissed out of hand.

A second consequence of the judgement – that Labour would have to forget about its manifesto commitments and junk its policy – provoked real outrage. Here was the very fabric of 'local democracy' and 'local government as we know it' being torn asunder. Previously it had been up to the local parties in office to decide to renege on election promises

when they realised they were more than capitalism could afford. Now to have this imposed from outside was going too far. Even the TUC was driven to demand a restoration of local democracy for councils. It never occurred to any of them that under capitalism nothing is autonomous from the crisis, and that the room for manoeuvre once enjoyed by local authorities – ludicrously dubbed 'local democracy' – is now an obstacle for the Tories.

With such a conception of the issues at stake, it's no wonder that Labour was unable to match the intransigence of the Government and offer any real challenge to the way its policy was being attacked. An early sign came with the special London Labour Party conference in December which passed a resolution ruling out any action against the cuts which went outside the limits of the law. The bourgeoisie changes the law to suit its needs – but defying bourgeois legality to defend the working class is too much for Labour.

What now?

While establishment experts consider whether London Transport could be better operated in sections under private enterprise, the GLC Labour group has been thrown into disarray by the Law Lords' ruling. After protracted debates, centring around Labour's respect for the constraints, financial and legal, which the capitalist system places on its policies, the Labour group split. By a vote of 23 to 22 it barely came out against the ruling, but Livingstone refused to hold the group to the majority decision – which allowed the full GLC to agree to obey the law and double the fares. Yet Livingstone still

had the gall to say that the Labour group's 'firm stand would be welcomed by Labour supporters all over the country who were looking for the Party to give a lead when faced with such problems' (*Labour Herald*, 15 January 1982). But the Labour GLC's confusion and equivocation is no example for county councils now faced with the effects of the Law Lords' judgement. Labour-controlled South Yorkshire has recently been told that its famous bus fare subsidies are illegal too; councils in the West Midlands, Merseyside, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Tyne and Wear are under similar threat.

To fight back workers must renounce not only the sordid legacy of local Labourism – rate increases, cuts and apologies – they must also reject Labour's strategy today. The fares fiasco shows the inability of the Labour Party to fight for workers' interests. Now the GLC is calling for an 'Assembly of London' to oppose the cuts. But rather than taking up the issue as one vital for the working class, the Assembly is designed to 'cut across party lines and speak for Londoners as a whole' (*Labour Herald*, 15 January 1982). Its first task will be to 'formulate the case for the defence of London's services and a fairer share of national resources'. With such a populist approach Livingstone is hoping to mobilise rank and file Tories to put pressure on their MPs to force the Government to change its attitude! This is where radical Labourism ends up.

The cuts in transport services and higher fares do affect everyone, the working class as well as bourgeois commuters. But the real reason for the cutbacks lies in the capitalist crisis, not the whim of eccentric judges or Tory bigots. And only workers can have the motivation, determination and ability to take on the ruling class. To turn the tide we have to say loud and clear that we will not foot the bill for the bourgeoisie's problems. We have to take whatever action necessary, regardless of the law, to make that point.

Tony Allen

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the next step

No parliamentary road

'WHY PARLIAMENT?' asks Michael Foot at the beginning of his diffuse and rambling apology for his Party and his politics, serialised last month in *The Observer*. But why even ask the question? Even Foot is not too sure. 'Who in the Labour movement, who on the Left, even the so-called *hard* Left, opposes Parliamentary action? Of course it is needed'. And of course Foot is fully in favour of extra-Parliamentary action too, as long as the primacy of the Parliamentary process is acknowledged. The aim of Foot's polemic is not to settle scores with his radical critics, but to reassure the readership of *The Observer*, the constituency of the Social Democratic Party, that Labour retains its traditional subservience to the institutions of the British state and is still fit to govern the realm.

Yet Foot is right in his perception that faith in Parliamentaryism prevails across the labour movement. The various factions of the British left differ only over how much extra-Parliamentary pressure will be required to bring about socialism through Parliament, and where it should be applied. Bermondsey's prospective Labour MP Peter Tatchell wants to use the influence of events staged outside the Palace of Westminster itself; Socialist Workers Party leader Tony Cliff thinks that action through the workplace is the only way to guarantee success. The widespread acceptance of the essence of Foot's faith in Parliament, and his appropriations of not only Marx and Engels, but even Trotsky, to support his view, necessitates a restatement of the Marxist position on the state and bourgeois democracy.

Smash the state

For Marxists, the state is the organisation of the ruling class in capitalist society for the purpose of preserving its class rule. It comprises two essential institutions — a bureaucracy and a standing army. Democracy is one form of capitalist rule; others include absolute monarchy, military dictatorship, fascism. Democracy is a particularly efficient type of bourgeois rule, corresponding to a high degree of capitalist development and a relatively stable balance of class forces. Parliament allows all classes in society to participate in government and assume responsibility for the system: conflicts can be regulated and resolved. Open debate confers legitimacy on decisions taken in the interests of the ruling class and the bourgeoisie can maintain its power through popular consensus.

Unlike Michael Foot, the bourgeoisie is not sentimental about Parliament and democratic rights. In times of major economic and political crisis, they are dispensable. Whenever the bosses are seriously threatened by workers, they are ready to resort to openly coercive forms of class rule. If Parliament becomes an obstacle to the pursuit of their class interests, the bourgeoisie is always prepared to defy it — or ultimately suspend it. The readiness of the British Army to flout the elected government in the wider interests of the ruling class in Ireland in 1912, and again in 1974, is discussed elsewhere in this issue of *the next step*.

For the working class, the state is the central barrier to the development of the class struggle through to the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of socialism. As Marx observed as early as 1852 in a letter to Weydemeyer

'the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat' (*Selected correspondence*). What difference does the emergence of democratic institutions make to this perspective? Simply that the existence of a wide range of democratic rights creates the best possible conditions for the development of working class consciousness and organisation to the point where it will be able to seize state power, destroy the bureaucracy and disband the bourgeois army.

This does not mean that Marxists have any confidence in the Parliamentary sham: we know that as long as capitalism exists the limited rights that workers have won can be withdrawn at any moment. While bourgeois democracy prevails, we use it to strengthen the working class movement; when it and its institutions turn into an obstacle, they have to be suppressed. Workers should have as little respect as the bourgeoisie for democracy. But there is this difference: the bourgeoisie attacks democracy to preserve its bankrupt system through more intense exploitation and oppression; the working class will destroy bourgeois democracy to unleash the productive capacity of the world and free the masses from subjection.

Marx was no liberal

Like every petit-bourgeois reformer for the last century and more, Foot quotes Marx and Engels with great enthusiasm — except what they wrote that is unacceptable to the bourgeoisie. He speaks volubly about 'socialist transformations', since decades of Labour Party politics have already confined this notion within strictly Parliamentary limits. But when it comes to the elementary Marxist proposition that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machines, but must *smash* it — not a word.

Lenin dealt with opportunist attempts to use Marx and Engels' observations on the possibility of non-violent revolution in Britain to abandon the essence of his revolutionary doctrine:

'The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is violence against the bourgeoisie; and the necessity of such violence is particularly called for, as Marx and Engels have repeatedly explained in detail... by the existence of militarism and bureaucracy. But it is precisely these institutions that were non-existent in Britain and America in the 'seventies when Marx made his observations (they do exist in Britain and America now!).' (*The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*, 1918)

Foot ignores what is most essential in the experience of working class revolutions from the Paris Commune onwards, that which distinguishes proletarian revolution from bourgeois reform.

Not content with turning Marx into a common liberal, Foot then sets about Trotsky. 'He would never have been guilty of the infantile, querulous condemnations of Parliament and Parliamentary action which some of his self-styled followers adopt'. Oh no? This is how Trotsky succinctly despatched George Lansbury, Foot's forerunner on the pacifist left, in the 'twenties:

'Parliament cannot in the slightest degree guarantee a peaceful transition: revolutionary class force is indispensable and unavoidable.' (*Where is Britain going?*, 1925)

This great revolutionary leader is reduced by Foot to the status of a drawing room 'literary genius', no doubt

ranked alongside Hazlitt and Swift in his Hampstead library. When Foot has done patronising the Bolsheviks, he chastises them for 'the mistake of imagining that the British Parliament was fashioned in the same mould' as the assembly in St Petersburg. But the mistake, and the chauvinist prejudice behind it, is entirely Foot's. As Lenin observed, the regime overturned during the October revolution was the most advanced democracy in Europe. Given the intensity of the class struggle in Russia in 1917, the charade of pomp and ritual that passes for democracy at Westminster could never have contained it. But this advanced democracy stood in the way of the revolution and it had to be swept aside. Trotsky drew out the lesson for Britain: 'The British proletariat must not reckon any historic privileges. It will have to struggle for power by the road of revolution and keep it in its hands by crushing the fierce resistance of the exploiters. There is no other way to socialism' (*Terrorism and Communism*, 1935).

Ends and means

The degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Stalin has long provided social democrats with new justifications for making their peace with capitalism. Foot quotes repentant Stalinist men of letters Orwell, Koestler and Silone in a lengthy discussion of the old academic conundrum about whether 'the end' justifies 'the means' used to achieve it. Such abstract disquisitions obscure real political issues: we judge people by their deeds. Let's look at some of 'the means' used by Foot as a leading member of the last Labour Government and ask whether they advanced his professed socialist ends.

In late 1974 the Labour Government rushed the Prevention of Terrorism Act through Parliament at record speed. This was the means by which the state declared every Irish person in Britain a potential criminal and arrested and detained several thousand people. Towards the end of 1977 the Cabinet authorised the use of troops to break the firemen's strike; by early 1979 its determination to force the most low-paid public service workers to accept a cut in real wages led to a series of strikes and a government-backed media onslaught on the workers involved. Shortly before the 1979 election the Government authorised the deployment of the SPG, already in regular use in London's black ghettos, to defend a National Front meeting in Southall: in the ensuing riot the police killed one man and injured hundreds. Now what ends were served by these means? We choose only a few examples of the anti-working class measures imposed by Labour between 1974 and 1979, none of which was opposed by Foot. The end was not any advance towards socialism, but the preservation of the capitalist status quo.

This brief examination of Foot's record illuminates a point made about reformists by Rosa Luxemburg almost a century ago. While Labour politicians protest to their left-wing critics that they agree on the objective of socialism but simply see a different means towards achieving it, in fact the means they choose reveal a *different* objective:

'He who pronounces himself in favour of the method of legal reforms in place of and as opposed to the conquest of political power and

social revolution does not really choose a more tranquil, surer and slower road to the same goal. He chooses a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new social order, he takes a stand for surface modifications of the old order.' (*Reform or social revolution*)

Behind all his hand-wringing over Poland and the victims of Soviet totalitarianism Michael Foot's actions point not to the realisation of socialism, but to the stabilisation of capitalism, even when that means vicious attacks on the working class. Foot fears the consequences for 'our people' of revolutionary methods — but his reformist approach makes sacrifices and setbacks, and more serious defeats, inevitable.

Who are the Marxists?

The genuflections of the leaders of the British labour movement, right and left, before the mother of Parliaments are regarded with contempt by the British bourgeoisie. *The Economist* puts its class position in a paragraph more lucid than anything Foot has ever written:

'What is touching about this latest re-run of the Cromwellian Putney Debates is the faith both Mr Foot and Mr Tatchell clearly share in the efficacy of Parliament as the source of political power. Few observers of the modern House of Commons are prepared to credit it with any higher status than as a periodic electoral college, remaining in uncomfortable permanent session, for whichever party is to lead Britain's notoriously all-powerful executive.' (19 December 1981)

The Economist leaves out the army: with Foot leading the labour movement who needs an army? The supreme arrogance of the British ruling class stands in marked contrast to the servile humility of the labour leaders.

Foot's Parliamentaryism would not be such a problem were it not for the fact that it goes virtually unchallenged in the labour movement. The Militant Tendency is prepared to crawl up Whitehall on its knees in obeisance to parliamentary democracy to fend off expulsion from the Labour Party. The SWP simply accepts the hegemony of the Parliamentary Labour Party over the working class movement and evades the central issue of state power. There is much talk these days of the influence of 'Marxists' in the labour movement and especially in the Labour Party. On the eve of the Russian Revolution Lenin inveighed against those who 'confine Marxism to the doctrine of the class struggle' which 'means curtailing Marxism, distorting it, reducing it to something acceptable to the bourgeoisie'. Who then are the Marxists?

'Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat.' (*State and revolution*, 1917)

Michael Foot is a pathetic figure at the head of the Labour Party. No amount of his pompous prose or vacuous rhetoric can disguise the shame of past betrayals and the fear of future defeats that haunts the official labour movement. There is no place for Marxists in the Labour Party. Their place is in educating and organising towards the proletarian dictatorship in the working class movement. The first condition for success is an intransigent struggle against the corrupting spirit of Michael Foot and his wretched Parliamentaryism.

THE BANKERS of the Western world heaved a sigh of relief when the army took control in Poland. A spokesman for the West German Dresdner Bank spoke out on behalf of the 460 Western banks with money tied up in Poland:

'We are confident that the situation has not deteriorated for the banks. We are convinced that any Polish government or government institution is strongly interested in restoring credit-worthiness to Poland internationally, and they are aware that this debt problem has to be handled carefully. We are continuing our preparations for the final signing of the rescheduling agreement.' (*The Guardian*, 15 December)

Western bankers welcomed martial law, hoping it would end the growing chaos and unpredictability of economic life in Poland.

Why then did leading imperialist statesmen respond to the December events with such ferocious anti-Soviet rhetoric? Why did NATO foreign ministers denounce martial law in Poland? And why did Reagan impose economic sanctions against the Soviet Union?

Reality

The leaders of Western imperialism have no sacred principles which forbid economic ties with Warsaw pact countries. Nor are they unduly discomfited by 'tyranny' in Eastern Europe. Indeed, some of the most important diplomatic agreements relaxing East-West tensions were signed in the immediate aftermath of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. During the period of detente the imperialist powers sought to integrate the Soviet bloc into the world economy.

In the 'sixties and 'seventies the Soviet bloc was drawn into closer contact with the imperialist countries. Western technology and credit provided a sorely needed impetus for the stagnating economies of Eastern Europe. East-West trade grew rapidly: it quintupled during the 'seventies and reached an annual two-way volume of \$90 billion. The EEC countries, in particular West Germany, became increasingly reliant on the markets of Eastern Europe. In 1980 West Germany exported \$12.35 billion worth of goods to the Soviet bloc. East-West trade was maintained through massive loans to the Soviet bloc. By the end of last year it owed more than \$80 billion to the West. Poland alone was more than \$26 billion in the red — after Brazil it had become the most indebted country in the world in relation to size and population.

West Germany is the imperialist country most closely involved with the Eastern bloc. Around one fifth of Poland's debt is owed to West German banks. West Germany is the Soviet Union's key partner in the important gas pipeline deal signed last year. In political terms West Germany has gone a step further than other imperialist countries in its cooperation with Eastern Europe. *Ostpolitik*, its policy on the Eastern bloc, aims towards the eventual reunification of Germany: it is central to Bonn's long-term strategy.

The myth of Soviet aggression

Despite the increase in East-West trade, detente has reached a dead end. The United States has been the leading force in the changing pattern of East-West relations. President Carter used the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 to launch an ideological and economic offensive against the Soviet Union. Washington suspended grain shipments, embargoed high technology exports and organised a boycott of the Moscow

THE WEST DIVIDED

Reagan's attempt to stir up a cold war response to the Soviet Union over the Polish events are showing up the cracks in the Western alliance. Frank Richards looks at the consequences of martial law in Poland for the NATO powers.

Olympics. The American turn-away from detente has stimulated the arms race and exacerbated tension throughout the world.

The US reaction to the military takeover in Poland showed how far it had stepped back from detente. The US Government responded with a barrage of cold war propaganda and the launching of an economic war against the Soviet Union. To justify its aggressive stance, the US claims that the Soviet Union poses a new threat to the capitalist world system. This claim has no basis in reality. During the last five years the Soviet Union has, if anything, declined even more rapidly than its recession-struck opponents. The stagnation of the Soviet economy has produced widespread political instability and it threatens to lead to the fragmentation of the entire Eastern European bloc (see 'The year the Soviet bloc began to break up', *the next step*, No 20, January 1982).

The real reason behind Washington's anti-Soviet tirades is the decline of US imperialism. During the last decade economic crisis at home has weakened America's grip on the world economy. While America has stagnated, Japan and some EEC countries have forged ahead. By 1975 the industrial output of the EEC exceeded that of the US. Recently things have deteriorated further in the US: productivity in manufacturing industry has barely risen since 1973. A recent survey on the American economy portrayed a gloomy picture:

'In its basic manufacturing sector, especially, the US has wrenching readjustments to make before it gets rolling again. Much of its plant is old and uneconomic to operate.' (*Business Week*, 11 January)

While Reagan was delivering his lectures on the evils of martial law in Poland his economic advisers were noting a further fall of 2.1 per cent in US industrial output in December.

American anti-Sovietism is part of an attempt to reverse the declining fortunes of US imperialism. The US is attempting to compensate for its economic weakness by flexing its political and military muscle. From the Middle East to Poland the spectre of Soviet expansionism serves to justify US interference.

The decline of NATO

America's NATO partners have little enthusiasm for Reagan's anti-Soviet crusade. They made their position clear at the Ottawa summit last September. Reagan's proposals for restricting trade further with the Soviet Union were firmly rejected. Europe was not prepared to prop up 'American leadership' and lose important business in Eastern Europe. However it took the Polish crisis to reveal the extent of the divisions within the imperialist ranks. The USA unilaterally declared an ideological and economic war against the Soviet Union and told its European allies to fall in line. Diplomats in Europe politely rejected Washington's plan of action. In public they expressed token concern with the 'attack on human

rights' in Poland but in private they told Reagan to ease off. The *Financial Times* complained that 'it would be deeply ironic if the crushing of Polish freedoms consolidated the Soviet Empire while provoking deep divisions which weakened US attempts to forge greater Western unity' (29 December).

It seemed that NATO countries were more preoccupied with the steel war that was breaking out between Europe and the United States than with forging a united bloc against 'the communist menace'. Industry Secretary Patrick Jenkin warned that American steps to keep European steel out of the US 'could lead to trade war' which 'would be a major source of bitterness and acrimony within the alliance' (*Financial Times*, 14 January). 'Economic relations between the United States, the European Community and Japan', *The Times* observed, were 'worse today than at any time since the war' (14 January).

Relations between West Germany and the US are especially tense. Chancellor Schmidt is not soft on communism but his country has a vital stake in Eastern Europe. Through *Ostpolitik*, West German imperialism hopes to turn Eastern Europe into its own sphere of influence. German ambitions are in direct conflict with American attempts to polarise East-West relations. The German bourgeoisie is counting on the Polish military to create a stable climate for the resumption of normal economic relations. German capitalists don't want a cold war that would benefit only the US ruling class.

Poland and imperialism

The aim of the present imperialist offensive against Poland is to prop up US hegemony over the imperialist world. The world crisis of capitalism has exacerbated inter-imperialist rivalries. The decline of US imperialism relative to Europe and Japan threatens the economic foundations on which NATO rests. Poland has simply brought to a head tensions in the imperialist camp that have been building up for several years.

Although the imperialist powers have differing responses to the Polish clampdown, they all benefit from the military takeover. The crisis of the Polish bureaucracy and its brutal attacks on the working class provide excellent propaganda for imperialism. The Soviet bloc serves as a day to day example of the horrors of 'communism'. Stalinism in action gives imperialism an ideological weapon to discipline the Western working class. The spectacles of repression and censorship, hunger, poverty and queues even make the imperialist system seem acceptable. In this sense the bureaucracy of Eastern Europe is the imperialists' best friend.

The imperialist powers are no friends of the Polish working class. They do not want more freedom in Eastern Europe, but more economic 'reforms'. They want to impose the discipline of the capitalist market on Poland — which would mean even more suffering and privation, lower living standards and unemployment. Freedom for imperialism means the freedom to exploit the workers of Poland.

We condemn the brutal oppression of Polish people. The Polish bureaucracy must be fought and destroyed. But this is a matter for the working class of Eastern Europe. The threat of war, however, comes not from Poland, but from the growth of imperialist rivalries. The West's response to Poland shows only the depth of the crisis in the imperialist system.



Poland's black December

On 13 December 1981 the Polish army took over the running of Poland, declared martial law and launched a wave of terror against the working class. Before the end of the month, thousands had been imprisoned, Solidarity had been destroyed and the last pocket of concerted working class resistance had been defeated.

Black December contains five articles which together reveal the real nature of the current struggle in Poland. Written by Frank Richards over the past fifteen months, they highlight the political difficulties facing the Polish workers' movement in the aftermath of the coup.

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THE MILITARY COUP in December was designed to deal with two problems. The collapse of the Polish economy had to be halted and the workers' movement had to be crushed. The first priority was to attack the working class. By November the Polish proletariat threatened the survival of the bureaucracy. Even the Solidarity leadership had lost control over its rank and file as workers became more antagonistic towards the existing regime. In addition, nothing could be done to reverse the decline of the Polish economy unless the labour movement was defeated. A prerequisite for 'implementing economic reforms' — raising prices, closing down factories, increasing workload — was the elimination of the new workers' movement.

The crackdown

After 13 December, the military junta moved swiftly against the working class. A communications blackout isolated workers from one another. Thousands of activists were arrested, leaving workers without their leaders. There was widespread resistance to martial law. But resistance had a local focus and was easily contained by the army. Workers in Gdansk, Warsaw, Katowice, Wroclaw and Silesia fought on their own. Violent demonstrations were crushed with brute force. It was more difficult for the authorities to deal with strikes and occupations. But after a series of bloody clashes culminating with the defeat of the Silesian miners in the third week of December, the back of active resistance was broken. The most dramatic of these struggles, at Wujek mine in Silesia, involved pitched battles between 2000 miners and the militia. Wujek miners were only defeated after 10 of their number and four militiamen were killed.

The crackdown was primarily directed at the working class. The army did not only arrest leading Solidarity members but also local activists. The treatment of the detainees was and remains very selective. Reports indicate that in contrast to the treatment of well-known figures, workers suffer from degrading conditions and are subject to physical harassment and abuse.

The authorities aim to use martial law to impose a system of political controls that would eliminate the proletarian opposition movement once and for all. The harsh economic conditions, particularly during winter, have assisted the military junta. Workers faced with a physical struggle for survival — shortages of food and fuel — are of necessity forced to turn their attention to their families. But the generals have not been able to have everything their own way. Passive resistance on the shopfloor continues.

At the Ursus tractor factory all forms of communication between different workshops are forbidden. In addition, the authorities have indicated that the 80-member factory committee would be held responsible for sabotage or work badly done. The only way workers can express their hatred of the regime is in the works canteen. Here bureaucrats and Party members are ostracised: whenever one of them sits down, workers stand up and change tables. At a nearby steel plant passive resistance takes a different form. Here, workers are overzealous in keeping to rules and regulations. Components with even minor defects are rejected by quality control, thus paralysing production in other workshops. At the PZO optic instrument factory in Warsaw, workers who in the past produced missing spare parts are now refusing to do so. Production at PZO has fallen

Martial law means no
return to Solidarity

INSIDE POLAND

Through the ruthless application of force the Polish bureaucracy has contained the challenge of the workers' movement. Tens of thousands of workers have been interned and thousands of others have been thrown out of work. But what will the bureaucracy do next and what are the prospects for the working class?

drastically.

The crackdown has decapitated the workers' movement but the spirit of resistance lives on. The army may control the streets but it is powerless to enforce discipline on the shopfloor.

Economic reforms

The military cannot wait until discipline is restored in the factories. The collapse of the economy has reached such proportions that the bureaucracy has virtually no control over economic life. Before its long-term strategy of reforms becomes a realistic proposition, the bureaucracy has to restore a semblance of economic order.

On 1 February food prices will be increased by between 200 and 400 per cent. This is a prelude to a general price rise which will bring the zloty more in line with the real value of goods. In the past, ever since 1970, the bureaucracy has always been forced to reverse its plans to increase prices by working class pressure. This time the Polish bureaucracy has mobilised its coercive apparatus to ensure that price rises are implemented.

Martial law conditions are the essential foundations for economic reforms. The next phase in the bureaucracy's strategy is to enforce higher work norms and to rationalise production. Wholesale closures are planned along with the introduction

of market-type mechanisms. The speed with which these measures will be introduced depends on the political climate. The Church and the intelligentsia also believe in economic reforms. However, unlike the bureaucracy, they do not understand that a precondition for reforming the economy is not less but more coercion. The bureaucracy wants to 'liberalise' the economy. But liberalisation has to be *controlled liberalisation*; a strategy which combines political coercion with economic reforms.

The Church has been an important force for stability during martial law. The clergy has been widely used to break up strikes and occupations. For example, miners who occupied Piast pit and went on hunger strike last December were visited by two priests who urged the miners to abandon their struggle. When they failed to convince the miners they promised to return the next day to hold a mass. They never returned, but their intervention had a demoralising impact on a group of workers who were looking for outside support.

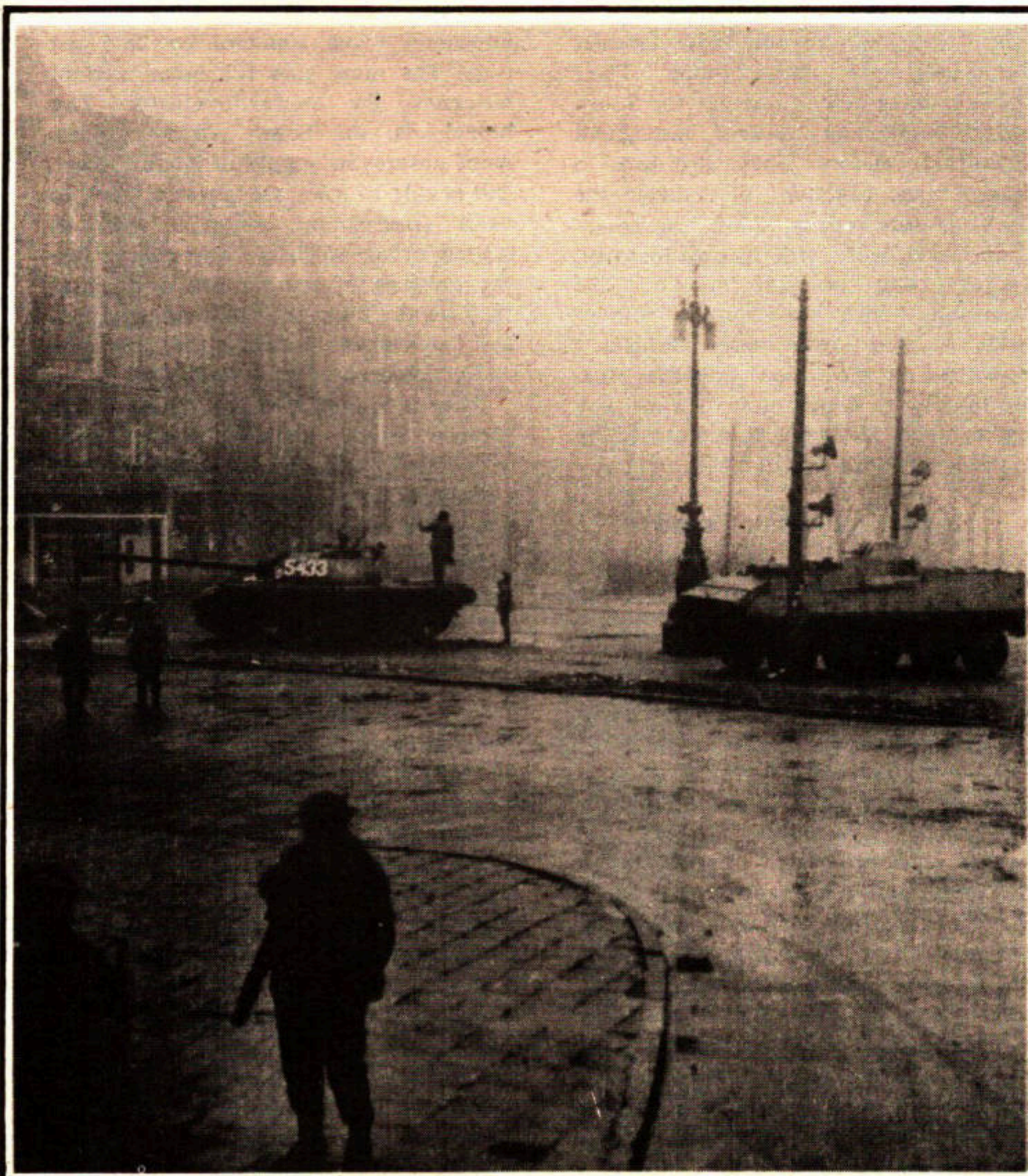
In the Western media the Church is depicted as the lone voice of opposition in a totalitarian Poland. In reality, the Church has played a crucial role in reconciling people to martial law. *The Times* noted that 'the Church has been holding negotiations with the state virtually since the imposition of martial law on 13 December — indeed the Church has become the only interpreter for the military council of the Polish people's needs' (21 January). Archbishop Jozef Glemp has even criticised arch-moderate Lech Walesa for refusing to negotiate with the military junta. In recognition of the Church's valuable role the military council has allowed the broadcasting of religious services.

Future prospects

The military council has been unable to solve any of the fundamental problems facing the bureaucracy. But the Polish bureaucracy cannot rule on its own. In the past it relied on the Church and the Solidarity leadership to moderate the actions of the working class. When the leadership of Solidarity lost control over the rank and file the army stepped in. But martial law can only be a holding operation. The desperation of the bureaucracy is illustrated by its vain attempts to breathe life into the moribund Communist Party. Leading bureaucrats are even considering the launching of a new national-coalition party that would endow the state with a semblance of legitimacy.

The dilemma facing the bureaucracy is that its power can only be maintained through coercion. However, martial law conditions are not conducive to reforming the economy. In the medium term the Polish bureaucracy will be forced to vacillate between ensuring its political survival through force and the exigencies of economic reform. It will look to the Church and the intelligentsia to provide passive support: to accept bureaucratic rule in exchange for economic reforms.

One thing is clear. The bureaucracy may talk about tolerating independent unions in the future. But its whole strategy depends on the elimination of independent working class organisations. There is no going back to Solidarity. Even if the bureaucracy allowed Solidarity to exist, the Polish working class have learnt that they need more than a trade union. The Polish state is inherently unreformable. Even the most modest aspiration of Polish workers requires the destruction of the bureaucracy and the state.



South Africa's homelands

Golf from Bophutatswana helps to overcome South Africa's international isolation. Britain's Anti-Apartheid Movement helps to keep South Africa's black people isolated from the British working class.

EARLY IN JANUARY ITV's midweek 'sports special' featured 'the century's richest golf tournament'. Five of the world's top golfers and ten show business celebrities competed for \$1 million prize money. The venue was Sun City, South Africa's new £50 million resort, not actually in South Africa, but in the 'independent nation-state' of Bophutatswana. This circus had little to do with golf. Its real purpose was to use sport to help make apartheid respectable before the British public.

Showbiz politics

Sun City exists for rich white South Africans, for Chief Lucas Mangope, Bophutatswana's President, whose National Development Corporation part-owns the Southern Sun Hotels, and for the South African government. By proclaiming the six separate chunks of territory that make up Bophutatswana an independent country, the South African state seeks to legitimise the 'separate development' policy on which its regime is based. It wants international recognition and financial backing for this arrangement — this is where Sun City fits in.

Southern Sun Hotels entrepreneur Sol Kerzner pays out big money to attract the world's top entertainers to his non-segregated auditorium. Frank Sinatra is one star, the Beach Boys, Lulu and Shirley Bassey are other crowd pullers. All this helps break down South Africa's isolation.

Sun City has another side to its cover for apartheid. Unlike puritanical South Africa, independent Bophutatswana has legalised gambling, pornographic films, strip shows and multi-coloured sex. What further evidence of independence could be required? Rich white South Africans drive from Johannesburg to spend weekends in drunken debauchery.

The Sun City golf tournament merely highlights how far South Africa will go to present itself and its homelands as stable and harmonious, steadily moving towards real progress for the majority of black people. But no amount of cosmetics can disguise the harsh realities of life in South Africa. Within a few miles of Sun City lie vast slum areas without any basic services, containing hundreds of thousands of impoverished blacks.

Botha's backdown

It is now more than two years since Prime Minister Botha set the cat amongst the pigeons with his call on white South Africa to 'adapt or die'. Black cooptation became the rage and the Nationalist Government promised to legislate apartheid out of existence. The sky seemed the limit. High-powered commissions to investigate apartheid were established by Botha himself. Senator Owen Horwood, South Africa's Finance Minister, made no mention of apartheid in the 1979/80 budget, whilst expanding education and black services. Friendly governments were installed in London and Washington and gold was rising. In Errol Tobias the South Africans had their first coloured Springbok half-back to present to the world.

However, last year, when Botha met South Africa's 600 leading businessmen at the Carlton Two conference held in Cape Town (called after the Johannesburg Carlton Hotel summit in 1979, where Botha made his proposals), things had changed for the worse. Nothing was said about the fact that all Botha's commissions have either had their major proposals taken out or rejected out of hand. Unlike at the 1979 conference, Botha never mentioned dismantling apartheid. On the contrary, the decentralisation of

industry through homeland development was the major theme of his speech. Botha revealed his adherence to the separate development policy which remains the core of the South African capitalist system.

Some 90 per cent of South African industry is concentrated in the four main metropolitan areas. For years, the South African government has been trying to encourage industry to move out to the underdeveloped homelands or to what is referred to as 'the border areas'. So far this has been a dismal failure. Botha proposed new incentives and new priority areas, headed by the most recently independent Ciskei, to be backed by a development project. But considering that this has failed in the past, and that the Southern African Development Bank has almost collapsed through lack of funds, why bother?

The object of the exercise is one for which the homelands were set up in the first place. The homelands have existed in South Africa since the turn of the century, although the name has changed from 'Bantu Reserves' to the more familiar 'homelands' we know today. Their function is as labour reserves for South Africa's burgeoning industrial, mining and agricultural sectors. They also serve a vital political function: they divide the black majority into its 'ethnic' or 'tribal' components, each with its own identity, territory and political system. The homelands policy has sought to remove black workers from any permanent settlement in the urban industrial areas and thereby to pre-empt any claims they might make for political representation and rights in white South Africa.

Home away from home

However the development of South African capitalism has tended to undermine the homeland strategy. The massive expansion of manufacturing in the 'sixties and 'seventies drew more and more blacks into permanent residence in the cities. In 1970 only four million blacks lived in 'white areas'; by 1977 the number was approaching six million, including a growing proportion of settled urban workers. Yet the majority of black workers in South Africa's towns and cities are still migrants from the country, casually employed in service occupations, mostly in the public sector. They are constantly liable to be deported to the homelands. The division between settled city workers and rural migrants remains a crucial one for the South African ruling class; the maintenance of the homelands as a reserve for labour and as a powerful lever to prevent the emergence of a united black working class is vital for the



continuation of the apartheid order.

To maintain the right balance between rural and urban labour the South African government has deliberately ensured that the homeland economies stay backward. The lack of development in these areas is illustrated by the fact that of the 28 400 jobs created in them each year in the 1973 to 1975 period, more than three quarters were in the public sector. This helped to foster the emergence of a more stable middle class loyal to the homeland policy — but little else. The major economic activity remains subsistence farming. Yet the *National Accounts of the Bantu Homelands 1971-1975* reveal that remittances from migrants employed in urban areas (and they only remit 15 per cent of their earnings) exceeded the total value of agricultural production in the homelands.

This is what decentralisation means for the black masses in South Africa. A worker from Bophutatswana who travels into Pretoria, works only three months, then spends nine months in gaol for a pass law offence can still raise his annual homeland living standard by 28.5 per cent! The same goes for other migrant workers. By underdeveloping the homelands, the South African government ensures its supply of labour-power, and is able to use these labour reserves to exert control and discipline over its settled urban workers who always fear the pressure of competition as much as they do the possibility of unemployment and banishment back to the starvation and deprivation of the homelands.

The ITV golf feature ignored this because South Africa's sporting links with Britain play an important role in smoothing relations between these two imperialist powers. At the same time, condemning British links is a favourite sport of British liberals. It salves their consciences and avoids any real challenge to the British ruling class.

Isolate the AAM!

The United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity have declared 1982 the Year of Mobilisation for Sanctions against South Africa. This is wholeheartedly being supported by the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain which has organised a national demonstration on 14 March as the culmination of the 'Isolate Apartheid South Africa' campaign launched in March 1981. Following the trade union 'week of action' in October, the AAM is staging a conference on the eve of the demonstration on the theme 'Southern Africa: time to choose', to which speakers like Michael Foot, David Steel and Len Murray have been invited. The object of these activities is not to urge British workers to take action against

GOLF THE APARTHEID WAY

British companies that prop up apartheid and thereby show real solidarity with black workers in South Africa. On the contrary, by appealing to the British government to impose sanctions against South Africa, the AAM is trying to reconcile British workers' opposition to apartheid with the imperialist interests of the British ruling class.

Following its strongest backers, the TUC bureaucracy and the Labour Party, the AAM considers that British imperialism could play a progressive role in South Africa today. Despite the fact that British capitalists remain the largest foreign investors in apartheid and that the British economy increasingly relies upon trading with South Africa, the AAM wants British workers to believe that fighting apartheid can be done without challenging British capitalism itself. Recently, for example, the York Anti-Apartheid group picketed the York Rowntree Mackintosh plant as company directors and guests arrived for an official function. The picket was one in a series of activities in solidarity with Rowntree's black workers at the company's South African sweet factory. Black workers had been sacked, arrested, detained and subjected to vicious harassment during a protracted trial of strength with the Rowntree management and police over their starvation wages, pension rights and the right to join the trade union of their choice. Together with the York and Humberside Regional TUC, the local AAM held a conference in Leeds to launch a major campaign to reverse Rowntree management's intransigence. How did they propose to do this? Appeal to the workers to take industrial action in solidarity with the South African workers? Not on your life. They appealed to Rowntree's management to reverse its policy in South Africa. Not surprisingly, the same management that is responsible for brutal repression in South Africa proved immune to the pious persuasions of the AAM.

The AAM's central strategy is to persuade British capitalists that Britain's association with South Africa is not in the interests of British capitalism. For example, last June TUC chief Len Murray 'urged' the British Leyland management, after its South African subsidiary had sacked over 1900 black workers over a wage dispute, 'in the interests of defending the international reputation of BL and of British industry generally, to use all your influence with the subsidiary...to have all dismissed employees reinstated'. BL boss Michael Edwardes ignored Murray: he knows that when it comes to BL's profits tough tactics are necessary in South Africa, whatever the cost to the firm's 'international reputation'. Edwardes only has to point out that the closure of BL's South African operation would damage BL in Britain and the AAM/TUC opposition collapses. The loyalty of the labour bureaucracy to Britain always comes before its commitment to fighting apartheid.

The AAM in fact is a barrier to building an effective anti-apartheid movement in Britain because it serves to channel workers' natural abhorrence to apartheid into support for British imperialism abroad and at home. Whilst the AAM is hot on calling for the end to sporting links with South Africa, its politics provide no way of building resistance to apartheid in the only section of British society that has an interest in its overthrow — the working class. Instead of wasting 1982 trying to get British capitalists to turn against their good friends in South Africa, British workers should isolate the AAM and its nationalist pro-capitalist politics. This would be a real step forward in the struggle to smash the apartheid regime.

Charles Longford

MINERS FALL INTO LINE

SCARGILL IS TO BLAME

BRITISH MINERS have always played a leading role in the labour movement. However, like workers in other traditionally powerful sectors of British industry, they have experienced a sustained decline. Between 1950 and 1980, 600 pits were closed and half a million jobs were lost. Up to the early 'seventies falling demand for coal resulted in a steady decline in the mining industry. The cheap price of oil and the introduction of new technology had a catastrophic impact. Miners were on the defensive and there was little resistance to closures.

The militant tradition

In 1968 the left emerged as an important force in the NUM when Lawrence Daly beat Joe Gormley in the election for general secretary. Miners had had enough: they voted for militants who promised to fight pit closures and halt the fall in wages. A new phase of militancy had begun. Rank and file pressure forced the NUM national executive to support industrial action and the miners came out on a national strike in 1972 for the first time since 1926. The militancy of the miners during the period from 1972 to 1974, which led to the demise of the Heath Government, is well known. However, this militancy must be seen in its proper perspective. The rise in oil prices in 1973 altered the position of the mining industry. Almost overnight, mining was transformed from an industry in decline to one that had a special priority for British capitalism. The oil crisis gave the miners a security which tremendously strengthened their bargaining position.

The oil crisis greatly influenced the thinking of the NUM leadership. Both left and right wings of the NUM bureaucracy saw the union's strength as a result, not of the militancy of the rank and file, but as a product of the state of the industry. Increasingly the NUM has looked to the employers, the NCB, for a joint approach to the problems facing the industry. In the short term this relationship between union and employer paid off. The shortage of energy sources meant that the ruling class was prepared to invest in mining. This joint approach appeared to be vindicated by the 1980 Coal Industry Act which established an investment programme for expanding the mining industry.

Collaboration between union and employer created a harmonious climate, and production and productivity increased substantially. As the *Financial Times* noted before last year's threatened stoppage: 'One of the ironies of the present situation is that the industry has become a victim of its own success in raising output — the result of the investment programme and productivity deals with the miners four years ago' (11 February 1981). The ruling class was well aware of the benefits of class collaboration in the pits. That's why it warned Thatcher last year to back down and postpone pit closures:

'Large-scale redundancies after several years of industrial peace and a greatly improved attendance record could wreck much of the understanding which has undoubtedly developed between management and labour.' (*The Times*, 20 January 1981)

In the event Thatcher backed down and the pit closures were postponed — but it was a victory for the industry, not for the working class. As the voice of British business put it: '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

The results of the pithead ballot on the National Coal Board's pay offer gave the ruling class a much needed boost. 'Good news for Britain!', commented *The Times* as it breathed a sigh of relief. NUM president elect Arthur Scargill and his left-wing colleagues had already worked out a justification for their defeat. Out-going president Joe Gormley was castigated as the villain of the piece — his anti-strike article in the *Daily Express* just before the ballot was blamed for the setback. Others sought different excuses. Socialist Worker explained the defeat as the result of 'lack of campaigning by the local leadership' and added: 'But what makes it worse is that it could have been won. If only there had been a campaign' (21 January). The myth of the militant miner dies hard. While the left dreams up excuses we analyse the realities behind the miners' strike that never was.

Mr Arthur Scargill' (*The Economist*, 21 February 1981).

The pro-industry approach of the NUM strongly influenced the rank and file. Workers related to their industry and saw its expansion as the best guarantee of their living standards. Basic trade union principles were gradually sacrificed to the goals of the Plan for Coal. In 1977 opposition to productivity deals and

incentive schemes collapsed and a 'self-financing incentive scheme' was accepted by the NUM executive. The new bonuses raised wages but at the price of stirring up divisions between the more productive and the less productive pits. Two years later the NUM executive was shocked to discover that it had less influence than the NCB over the rank and file. After rejecting a 20 per cent pay offer, the

NUM called for a pit ballot in favour of strike action. Just two days before the balloting in December 1979, the Coal Board put out a report which showed that a 25 per cent wage increase would put 15 000 jobs at risk. Strike action was defeated.

Militancy was in full retreat. Collaboration with the NCB had led to the paralysis of the rank and file. The left wing of the bureaucracy still made militant noises but it could not deliver the votes. In November 1980 the left argued for rejection of the NCB's 13 per cent pay offer — its call was rejected by 56 per cent of the men.

Scargill's vision

Scargill's recent election as president of the NUM was not simply a victory for militancy. Scargill won because of his reputation as the most militant supporter of the mining industry. Scargill, like his moderate colleagues on the NUM executive, identifies the interests of his membership with those of industry. Inevitably Scargill justifies his objectives in terms of its impact on industry. Scargill is thus an ardent supporter of *British* coal and the *British* economy and an opponent of foreign coal and foreign oil. In his election address, next to a cartoon which depicts the British taxpayer supporting an Arab holding a can of 'cheap imported oil', Scargill speaks out for Britain:

'It was not until the early 'seventies that the union's argument was finally completely vindicated. Within a matter of months oil prices had quadrupled and, if we calculate the 20-year period during which oil imports were pouring into the country, the cost to Britain of this policy was over £20 000 million more than it would have been had we depended upon British coal and British miners.' (*Miners in the 'eighties*)

Scargill's nationalist ramblings and business calculations subordinate militancy to the interests of industry. But what if demands for a decent living standard run counter to the interests of the mining industry? For Joe Gormley the answer is clear. He argued against strike action on the grounds that 'the board has no more cash'. Gormley simply drew out the logic of the argument which Scargill tried to evade. The men in the pits voted for their industry and rejected Scargill's call for industrial action.

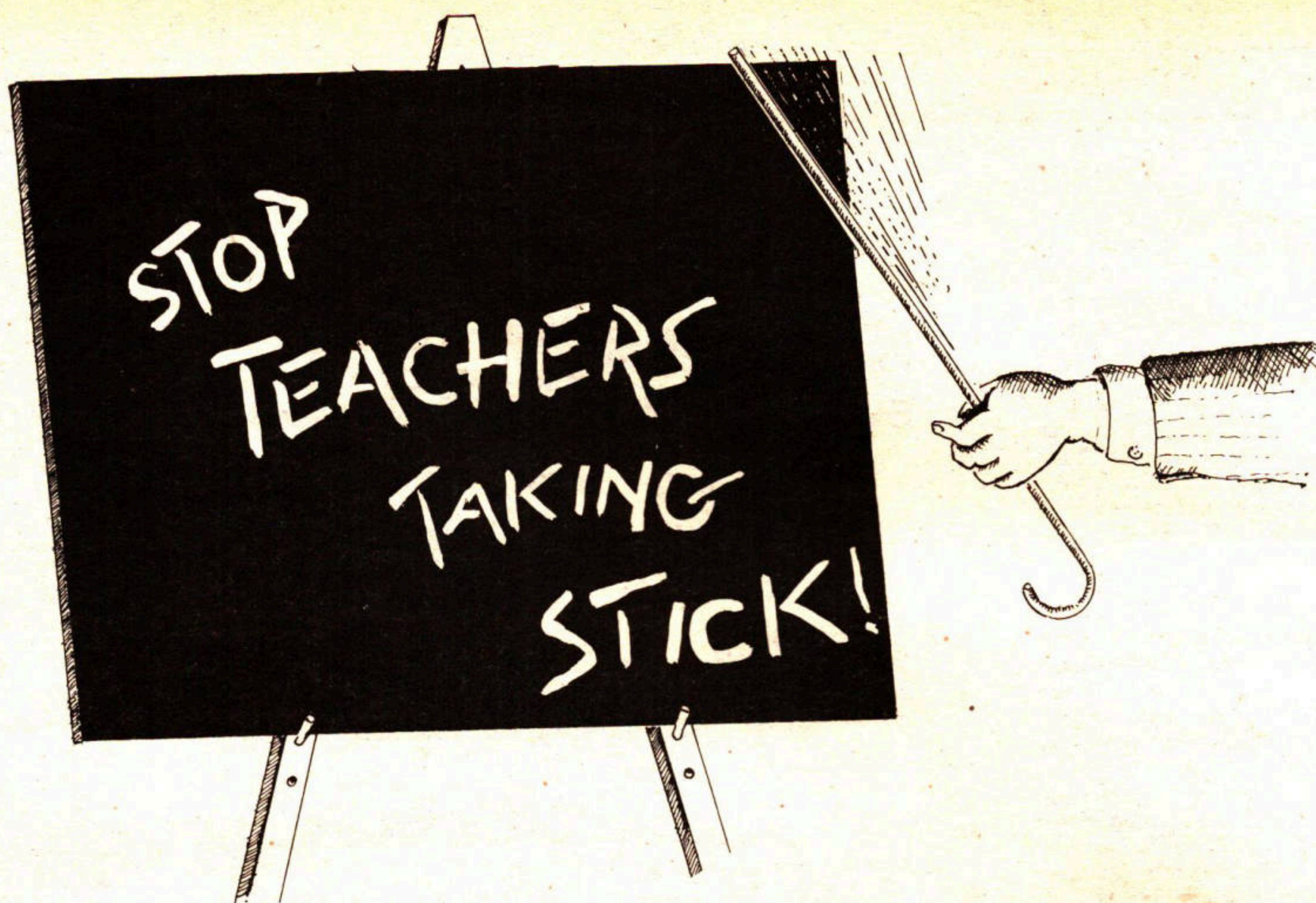
The price of collaboration

Scargill's militancy can survive as long as mining is booming. But the moment that the industry goes into crisis militancy collapses. The policy of collaboration educates workers about capitalist reality and not their class interests. That's why miners refused to go on strike. In Yorkshire, which has some of the most productive pits in the country, militancy was sustained and 66 per cent of the men voted for strike action. In South Wales, Scotland and Kent — traditional left-wing strongholds — the vote for strike action fell below the 1980 ballot. Why? Simply because the coalfields are in decline and the miners there face the prospect of more pit closures. In these areas miners had to weigh up the threat of redundancies against their tradition of militancy.

The results of the pit ballot show the dead end of Scargill's business militancy. The miners were defeated by policies which tied their interests to the account books of the NCB. The best thing that miners can do for the British working class is to break all their links with the NCB, ignore calls for import controls on coal and fight ruthlessly for every job.

Pat Roberts





COMPULSORY REDUNDANCY is something new for teachers. But the fact that the Government is pushing this measure through now comes as no surprise. This is not just because of Britain's economic crisis. More importantly, it is because of the ease with which cuts have been implemented in the past. When it comes to resisting the threat to jobs, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), the main teachers' union organising more than half the 418 000 employed in England and Wales, can offer no lessons at all. Since the mid 'seventies it has followed three disastrous tactics.

First, it has allowed newly-qualified teachers to stay unemployed. More than 60 000 trained teachers are now in this position. Those who manage to get jobs often end up as 'supply' teachers, working from day to day with no security of employment.

Second, it has agreed to negotiated redundancy agreements. NUT policy since the mid 'seventies has been to accept voluntary redundancy, early retirement and redeployment from one school to another. This has allowed 20 000 jobs to disappear in the past two years alone!

Third, it has organised anti-cuts campaigns around the theme that 'education is good for Britain'. Such campaigns proved powerless once the ruling class explained that to revive Britain — that is, British capitalism — it was necessary to decimate public services and jobs. Together with the argument that cuts must be fought 'for the sake of the children', this approach panders to the view that teachers are not workers with a right to work whose jobs must be defended.

We have to change NUT policies fast. Encouraged by its feeble opposition, the Government aims to implement 2500 compulsory redundancies this year and to do away with 11 000 more teaching posts by not filling vacancies. Another 15 000 jobs are planned to go in 1983-84 and 10 000 the year after.

The NUT and the class struggle

Teachers are up against problems when organising the defence of jobs and living standards. At work they remain isolated from each other for most of the day, vulnerable more to feelings of professional responsibility than class solidarity. Even the largest schools employ only a couple of hundred teachers; most are much smaller. And there is little tradition of workplace organisation since NUT policy does not recognise school groups as branches — instead all its branches cover large geographical areas.

The new year began with five teachers being sacked, four in Bromley, one in the Scilly Isles. These were the first compulsory redundancies among teachers, but now the Government is planning thousands more. Rob Knight looks at what can be done to fight back.

But these problems can be overcome. There was a vigorous fight for higher pay in the 'sixties and the last decade saw a number of actions taken against cuts. Just last December, 15 000 London teachers held a half-day strike in protest against Heseltine's proposed legislation. The real problem is not lack of militancy. It's the lack of any means of challenging the politics of the union leadership.

The NUT executive is right wing even by TUC standards. It has consistently sabotaged the fight for jobs. Since 1974 the union's infamous Rule 8 has meant that no local action can get official backing without prior permission of the national executive. In practice getting permission can take up to two years! When local schools and branches go ahead regardless, union members face threats of expulsion. Last year national executive member Dick North and several others were suspended from the union for participating in unofficial action.

The executive needs dictatorial powers because it knows it is under threat. Teachers' living standards have deteriorated as a result of successive wage rises below the rate of inflation and now there is a groundswell of anger in the union. The Government has met the current 13 per cent wage claim by an offer of four per cent. NUT members know that without a fight they are in for yet another wage cut to add to the threat to jobs. How can union militancy change this situation?

What's left in the NUT?

Sporadic outbursts of opposition to cuts have to be given a consistent political direction. This means not just fighting cuts themselves, but also challenging the NUT executive and its defeatist strategy and tactics.

An organised left wing has operated in the NUT since 1968, initially through the 'Rank and file' group, but later in the Socialist Teachers' Alliance (STA) as well. The STA, backed by the International Marxist Group, now makes little pretence of opposing the executive. Following its mentors' infatuation with the Labour Party, the STA is making Labour Party affiliation the main issue for the NUT's next conference at Easter. Next in line

comes affiliation to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. This is no way to beat the executive — or fight for better wages and jobs.

What about the 'Rank and file' group? It is well organised enough to force motions on racism, unemployment, cuts, wages, and other crucial issues onto the national conference agenda each year. And until Dick North's suspension it had a supporter on the executive. 'Rank and file' members have also borne the brunt of the recent suspensions in Lambeth and Southwark. But it shares the weakness of its backer, the Socialist Workers Party, and is unable to take on the NUT leadership's political outlook.

'Rank and file' says its main aim is to 'create the confidence to win' — by linking up isolated struggles, generating support and solidarity (*Rank and file teacher*, December 1981). However, by itself simple trade union militancy is no way forward. Militants need a coherent alternative strategy with which to mobilise wider support in opposition to the executive line. 'Rank and file' is aware of its weakness and isolation, and it aims to 'agitate on a broader plane and hopefully provide the ideas and arguments which will help teachers to be more effective militants in their schools'. Yet in practice, we see nothing of the kind.

Leaving the exec alone

Take the problem of racism. In East London, supporters of *the next step* urging more effective action against racism in schools have been met with apathy, if not outright opposition, from 'Rank and file' SWP members, even in the wake of brutal physical attacks on Asian children. The 'Rank and file' answer to the young racist thugs is to expose them to 'multi-racial fun, anti-racist ideas and above all, an organisation that is not immediately recognisable as "just another bunch of teachers telling us what to do"'. That organisation is the Anti-Nazi League — whose paternalistic 'fun' has left the tide of racist violence unchecked, and whose 'anti-racist ideas' have done nothing to build resistance to local councils that encourage racism with their housing and education policies.

However, it is possible to challenge the executive on racism. We can break down

the 'professional' attitudes of teachers by getting them to oppose racist attacks and fight against their causes. The only criticism 'Rank and file' makes of the latest NUT guidelines on racism — guidelines which call for cooperation with the police and getting better books on foreigners — is that they don't allow branches to affiliate to the ANL!

'Rank and file' is also short on ideas that work when it comes to the Labour Party. Labour approves in principle of the economies in public sector spending that have led to cuts, closures and redundancies in the education sector. But 'Rank and file' can't bring itself to reject affiliation to the Labour Party: 'Put simply it's a case of voting for Labour Party affiliation where it comes up, but not prioritising it as a demand'. In other words — vote Labour but keep quiet about it. This timid proposal shows how little faith the SWP has in itself as an alternative to the Labour Party and what a low priority it gives to challenging an organisation whose politics do so much to hold back teachers' militancy — even when they are still outside the Party.

SWP gets into cuts

If 'Rank and file' has trouble fighting racism and the influence of Labour, how does it do on the 'bread and butter' issue of fighting cuts? In Hackney, East London, four 'Rank and file' activists have been expelled from the SWP for wanting to organise an anti-cuts campaign with other public sector unions. The reason for this bureaucratic manoeuvre is that the SWP is suffering a shortage of the commodity it rates so highly — confidence. It has no confidence in its ability to lead successful struggles and so disciplines those of its members who have had enough of this shallow pessimism.

Unlike 'Rank and file' and the SWP, we believe that an effective movement can be built to take on all the attacks teachers face and develop a broad class outlook among NUT members. We need to oppose racism with working class political action, not 'fun'. Instead of paying for Labour Party affiliation, we want to set up a fund to finance local activities in the interests of the members. Supporters of *the next step* are fighting too for getting rid of the limitations the union rule book places on these objectives. If you are in the NUT, in or out of 'Rank and file', contact us as soon as possible. Do it today if you are going to this year's annual conference.

RAPE - IS PRISON THE ANSWER?

Everybody from right-wing Tory to radical feminist agrees that harsher custodial sentences are the only way to deal with rapists. Kate Marshall looks at the background to the recent controversy about the punishment of men convicted of rape and argues that we cannot rely on the police, the courts and the prisons to defend women's interests.

RAPE IS THE MOST barbarous of all the crimes inflicted on women. The attitude of bourgeois society to rapists — and their victims — is a reflection of the contempt in which it holds women. In 1977 a Guardsman raped a young woman: he also broke three of her ribs and rammed his fist (plus rings) into her vagina. The resulting injuries kept her in hospital for four months. Justice Slynn commented that the man had 'allowed his enthusiasm for sex to overcome his normal good behaviour'. On appeal he received a suspended sentence, on the grounds that imprisonment would set back his career in the British Army. In the case that set off the recent furore, Justice Melford Stevenson told a 17-year old woman that by hitch-hiking alone she was 'guilty of a great deal of contributory negligence' and set her rapist free with a fine. Charges against three Glasgow youths who raped a woman and slashed her with a razor were dropped, despite forensic evidence, a witness and a confession. A television expose of a police investigation into rape revealed what many women had long known — that rape victims are presumed to have invented, or invited, their assault. In the Parliamentary debate on the Guardsman case, Nicholas Fairbairn (whose decision not to prosecute in Glasgow led to his resignation as Scottish Solicitor-General) invoked the classics in support

of a view on rape widely held today:

'MPs would do well to remember that rape involved an activity which was normal. Ovid said: "Whether they say 'yes' or 'no' they all like to be asked, and saying she would never consent she consented". It was part of the business of men and women that they hunted and were hunted and said 'yes' and 'no' and meant the opposite.' (*The Times*, 20 June 1977)

However, the fact that Tory back-woodsmen hold philistine attitudes to women does not mean that they are opposed to tough treatment for rapists. Another backbencher, Robert Maxwell Hyslop, intends to introduce a private member's bill shortly in response to the recent cases. He wants to reverse the ruling that hitch-hiking justifies rape, to introduce a mandatory custodial sentence of at least two years and make a vehicle in which rape takes place liable for confiscation. Tory right wingers are staunch advocates of hanging, flogging and 'short, sharp shocks' for juvenile offenders. Their approval for prison sentences for rapists is part of their wider support for strengthening the forces of law and order in society.

However, when it comes to rape and sexual offences, Tory disciplinarians enjoy the broad backing of the Labour Party. As Fairbairn observed in the 1977 debate, 'they were the only crimes which excited Labour MPs to ask for greater sentences'. At the time Jack Ashley won the support of around 80 Labour MPs for a bill to strengthen the law. He now intends to push a new measure

which would give the prosecution the right to appeal against lenient sentences. When Margaret Thatcher declared that all rapists should be jailed her Labour opponents agreed. And Thatcher was applauded too by the fervent anti-Tories of the women's movement.

Feminists against rape

The women's movement has campaigned actively against violence against women and has rightly condemned bourgeois apologists and their hypocritical justifications for it. However, there are two major flaws in the feminist campaign against rape that make it ineffective in dealing with the problem.

First, the feminists isolate rape — and other extreme examples of the brutalisation of women, like wife-battering — from the day to day oppression of women in capitalist society, in the family and at work. This leads to the identification of the problem as men — not capitalism. Thus Susan Brownmiller insists that rape 'is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear' (*Against our will*, 1975). And it leads too to the narrow focus of today's women's movement which concentrates on issues like rape, while neglecting the broader struggles against cuts and closures, and for nursery and abortion facilities. But rape is simply the most abhorrent symptom of women's oppression: it will not disappear unless the disease is treated.

The second problem follows from the first. Once aspects of women's oppression are separated from capitalism, women are isolated from the only section of society with an interest in defending women's rights through fighting the system — the working class. The result is that feminists turn their back on the labour movement and look to the state to protect them against men. This is where Susan Brownmiller meets Margaret Thatcher: both want prison sentences for rapists. Feminists often go further than the Tories, calling for longer sentences and police-imposed curfews on men. But the bourgeois state exists to preserve bourgeois society — which needs to keep women in a subordinate position. Not only can it not be relied upon to curb violence against women, it will take advantage of feminists' invitations to strengthen its repressive grip on society as a whole.

Workers against rape

The working class has its own traditional methods of dealing with anti-social behaviour. Trade unionists know how to deal with scabs; the anti-imperialist movement in Ireland has its ways of dealing with informers or others whose activities are a danger to the community. We need to activate these traditions so that workers themselves — not the police — can take an active part in the defence of women's rights. This does not mean that we should let the ruling class off the hook: we should fight to end night work, for adequate public transport and street lighting.

However, rape will not be eradicated as long as women are unequal in every respect, isolated in the family and impoverished. Rape will continue to exist as long as capitalist social relations keep women in subjection.

The December meeting of the Manchester central branch of ASTMS passed a motion calling for 'positive action' in the union. Manchester Women for Communism submitted the following document for discussion at the February meeting.

ASTMS - WHAT SORT OF POSITIVE ACTION?

IN 1980 17 per cent of the membership of ASTMS was female. A National Women's Advisory Council was established in 1975 to look after their interests, to monitor the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, and to ensure that the resolutions passed at the 1975 Annual Conference of ASTMS were implemented. The agreed resolutions called for adequate nursery and abortion facilities and parental leave. But despite all of them the existence of the Advisory Council and the relatively good representation of women amongst the full-time officials (9.5 per cent), ASTMS has done virtually nothing to fight against the root causes of women's oppression. Even if 17 per cent of the officials and the executive were female we could not guarantee any real improvements for women. The problem lies deeper than this.

Women's oppression results from the existence of domestic work in the home, which is carried out in the main by the female section of the working class. This work — child-care, cleaning, cooking, etc — is not part of the concern of either the employers, their state or our union. So long as the women get on with the task of producing and reproducing the labour force, getting themselves, their husbands and children back to work the next day fit to be exploited, then the bosses are happy. For women to be free to get fully involved as workers (only 45 per cent of women work and 40 per cent of these only work part-time), and as trade unionists, this work would have to be taken out of the home and socialised

— made into a public industry.

Many unions argue that housework should be shared between husband and wife. But this is no solution: the work itself, because it is privatised, time-consuming and unpaid, is oppressive. Until it is taken on by society, under socialism, we must fight to force the state and the employers to take on the most arduous and time-consuming aspects of domestic work. The need for nurseries is self-evident. There are less nurseries available now than in 1900! Local authority nurseries are only available to single parents who have a full-time job and can afford the fees, and even then the waiting lists are long. What we need is nurseries which are free of charge, and open 24 hours a day, so that women can go out (or to meetings) in the evening, and so that these facilities are available for night and shift workers.

In addition, many women have the extra burden of looking after disabled or old people at home. It is therefore part of the fight to free women from this work that we must fight against the cuts in social services and the closure of hospitals and old people's homes. The third aspect of this fight is for free abortion on demand. Abortion is a necessity today for working class women unable to afford more children, particularly in the absence of nursery provision.

Without these basic facilities — especially in conditions of recession, when the government is cutting back on the unproductive state sector — women will

continue to be unequal and unable to overcome their oppression. The existence of domestic work explains women's inability to compete equally with men for jobs, and explains the segregation of the vast majority of women in the worst-paid, worst-organised and least skilled jobs. It also explains the widespread belief that women are naturally inferior and expendable at a time of mass unemployment. It might be useful, as the motion for ADC suggests, to conduct a survey amongst women members of ASTMS to discover the extent of this inequality and to circulate it to the membership as a whole, so that a full appreciation of the situation develops. But the findings must be located in the context of the present attack on workers' living standards and a strategy for fighting the inequality of women.

The other aspects of the motion are concerned with 'positive action'. This means 'changing the rules' so that women are fairly represented on union bodies and delegations. Unfortunately 'positive action' does not work. What have the two members of the General Council of the TUC who have to be female done to fight for women's rights? When Marie Patterson was interviewed by *Spare Rib* in 1977 in the middle of one of the most important equal pay disputes ever, at Trico's, she said: 'I've got enough to do without finding out about other people's strikes'. Mel Read, who is on the ASTMS executive, certainly attended the big 1978 trade union conference organised by the National Abortion Campaign. But her

role was simply to defend the trade union leaders who were under attack from the rank and file. We do not criticise these individuals as individuals, but simply point out that they operate as official trade union leaders rather than as women workers. They might have been elected because they are of female gender but that doesn't mean that their political interests coincide with those of the mass of women workers. We should be more concerned about the *politics* of the people we elect to represent us than their sex.

There will always be a few women who can go to the top of the unions, just as in every other section of society. The motion to the ADC is aimed more to encourage the participation of ordinary rank and file women in the union. It is right to argue that meetings of the union should be held at more convenient times (ie in work hours) and for creches to be provided at all other times, to make it as easy as possible for women with children and other domestic responsibilities to attend. But the best way to get women into ASTMS, and for them to become *active* members of the union, is to change the union into a fighting body, one which campaigns for the interests of women workers and involves our brothers in the struggle too. The 'education' and 'training' which the motion calls for will not take place in the abstract, but around campaigns to defend and extend the facilities we need.

Our policy should be:

- for free and safe contraception, free abortion on demand
- for free, 24-hour nurseries
- against all attacks on the social services
- against all redundancies, for a women's right to work
- to transform the union into a democratic, campaigning union that puts the interests of women workers at the centre of its programme.

Women for communism

At the close of 1981 the Revolutionary Communist Party's Manchester branch set up a group to push forward the struggle against women's oppression from a working class point of view. Women for Communism aims to combat the traditions of feminism and Labourism which currently paralyse both the women's movement and the labour movement. The articles in this special feature indicate the sort of issues the propaganda and activity of Women for Communism is taking up. If you are interested in Women for Communism get in touch at the address below.

A BORTION: FEMINIST BETRAYAL

CUTS IN NATIONAL Health Service facilities and further restrictions of the terms on which abortion is legally allowed are making it more and more difficult for working class women to get an abortion. Yet for many feminists the abortion issue is the greatest success of the women's movement. As Anna Paczuska writes, 'One campaign above all others symbolises how far we have come: the campaign for abortion rights' (*Sisters and workers*, Women's Voice/SWP). The complacent silence of the women's movement before the current offensive on abortion rights is a result of the feminist politics that have guided the various campaigns from the 'sixties onwards.

The '67 Act

The 1967 Abortion Act permitted the termination of pregnancy under certain prescribed conditions, as agreed by two doctors. The Act was the furthest the state was prepared to go towards making abortion legal: the defence of this limited advance has been the sole objective of the women's movement ever since.

The 1967 Act was made possible by 20 years of capitalist expansion. On the one hand, this allowed increasing government spending on the NHS, to the extent that it could provide a full abortion service. On the other hand, the boom led to demands on working women that were incompatible with large families: women were needed to staff the state sector, not rear large numbers of children. The Abortion Act was implemented at a time when the government anticipated a steady increase in the proportion of women at work. It was therefore prepared to give the legal go-ahead for the abortion facilities that would help to make this possible.

Economic expansion stimulated the growth of a professional middle class which sought to make Britain a more liberal place, especially in sexual and family matters. The abolition of the

death penalty and the relaxation of restrictions on divorce and homosexuality were the result of sustained pressure for progressive reform from this section of society. Abortion reform was another of its consequences.

The Abortion Law Reform Association was the pressure group that pushed the issue onto the Parliamentary agenda. The Association combined a middle class concern about personal choice with a more traditional paternalistic attitude to helping the 'deserving' poor, as one of its leaders, Madeleine Simons, explains:

'The notion of the "deserving" loomed large in our minds, and seemed to some of us, at least, to constitute the main justification for our activities. It was chiefly for the worn-out mother with many children, with an ill or illiterate or feckless or brutal or drunken or otherwise inadequate husband, that we were fighting.' (*Abortion and liberation*, 1972)

Abortion under attack

As boom turned to crisis the ideological climate changed. Bourgeois pundits discovered a new concern for the children of 'working mums' — the latchkey kids, the under-achievers at school, the poorly-fed ('square crisps don't equal square meals'), juvenile delinquents. Unemployment rose steadily and the pressure grew for women to move out of the workforce back into the home. At the same time the gutter press discovered 'abuses' of the abortion laws — an invasion of London by foreign women with unwanted pregnancies, an epidemic of teenage pregnancies supposedly encouraged by the new permissive legislation. The time was ripe for a right-wing attack on the 1967 Act.

In 1975 James White's Amendment Bill came before Parliament. It ran out of time, only to be replaced by a similar measure moved by William Benyon in 1977, and another from John Corrie in 1979. These bills aimed to tighten up the conditions on which abortion was allowed, to make it more difficult for women to get an abortion. They sought to restrict late abortions, to ensure that the two consenting doctors were long-established and in different practices, to prevent non-medical personnel from giving advice on abortion and to prevent 'foreigners' from using British facilities. The anti-abortion lobby in Parliament was backed by a massive campaign in the country, run by the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child and 'Life', in close cooperation with the Catholic Church.

It was in response to this coordinated offensive on women's rights that the feminists began to move. The National Abortion Campaign was founded in 1975 by ALRA and the National Council for Civil Liberties. It soon became a popular cause among left groups and even within a section of the labour bureaucracy. Its main slogan was 'Free abortion on demand — a woman's right to choose'. In practice the first half of this slogan was always subordinated, and often dropped altogether, in favour of the second half. The women's movement's preoccupation with individual choice above its concern for the collective defence of women's rights continuously undermined the effectiveness of NAC.

Sisters and brothers

The feminist defence of the 1967 Act contained two elements. It tried to combat the propaganda of the anti-abortionists while seeking an alliance with the labour bureaucracy against more restrictive legislation.

Confronting SPUC was a major priority for NAC, nationally and locally. Feminists picketed church halls, wrote streams of letters to local newspapers and launched counter-demonstrations. NAC countered SPUC's hysterical propaganda by aping its methods: it answered sordid tales of aborted foetuses crying and being asphyxiated with its own horror stories about back-street abortions; to photographs of unborn babies it replied with images of knitting needles and sepsis; it joined in the futile debate about the moment life begins and the 'viability' of foetuses of different gestational ages. Instead of shifting the discussion from the preoccupations of bourgeois public opinion to the real issues of women's rights, feminists pandered to every reactionary prejudice. They urged Parliamentary debaters on abortion to consider 'the economic argument' (*A woman's right to choose: why we must fight the Abortion Amendment Bill and how to go about it*, ALRA, 1975). They had carefully calculated the cost of extra births, more mothers on social security, more children in care, etc, trying to make out that abortion was a cheaper option for the state — not that it was a basic necessity for women. NAC argued against the exclusion of foreign women from abortion facilities on the grounds that the majority went private anyway — not because women from overseas had just as much need as British women for abortions.

The feminists distrusted the unions at first — because they were largely run by men, rather than because of their politics. However, the middle class snobs of the women's movement soon made the startling discovery that 'some of the best speeches on abortion have been made by people who have spent their lives in factories' (*A woman's right to choose*, ALRA Action Guide, 1976). And the abortion campaigners also realised that many union bureaucrats, sensitive to the growing proportion of women in their ranks, were sympathetic to the abortion cause. At its 1975 Congress the TUC adopted a policy of opposition to any further restrictions on abortion rights. Passing resolutions in support of free abortion was a useful gesture of concern for the sisters — and it relieved the brothers of the burden of doing anything in defence of abortion rights.

It wasn't until 1979 and the 'Campaign against Corrie' that the TUC began to act, calling its first national demonstration in support of abortion. What prompted this sudden concern of the TUC for women's rights? Leading SWP feminist Anna Paczuska supplies the answer:

'Abortion became not just part of the campaign for women's rights, it became an integral part of the fight against the Tories and their anti-working class politics.' (*Sisters and workers*)

The Tory election victory of 1979 in conditions of deepening recession gravely weakened the position of the labour bureaucracy. It pushed the trade union leaders into identifying more closely with broader political movements — such as those against nuclear weapons and against curbs on the availability of abortion — as a means of widening their base of popular support. Thus the interests of feminists and bureaucrats converged in the protest against Corrie.

Whatever happened to NAC?

The White, Benyon and Corrie amendments all failed to get through Parliament. The 1967 Act remains in operation. And the mass feminist campaign for abortion rights of the 'seventies lies dormant today. What went wrong?

First, NAC's narrow defence of the 1967 Act — 'it's all we've got' — has consistently held back a broader fight for abortion rights. The Act itself is far from conceding free abortion on demand and



the existence of the law is itself no guarantee of abortion even under its restrictive terms. Cuts and closures of hospitals have curtailed the availability of abortions over the last few years, despite the 1967 Act. This underlines the fact that under capitalism, laws are an inadequate safeguard for democratic rights — the defence of these rights cannot therefore be confined to the sphere of legislation and hope to be successful.

Second, NAC ignored the working class in favour of an alliance with the labour bureaucrats. The feminists' petit-bourgeois distaste for the working class led them to miss the opportunity to build on the support for women's rights that does exist to create an effective movement to win real advances.

Third, NAC's feminist prejudices led it to organise the abortion campaign around the bourgeois notion of individual freedom of choice enshrined in legislation, rather than the working class concept of freedom won only through the overthrow of the capitalist system. To achieve free abortion on demand we need not just the sort of medical facilities that capitalism cannot provide for working class women,

but conditions in which women are genuinely free (socially as well as legally) to decide whether or not to have children. What we need is not some metaphysical control over ourselves ('our bodies, our lives, our right to decide' as NAC puts it), but control over society so that women's needs and interests can be fully met.

For us abortion is a class question because fighting for free abortion on demand means challenging class society — capitalism — and its oppression of women. In the struggle for socialism we oppose every piece of reactionary legislation and every cut in services. To build a united fightback against the current attacks on women's rights we need to reject the narrow and divisive approach of the feminists and base our campaign on an appeal to active workers, men and women.

Carol Taggart

'SEXISM' AND STUDENTS

WHEN THE WOMEN'S movement began to move at the end of the 'sixties, it was the new generation of students who acted as the driving force behind it. The post-war boom had brought more women than ever before into further education. On emerging from the sanctuary of their sociology seminars, however, newly-qualified women found that with or without degrees and diplomas, they were still discriminated against in employment and pressed into domestic slavery. From their frustration, feminism was reborn. From the outset these radical women students chose the wrong target — 'sexism', 'patriarchy', or simply 'men', rather than the capitalist system. Their pressure group approach to parliamentary politics succeeded in squeezing some minor advances for women from the tail-end of the boom, but the women's movement proved no match for the realism of the ruling class once the system swung back into a period of crisis. Acceptance of capitalism always means, in the end, accepting those measures necessary to save it. Salvaging the democratic rights of women is never far from the top of the bosses' agenda when their profitability starts to drop through the floor.

Capitalism or male chauvinism?

The National Union of Students (NUS) is a self-proclaimed champion of women's rights. However, over the years since the feminists first gained influence in the NUS, the 'rights' being championed have gradually changed.

As recently as 1977, a widely-supported motion to NUS conference located the roots of women's oppression in capitalist social relations rather than chauvinist male psychology. It also demanded that 'every woman should have the right to... abortion and contraception... freely available on demand' on the grounds that 'free abortion on demand is a class issue'. True, the sticky fingers of the radical left smudged the principled content of that motion. The motion's assertion that free

abortion on demand is a class issue is only formal, it is incompatible with its support for autonomous women's organisations. Such organisations would be autonomous only of working class politics — the only sort of politics that can defend women's rights. However, compared to what followed as the crisis deepened, the 1977 resolution was the very rock of revolutionary politics.

By its 1980 conference, the NUS had forgotten all about the democratic right to free abortion on demand. Instead, its attention focused on the spectre of 'sexism'. The NUS has switched from campaigning for free abortion and nursery facilities and the right to social equality, to arguing for banning striptease shows on campus. But why have they found it necessary to trivialise the fight for women's rights? The answer is that the NUS has got the wind up.

The NUS executive may not actually be the TUC bureaucracy, but that's not for want of trying. Dominated by the same Broad Left alliance that has worked so hard in the trade union movement to foster class collaboration in British industry, the NUS leadership has become a parody of its big brother. It incorporates all the worst features of the TUC's allegiance to the state and its narrow bureaucratic outlook. At a time of recession, this has had two effects on the leadership of the student movement, both of which are directly related to the NUS' shift to the right on the question of women.

First, the NUS leaders fully accept the necessity for cuts. Britain must come first, and Britain can no longer afford its further education system, let alone the fringe benefits such as student unions. The problem for them is not how to oppose all cuts in education and student facilities, but where those cuts should be made. Should they cut down on those expensive circulars? Should they stop subsidising beer prices? These are some of the great questions of the moment.

The second problem is the one closest to the heart of every bureaucrat: how to protect his own skin. Student numbers are being reduced, union finances are under attack and disaffection with the inability of the NUS leaders to do anything to defend students is running high, leading to a growing number of disaffiliations from NUS. The Sue Slipmans, Trevor Phillips and David Aaronovitchs who run the NUS machine have had their work cut out to keep the structure of the NUS — and their influence over it — intact. Their desperate need is for unity, the unity of the student movement behind the NUS and its leadership. Their survival strategy is the time-honoured policy of all aging parents — lock up your daughters!

Black paper

The way to ensure that students stay on the straight and very narrow, the argument runs, is to keep them away from any contact with untoward influences. In practice, that means removing all controversial political issues, issues which challenge the labour bureaucracy and the system they serve, from the arena of student politics. Discussion of the broad democratic issues facing the labour and student movement — women, racism, Irish independence — is out. Parochial 'student' issues — grants, bus fares, 'sexist' advertising on campus — are in. The acknowledged need to cut union finances somewhere provided the NUS executive with the perfect excuse for stamping out politics, by complaining that campaigns were 'too costly'. At the 1980 conference, the leadership moved in to curb all student political activity around the issue of women's rights.

The NUS executive's 'Black Paper' *The shape of things to come*, called for all 'general, social and political campaigns to be 'de-prioritised' in favour of more directly 'student' affairs. The executive's reactionary plan was made so explicit that it was rejected, only to be replaced

by a rehashed, slightly modified version which contained all the key points of the original and was finally carried with ease. Women's oppression could now be raised in student unions only in relation to on-campus issues: free abortion on demand and free 24-hour nursery facilities for all women were taboo:

'We should aim to re-emphasise the position of women and ethnic minorities in the context of our work on education and welfare. Such re-orientation would be designed to make that work far more relevant and exciting for our own members, as well as more closely to their direct interests.' (*The shape of things to come*)

For 'more relevant and exciting' read 'less likely to lead to political action'. Following this line of inaction, the NUS has embraced all the current feminist fads as a welcome alternative to mobilising in defence of women's rights. Women's oppression has been removed from the sphere of politics to that of ideology: 'sexism' is now the central problem. Indeed the term 'sexism' has multiplied its appearance at NUS conference to the point where it assumes the rank of punctuation mark. But what is 'sexism'? Well, 'sexism is a series of attitudes held by society about individuals which defines their roles within that society based on their sex' (*Motion 137*, NUS Conference, 1980). And how to deal with it? A few articles about rape in *National Student* and banning you-know-what posters would help, but basically, 'the eradication of sexism can only be achieved by its total elimination within the education system'. Or, if you like your bourgeois claptrap with a sprinkling of sociological jargon, you could always 'demand that society examines itself introspectively with a view to eliminating the socialisation process which breeds violence against women' (*Emergency motion*, NUS Conference, 1980).

Teach the boys it's naughty and they'll stop it? This nonsense has nothing to do with women's oppression and how to fight it. The fact that committees are headed by chairmen, that pornographic films are legal, and that women have trouble getting served in 'El Vino's', is not the root cause of social inequality. These are the symptoms, not the disease. How can we sum up the problem? Capitalism=women's oppression, socialism=emancipation. Such straightforward explanations may be anathema to feminists and NUS conferences, but they are indispensable to an understanding of why only revolutionary politics can further the fight against women's subjugation.

Clearing the road

The NUS executive has nothing to say to women. They can applaud the feminist motion-movers, whilst clapping themselves on the back for their success in driving almost every important political issue away from the student body they represent.

One useful challenge to the bureaucrats will be the building of a campaign to break the feminist hold over NUS policy on women's oppression. The democratic demands for free abortion on demand, free 24-hour nursery facilities, free and safe contraception and equal pay, can be used to force the NUS out of the comfortable hole it has wormed its way into. The alternative is a tightening of the bureaucrats' grip on what campaigns are suitable, and an endless stream of meaningless motions on 'introspection' and psychoanalysis, whilst the position of women is further weakened. The options are clear; the road ahead isn't. Let's get some of the rubbish out of the way and then we can get started.

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Tory Irish Policy

Rock firm for the Union

As James Prior gropes his way towards yet another British initiative in Ireland, the Conservative and Unionist Party in Britain contains hostile critics of its Irish policies; the Party is bitterly at odds with its traditional allies, the Ulster Unionists. Mike Wall argues that it is the 'no surrender' Tories who most clearly and consistently express the interests of British imperialism in Ireland.

WHEN TORY Northern Ireland minister James Prior announced his approval last November of a devolved assembly in the Six Counties as part of the unfolding 'Anglo-Irish' initiative, he came under ferocious attack. Backbench diehard Nicholas Winterton rebuked him for 'blatant incompetence' and 'crass ineptitude'. Prior immediately joined his predecessor Humphrey Atkins and his boss Margaret Thatcher in Ian Paisley's cast of Ulster's betrayers. Relations between the Ulster Unionists and the British Tories reached an all-time low.

The division between those representatives of the British ruling class who favour conciliation and those who see coercion as the only answer to the Irish national liberation movement is as old as its struggle against British imperialism. Prior, like previous ministers William Whitelaw and Reginald Maudling, follows in the tradition of Irish chief secretaries Arthur and Gerald Balfour and George Wyndham, the 'constructive Unionists', around the turn of the century. Winterton, his backbench colleague John Biggs-Davison and Tory renegade Enoch Powell follow the uncompromising approach to the defence of the Union advocated by Randolph Churchill and Bonar Law in face of the Home Rule agitation.

Constructive Unionism

The heyday of constructive Unionism was the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth — between Gladstone's Second Home Rule Bill in 1893 and Asquith's final attempt to push recognition of limited autonomy for Ireland through the British Parliament in 1912. The Irish national movement, following the disgrace and death of Parnell, was weak and divided; and the British Empire was sufficiently powerful and prosperous to be able to afford concessions in Ireland. British administrators and some progressive Protestant landlords considered that the impetus behind the nationalist movement could most effectively be halted by measures of social

improvement.

The brothers Balfour and George Wyndham won the cooperation of Unionist landowners such as cooperative pioneer Horace Plunkett and John Shawe-Taylor in a series of measures of reform. Successive legal changes in the terms of land ownership transformed Ireland in 20 years from a nation of unruly peasants to one of conservative tenant farmers. The administration encouraged improvements in farming technique and established an embryonic ministry of agriculture. Education was extended through the establishment of a university for Catholics and local government was reorganised along British lines. In place of the traditional contempt and cold steel approach to the natives, the constructive Unionists cultivated moderate nationalist politicians like William O'Brien of the United Irish League.

The constructive Unionists reached the end of the road when, with the Third Home Rule Bill looming ahead, Wyndham's protégé Anthony MacDonnell proposed that central and local government in Ireland should take over financial and legislative powers currently controlled from London. MacDonnell's devolution proposals produced a Unionist uproar. The alliance of the Protestant landowners, Orange industrialists and Loyalist workers, which had resisted the earlier Home Rule proposals, grouped to defend the British link as the guarantor of all their interests. Wyndham was forced to resign and his conciliatory approach gave way to a more aggressive British policy.

However, at least at the level of official Conservative Party policy, it is the broad strategy of constructive Unionism that has guided the Tories' approach to Northern Ireland over the years since the present 'troubles' began. Lord Gowrie, Prior's No 2 at the Northern Ireland Office, is a reincarnation of George Wyndham — another product of the Anglo-Irish Protestant ascendancy and also a third-rate poet. The *Irish Times* recently summed up his approach as

'broadly supportive of the Unionist position' but with a clear understanding 'that where there are two loyalties or cultures, the way forward is not to extinguish one but to negotiate and legislate for the continued existence of both' (15 January). This indeed has been the dominant theme in Tory discussions over the past 13 years.

In 1969 the Conservative Party conference approved reforms implemented by Stormont, declaring that 'discrimination is indefensible' and urging 'the necessity of reconciliation' among the people of Northern Ireland. At the 1971 conference, the minister then responsible for the Six Counties, Reginald Maudling, registered his recognition that 'the minority's feeling that they can never hope to participate in government' was at the root of the conflict. 'Talking to all shades of Northern Ireland opinion' remained his proclaimed priority.

When Whitelaw took over he went even further, engaging in talks with the Provisional IRA at the height of their bombing campaign in 1972, and then proposing a 'power-sharing' assembly as the solution to the problem at the Sunningdale conference in 1973. Prior has taken over Atkins' passion for devolved assemblies where he left off, explicitly stating that 'total integration [of the Six Counties into the UK] is not a viable solution' as he continued consultations on his latest initiative. Edward Heath was the first British Prime Minister to visit an Irish Taoiseach in Dublin: Thatcher's discussions with first Haughey and then FitzGerald indicate Tory recognition of 'an Irish dimension' in British administration of the Six Counties.

The Conservative Party's overtly conciliatory approach to the Irish War has provoked internal strife and a degree of acrimony between British Tories and Ulster Unionists unparalleled in the history of their association. Before we examine this conflict in more detail, it is useful to look at the Tory Empire Loyalists who defeated Home Rule 70 years ago.

'Not an inch'

Ever since the modern movement for Irish freedom began, an influential section of the Tory Party has acknowledged that there can be no compromise between Irish claims for national independence and the necessity for Britain to continue to rule Ireland. For this section military repression has always been the first principle of Tory Irish policy. From the beginning of Loyalist resistance to the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, Irish Unionists won the support of British Conservatives who identified backing for the Union with the defence of landlordism, with the unity of the Tories (and the division of the Liberal Party) and with the preservation of the Empire. The climax of the 1886 anti-Home Rule agitation was the visit of Conservative peer Randolph Churchill to Belfast. He assured a vast crowd of Loyalists that, if it became necessary to fight against Home Rule 'there will not be wanting to you those of position and influence in England who are willing to cast in their lot with you'.

The outraged Loyalist reaction to the constructive Unionists' 1904 devolution proposals led to the strengthening of the Tory-Unionist alliance against any rapprochement with Irish nationalism. The alliance reached its zenith under Andrew Bonar Law and Edward Carson, who together led the final phase of resistance to Home Rule from 1911 until the outbreak of the First World War postponed the resolution of the conflict. Law's famous statement of solidarity with the Unionist cause reveals that the Tories were prepared to challenge state power in Britain to preserve the Union with Ireland:

'I can imagine no lengths of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them, and in which, in my belief, they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.'

Through the 1801 Act of Union Britain had fused Ireland into the British state as a means of stabilising its rebellious colony: the result was that any attempt to weaken the Union now became a threat to the British state itself.

One theme recurs in the polemics of the hard-line Tory Unionists against those in their own Party who favoured a conciliatory approach in Ireland, and especially against Liberal Home Rulers — that of betrayal. Randolph Churchill set the tone in his 1886 Belfast peroration:

'Like Macbeth before the murder of Duncan, Mr Gladstone asks for time. Before he plunges the knife into the heart of the British Empire, he reflects, he waits.'

Churchill struck a note which is familiar to us, nearly a century later, in the speeches of Ian Paisley and Enoch Powell.

Straight Tory talking

Every Tory minister for Northern Ireland has been accused, not only by extreme Loyalists, but also by Conservative backbenchers, of treachery in putting 'political solutions' at a higher priority than winning a military victory in Ireland. Maudling was pilloried for being 'soft on terrorism' and tolerating no-go areas. 'It would be incredible, if it had not actually happened, that for a year and a half there should be areas in the United Kingdom where the Queen's writ does not run', said Enoch Powell in 1971, when he was still a Tory MP. Whitelaw's talks with the IRA, his ceasefire agreements and his 'power-sharing' schemes produced similar streams of invective, as have talks between Tory Prime Ministers and the Dublin government. Biggs-Davison has consistently condemned the Tory leadership's 'flabbiness':

'Past flabbiness in the political direction of operations, and the appeasement of the Provos in their so-called ceasefire, the shoddy "Troops Out" agitation — these have encouraged the belief that, even if one cannot bomb the

Loyalists into an all-Ireland socialist republic, one can make the British quit, as though Northern Ireland were not part of the realm but another Palestine or Cyprus.'

Here Biggs-Davison touches another major theme of today's Tory Unionists — their repudiation of the way in which the British approach to the Irish War is presented to the public.

The Tory Unionists resent Northern Ireland being labelled as a colony. For them the Six Counties are incontrovertibly part of the United Kingdom. In 1971 Enoch Powell summed up their view in a speech to the South Buckinghamshire Conservative women:

'For 18 months a part of the United Kingdom has been under attack from an external enemy assisted by detachments operating inside ... a fact which concerns Buckinghamshire as it concerns Cornwall or Aberdeenshire or County Down. For when one part of a nation is under attack, the whole is under attack.'

Biggs-Davison too rejected those radicals who drew parallels between Ireland and Vietnam:

'The analogy is false. Northern Ireland is not a colonial territory. It is no Aden or Cyprus. It is part of the homeland.'

The Tory Unionists understand that Britain's relationship with Ireland is different from its ties to other colonies: Britain could withdraw from them without undue difficulties. But, as a result of its inclusion in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has become a *domestic* problem. An attack on British control there is an assault on the British nation-state itself.

Placing the conflict between the Irish liberation movement and the British state at the centre of their analysis, the defenders of the Union in the Conservative Party contemptuously dismiss the myths fostered in Britain to explain the war in Ireland. 'The divisions of Northern Ireland are not the divisions of religion', a Mr Wren-Hilton told the 1972 conference, 'but divisions between those who honour and respect Her Majesty the Queen and the Union Jack, and those who wish to see an alien flag'. Enoch Powell despatches the vulgar arguments with characteristic pungency:

'The assumption that people start fighting in Ulster and throwing petrol bombs at one another because they have suddenly lost their senses or their tolerance or become foolish, or, conversely, that trouble stops because they have mended their ways, become tolerant and wise, and 'learned to live together', is more insulting to the intelligence of those who use this sort of talk than it is to those about whom it is used. Its danger is that, being foolish, it is bound to obscure real causes, and therefore the real remedies.'

And what about the impartial security forces, valiantly keeping the peace?:

'The British forces are in Northern Ireland because an avowed enemy is using force of arms to break down lawful authority in the province and thereby seize control. The army cannot be "impartial" towards an enemy, nor between the aggressor and the aggrieved: they are not glorified policemen, restraining two sets of citizens who might otherwise do one another harm, and duty-bound to show no "partiality" towards one lawbreaker rather than another. They are engaged in defeating an armed attack upon the state.'

For Powell and the rest the conciliatory strategy embraced by the Tory leadership, and the 'sedulous propaganda' associated with it, have seriously weakened the British war effort: 'a war cannot be waged let alone won, when it is held necessary to assume that the enemy does not exist'.

The Tory Unionists demand the military repression of the nationalist people in the Six Counties. For Powell 'nationhood is absolute': Ireland must be either Irish or British and he is in no doubt on which side he stands. Such Tories give full support to the Army and the police and whatever methods they

find necessary. They fully endorsed measures like Bloody Sunday when paratroopers in Derry shot 13 unarmed civilians, and condemned public criticisms of the Army in Britain as treachery. They acquiesce to the violence of the Loyalist paramilitaries, explaining it, in the words of Tory intellectual and committed pro-Unionist T E Utley, as a natural reaction to 'the vicissitudes of Tory policy'.

The Ulster paradox

If we examine the reality of British rule in Ireland over the past 13 years in the light of the debates and controversies in the Conservative Party two points emerge. First, whatever the diplomatic talk about 'legitimate grievances', 'respect for the rights of the minority' and the 'need for reforms' that has prevailed at the highest levels of the Party, on the streets of the Six Counties coercion has been the rule. Maudling introduced internment, torture and gave the order for Bloody Sunday. Whitelaw officiated over Direct Rule, the crushing of the no-go areas in Operation Motorman and the build-up of military repression. Atkins talked a lot about political initiatives but the only lasting

Seventy years of...

'The logic of the situation will not be altered; two ideas, essentially antagonistic, will confront each other... until one or the other has obtained the mastery.' Unionist academic Edward Dowden, October 1904

memorial to his term of office was 10 dead hunger strikers, victims of his brutally intransigent policy. Prior has talked to FitzGerald — but mainly about improving border security and extraditing political prisoners; he has stepped up Army and police harassment in nationalist areas. Second, while coercion has been the only consistent policy of the Tories in practice, its most fervent advocates are far removed from the centres of power in the Party. Biggs-Davison remains a humble backbencher; Powell has been forced out of the Tory Party to take up a Unionist seat in the Six Counties. How do we explain the striking paradox of

... 'no surrender!'

'It is the consistent and settled view and policy of the Irish Republic that this province (sic) ought not to be part of the national territory of the United Kingdom but ought to be part of the national territory of the Republic, and that view is also held by a proportion of the inhabitants of this province. The majority, however, consider and assert themselves to be not a separate nation but... a part of the nation which inhabits Great Britain. It is not an issue on which both views can be satisfied: one or the other must prevail.' Enoch Powell, speech 'at Londonderry' January 1971

official Tory policy: coercion in practice — but conciliation in theory?

Britain has no alternative to military force to secure its position in Ireland: the Tory Party's pro-coercion lobby correctly perceives the true interests of British imperialism. By incorporating Ireland into the United Kingdom, the British state has made the preservation of the Union a vital strategic necessity for maintaining its own integrity. 'But', some say, 'Britain granted independence to 26 Irish counties in 1921, why could it not also give up the remaining six?'. Partition was Britain's means of regaining control —

lost in many areas — by installing a friendly regime in Dublin and binding Belfast and its hinterland ever more tightly into the United Kingdom. Partition has made it even more difficult for the British to withdraw: its division of Ireland and its continuing occupation of the Six Counties are the means by which Britain dominates the whole of Ireland.

Britain's attempt to set up a devolved government in Ireland before the First World War nearly precipitated a civil war or a coup d'état in Britain. 'There are things stronger than Parliamentary majorities' was Bonar Law's ominous declaration as the anti-Home Rule movement prepared — in Britain as well as in Ireland — for military resistance to the government's plans. The Curragh mutiny of British officers based in Ireland who refused anticipated orders to coerce Loyalists into accepting Irish Home Rule indicated how far the Irish crisis had become a crisis of the British state itself. The same problem confronts the British ruling class today: the integrity of the British state is at issue in any weakening of the links of Northern Ireland to Britain. The refusal of British troops to suppress the Loyalist workers' strike against Whitelaw's 'power-sharing' executive in 1974 shows that powerful opponents of any compromise on the Union prevail at the heart of the state repressive apparatus.

Britain cannot withdraw from Ireland because of the consequences for political stability throughout the British Isles: no political solution is possible for British imperialism in Ireland without a military victory. As Biggs-Davison put it:

'Political initiative will be found no substitute for military initiative, and if we do not win in Belfast and Londonderry (sic) we may have to fight in those other ghettos of Birmingham and London.'

The fact that all Tories share a commitment to the Union means that, in practice, the strategy of the coercive Unionists prevails. The universal acknowledgement of the crucial importance of 'defeating the terrorists' reflects a recognition of this. There is no place in Britain's regime in Ireland today for the paternalism of the constructive Unionists. Britain is under attack from a powerful and popular national liberation movement; profound economic recession rules out any possibility of buying off the nationalist people with reforms. Why then does the conciliatory outlook prevail among Tory administrators of Direct Rule in the Six Counties? Because of something that is more precious to them than the support of the Unionists — the domestic consensus of support for Britain's war in Ireland.

Mystify and rule

The Tories maintain a posture of concern to discover a political solution acceptable 'to both communities' and a reluctance to deploy military terror because they fear that explicitly proclaiming their coercive strategy would provoke many British people to withdraw their approval for British rule in Ireland. They assiduously promote the myths that obscure the nature of the conflict in Ireland and help to hinder the emergence of opposition to the British government at home. Partition plays a useful part. Before Ireland was divided the terms of the Irish conflict were clear for all to see: Britain's coercive strategy was exposed, with the result that substantial support emerged — especially from British workers — for Irish independence. Partition has given full scope to notions about religious bigotry, spurious arguments about majorities and minorities and soldiers as peacekeepers. Powell is too forthright an advocate of British imperialism for its own best interests: he takes British propaganda at face value and fails to

appreciate its function in mystifying military repression and consolidating the public approval for the British occupation without which it would be gravely weakened.

Even the antagonism between the Tories and Ulster Unionists fulfils a useful function for British imperialism. The Government can portray measures of increased repression as necessary to assuage Loyalist anxieties about 'the security situation'; it can sneer at Paisley publicly while privately acquiescing to the build-up of Loyalist paramilitaries as a useful adjunct to the state forces. The notion of the Ulster Loyalists as the tail that wags the British bulldog is widely accepted in Britain — even on the left. This suits the Government too as it shifts the blame for British barbarism in Ireland from its true source — British imperialism — on to its agents in the Six Counties.

Listen to the lions

The Conservative Party has been in government only between 1970 and 1974, and since 1979 — less than half the duration of the present war. Yet a review of the debate among the Tories reveals that it has been conducted along essentially the same lines as the debate in the Labour Party. Right wingers in both parties see military force as the only way of dealing with the Irish problem. Indeed, Labour's Roy Mason was the most popular Northern Ireland minister of any party with the Ulster Unionists. Radicals in both parties believe that a peaceful solution can be found through compromise and cooperation.

The much-celebrated advance in Labour's Irish policy simply indicates the growth of the constructive Unionist sentiments in the Labour Party. Labour supporters may see Irish unity as desirable in the distant future; so too do Tory progressives — Lord Gowrie recently declared the border 'an economic nonsense'. However, essentially the Labour Party seeks to reform British rule in Ireland and make it more acceptable to the Irish people. And when the Labour Party comes to take responsibility for ruling Ireland at a time of war, the hard-line approach inevitably prevails — in practice, if not at Party conferences. The commitment of all sections of the major bourgeois parties to British imperialism has ensured that conciliation has always given way to coercion in the prosecution of the Irish War. This is why bipartisan harmony has prevailed over the past 13 years, around the central objective of defeating the Irish liberation movement.

'What happens in Ulster touches us all; it is part of our country, our United Kingdom. So let the people of Ulster be assured of this: the Conservative Party stands rock firm for the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.'

Margaret Thatcher, speech to the Conservative and Unionist Party conference, October 1977

The lesson of this survey of Tory Irish policy is that anybody who wants to understand British imperialist strategies in Ireland should listen to those whose views correspond most closely to the reality of the War: the Tory supporters of coercion — the authentic voices of British imperialism. The constructive Unionists of both Tory and Labour Parties simply reflect the fear of the British ruling class to face honestly its opponents in Ireland and in Britain. We should reject the lapdogs and listen to the lions and be as clear in the perception of our class interests and as uncompromising in their prosecution as they are.

IRISH PRISONERS IN ENGLISH GAOLS

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IN 1974 a young IRA volunteer, Michael Gaughan, went on hunger strike in Parkhurst top security prison in solidarity with the two Price sisters' demand for transfer to a gaol in Ireland, and also for two political demands: the right not to do prison work or wear prison uniform. Two months later he died, a forced-feeding tube having pierced his lung. Four months later Frank Stagg, an IRA prisoner in Wakefield prison, resorted to a hunger strike for the same demands. He died after fasting for 62 days. The Irish political prisoners in English gaols have always resisted the British government's policy of criminalisation of themselves and their struggle.

Political status

Their status as political prisoners has nowhere been more clearly put than by Joe O'Connell's speech from the dock during his Old Bailey trial as one of the Balcombe Street Four in 1977:

'There has been an attempt by this court to isolate certain incidents which have been called "crimes". These incidents have been put completely outside the context in which they occurred... The true context is that of the relationship between Britain and Ireland... a state of war against the occupation of Ireland by Britain.

'The judge has attempted to restrict the reference to bombings and shootings to "terrorist" offences. We would like to ask the judge whether the bombings of Hiroshima and Dresden were terrorist offences? Whether the torture carried out by British soldiers in Aden and Kenya and Cyprus were acts of terrorism? We say that no representative of British imperialism is fit to pass judgement on us, for this government stands guilty of the very things of which we now stand accused... We admit to no crimes and to no guilt, the real crimes and guilt are those that British imperialism has committed against our people.'

There are supposed to be no political prisoners in Britain, no political trials, but in reality the arrests, trials and prison conditions of the Irish POWs in England are highly political. Like their comrades in the H-Blocks and Armagh, they are in prison in the first place only because of the political situation. Currently there are 72 prisoners, five of whom are women (Ann and Eileen Gillespie, Carole Richardson, Annie Maguire and Judith Ward). Over half of them are young men from the north of Ireland and the rest from the Twenty-six Counties.

The vast majority of the Irish POWs are classified as top security Category A. Of a total prison population of 45 000, 300 are Category A, and a third of these are the Irish POWs. The rules of Category A are used especially punitively against them and this is the system which has enabled the Home Office to treat them as special category prisoners, while claiming that there are no political prisoners in England. The rules are used to impose maximum isolation on the Irish prisoners.

Solitary confinement is a major weapon. British courts cannot sentence anyone to long periods in solitary. But through the use of 28-day renewable spells in the 'Punishment Blocks', the prisons have constantly used it against the Irish POWs for petty infringements of prison rules, protests and reaction to beatings by the screws. 'Rule 43' also allows a prisoner to be isolated indefinitely to 'maintain good order and discipline' in the prison. By using these two rules the regime has managed to hold Irish POWs in continuous solitary confinement for as long as two and a half years (Brendan Dowd), and several for two years (Eddie Butler, Liam McLarnon and Hughie Doherty) and almost all for regular 28-day spells. When six POWs in Albany staged a peaceful 'sit-in' in their cells in 1976 as a protest against Brendan Dowd's two and a half years in solitary, they were subjected to a full-scale attack by prison officers, leading to broken limbs and other serious injuries, and were punished by further periods in solitary.

Regimes of terror

Like other regimes, the British have tried to use isolation as the ultimate weapon to destroy the personalities of political opponents. In 1974 sensory deprivation units (Control Units) were introduced in Wakefield gaol: rounded, white, totally silent cells. They were windowless, admitted no sound, were constantly lit; no warder would speak to the prisoner and they would have nothing to do all day. Eddie O'Neill, Ray McLaughlin and Brendan Dowd were amongst those held for 90-day renewable periods in the Control Units. As a result of bad publicity the Home Office claimed the Units were no longer operating, but other prisoners have testified to their continued use in the F Wing of Wakefield prison.

As well as the mental torture through

isolation, physical assault by the screws is routine. Nearly 75 per cent of Irish POWs have been seriously attacked and beaten, many to the extent of being hospitalised.

The prison regime fears the political awareness and capacity to organise that exists among the Republican prisoners. Isolation from the outside world, as well as within the prison, is a tactic used to disorient and demoralise them. All the available prison rules are used to the full. Political prisoners are allowed only very few authorised visitors, usually only close relatives, and any other visitor is checked out and interviewed by the police. Visitors are searched before and after visits, and the prisoners regularly strip searched. Many visits take place with a screen separating visitor and prisoner (closed or screened visits) and two or more officers sitting up next to them.

Although many prisoners' families live in Ireland, only four prisoners have ever been transferred back to Ireland, and then only after being forcibly fed for 205 days on hunger strike (Price sisters 1974). Yet it is Home Office policy to transfer prisoners to gaols close to home, and British soldiers are automatically sent back to Ireland or Scotland after crimes committed in the north of Ireland.

A further harassment is the constant moving of republican prisoners from prison to prison, and it is regular practice to move a prisoner across the country on the very day that a visitor arrives from Ireland. This can mean prisoners losing long-awaited visits and can mean their being moved several times in one year. This form of harassment makes it difficult for them to organise as republican POWs inside the gaols and to keep contact with home.

The closed visit, strip searching, harassment of relatives visiting and the demand for repatriation have been the chief issues over the past years in English gaols.

Frame-ups

The hunger strikes in the H-Blocks and Armagh have exposed to the world the political nature of the arrests and convictions of prisoners in the no-jury Diplock courts. Less is heard of the political nature of the trials in England. Eighty per cent have been under the Conspiracy Laws, where the onus of proof is on the defendant to prove he or she is innocent. No crime needs to have been committed, the defendants do not have to be shown to know each other, and convictions are easily obtained in sensational pre-trial media coverage which marks out the prisoners as dangerous IRA men from the moment of their arrest. As a result of the procession of mass trials for conspiracy in the 'seventies over 50 republicans are serving life sentences or 20/30 years (O'Connell — life plus 159 years), and at least 14 are totally innocent.

The case of Annie Maguire highlights this political judicial process in a tragic and dramatic way. Annie Maguire and the six people convicted with her are in prison not for what they did, but for what they are. They were framed because they are Irish, they are from Belfast and they have friends from Belfast.

Annie Maguire was arrested in the wake of an earlier trial in 1976 in which four young people were convicted of the pub bombings in Guildford and Woolwich. One of the accused was a nephew of hers by marriage, Gerald Conlon from Belfast. During this trial reference was made to a supposed bomb factory presided over by someone called 'Aunt Annie'. After the trial the *Daily Mail* began a witchhunt which eventually led to the charging of Annie Maguire and her family with possession of explosives.

No explosives were ever found, but the prosecution alleged that the bomb factory was in fact in the front kitchen of Annie Maguire's council flat in Harlesden. Annie's neighbours, who are all

English, were always in and out of the house as Annie was a friendly person. She had lived 20 years in England, had no republican sympathies and was a member of Paddington Conservative club.

At this implausible bomb factory in Harlesden the police arrested seven people when they raided in December 1976.

Annie and her husband Paddy Maguire, their lodger Sean Smyth, her two teenage sons Patrick and Vincent, a neighbour Pat O'Neill who had just dropped in, and lastly Patrick 'Guiseppe' Conlon perhaps the most shocking of all. He was the father of Gerald Conlon, a defendant in the Guildford/Woolwich case, and had travelled from Belfast (although very ill) the previous day to see solicitors about his son. All seven received long sentences — Annie and Paddy 14 years, Conlon 12 years, the two boys four and five years, Pat O'Neill 12 years. The two younger children were taken into care.

What was the evidence offered by the prosecution? The *only* evidence was forensic. It was claimed that traces of explosives were found on the hands of all the defendants except Annie, and to convict her it was claimed that traces were found on one out of 12 rubber gloves in her kitchen drawer. The tests used have since been discredited by a forensic scientist, John Yallop, who has found that the test used (thin layer chromatology) can give positive results to a common household substance like washing up powder and also cigarette smoke. He also found that the test had not been competently done by the technician in this case. This is the same forensic evidence that has been used to convict 25 Irish POWs in English trials including those found guilty of the 1974 Birmingham pub bombing who also proclaim their complete innocence.

Such a conviction was only possible because an English jury, whipped up by prejudicial and sensational media coverage for weeks before the trial, could believe that a whole Irish family could be capable of making bombs in the kitchen, that seven people could have explosives on their hands without a trace being found in the house. It was a political trial with seven innocent victims. Patrick Conlon has since died in Wormwood Scrubs, his chronic lung complaint neglected medically, protesting his innocence to the last.

Fighting criminalisation

The prisoners in Britain have resisted criminalisation at every stage of their activity. In the words of Paul Hill from Belfast serving life at Parkhurst:

'I am told at every opportunity that I am a criminal, a murdering Irish bastard. Criminal? Who are they trying to convince? Themselves? Because they will never take the fact from us that we are political prisoners.

'Their campaign is one of mental torture to leave us mental wrecks... but I, like all Irish prisoners held in Britain, will never adapt to their system. We will never be disciplined by their rules.

'The Irish prisoners are in British prisons because British troops are on Irish soil. If that is not political, what is?

'I have been told that I will spend the rest of my natural life in prison. I am 21 years old. But I, like all Irish prisoners, seek no sympathy. But we do seek your support. To the people who remain silent knowing this torture is being inflicted on their fellow Irishmen, I say we are here because of you, because we fought injustice.

'And to the people who call us criminals, I say a criminal is motivated by gain. The next time you hear gunfire, don't think just of the gun, think of the so-called criminal behind it. Where is his gain, does he believe in freedom? When a youth stands with an armalite on a street corner and faces the might of the British Army with a handful of rounds, you better believe he believes in freedom.'

Sue O'Halloran
Sinn Féin POW Dept

WHY WE NEED THE IRISH FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Last year Irish solidarity groups in Britain failed to mobilise any significant support for the hunger strikers: in 1981 they became more and more subordinate to the Labour Party and more and more inactive. Mick Kennedy explains why – and why the Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign can provide a solid basis for a new Irish solidarity movement.

THE CONVERGENCE of the various Irish solidarity organisations in Britain around the forthcoming conference 'Ireland: time for Tory policies to go' confirms the urgent need for an alternative movement for Irish freedom. The conference has been called to press the British Government to adopt 'a radical political initiative' as an alternative to the 'more reactionary Tory policies... being urged by Enoch Powell, the Unionist bloc and the extreme right in the Conservative Party' (conference leaflet). The aim of the British left is no longer to challenge British imperialism in Ireland, or even in fact to attack Tory policies in general, but to replace *right-wing* Tory policies with a more radical approach. What then is their alternative?

Progress in the Labour Party?

All parties to the conference are united in welcoming the Labour Party's new Irish policy, adopted at Brighton last October, as a major progressive step. The organisers of February's conference declare that 'a significant blow against bipartisanship was made when the conference adopted the National Executive Committee's recommendation that the Party would support the reunification of Ireland'. But was it? The NEC's document on 'Northern Ireland' outlines a three stage strategy. Labour's long-term objective is Irish unity; in the medium term it seeks to foster devolved government in the Six Counties through some form of 'power-sharing' assembly under British control; and for the immediate future it approves Direct Rule from Westminster and military occupation. Tory Northern Ireland Secretary James Prior thought the Labour Party conference debate that approved this strategy 'constructive'. But the left's Irish activists greeted it as a breach in the common approach of the two major parties to the Irish War. How do they justify this?

For the left the decisive factor is the Labour Party's endorsement of Irish unity as its ultimate goal. But this is no cause for conflict with the Tories: both Prior and his Secretary of State Lord Gowrie would like to see Irish unity 'some day'. Tory 'wet' declarations of this sort have led some on the left, like *Socialist Challenge* Irish expert Geoff Bell, to welcome 'progressive' moves in the Tory Party – the obvious alternative to 'right-wing' Tory policies. Others speculate about precisely how unity might be achieved and troop withdrawal take place. A recent paper to a Troops

Out Movement conference envisaged a future for that organisation in 'mobilising opposition to any anti-Irish parts' of the government's 'withdrawal programme'. In reality Labour's 'Irish unity' is a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Even the NEC document acknowledges that 'a long and arduous process of discussion and negotiation' will be required. And in the meantime?

In the meantime Labour has its 'medium' and 'short-term' strategies. A glance at these reveals them to be very familiar: they are exactly the twin policies of conciliation and coercion followed by both Labour and Tory governments since the present war began (see 'Rock firm for the Union', pages 12 and 13 of this issue of *the next step* for a full discussion). Labour's categorisation of coercion as a 'short-term' necessity and conciliation as its 'medium-term' objective simply reflects the priorities of British imperialism: *first* crush the national liberation movement, *then* impose a political solution. While the radical left likes to dream about Labour's long-term aims, the Labour left prefers to consider the medium-term – what sort of assembly? How to implement the AES in Ireland? Would organising the Labour Party in the Six Counties help? In the real world these considerations make no difference either: the only thing that matters is Labour's immediate commitment to Direct Rule and military repression. The rest is for a tomorrow that will never come. *Today*, on the streets of the Six Counties, bipartisanship rules, and it wears a soldier's boot.

What happened to TOM?

How has it come about that organisations, which were set up with the aim of building solidarity with the Irish liberation struggle in Britain, have been reduced to pretending that Labour's apologies for British barbarism in Ireland constitute a progressive policy? Shortly after the Revolutionary Communist Tendency launched the Smash the PTA Campaign two years ago we wrote an open letter to the Troops Out Movement outlining our differences:

'The fundamental difference between TOM and the RCT concerns our different assessment of the social forces which will bring about the sort of troop withdrawal we want to see. TOM puts its faith in the British government acting under the pressure of public opinion. The RCT puts its faith in the working class.' ('How to get the troops out', *the next step*, No 5, June/July 1980)

The past two years have confirmed

our judgement that an anti-imperialist movement in Britain can only be built in the working class. TOM has welcomed every bourgeois discussion of new British initiatives as indicating a shift in government policy towards withdrawal. Its orientation towards any section of society perceived as moving to endorse withdrawal – whether out of concern for taxpayers' money, dead British soldiers, liberal outrage at military and police techniques or prison conditions – has led it further and further from the working class. The result has been an increasingly diffuse and ineffective strategy.

TOM has turned towards the Irish community in Britain and towards the Catholic Church, ludicrously occupying the Irish Club in London and picketing Westminster Cathedral during the hunger strikes. It has turned towards other oppressed people, women, and blacks, and sought to draw them to support the Irish cause. But the oppressed expect the British left to mobilise the labour movement to fight oppression – they've been fighting it long enough in isolation. The failure of all these strategies has pushed TOM and its radical left backers towards the Labour Party.

Last year's hunger strikes precipitated the virtual collapse of the British left's Irish solidarity work. Why, at the moment when there was such an urgent need for this activity and, indeed, when there were unprecedented opportunities for developing it? The reason was that TOM's political approach was impotent in face of a clear polarisation of British public opinion against the Irish liberation struggle. For every section of the British ruling class there was no question of the importance of a firm stand against political status. No liberals could be persuaded to back 'the five demands' – and TOM had consistently rejected the sort of broad political strategy that could have won working class support. The result was that TOM crumbled as the organisations and individuals who supported it drifted towards the Labour Party.

'Time to go'

The present campaign in the Labour Party began once the first few hunger strikers were dead. The Labour Committee on Ireland, inspired by radical left entrists in the Labour Party, was revived to try to salvage Labour's reputation after Don Concannon's visit to Bobby Sands' deathbed. When it became apparent how damaging the continuing hunger strikes were to the international reputation of the British state, the LCI urged 'a compromise which will allow the Government to claim that it has not conceded political status' (LCI statement to Labour's NEC, 27 May 1981). The LCI then set about promoting the campaign in the Labour Party which led to the endorsement of the NEC's document in October, which it greeted as a historic advance.

The TOM itself remained outside the Labour Party, but Labour politics guided its activities. Indeed, virtually since its foundation in 1973, TOM has been prepared to narrow its programme to get Labour politicians onto its platforms. Now it just accepts their politics and admires them from afar. For many TOM supporters, any statement from a left-wing Labour MP on Ireland is to be welcomed, even if, like Tony Benn, they only call for a different set of troops (UN troops) to oppress the Irish. This abject posture before Labour left personalities reached its most cringing with Ken Livingstone. His statement of approval for 'unity and withdrawal' was greeted raptuously, even though at the same time he condemned the struggle by the republican movement to achieve these objectives. One of TOM's major initiatives in 1981 was a petition of support for Ken Livingstone.

However, the driving force behind the

'Time for Tory policies to go' conference is neither the LCI nor TOM, but the Committee for Withdrawal from Ireland. This organisation is the product of a curious liaison between the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Liberals back in 1979 when it organised the 'Time to go' demonstration on the tenth anniversary of the British invasion. In 1980 it organised a 'Voices for withdrawal' rally attended by speakers from the British and Irish trade union movements. And in 1981? Well, in 1981 there were the hunger strikes and the IRA bombing campaign and all the CWI's attempts to assemble Labour bureaucrats, Liberals and Stalinists on a platform to talk about 'withdrawal' proved impossible as none of them wanted to embarrass the Government at such a sensitive time. So the CWI's conference had to be postponed, and postponed – until the quieter days of February 1982.

Time to act

The 'Ireland – time for British workers to act' conference organised by the Smash the PTA Campaign to launch the Irish Freedom Movement stands in marked contrast to the LCI/CWI conference.

Our conference is based on a clear perception of the issues at stake. The Irish War is a war between the Irish people and the British state which cannot withdraw from Ireland until it has crushed this threat to capitalist rule throughout the British Isles. We unconditionally support the national liberation movement in Ireland and aim to rally backing for it in the only section of British society which has an interest in the defeat of the British state.

The organisers of the LCI/CWI conference are confused on all the basic issues of the Irish War. Their faith in the capacity of the British state to compromise with the Irish liberation struggle leads them to endorse Labour's policy for a reformed British administration, a policy which is complementary to military repression, not an alternative to it. Their loyalty to Britain leads them to condemn the military struggle of the Irish republican movement whilst trying to win sympathy for the victims of the extremes of British oppression in Ireland. They want to modify imperialist oppression – not overthrow it.

The 'Time for British workers to act' conference is the result of two years consistent work by supporters of the Smash the PTA Campaign in workplaces, trade union branches and trades councils – as well as on the streets and around housing estates. It aims to widen the range of activities we have organised in the past – around the PTA, the hunger strikes and other aspects of the Irish War – into a broader Irish Freedom Movement. The 'Time for Tory policies to go' conference is the result of concerted lobbying of trade union and Labour Party bureaucrats in the bars of seaside towns and the House of Commons. It has no function other than to try to save the face of the IMG, the SWP, the CP and the rest, and allow them to claim they are 'doing something' about Ireland. But the reality is they are doing nothing and will do nothing. With a witchhunt underway in the Labour Party none of these organisations on its left flank are going to raise the issue which is guaranteed to provoke the leadership into further bans, prescriptions and expulsions.

As the Irish War goes into its 13th year it's time to stop trying to promote the Irish policies of Lord Gowrie as an alternative to those of Enoch Powell. It's time too to give up the attempt to replace Don Concannon's strategy with that of Tony Benn. It's time to mobilise British workers to act in solidarity with the Irish liberation struggle. That's why we're launching the Irish Freedom Movement.

WAR IN THE UNIONS

Last month we launched our new platform for anti-racist trade unionists, Cleansing our ranks. Already, in the health service and in the civil service, the battle has begun to build anti-racist action in the unions. Reports from Pam Lawrence, Alex Farrell and Marcelle Reynolds.



No NHS pass laws!

In October 1981 the Department of Health and Social Security carried out a 'feasibility study' in ten hospitals, to test out a scheme for checking patients' race and nationality. Euphemistically called checking 'overseas visitors', the real aim of the scheme is to deprive black people of free National Health Service care. At hospitals in Hillingdon, Ealing and elsewhere staff boycotted the checks. But there's still a long way to go before NUPE, COHSE, ASTMS and the other NHS unions put up a real fight.

THE NHS CHECKS — like those at the dole offices — originated in a set of proposals launched in April 1981. Drawn up by ex-Health minister Patrick Jenkin they propose that all prospective patients who aren't 'ordinarily resident' in the UK (unless from the EEC or other countries with reciprocal health insurance arrangements) will have to pay for NHS treatment.

What does this mean? Overseas students, and most migrant workers and their families, are automatically excluded. So are many black workers who've lived here for years, but regularly go home — to the Asian sub-continent in particular. In fact, under the new Nationality Act, even British-born blacks and black British passport holders won't be safe.

The vagueness of Jenkin's plan suits the DHSS. As Cathy Fagg, Deputy House Governor at St Stephen's hospital in London put it, it's 'just a matter of common sense, whether we go on their being foreign or their colour or whatever'.

Feelings

The Government's quango on the matter, the 'Working Party on the treatment of overseas visitors', has drawn up some guidelines on how to approach this delicate operation — again based largely on intuition:

'There is a strong feeling that we should cease to treat people from countries with which we have no reciprocal or EEC arrangements more favourably than they treat our people.'

The guidelines complain about the numerous 'long-stay visitors' (30 years or so?) who 'take improper advantage' of the NHS.

At the same time they're concerned about 'how the appearance of discrimination can be avoided' and therefore recommend that the full scheme is delayed until all the niceties have been sorted out.

Jumping the gun

Meanwhile overzealous hospital administrators are already putting the boot in. The Jenkin Plan isn't yet law, but the Working Party's final report — now in WAR's hands — confirms everybody's fears. WAR is already getting requests for help from black patients who've been subjected to the race checks. One black worker from West London, who's lived and worked in Britain for years, went along to St Charles hospital in Ladbroke Grove, London, expecting free NHS treatment as usual. He was in for a shock. An outpatients clerk bombarded him with a series of questions about his nationality, race and length of stay in Britain. The clerk didn't get an answer and the patient — so far — hasn't got his treatment.

The NHS already operates passport checks, but in an arbitrary, disorganised way. Black patients already get the

lousiest treatment of all. But now the screw is being tightened and the NHS — like the dole offices — turned into an instrument of surveillance over the entire black community. What can be done to stop the Jenkin Plan?

Counting the cost

The key, as the DHSS well knows, lies in the response from the NHS unions. The race and nationality checks are but one part of a massive cost-cutting exercise in the health service. Racism is being consciously used to speed up the process of privatising health care, something the NHS unions say they oppose.

But the DHSS has been softening up the unions for this onslaught for years. Back in 1949, only four years after the creation of a free health service 'for all', foreigners were already being subjected to a witchhunt in the gutter press for supposedly abusing the system. Always

more concerned about displaying their willingness to save money than save their members' jobs or protect the services, the NHS union leaders have enthusiastically joined in the chorus against 'foreign visitors' and 'tourists'. Now the writing is on the wall, they're having difficulties changing their tune. Here are some of the bureaucrats' arguments against the Jenkin Plan:

'There are already rules for charging foreign patients...we can't ask unions to commit themselves for the future and foreigners should not be able to come over here in order to exploit the NHS anyway.' (ASTMS, *National Health Service*, 28 October 1981)

'If the proposals were introduced they would place an intolerable responsibility on members of staff such as admissions clerks and nurses who would have to determine the patients' residential status.' (NALGO, *North-west Regional Health Authority Minutes*, 27 October 1981)

'The administration costs of collecting the charges would be extremely high, compared to the small amount of revenue brought in.' (TUC, *Health Services Committee*, 17 December 1981)

It's superfluous, it's too much work, it won't save money — these are the lines along which the union leaders are conducting opposition to the Jenkin plan. Each argument is worse than the last. By accepting the racist implication that blacks are in some way a burden on the NHS, whilst seeking to convince the DHSS that the whole exercise is uneconomical anyway, they've given up the fight before it's started.

A life and death question

The fate of the Jenkin Plan won't only affect the health of thousands of black people, depriving them of the most elementary NHS treatment. It's a life and death issue for the health service unions too. The DHSS knows that the best way to undermine militancy in the NHS is by preying upon the supposed responsibility of hospital workers to serve the state at any cost — rather than look after their interests as trade unionists. By turning hospital workers into immigration cops, by exploiting racist prejudice, the DHSS hopes to save itself a fortune and tear apart the union.

WAR has begun organising the fight-back against the Jenkin Plan, alongside militants in the hospitals that resisted the pilot-scheme last October. We're organising speakers for union branches, bulletins for hospital workers and patients and preparing the ground for a boycott of the full scheme. Join WAR's Trade union sub-committee and get active in your workplace!

Motion to be debated at NUPE National Conference 1982

This union notes

1 The proposed introduction by the Department of Employment of a new racist interrogation procedure into Unemployment Benefit Offices, which will identify the race of claimants as a basis for restricting the entitlement of black people to benefit. This is scheduled to be test-run in selected UBOs in early 1982.

2 The proposed introduction by the Department of Health and Social Security of a nationality test in the National Health Service and General Practices, in spring 1982, aimed at denying black people free health care on the NHS. This has been test-run in 10 hospitals nationwide, including Wythenshawe hospital in Manchester.

3 The enactment of the racist Nationality Bill, the stepping up of internal controls and mounting racist assaults on blacks in Britain.

This union believes that

1 These moves by the state, in line with the new Nationality Act, are racist, and are aimed at the systematic denial of state benefits to black people.

2 Neither blacks nor the working class as a whole bear any responsibility whatsoever for the economic crisis nor its effects.

3 Trade unionists have every interest in actively resisting all and any attacks on black people from whatever source.

This union therefore resolves to

1 Campaign against both the DE and DHSS proposals with the aim of preventing their implementation by whatever means will effectively achieve this end, including if necessary industrial action.

2 Campaign against the implementation of the Nationality Act, and any further proposals

which advance its racist ends, with the aim of making it inoperable.

3 Organise within the trade unions on the above basis, and to combat any manifestation of racism within our own ranks.

This year's NUPE conference is being held in Scarborough at the end of May. The proposed NHS charges on overseas patients is going to be a major issue. The Jenkin Plan is thoroughly racist, it aims to intimidate black workers and their families and effectively deny them access to free health care — all on the pretext of stopping 'foreigners' abusing the welfare state. Already NUPE members have been working flat out to alert all trade unionists to the implications of a scheme that threatens black people immediately, but all workers' livelihoods eventually. WAR is getting its supporters moving in the hospitals. Already motions opposing Jenkin's plan are scheduled for national conference. This year NUPE delegates will be debating an issue upon which concrete action can be taken and be successful. If you are in a health service union or in NUPE and you want to fight the Jenkin plan, contact us immediately. So far, resistance is being mounted in Manchester and London. Let's make the Jenkin Plan inoperable in 1982: free health care is non-negotiable and racist pass laws unacceptable!

Workers Against Racism

WRECK THE CHECKS!

From Monday 22 February 14 dole offices will be subjected to a pilot scheme designed to check the racial origins of all claimants. Drawn up by the Department of Employment last April, the scheme is scheduled to come into full operation by October 1982. Workers Against Racism supporters have been working flat out, inside and outside the dole offices, to make sure the DE's racist plans are killed stone dead.

THE DE first started collecting statistics on 'adults from Commonwealth countries' in 1963 — immediately after the introduction of the 1962 Immigration Act. They refined the system straight after the 1971 Immigration Act came into operation. Now, hot on the heels of the 1981 Nationality Act, the DE's about to introduce Stage 3.

Vital statistics

'We need the information to ensure that people are not discriminated against.' (DE spokesman, 10 November 1981)

What's all this intelligence-gathering for? We can immediately dismiss the DE's innocent claims about collecting statistics to ease discrimination; after 20 years the position of black workers in the jobs market is worse than ever. Neither can we put it down to the bureaucratic habits of civil servants. The statistics serve a purpose. They enable the state to control the flow of immigration according to the bosses' needs, and to strengthen controls over blacks already here. It's the latter concern that lies behind the new dole checks. They're not about restricting immigration, which has all but ceased, but rather depriving black workers of the benefits they're entitled to. The authorities also hope to weed out a few 'illegals' along the way.

Who benefits?

The clue lies between the lines of the Nationality Act. This Act, unlike the 1962, 1968 and 1971 immigration laws, does nothing to restrict the right of entry. It doesn't need to. The Government won that particular battle a long time ago. The Nationality Act redefines who is a British citizen and therefore who is entitled to state benefits and other rights. In future only 'British Citizens' (white) will qualify for a share in the national cake; 'British Overseas Citizens' and 'Citizens of UK Dependent Territories' (blacks, Asians and Hong Kong Chinese) will be subject to the benevolence of the Home Office.

It's one thing though to pass a law, and quite another to enforce it. To do that means bringing the procedures of all government departments in line with the new legislation. And this requires the full co-operation of government employees. That's why the new dole checks are so important.

They work like this. At present claimants are questioned about their country of origin, but only at Job Centres after they've signed on. That's no longer good enough for the Home Office. Current statistics don't record British-born blacks, and don't identify claimants as non-eligible from the word go — at the unemployment benefit office. The new procedure is aimed at doing just that. In line with the DE's proposals to run down Job Centres by making registration at them voluntary, the racist interrogations will in future take place directly at the UBOs. And the questions will be different too. All black claimants will be questioned and not only about their birth place, but also their race.

Consultation

The DE spelt it all out in a recent circular to the civil service unions. Pondering on the best way to make an initial assessment of suspect claimants (questions, speech, appearance, etc) it finally sug-

gested that a 'simple black/white assessment' might be the most straightforward method. It is of course. But the DE is graciously allowing the unions a say in the matter, by trying out various possibilities during the four-week pilot scheme. CPSA and SCPS members will be asked to indicate whether they prefer the 'visual assessment method', the 'card assessment method' or perhaps have some original ideas of their own. The DE has assured the unions that the 'staff will be consulted before it is introduced in detail and if it does not work we will have to think of something else'.

Who's being tested?

The aim of the pilot scheme is clear. If the recent DHSS nationality tests in hospitals are anything to go by, there will be no unearthing of a black fifth column dedicated to bleeding the Welfare State to death. The hospital checks didn't even uncover one lurid case of an Arab oil sheikh. What's being tested is not the extent of 'abuse' at the UBOs, but the willingness of dole clerks to go along with their new job description. Are they prepared to become Home Office informers, part-time immigration officers — or will they 'think of something else'?

Every civil servant has to sign the Official Secrets Act and is expected to display unswerving loyalty to his employer — the state. It's that quality of loyalty that's being put to the test now. UBO clerks are being asked to identify blacks as a potential threat to the Exchequer and hand over suspected scroungers to the appropriate authority.

This is nothing new. The Civil Service unions have never resisted the state's efforts to make dole office workers into ever more efficient spies on the unemployed. They went along with the race checks at Job Centres without a murmur. The DE is confident it can rely on the CPSA and SCPS leaders to continue in this fine tradition.

But the DE's not so sure about the rank and file. Dole office clerks displayed an unprecedented level of militancy during the recent 21-week pay dispute. They were neither civil nor servile, and were only unsuccessful because their union leaders were willing to settle for a pittance. Two months before the strike was over they were offering to trade jobs and raise productivity to finance the pay rise.

The question is, will dole office workers use their industrial muscle this time around, to wreck the dole checks?

Will they resist the temptation to take on the work of their colleagues in the Job Centres — many of whom will soon be redundant — to save their own skins? How deep do the old loyalties go?

We can be sure that the CPSA and SCPS leaders will put up no more than verbal opposition to the scheme, and on the weakest grounds at that. They are already arguing that the new checks will be inefficient, unworkable, too expensive, likely to cause tension and so forth. The CPSA's DE Group Section Executive Committee (Broad Left) has already indicated its willingness to consider continuing the old scheme of checks at Job Centres if the new one at UBOs is dropped. Full-time officials of the union are debating whether to accept the recommendation of the Commission for Racial Equality — to implement the scheme provided all claimants (black and white) are approached to complete a questionnaire anonymously. With the left on the run already, the CPSA's right-wing National Disputes Committee is under little pressure to block the DE's plans — let alone back up any opposition with industrial action.

Wreck the checks!

At UBOs where the pilot scheme is due to take place WAR supporters have been assisting militants in organising all-out opposition to the scheme. We've been addressing CPSA branches throughout the country and getting a very good response. Most active trade unionists in the UBOs are quick to recognise the connection between their struggle for jobs (100 000 Civil Service redundancies are scheduled for 1983) and this new attempt to emasculate their unions. At Battersea and Deptford UBOs plans are already underway for a local public meeting on 19 February and an active boycott of the scheme when it starts. Workers there are keen to extend the campaign to UBOs outside the pilot scheme. Battersea UBO has a militant record of unofficial action, but CPSA members there are concerned that when their managers fail to get co-operation, the DE will simply look elsewhere, to offices with a weaker trade union tradition. In this context, it is vital that any member suspended for refusing to operate the scheme is defended by strike action from the word go.

And outside the dole offices? WAR has been leafletting the dole queues, and approaching claimants' unions and unemployed centres, urging claimants to refuse to co-operate.

It's not too difficult to convince most claimants that the checks are an assault on their rights, and designed to divide them along racial lines. The important thing is to let them know that for once the trade unions will be backing them all the way.

WHERE THE DOLE CHECKS ARE TAKING PLACE

The DE's chosen 14 UBOs and classified them as 'mainly Asian', 'mainly West Indian', 'higher/lower proportion of ethnic groups', etc. The 14 are:

London	Battersea
	Deptford
	Harrow
	Hendon
	Ealing
Midlands	Smethwick
	Aston
	Washwood Heath
South-East	Slough
	High Wycombe
North-East	Blackburn
	Nelson
Yorkshire & Humberside	Batley
	Huddersfield

Contact WAR's trade union sub-committee for details of protest action in your area. Write to Workers Against Racism, BM RCT, London WC1N 3XX or phone 01-274 3951.



CLEANSING OUR RANKS

Had enough of official declarations against racism which amount to nothing? Worried about nationality checks and colour bars at work? Want to fight them in your union? Then get **Cleansing our ranks** — a platform for anti-racist trade unionists! Price 20p (plus 15p p&p) each, or £2 for 10 copies post free. Send cheques or postal orders, made payable to Junius Publications, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX.

WAR Action

Tuesday 16 February
WAR trade union sub-committee
To discuss work place action against racist checks in the public sector.
Club room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square WC1 (near Holborn tube).
7.00pm

Monday 22 February
Stop racist checks at dole offices!
Picket Department of Employment
8 St James' Square, SW1 (off Pall Mall, near Picadilly tube).
12.00-2.00pm

Friday 26 February
Cleansing our ranks
Public meeting on fighting racism in the labour movement.
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (near Holborn tube).
7.00pm

PLUS
Pickets of all London dole offices where racist checks are being introduced.
Phone 274 3951 for details.

Reviews

THE BATTLE AGAINST BERLINGUER

Grant Amyot, *The Italian Communist Party*, Croom Helm, 1981, pp252, hbk £12.95.

THE RED BRIGADES' recent kidnapping of NATO general James Dozier brought immediate condemnation from the Italian Communist Party (PCI). But despite all the PCI's attempts to isolate them, the Brigades still enjoy a measure of support in the working class unparalleled by petit-bourgeois terrorists elsewhere in Western Europe. It is not surprising that the PCI has engendered such substantial left-wing opposition given its reactionary programme and its antics in Parliament. But why is the PCI so right-wing? Why is it so integrated, through local government, into the apparatus of the bourgeois state? Why has it been one of the main communist parties of Western Europe to distance itself from the USSR and the dictatorship of the proletariat? Why was it one of the major architects of Eurocommunism in the 'seventies'?

Grant Amyot doesn't answer these questions — though he is aware enough of their significance to touch on them repeatedly. Instead, he surveys what he loosely calls 'left-wing Eurocommunism' — a tendency in the PCI, led by Pietro Ingrao, which opposed the Party leadership's strategy line in the 'sixties. Amyot argues that Ingrao's interpretation of the PCI's policy of 'structural reform' for Italy was 'revolutionary'.

The 'Italian road' and its critics

His argument goes as follows. The rightism of the PCI followed partly from the 'iron law of oligarchy' (the PCI has no less than 3000 full-timers), but mainly from the Party's wholehearted adoption of the strategy of the Popular Front in 1935. Palmiro Togliatti, PCI secretary from 1926 to 1964, was, with Dimitroff, one of the main authors of this strategy. Like Gramsci, the influential Italian theoretician of this period, he believed that the failure of the Italian bourgeoisie to reform agriculture in the nineteenth century meant that Italy had still to complete its bourgeois revolution and was therefore uniquely ripe for fascism. Togliatti also agreed with Gramsci that the 'sectarianism' of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) after the First World War, particularly towards the petit bourgeoisie, helped to provoke the rise of Mussolini. Therefore for Togliatti the whole problem was how to ally with the petit bourgeoisie against fascism.

For Amyot Togliatti's support for bourgeois democracy against fascism led, through the PCI's participation in the wartime Resistance and its defence of Italy's Catholic constitution, to the concept of 'structural reform'. The PCI leadership came to the view that the reorganisation of Italian capitalism was the best defence against the far right. Ingrao disagreed with this. He felt that the working class militancy that accompanied the Italian economic miracle of the late 'fifties and early 'sixties opened up new possibilities. The task was not, as the PCI leadership suggested, to ally with the Christian Democrats, uphold Parliament and solve the Southern question. Ingrao's alternative was to urge the Northern working class to mix its economic struggles with political demands — for 'direct democracy' and an 'alternative model of development' for capital accumulation. However, Ingrao eventually lost despite a brief New Left revival in the wake of the strikes of autumn 1969, because of tactical errors and because Italy's return to economic difficulty in the 'seventies seemed to put the defence of Italian capitalism against fascism on the agenda once more.

The legacy of Gramsci

Much of what Amyot says is true. But he misses out many of the reasons why the PCI is so right-wing and he also misunderstands the Popular Front. This is what explains his view that Ingrao really represented a break from the reformism of the PCI.

Gramsci was wrong to think that Italy had not completed its bourgeois revolution by the

turn of the century. But the weakness of Italian imperialism and the relative weight of agriculture did mean that the Italian labour movement was dominated by militant syndicalism and petit-bourgeois radicalism. When, after the First World War, these two strands came together in the PSI, the party was ill-prepared to deal with the capitalist offensive that began in 1920.

Because of the backwardness of Italian capitalism, its weak ruling class had to resort to fascism early to secure control. But the collapse of the factory council movement in 1921 and the subsequent rise of Mussolini had little to do with PSI 'sectarianism'. On the contrary, the PSI aided the fascists by its very timidity: led by reactionaries and centrists (Turati, Serrati), it greeted the workers' occupations with fine words, not aggressive direction.

When the PSI left wing split away to form the PCI it was headed by Bordiga, an ultra left figure who personified not just the strengths of Italian working class radicalism but also its weaknesses. As the fascist bands roamed the streets the PCI refused to apply Lenin's policy of a united front with the PSI. Once Bordiga was imprisoned, however, the PCI moved in a right-wing direction. In the Aventine parliament, set up in 1924 in opposition to Mussolini's, Gramsci led the PCI to collaborate not just with the PSI, but with outright bourgeois parties. By 1926 and its congress in exile in Lyon, Gramsci had triumphed over the Bordighists and won the PCI round to democratic 'anti fascism'. By 1935, the PCI was attacking Mussolini for selling-out Italy to Germany, and appealing to 'honest' rank and file fascists to unite with the PCI against the Government.



To put it in a nutshell: the PCI's rightism was not simply a reaction to the PSI. It was born out of the defeats of the working class in 1920 and the confusion caused by Bordiga's sectarian policy.

Popular Frontism today

Amyot also believes that, because the Popular Front was framed in defensive, parliamentary language, Ingrao's 'positive', extra-parliamentary strategy marked a break from it. This is his second mistake.

Togliatti did stress 'defence' in the 'thirties. But, even then, the Popular Front rested on the premise that it was the responsibility of the working class to resolve the crisis of capitalism through a 'positive' programme of economic reforms not unlike today's alternative economic strategy. Ingrao's emphasis on working class control over the direction of capital investment and on the need for fighting community/factory bodies was just an application of Popular Frontism to the Italy of the post-war boom. His desire to see local organs of working class power 'refigure' non-totalitarian forms of socialism, his stress on the need for changes in personal values, his distrust of democratic centralism — all these familiar 'Eurocommunist' themes fitted into a coherent radical reformist approach. Ingrao's policies were variants of policies already being applied by PCI-run city councils, alloyed with the liberal disgust with Stalin's record that broke out after Khrushchev's

'secret speech' of 1956. Ingrao's political demise was, therefore, guaranteed from the start. He could never offer the PCI leadership any fundamental opposition, and nor could his successors in the Party of Proletarian Unity for Communism (PdUP) and its paper *Il Manifesto*.

The fight in Italy must be a fight against the PCI, and in particular against its representatives in the trade union bureaucracy (a stratum which, for all its growth in the 'seventies, Amyot neglects). Such a fight demands a rigorous understanding of Italian Stalinism. The Red Brigades don't have this: on the contrary, their view that Italy is a backward capitalist country shows their indebtedness to the revisionism of Gramsci, and their belief that Italy is 'oppressed' by US imperialism recalls Togliatti's chauvinism. But if Italian revolutionaries can take a clear analysis of the PCI to those workers who currently sympathise with the Red Brigades, the days of Enrico Berlinguer are numbered.

James Wood

WOMEN AT WAR

The life and times of Rosie the riveter, director Connie Field.

ROSIE THE RIVETER has been widely acclaimed as the documentary film of 1981. It is more than just a well-made film. It opens up a period of women's history which has been concealed for a generation: the history of the women who took over the factory jobs 'their men left behind' when they were drafted to fight in the Second World War.

American film director Connie Field made the film by inter-cutting newsreels and US government propaganda footage of the period with contemporary interviews Field conducted with five women who were drawn into war production at the time. The women, selected from among 700 for their ethnic diversity, militancy and wry humour, worked in skilled jobs such as welding and burning to produce aircraft, ships, tanks and munitions. Their stories of the conditions they faced at work are in stark contrast to the propaganda image of middle class temporary women workers celebrated in the popular song of the period:

*'Rosie works whether rain or shine
She's the powderpuff of the assembly line
She's makin' history
Workin' for victory
Rosie the riveter.'*

The five real Rosies agree that factory work opened up a new world after the stultifying, poorly-paid jobs in domestic work and service industries — or no work at all — which had been their life before the war. But once through the factory door, they found their lot little improved. They found themselves barred from jobs they were qualified for. They had to fight every inch to get the unions to negotiate a wage approaching the rate for the job. The black women had to fight even harder — to get the same wages as the white women and to win the right to use showers at work.

The employers, aided by the government's propaganda machine, were able to exploit the women's willingness to work. Not only were they able to keep wages low, but despite whirlwind training at minimal cost, they pushed productivity to record levels. The film documents the appalling cost these women paid in industrial safety. Two recall seeing fellow workers killed because of inadequate safety standards. By 1944 industrial deaths were officially recorded as running at more than five times the rate of soldiers killed in battle.

The film also explodes some myths about the facilities women were granted to help look after their children. Government-sponsored creches were adequate to cover barely 10 per cent of the women workers who needed them — none of the women in the film even knew they existed. One tells how she travelled from the Mid-West to San Francisco in search of work, leaving her mother to look after her baby which she was not to see again for four years.

Racism at work is a constant theme in the stories of all the women. One woman tells how she witnessed a white worker kicking a Filipino who was lying helpless on the ground while the

other workers stood and watched. She was holding a blowtorch at the time and without thinking found herself threatening the racist with severe injury unless he laid off. When the manager tried to discipline her for her temerity she gave him the verbal equivalent. He too laid off.

Stories such as these give the film its undertow of confident, easy-going humour. But there is another story which the film refers to only obliquely. That is that the war was won by the bosses, not the workers, male or female. One of the women sums up the view prevalent among large sections of the working class when she says: 'Of course, no one wanted to go to war and be killed, but we were all for the war'. How could this be? All the women in the film are militant workers — and they fought for their trade union rights at a time when class consciousness was submerged in a wave of patriotism.

Field, who proclaiming herself a militant feminist, told a *Time Out* reporter: 'the main thing I want to do is to give people back their dignity'. But while she opens up the history of women's oppression in the last war, she gives few clues why, when it came to demobbing, women were shunted back into low-paid jobs or into the home to rear the next generation of warriors and workers. How do we explain the ease, vividly documented in the film, with which the government's propaganda machine coaxed women out of the factories when the soldiers returned? In 1942 the newsreels proclaimed: 'Yes, she can operate the metal-press as easily as her own juice extractor; she plies the welder as if it were a needle, and cuts steel like cloth for a new dress'. By 1945 women psychiatrists were being commissioned to write books with titles like 'Women: the lost sex', while adverts announced that 'she's clocking-in at home'. The trade unions, which under pressure had been prepared to fight for better wages for women, were easing the way for a transition to a peacetime economy. But Connie Field, whose future as feminist filmmaker is closely tied to the trade union bureaucracy, says nothing of this. *Rosie* makes it appear as though the reserve army of female labour operates purely spontaneously, without political mediation. If that were the case, women's oppression would be a story with no ending. For if a process occurs without human agency, how could it ever be brought under control?

Rosie is being shown in trade union branches all over the country. The TUC, and leading union bureaucrats in general, have given it a warm reception. They have every interest in doing so. At a time when capitalism is again making savage attacks on women and taking advantage of their weak position in the labour market, the trade union bureaucracy is again called on to ease the transition. Women workers, as employees in the public and private sectors and as consumers of declining welfare services, have every interest in overthrowing the system which oppresses them. The bureaucrats have no stomach for that fight. But if they are to head it off, they must be seen to be concerned about the interests of their women members. *Rosie* gives them a good opportunity.

Connie Field has made a film which aims to reconcile women's interests with those of the labour bureaucracy. It is not just that women have been 'hidden from history': the politics that subordinate them to history have also been hidden. Unfortunately *Rosie the riveter*, while revealing many features of women's oppression, falls short of exposing what causes it, and thus fails to show how to overcome it.

Gareth Evans

The film is available for hire for £35 + VAT from The Other Cinema, 79 Wardour Street, London W1.

She's been using the finest equipment in war — she'll want the best equipment in peace...

It would be an effort to offer the Private with the Predator anything but the perfect cooker... or the thousands of other young women like her who spent the war working on precision instruments. But the new Main has sky-high standards of perfection. It's speedy, dependable, economical, easy to clean; it has a high-speed grill, enamelled surfaces, no protrusions to rip pockets off overalls and, of course, the wonderful Mainstay Control which cooks food perfectly without further trouble once it's in the oven.

the new MAIN gas cookers are on the way



Polish puzzles

It's typical of Trotskyists to criticise the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries like you did in *the next step*, No 20, January 1982. At a time when the imperialists are on the offensive you just line up with them. Reagan is planning a showbiz extravaganza in 'solidarity' with Poland - will you be in the chorus line with Frank Sinatra? Communists recognise that the Polish Party has been through many problems. But you would have problems too if you owed \$27 billion to imperialist banks!

What you don't point out is the fact that Solidarity's aim was to restore capitalism in Poland by doing away with central planning, introducing the market and undermining the socialist system. Communists - which you are not - defend the right of the Polish Party to take whatever measures necessary to keep Poland out of the clutches of the imperialists.

David Rand
North London

Your review of the year, (*the next step*, No 20, January 1982) aptly characterises the 'left' in Britain by their adherence to the imperialist Labour Party, both inside and outside parliament. All the more pity that you join them in their confusion over the true nature of the Soviet Union.

In your articles on Poland and Russia you write of the need for workers in those countries to overthrow the bureaucratic state which oppresses them, but you don't identify the bureaucracy as the exploiting class that it is, ruling a restored state capitalism. The new czars in Russia not only exploit their own workers but have become what Lenin called social-imperialists, socialists in words and imperialist in deeds (just like the Labour Party).

1981 was not only the year of struggle against US imperialism in Latin America. It was also a year in which the heroic people of Afghanistan continued their fight against the Soviet invaders of their country. In which the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia battled against the Soviet-backed Dergue and its Cuban mercenaries. And in which more and more people throughout the world came to see that there are two imperialist superpowers, the US and the USSR, which threaten a new war for redivision of the world.

Revolutionaries must be consistent in their opposition to all forms of imperialism. We cannot take sides as the right and 'left' do. We must support the people of Poland and Chile, of Afghanistan and El Salvador. Thus we can distinguish ourselves from the anti-communism of the right, by showing that there is nothing socialist in the Soviet Union. And from the dogmas of the 'left', by exposing their illusions in Russia.

I sincerely hope that the RCP, which has so much clarity on other issues facing us

today, can bring itself to reflect consistent anti-imperialism and join in the growing worldwide opposition to the two superpowers that threaten a new world war.

East London reader

Tony Allen replies:

These two letters sum up two opposing views of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: one, that these countries are 'state capitalist' and the Soviet Union is an imperialist power, the other, that they are 'socialist' planned economies. Both are wrong.

The state capitalism thesis rests on pure impressionism. The very term is an invention used to cover up the fact that these countries do not resemble capitalist economies at all. And a theory which tries to prove Russia is imperialist by pointing to invasions and a reactionary foreign policy doesn't get us far either. According to this logic, Ghengis Khan was an imperialist too.

Our correspondent is entirely wrong in equating the USA and the USSR, and presuming that these 'two imperialist superpowers' threaten a new war for the redivision of the world. The USA is the world's leading capitalist power, now in the throes of crisis and up against ever more intense competition from its rivals, especially Japan and West Germany. That's why Reagan has taken over the White House to restore America's former greatness. In the process we find a new arms build-up and greater belligerence in the field of foreign policy. Here is the real impetus leading towards war - one which engulfs all the major imperialist powers.

The USSR is nursing a decrepit system too, but a system which lacks the dynamic of capitalism. Our article in *the next step*, No 20, January 1982, showed why the Soviet economy was in crisis, and the problems this brings the bureaucracy in maintaining social control. Escapades like the invasion of Afghanistan follow from this, where the Soviet bureaucrats are anxious about the stability of their regime if national minorities begin to rebel. The invasion had nothing to do with safeguarding capital investments, or forming the first thrust in a drive to take over Iran as imperialist propaganda would have it.

We insist on distinguishing between the USA and USSR because we know that imperialism is the real enemy today. But this does not mean we apologise for the bureaucracy in Eastern Europe as David Rand does. It is true that Poland owes the Western banks billions of dollars and Reagan is embarking on an anti-communist crusade. But we have a responsibility as revolutionaries to state clearly what the obstacles to overcome are if there is to be any way forward for the working class.

Why is Poland so heavily in debt? Why has its economy been stagnant since the mid 'seventies and in decline over the past few years? These are questions which cannot be answered by talking of the 'problems' faced by the Polish CP. The Polish regime has no legitimacy in the eyes of the working class; it is founded on a denial of workers' democracy and maintained by state repression. That is why the regime cannot control the economy. All talk of central planning is a travesty of reality.

Our correspondent believes that while Solidarity wanted to undermine 'socialism' the generals marched in to defend it. As we pointed out, Solidarity's politics could not defend the working class. But the aim of the bureaucracy is not to defend workers either, and the regime itself is introducing massive price rises, industrial rationalisation and unemployment. There is even talk of Poland joining the International Monetary Fund to get closer supervision from its creditors. As Trotsky once said of the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy's own strategy opens the way to capitalist restoration.

Understanding the laws of motion of Eastern European society is of vital importance today, both to avoid the gross mistakes exemplified by the above two letters, and to develop a revolutionary strategy for the workers' movement. With these aims the RCP will be publishing articles giving a critique of the state capitalist theory and an analysis of Eastern Europe.

Danger: Ireland — radicals at work

AT MY TGWU-ACTSS branch meeting in January, I put a motion calling for solidarity with the Irish struggle, rejection of TUC attempts to proscribe debate on Ireland and for campaigning in the labour movement for an anti-imperialist policy. The motion also asked the branch to back the Bloody Sunday demonstration on 31 January and the 'Time for British workers to act' conference on 6 February so that pledges of support would mean something in practice.

First there were nervous glances. Then, a proposal to split the motion in two - to separate support for the march and conference from the first part which 'we haven't had time to think about' (only 13 years!). The SWP supporters went one further: 'We should split it in three - the anti-imperialist bit, the Bloody Sunday march and the conference - because the march will be more broad-based than the conference'. However, this thinly veiled attempt to divide off support for the Smash the PTA Campaign conference didn't get passed. Instead it was decided to discuss the first part of the motion fully in March and take the second part proposals together.

This brought forth another SWP manoeuvre: 'isn't there another conference on Ireland to be held in February - a more broad-based one? Shouldn't we support that instead?' The problem here was that the supporters of the LCI/CWI conference barely know anything of it, so this move also failed.

Finally came the thorny question of sending delegates to the Smash the PTA Campaign conference. A member of the former hunger strike committee complained that the branch didn't have a policy on Ireland so a delegate couldn't be trusted to represent the views of the branch! He then invented a new concept: 'observer-delegate'. Despite the strain this act of creation had given him, he went on: 'I'm not happy about the branch "supporting" the conference - maybe we should word the motion: "This branch is interested in..."'. Where will it all end, I thought? When the end did come, the branch *did* agree to support the conference - and to send two 'observer-delegates'.

The striking thing about the whole discussion was how it was the left, those who often say they support the Irish struggle, who put up all the obstacles. Everyone knew the LCI/CWI conference was only a token gesture and that the Smash the PTA Campaign initiative was the only thing with any consequence. That was why there was so much heart-searching. It had nothing whatever to do with the technicalities of representing branch policy. An earlier motion on a Trades Council-sponsored women's conference was passed with the agreement that 'anyone who wants to go can say they are a delegate of this branch'!

Ian Peart
Leeds

IRA bombs

The following exchange of letters took place in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* recently:

As an English socialist who reads 'AP/RN' every week, I feel I must comment on Peter Dowling's article (22 October).

While I agree with most of his article, one paragraph I find alarming. He states: 'An additional element may well be an anti-war movement in Britain, severely limiting Westminster's room for manoeuvre'.

Far from being an additional element, without an anti-war movement in Britain the War will not only go on but British troops will get even more brutal and a return to the days of internment seems highly likely.

What's more, the bombing campaign in England has helped Thatcher and the British establishment blind the British working class to the real issues involved in Ireland and increased support for their repressive policies. It has appeared to many British working class people that the IRA are at war with the British people as a whole.

It was the anti-Vietnam war movement in America which to a very large extent resulted in

America pulling out, having lost the will to continue the war.

The bombing campaign in England will not bring about a withdrawal of troops. But a mass anti-war movement in Britain has every likelihood of doing so.

But you cannot have your cake and eat it - it's bombs in London or a mass anti-war movement.

C D Rumbold
Luton

After reading the letter from C D Rumbold I couldn't resist putting pen to paper. His letter is a clear expression of the boot-licking attitude of his organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, to the British state.

To take his main point. It is utter rubbish to claim that there can *either* be bombs in England *or* a movement for withdrawal. The idea that it is IRA bombs that are to blame for the British left's inability to create a working class led solidarity movement is an old escape route of the left. The real problem is that the SWP and other organisations have never taken up the job of convincing workers that a struggle which takes on and weakens the British state is in their interests as well.

Instead, the left has consistently given in to some of the most backward prejudices of the British Labour and trade union leaders - anti-violence, pro-British chauvinism and so on.

The Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act Campaign has found that workers are receptive to demands that the Irish liberation fight should be supported.

We organised a 250-strong labour movement conference in Coventry in March 1981, won backing for our intervention in the 'People's March for Jobs' during the hunger strike, and achieved even more with our four-day march to the TUC in September - the 'Workers March for Irish Freedom'. More recently we organised a 400-strong local demonstration in north London against the PTA. That was *after* the London bombs.

Only activity of this type, directed to a working class that itself is under vicious attack from the British ruling class, will build a strong anti-imperialist force in this country. Bombs make our task neither more nor less difficult. Those who claim otherwise are merely excusing their fear of challenging existing prejudices.

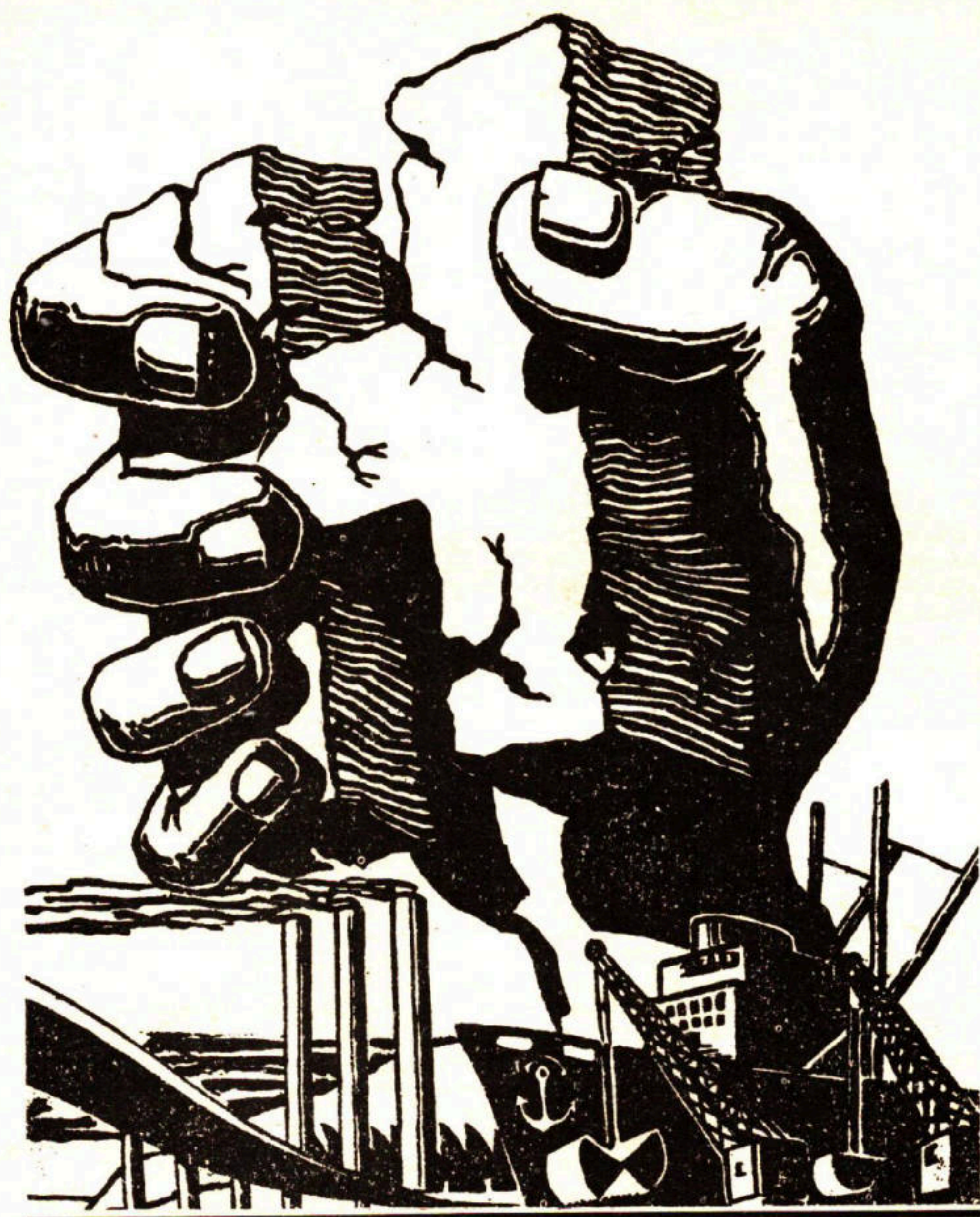
Keith Tompson
Smash the PTA Campaign



Write!

From bus fares to bureaucrats, from rape to racism, from Reagan to Brezhnev, from Irish liberation to the Labour Party, *the next step* discusses all the important issues today. Whether you are for or against us, write and tell us what you think!

Send letters to: The editor, *the next step*, PO Box BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX.



National labour movement conference

to launch the

Irish Freedom Movement

Saturday 6 February

Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19
10am-5pm

British youth for Irish freedom Delegation to the Six Counties

A delegation to join in the local commemorative Easter Rising marches in the north of Ireland. It will provide an opportunity to discuss the British occupation, and set up closer links with the youth of the Six Counties.
For details, phone 01-274 3951.

RCP activities February

COVENTRY

Thursday 4 February 7.30pm
The Middle East — a new imperialist carve up. Joint Revolutionary Communist Society/Palestinian Society public meeting. *Warwick University, Students union building.*



Tuesday 9 February 7.30pm
No to Scarman — fight racism. COVWAR public meeting. Speakers invited from the Asian community and the local labour movement. *Cinematograph Club, 689 Foleshill Rd, Edgewick.*

Thursday 11 February 10.00am
Picket of Coventry Magistrates Court in support of youth in 13 July riots. Drop all charges! Stop criminalisation of black youth!

Thursday 18 February 7.30pm
Poland: the tanks move in. *Warwick University, Council room, Students union building.*

LEEDS

Friday 12 February
Poland's black December
Speaker: Frank Richards
1.00pm, *University of Leeds, Debating chambers, Students union building.*
7.30pm, *Room 607, Civic Hall, Calverley St, Leeds.*



Thursday 25 February 7.30pm
Women in the unions.
Speaker: Kate Marshall (from Manchester Women for Communism). *University of Leeds, New Art block, LG 10.*

Thursday 11 March 7.30pm
Rosie the Riveter
Film and discussion on women. *Swarthmore centre.*

LONDON

EAST LONDON

Wednesday 3 February 7.00pm
ELWAR activists meeting. *Common room, 3rd floor, City of London Poly, Calcutta House, Old Castle St (near Aldgate East tube).*

Friday 19 February
Rosie the Riveter
Film and discussion on women. 12.30pm, *City of London Poly.*
7.30pm, *Homerton Library, Homerton High St, E9.*
£1 waged, 75p unwaged.

EAST LONDON SPTAC
Fortnightly meetings at *Dalston Labour Club, Dalston Lane, E8.*
10 February, 24 February.
7.00pm.

NORTH LONDON

Preparing for power

A series of ten forums on the international class struggle in 1982. *Room 61, North London Polytechnic, Holloway Rd (Highbury and Islington tube, Holloway Rd tube).*

Thursday 11 February 7.00pm
The fall of Tony, the rise of Shirley and the end of Tariq? Labour in crisis: what is the alternative? Speaker: Mike Freeman, editor of *the next step*.

Thursday 18 February 7.00pm
After Scarman, what next? Riots in '82? Speaker: Fran Eden, National organiser WAR.

Thursday 25 February 7.00pm
The Middle East in turmoil: Zionism at the crossroads. Speaker: Nick Jenkins, editorial board of *the next step*.

Thursday 4 March 7.00pm
The capitalist crisis: is there an end in sight? Speaker: Tony Allen, editorial board of *the next step*.

SPTAC North London

Regular meetings for activists. Phone 274 3951 for details.

SOUTH LONDON

Monday 15 February 8.00pm
SPTAC South London. Meeting for activists. *Lambeth Town Hall, Room 2, Brixton Rd (near Brixton tube).*

Friday 19 February 8.00pm
No apartheid on the dole! South London Workers Against Racism public meeting on the new race checks on the doles and in hospitals. Speaker: Judith Harrison. *Millan Centre, 57 Trinity Rd (near Tooting Bec tube).*

MANCHESTER

All public meetings held at the Britons Protection, Great Bridge-water St, Manchester.

Friday 19 February 7.30pm
Poland and British workers. Speaker: Frank Richards.

Friday 5 March 7.30pm
Youth unemployment and the TUC. Speaker: Alan Harding.

Thursday 18 March 7.30pm
Women and the unions. Speaker: Kate Marshall.

Friday 2 April 7.30pm
South Africa: Smash the Apartheid state. Speaker: Charles Longford.

