

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

20p

When Britain goes to war...

The Malvinas are Argentina's!

Defend the rights of 27 million Argentines

British imperialism is
a hundred times more reactionary
than Galtieri's junta

Peace means a British defeat

WORKERS MUST TAKE SIDES!



RCP Activities

BIRMINGHAM

Wednesday 2 June 7.30pm
No to the UN peace plan: support Argentina against Britain. RCP public meeting. For details of venue see the next step sellers or phone 01-274 3951.

Thursday 10 June 10.00am
Support Pino Khan — drop the charges! Picket of Victoria Court, Corporation Street, organised by Workers Against Racism and the Pakistani Workers Association.

Wednesday 16 June 7.30pm
Fight racism! March to the TUC! Birmingham Workers Against Racism public meeting. Details from the next step sellers or phone 01-274 3951.

COVENTRY

COVWAR activists group will be meeting regularly to build for the Workers March Against Racism to the TUC in September. Contact the next step sellers for details.

the next step is sold every week at Parkcourt dole 9.30-11.30am Mondays and Tuesdays, GPO 12.00-2.00pm Wednesdays and Thursdays, Foleshill Rd and the Precinct 11.00-1.00pm Saturdays.

LEEDS

Saturday 17 June 11.00-5.30pm
Workers Against Racism regional day conference. Sessions on the unions, the police and racist attacks. *Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, L3.*

Wednesday 23 June 1.00pm
Lobby Leeds City Council for a mural to commemorate Bobby Sands. *Civil Hall, Leeds.*

Leeds Irish Freedom Movement activists group meets fortnightly on Monday 14, 28 June at 7.30 pm. *Leeds Trades Club, Saville Mount, LS7.*

EAST LONDON

ELWAR activists group meets fortnightly at 6.45pm on Monday 7, 21 June. *Calcutta House, City of London Poly, Old Castle Street (near Aldgate East tube).*

East London Irish Freedom Movement activists group meets fortnightly on Wednesday 9, 23 June. *Dalston Labour Club, Dalston Lane, E8.*

NORTH LONDON

Wednesday 2 June 7.30pm
Fight racism! March to the TUC! North London Workers Against Racism public meeting. *Prince Albert Pub, Wharfedale Rd, N1.*

the next step is sold every Saturday 11.00-1.00pm at Camden Town tube and market.

SOUTH LONDON

South London Irish Freedom Movement activists group meets at 8.00pm on Tuesday 8, Monday 21 June. Newcomers welcome. *Lambeth Town Hall, Acre Lane, Brixton, SW9.*

South London Workers Against Racism activists group meets at 7.00pm on Tuesday 15 June at *John Marshall Hall, Blackfriars Bridge Rd, SE1 (near Waterloo station).*

MANCHESTER

Friday 4 June 7.00pm
A woman's right to work — fight the anti-trade union laws! Women for Communism public meeting with speakers from Laurence Scott and Rulecan disputes. Details from the next step sellers or phone 01-274 3951.

SHEFFIELD

Saturday 19 June 10.00am
Preparing for Power regional dayschool. Sessions include:
★ The internationalist tradition of the working class (Mike Freeman)
★ Building an anti-racist movement (Judy Harrison)
★ The crisis and the class struggle (Frank Richards). *Graves Cinema, Sheffield University.* For details phone 01-274 3951 or write to Preparing for Power, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX.

9 June 7.30pm
How to fight racism in the unions. Sheffield Workers Against Racism public meeting: speaker Judy Harrison. *Brown Cow, The Wicker, Sheffield.*

the next step is sold every week from 9.00-11.00am Mondays to Thursdays at West Street dole office.

BRIGHTON

16 June 7.30pm
Stop Britain's wars: Ireland for the Irish — Malvinas for Argentina! Irish Freedom Movement fringe meeting. **NALGO National Conference** *Apollo Hotel, 135 Kings Road, Brighton.*

BRISTOL

Friday 18 June 7.30pm
United we're strong — divided we fall. Workers Against Racism public meeting. Speaker Judy Harrison (WAR National Organiser). *Inworks Centre, Hepburn, Brinstocke Road, St Pauls, Bristol.*



CND prays for a British peace

God's on their side ~ we rely on our readers' support

People have been arrested for 'insulting behaviour' for chanting anti-imperialist slogans on demonstrations against the war in London. Send donations to help pay the fines and court costs to: Box BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. (Cheques and postal orders payable to RCP Association)

Contents

Editorial		Racism	
<i>Bring the war to Britain</i>	3,4	<i>The Workers March Against Racism</i>	10,11
US imperialism		<i>ELWAR — on the offensive</i>	10
<i>The United Nations in action</i>	5	<i>Pino Khan frame up</i>	10,11
<i>Reagan counts his dominoes</i>	6	<i>How we wrecked the Southwark race checks</i>	11
Women, labour movement and the law		<i>Divided we fall</i>	12
<i>Making the unions fit for women</i>	7	<i>NHS — race checks</i>	20
<i>The Rulecan dispute</i>	8	Ireland	
<i>The lessons of Laurence Scott</i>	9	<i>Tory devolution proposals</i>	16
Special features		<i>IFM: fighting for the future</i>	17
<i>Homes fit for dynamiters</i>	13	<i>Silent Too Long speaking tour</i>	17
<i>How the Tories stay on top</i>	14,15		

Editorial board

Editor
Mike Freeman
Editorial board
Tony Allen, Nick Jenkins, Judy Harrison, Sabena Norton, Marcelle Reynolds, Frank Richards, Helen Simons, James Wood

Published by Junius Publications Ltd
BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX
Printed by Morning Litho Printers Ltd (TU)
Typeset by Junius Publications Ltd (TU)

ISSN 0144-350X

June 1982

Bring the war to Britain

AS WE GO to press Britain has just invaded the Malvinas. The military outcome of the war remains unclear. But of one thing there can be no doubt: the ruling class has already won a major victory on the home front. Support for Britain's war drive is overwhelming. Behind the Government, the military and the bosses there is a broad consensus that Britain is in the right and Argentina is the aggressor. Insofar as there is any public debate about the war the discussion is really about how best to fight Argentina. The 31 Labour left MPs who voted against the Government's military plans on 20 May knew which side they were on, and simply preferred a more peaceful form of aggression against Argentina. As Tony Benn stated in summing up their position: let's have more 'financial and economic sanctions', that 'would almost certainly bring Galtieri down'. In this extended editorial we explore the reasons behind the pro-war consensus and outline a strategy for fighting it. But first we look again at the historic ties between Britain and Argentina.

Civilising mission

'Spanish America is free, and if we do not mismanage our affairs, she is English.' (Lord Canning, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1824)

Lord Canning was right. The overwhelming industrial superiority of nineteenth century England transformed much of Spanish America into its vassal states. In formal terms Argentina remained independent. But in reality Britain's control over the region ensured that its interests became paramount. A close working alliance between British industrialists and Argentinian landowners guaranteed this economic domination. Any attempt to build indigenous industry was thwarted by Britain's agents in control of the Argentinian state. 'Free trade' became the mechanism for establishing foreign control over the economy. The small landlord oligarchy preferred this arrangement whereby they received cheap British manufactured goods and a guaranteed market for their agricultural products.

Free trade wasn't merely an economic policy. When the middle class of Paraguay province decided to build up domestic industry through keeping out foreign goods, Britain responded swiftly. The British ruling class considered the emergent capitalism of Paraguay a threat to its trade and as a subversive example for

the rest of Latin America. Accordingly Britain financed an anti-Paraguay military offensive. In the war of the Triple Alliance, a united force consisting of troops from Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil invaded and slaughtered four-fifths of the male population of Paraguay. British civilisation and free trade prevailed yet again.

By the beginning of this century all the key sectors of Argentinian industry were in British hands. The country was run by two interest groups, the cattlemen's association and the British lobby. Despite the growth of working class action and the development of a radical nationalist movement, British interests continued to prevail. Britain was particularly worried by the emergence of working class militancy. Strikes in factories, mines and railways threatened to paralyse foreign capital completely. As working class action gathered momentum, leading to the drawing up of plans for a general strike, British business began to fight back. In 1919 a group of British-born industrialists and bankers initiated and financed the establishment of the infamous Patriotic League. This reactionary para-military organisation unleashed a wave of terror against working class communities. Repression was stepped up and the subsequent climate of terror made Argentina safe for British profit-making once more.

Britain's hold over Argentina's economy was heightened in the 'thirties. The slump forced British imperialism to seek salvation in its traditional spheres of influence, and to compensate for its decline it stepped up its plunder of the rest of the world. The Roca-Runciman Treaty of 1933 was economic robbery dressed up in the guise of a diplomatic agreement. Under the terms of this treaty, the Argentine economy was subordinated to the demands of the British market for meat and grain.

Galtieri — made in Britain

Since the 'forties Britain's predominant position in Argentina has been supplanted by US imperialism. But, although the US has become the main guarantor of imperialist interests in the region, Britain has continued to exercise considerable influence. The March 1976 coup which led to the rise of the present military junta may have been of US inspiration, but the model had 'Made in Britain' stamped on it. In overt political terms Britain has

never infringed Argentinian sovereignty. It didn't need to. Whilst Britain financed numerous coups, organised the murder of tens of thousands of workers, and plundered Argentina's wealth, it could maintain in public a stance of non-involvement.

Britain's invasion of the Malvinas is a sign of its weakness: Britain can no longer defend its interests from the lounge of the Buenos Aires Jockey Club. Nevertheless it remains true to form. Under the cover of liberating the Falklands, British imperialism draws on the experience of nearly two centuries of barbaric oppression to make sure it is not edged out.

For the people of Argentina longstanding foreign occupation of the Malvinas was a potent symbol of the subordination of their country to imperialism. For them, British control of the Malvinas was intimately linked to the indignity of foreign control and intimidation in Argentina. The British settlers on the islands are unfortunate victims of circumstance — but they have also become unwitting tools in cynical British manoeuvres. Self-determination for the British settlers is nonsense. It implies that 1800 British settlers should be able to thwart the aspirations of millions of Argentinians. Self-determination for the Malvinas in practice means the denial of self-determination to Argentina.

Argentina is a long-suffering victim of British imperialism. Britain has no rights to the Malvinas. The Argentinian people have legitimate claims that go way beyond the islands currently in dispute. This is an imperialist war the central object of which is to show countries throughout the backward capitalist world that Britain is still a world power to be reckoned with. British workers have no interest in upholding British militarism and every interest in supporting Argentina's rights and calling for the defeat of Britain.

For us the character of the regime in Argentina is irrelevant. Every time the British ruling class goes to war it depicts its enemies and their leaders as the blackest evil in the world. Galtieri and the junta have joined the Tsar and his Cossacks, Kaiser Billy and the Junkers, Hitler and the Nazis, Mussolini and the fascists, Emperor Hirohito and Colonel Nasser in Britain's gallery of infamy. This chauvinist hypocrisy plays a vital role in mobilising the working class for war. The chorus of abuse for Galtieri and profound analysis of the record of his regime

from the reformist and radical left press simply indulges and reinforces the wave of 'anti-Argy' chauvinism currently being stirred up in Britain. British workers do not need to be told that the regime in Buenos Aires is, like dozens of others backed in the past by Britain, reactionary. What needs to be shouted from the street corners — and here the left is silent — is that *British imperialism is a hundred times more reactionary*. A victory for Britain in the war in the South Atlantic would mean the further subjugation of the people of Argentina and a return to the sort of British 'non-interference' which means economic plunder and brutal oppression. The defeat of Britain on the other hand would create the most favourable conditions for the workers of Argentina to settle scores with Galtieri and his ilk.

Chauvinist heritage

Since the imperialist character of this war is so obvious, why is there such an overwhelming domestic consensus behind Britain's war drive? The answer is straightforward. Throughout this century foreign policy has tended to be above party politics. In Parliament, the Labour and Tory parties have maintained a bipartisan approach to foreign affairs, despite the differences of emphasis which may arise. For example, Labour Governments tend to be more critical of South Africa than their Conservative counterparts. But under the counter nothing changes — arms, trade and investments have flowed to South Africa no matter what the Government. As a rule it can be said that the greater the threat to British imperialism the greater the scope of bipartisanship. Thus the Irish liberation struggle, which represents a formidable challenge to the British state has been uniformly condemned by every major parliamentary party. Moreover, even when in opposition, the Labour Party has never criticised the Conservative regime's Irish policy.

The actions of the Labour Party have ensured that the pursuit of British imperialist interests is a legitimate standpoint in the working class. If anything, the Labour Party, and particularly its left wing, is more nationalistic than other major parties. We have now become accustomed to the ritual of Labour politicians blaming the crisis of British capitalism on the EEC or on foreign imports. Recently the Labour left has

(continued on page 4)

the next step

(continued from page 3)

extended its chauvinist repertoire to denouncing American imperialism. Of course America is imperialist. But what Tony Benn argues is that Britain isn't, and moreover, that Britain has become a colony of US imperialism! Tell that to the workers of Argentina.

The chauvinist outlook of the labour bureaucracy has deep roots in the British peace movement. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has been very embarrassed by the war in the South Atlantic. These days it is legitimate and even respectable to protest against nuclear weapons and about the threat of a war in the future. This is especially true if, like CND, you infuse your protest with a good dose of anti-Americanism. Many establishment figures and even a section of the military can go along with this sort of campaign. But matters are entirely different when Britain is engaged in a real war. It is no longer a question of the threat of war in the future but a real war in the here and now. Real war has created a dilemma for CND. It is meant to be against war, but taking a stand against this one means losing respectability and being labelled anti-British.

CND's response to the war is therefore instructive. It feared that an anti-war movement might develop outside its control, so it set up the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands. One of the first statements that it issued was to dissociate itself from anti-imperialists. A leaflet distributed by the Ad Hoc Committee on 16 May declared: 'We are not supporters of Argentina or enemies of Britain'. This is a delicate way of saying: 'A war is going on, we want peace, but you can be sure that we are the enemies of Argentina and the supporters of Britain'.

The problem with the Ad Hoc Committee is not merely that it has the wrong slogans. It isn't just British first and pacifist second. Its very existence is designed to control the anti-war movement in order to betray it. Committee stewards have actively sought the help of the police to isolate anti-imperialists from demonstrations. They have threatened sellers of *the next step* with physical violence. They have also sabotaged attempts to mobilise for demonstrations in case they lose control over the protests. Their rule is to keep anti-war sentiments within safe channels to ensure that discussion remains according to the terms set by British imperialism.

Their peace and ours

The opposition to the war rests its case on the need for a peaceful solution. Calling for peace in the middle of the war begs a very important question. What sort of peace? While everybody is in favour of peace, peace means different things for people in different social positions. For Margaret Thatcher and the British ruling class it means oppressing Argentina in total peace. For the Argentinian people and British anti-imperialists it means peace from military intervention — something that can only come about with the defeat of British imperialism.

In reality, nobody is for peace in the abstract. The Labour left MPs who want a 'peaceful solution' want to see the defeat of Argentina brought about by 'peaceful' means. Thus Tribune MP Michael Meacher argues that 'the noose on Argentina could be clearly tightened'. For Meacher, the best course of action is to step up economic sanctions, get imperialist bankers to deliver a death blow against the Argentine economy and force

Washington to destroy Argentina's remaining supply lines. Peaceful economic war — the Labour left is sure that it works. After all, wasn't the left-wing Allende regime in Chile brought down by the forces unleashed by imperialist economic boycott?

The call for economic war is complemented by the demand for peaceful negotiations. Peaceful diplomacy has an air of calm rationality about it. But in reality negotiations are simply another way of fighting a war. The outcome of negotiations is not based on logical arguments. Rather, it is economic power and military might which decide the nature of any negotiated settlement. Negotiations between British imperialism and its historic victim Argentina are conducted with the barrel of a gun at the head of the weaker party.

Expose the charlatans!

Many on the left say they agree with our analysis that the enemy is the British ruling class. Unfortunately they conclude that now is not the time to act on these principles for fear that we'll become isolated. They even go so far as to work under the wing of the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands. They say that although the Committee's slogans are diffuse, they are acceptable in principle. Thus the SWP, while expelled from the Ad Hoc Committee, kept silent about its 'differences' in case it became isolated. An extreme example of this fear of isolation occurred in Sheffield on 15 May. A demonstration of the Ad Hoc Committee was called off because the organisers took exception to the radical slogans that appeared on many banners. A small group called (ironically) Workers Power agreed to get rid of its banner to make sure that the protest went ahead.

In the event the march was still called off — the Ad Hoc Committee was relieved to have a pretext to avoid the embarrassment of having to lead an anti-imperialist demonstration in face of a hostile public.

This preoccupation with isolation means that the British consensus is never effectively challenged. The ruling class has opted for war. The Labour left has taken the same side but wants to fight the war peacefully. The Ad Hoc Committee has sought refuge in peace and the radical left, motivated by fear of isolation, has sought the sanctuary the Committee provides. The left's hysterical criticism of Thatcher is easily absorbed into the incoherent ramblings of middle class pacifists, liberals and vicars.

Revolutionaries are not purists who declare abstract principles and seek the splendour of isolation. But the issue at stake is not whether we are isolated or not, but to build an anti-imperialist anti-war movement. The British consensus will only be challenged if the case for the defeat of imperialism is clearly put. Only an approach which forces workers to choose sides can expose the real character of the war. Only if we bring the war to Britain and transform the underlying fears of hundreds of thousands into class hatred against imperialism, can the tide of chauvinist hysteria be reversed.

Temporary unpopularity is a risk well worth taking. If the working class has no independent voice on this war, then the bosses will know that victory in the class war at home is already within their grasp. Then the force and violence now directed against the people of Argentina will be turned against the working class. On the other hand, should the domestic consensus break down, workers will discover a power that will prove resistant to the bosses' intimidation.



A new pamphlet on Britain's war against Argentina

Taking sides against imperialism

Why has Britain gone to war over the Falklands?

Why do we support Argentina's claim to the Malvinas?

Why has the mass movement against war in the future proved incapable of opposing a real war in the present?

Why do we want to see Britain defeated?

How can we fight the war in Britain?

For the answers to these, and other questions about the war, write now for this rush-release pamphlet.

Send 50p (including postage) to BCM JPLTD London WC1N 3XX. (Cheques and postal orders payable to Junius Publications Ltd)

STATEMENT BY THE AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR PEACE IN THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

The organisations involved in the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace in the Falklands are seriously concerned over some of the slogans used on the demonstration on Sunday, 9th May. We want to make it clear that the aims of the committee are:

1. to stop the war over the Falkland Islands.
2. to pursue a peaceful settlement through negotiations at the United Nations.

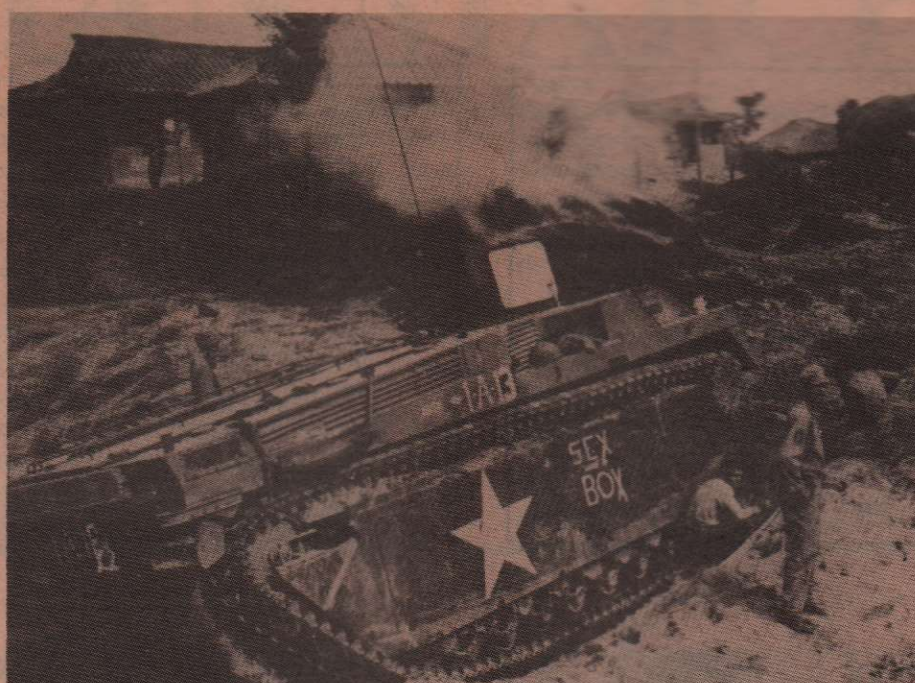
We are campaigning for the end of hostilities; we are not supporters of Argentina or enemies of Britain.

We know and readily accept that many organisations will have more detailed policies, but these proposals, as already outlined, have been accepted by this Committee over three meetings, and are the ones that embrace and unite all organisations involved. We come together on the basis that it is the common ground of cessation of hostilities and negotiations through the United Nations that unites us at our demonstrations, not accentuation of the differences.

We have no wish to restrict organisations pursuing their own policies independently. We do demand, however, when supporting demonstrations called by the Ad Hoc Committee, that they should conform to the central policy of the Committee.

We wish to make it clear to the Press, the British public and all organisations that refusal to do so makes those organisations not supporting our aims unwanted and unwelcome on this Committee or its demonstrations.

The United Nations



“A thieves’ kitchen”

EVEN BEFORE the Second World War ended, the United States government, at the Dunbarton Oaks conference, began the process of organising the post-war world under its control. Its aim, ratified at the San Francisco conference in 1945 that set up the United Nations, was straightforward: to break up the colonial empires of Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy and extend US influence in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. First President Franklin D Roosevelt, and after his death, Harry S Truman, promoted ‘decolonisation’ via the UN as the ‘orderly and peaceful transition of power that would not jeopardise long-run Western economic and political interests’. Decolonisation did not of course include the USA’s newly acquired territories in the South Pacific which were designated of vital strategic importance.

At its formation the UN Security Council included five permanent members. The post-war peace keepers were the victors of the 1945 carve-up: the USA, Britain, the Soviet Union, plus France and China – at the request of Britain and the USA respectively. The veto system – which meant that major decisions had to be unanimously approved – was designed to give the UN an impartial status. However, ‘China’ was represented at the UN by the Taiwan regime from 1949 until the early ‘seventies; and the Soviet Union’s major concern was to preserve the favourable *modus vivendi* with imperialism it had established in 1945. This meant that in practice the veto system simply acted to confer legitimacy on the measures required to preserve imperialist stability. In any event, the veto never stopped the USA from getting its way on key issues at the UN.

Palestine 1948

The UN took over control of Palestine from Britain in 1947. With the backing of the USA and the other world powers, the UN Special Committee on Palestine proposed the partition of the country, apportioning 55 per cent for a Jewish homeland. Having justified the Zionist claim to their promised land the UN stood by as the Palestinians’ national rights were crushed and Israel was established.

Korea 1950-53

The Korean war was important in establishing US authority on the world stage – and inside the UN. When the national

liberation movement based in the north-ern part of Korea attempted to unite the country and oust imperialist control in the south, the US immediately despatched troops from Japan. The USA then over-rode a Soviet veto on the Security Council to send in UN troops to back forces under its direct control. The joint forces, under effective US military command, ravaged the country north and south. Having made the region peaceful, the UN/US forces withdrew to the south and installed a brutal military dictatorship to safeguard capitalist interests in the area.

Suez 1956-67

Suez was where Britain got the message that it no longer ruled the Middle East and that the USA had taken over; the UN ratified Britain’s humiliation. When Egypt’s Colonel Nasser legitimately claimed control over the Suez canal region previously plundered from the Egyptian people by the British Empire, the government responded in the customary way. It despatched the fleet in a clumsy combined operation with France and Israel against Egypt.

In Washington, President Eisenhower was outraged at Britain’s attempt to strengthen its position in the Middle East at the cost of upsetting US plans for the area. He immediately called for UN intervention, over-rode both the British and French veto, and the invading armies returned to their ships in disgrace. The Israelis pulled out of Sinai and Gaza to be replaced by UN troops, who were to stay for another ten years.

The Congo/Zaire 1960-64

Imperialist intervention in the Congo became necessary because of the mounting chaos which resulted from the failure of the attempts by the former colonial power Belgium to establish a stable pro-Western regime. The secession of Katanga (Shaba) province – the source of 10 per cent of the world’s copper, 60 per cent of the cobalt, as well as radium, zinc and industrial diamonds – was

the pretext for the interference of UN troops to restore imperialist control.

The UN’s first objective was to re-integrate Katanga back into the Congo. The secession had been encouraged by Belgium whose mining companies had a firm grip on the province, but because it destabilised the whole area, it ran against the broader interests of imperialism. UN troops soon brought Tshombe’s Katangan rebels to heel while preserving Belgium’s interests in the province. The second objective was to crush the mass anti-imperialist movement. The murder of its leader Lumumba was a start but it took the combined efforts of the UN, Belgian troops and Katangan mercenaries several bloody months to crush the masses.

In this peace-keeping operation tens of thousands of Africans were slaughtered; many more died of famine and disease resulting from the devastation of agriculture.

Middle East 1973-74

When Egypt launched the Yom Kippur war in 1973 the USA was quick to perceive the threat to imperialist relations in the area. Following the ceasefire, 7000 UN troops were sent to police the opposing forces while successive US administrations tried to establish a more secure framework of domination. In May 1974, when the Geneva negotiations between Syria and Israel over the future of the Golan Heights were reaching fruition, UN forces moved into the area to contain Arab resistance to the deal.

Lebanon 1978

The most recent UN operation has been to keep the peace in the Lebanon. Here ‘peace’ means crushing the Palestinians in general and the Palestine Liberation Organisation in particular. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon set up a 10 kilometre ‘peace zone’ along Israel’s northern border when it went into southern Lebanon shortly after the 1978 Israeli invasion. The UN forces concentrate on keeping the PLO out of this area, while tolerating the presence of the

murderous anti-Palestinian Christian militia of Major Haddad.

Non-aligned impotence

Many liberal and reformist apologists for the UN argue that its whole character has been changed by the admission to the General Assembly of many poor nations, granted a provisional form of independence by the imperialist powers over the post-war years. Loosely affiliated in the ‘non-aligned’ group, and seen by Stalinists as the natural allies of the Soviet Union, these Third World countries are widely held to be a rising power in the UN. It is true that the US loses more votes these days – as early as 1967 it was on the winning side on only 36 per cent of all resolutions, compared with 56 per cent in 1955. The fact remains, however, that on the key issues the USA gets its way: the UN has rarely taken action of which the USA seriously disapproved.

Even when there has been a combined Soviet and non-aligned bloc vote – on behalf of Namibian independence or for sanctions against South Africa and Israel – the US has been easily able to overrule it. The General Assembly can say what it likes; but US power in the Security Council makes sure that, when it matters, the UN does what it’s told. The non-aligned countries support Argentina’s claim to the Malvinas; the Security Council resolution reflects US backing for a British invasion to reclaim them.

The USA is however becoming increasingly frustrated with the UN. This frustration has less to do with the posturings of the non-aligned bloc and more to do with the growing rivalries among the imperialist powers themselves. As one American foreign affairs commentator put it: ‘The relationship of the US to the UN has become somewhat tenuous’, in an article entitled ‘New fears in the UN centre on the possibility of “a coalition of the Europeans and the totalitarian left on Central America”’ (*The Guardian*, 24 February). As inter-imperialist tensions deepen in response to the recession, the UN seems destined to go the same way as its predecessor the League of Nations. Lenin called it a ‘thieves’ kitchen’. It kept the peace by presiding over the enslavement of millions – until it collapsed when the thieves fell out and went to war with one another. The United Nations, despite its rhetoric, has always come down on the side of imperialism and against those who fight it.

As the South Atlantic war upsets US plans for Latin America



Reagan counts his dominoes

The very fact that Britain is at war with Argentina shows how far the United States has lost its grip throughout Latin America. Phil Murphy looks at the crisis of US foreign policy.

AS THE UNITED STATES grew in strength as a capitalist power, so too did its pernicious influence over the rest of the American continent, particularly its southern parts. In the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, rising America staked its claim, but it was not until 1898 that Spanish control of South America was decisively overcome. The USA consolidated its influence after the Second World War with the Rio Treaty of 1947 and the foundation of the Organisation of American States in 1948. Over the next two decades the USA established a position of unparalleled supremacy in Latin America.

The centre cannot hold

The recession however has steadily undermined American influence. Competition from Europe and Japan has displaced the USA as the main trading partner of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay; key rivals have outpaced the USA in importing goods from Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Peru. The US share of Latin America's export trade fell from 17 per cent in 1953 to nine per cent in 1976. In terms of investment outlets US companies have lost major contracts to European and Japanese firms. Take Brazil for example — the US share of foreign investment fell from 38 to 30 per cent between 1971 and 1978. In the arms trade France in particular has begun to squeeze the USA out of important markets.

At the same time the world recession has exacerbated political tensions. It has wreaked havoc on economies reliant on a few major exports — coffee, bananas, cotton — with a fragile industrial sector. In Central America for example industrial growth dropped from an average of 8½ per cent in the 'sixties to 3½ per cent between 1975 and 1978. By 1980 most Latin American economies were stagnant: in El Salvador GDP fell by 10 per cent. The result, in countries already characterised by extremes of poverty and repression and run by corrupt and autocratic elites, has been political explosions of the sort that put the Sandinistas in power in Nicaragua in 1979. Conflicts between populist anti-imperialist forces and reactionary regimes are currently

raging with varying degrees of intensity in El Salvador and Guatemala. And even Honduras and Costa Rica are losing their facade of stability.

Another feature of the burgeoning instability of South America is the proliferation of border disputes. The two most serious conflicts are between Venezuela and Guyana and between Chile and Argentina, but Guatemala still wants Belize, Peru has a claim on a chunk of Ecuador and Venezuela is also in dispute with Colombia. Argentina's claim to sovereignty over the Malvinas is only the most well known (now) threat to the established order of the region.

Drawing the line

America's response has been to try and compensate for its economic decline by increasing its political and military interference. Like Britain, the USA has never been slow to resort to sordid intrigues, assassinations, staged coups and, when all these failed, direct military interference: Guatemala 1954, Cuba 1961, Santo Domingo 1965, Chile 1973 are some of the better known examples. In the past however such tactics were a last resort; from now on they will have to be systematically pursued.

The Reagan administration has pursued further the strategy begun by Carter towards the end of his term of office. Raising the spectre of Cuban/Soviet infiltration, the USA has gone on the offensive. At his first press conference on taking office, Secretary of State Alexander Haig made it clear that 'the line would be drawn' — in El Salvador. One of Reagan's chief Latin America advisers amplified:

'I think that we're going to see in the next two to four years an effort made to deal with the situation in Central America. Whether this means we will see direct assistance, whether it will be sanctions against Cuba and Nicaragua, or anybody else aiding and abetting terrorism and revolution, I don't know; but we're going to see some action — "I can assure you of that".' (*The Listener*, 12 February 1981)

The line had to be drawn in Central America. This was not because of the area's economic importance for the USA.

Partly it was because of the fear of revolution spreading further afield to Mexico, the USA's third largest overseas market and now the world's fourth largest oil producer, or to Panama, still a major shipping route for the USA. But mainly it was to show the world that the USA was still master, 'in its own backyard', as *Time* magazine put it (22 March). So the Reagan government has pumped money, arms and advisors into El Salvador. And it has gone in search of allies to help it police this troublesome region.

The last vestiges of Carter's ill-fated 'human rights' policy — which distanced the USA from some of its more vicious old friends — were ditched. Jeane Kirkpatrick, now UN ambassador at the UN, was straightforward about the new policy:

'If we are confronted with the choice between offering assistance to a moderately repressive autocratic government which is also friendly to the US and permitting it to be overrun by a Cuban-trained, Cuban-armed, Cuban-sponsored insurgency, we would assist the moderate autocracy'. (*The Washington Post*, 4 January 1981)

The 'moderate autocracy' that most fitted the bill was Argentina: the new US regime cultivated links with Galtieri and the junta. The line would be drawn in El Salvador and Argentina would play a key role in a US-sponsored Pan-Latin American 'army of peace' to safeguard imperialist interests throughout the sub-continent.

Reagan's dilemma

The Falklands crisis has caused a major setback to American plans. From the beginning it has had to balance its concern to maintain its particular interests in Latin America with a broader need to take a hard line against the sort of challenge to imperialist law and order that General Galtieri's takeover of the Malvinas represented. Washington's immediate response was to try to avoid trouble by sympathising with Britain while keeping friendly with Argentina: Kirkpatrick thus went off to dinner at the Argentine embassy on the night of the invasion.

Reagan's neutral position — 'we're friends of both sides' — gave some space for Haig's trans-Atlantic shuttle diplomacy. But this brought no results and the President came under increasing pressure from both sides. One commentator summed up the concern of many that the USA could not be seen to be endorsing actions such as those of Galtieri:

'By not siding more forthrightly with Britain the United States may be jeopardising the objective it thinks it is serving: Latin American stability. By seeming obsessively concerned about the survival of existing regimes, the United States extends to those regimes a license for adventurism and settling old scores'. (*The Washington Post*, 15 April)

As the British fleet drew nearer its destination, Latin America — with the exceptions of Chile and Colombia — rallied to Argentina's side. A resolution recognising Argentine sovereignty over the Malvinas was passed by 17 votes to nil at a special meeting of the OAS — the USA, Chile, Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago abstained.

In the end the USA had to climb off the fence onto Britain's side. It had to sacrifice its Latin American policy to preserve its standing as the global policeman.

The resolution of the South Atlantic War remains uncertain. But it has already dealt a body-blow to Reagan's grand plan for the area. The administration is already working towards the future. It despatched top troubleshooter General Walters (fresh from the elections in El Salvador) to Buenos Aires in mid-May, 'to keep in touch with the government of Argentina and to facilitate communications in this very delicate situation' (*The Guardian*, 14 May). However Reagan may well need to find a new ally: he recently met Brazilian President Figueiredo and held amicable talks. America still has great economic and military power in Latin America; it will probably salvage a viable foreign policy and consolidate its influence in the region. Fortunately for the masses of South America that is much more than can be said for Britain.

NORMAN MARCHES ON

The steady advance of Employment Secretary Norman Tebbit's anti-trade union legislation through parliament has thrown the TUC leaders into a panic. Having cooperated all the way with government and employers in the shakeout of industry and the destruction of shop floor organisation, Len Murray and his colleagues have now declared 10 June Union Day in a desperate attempt to rally opposition to Tebbit's law. After three years of undermining, holding back or selling out every militant response to the Tory attack, the TUC now wants to 'educate' workers about the dangers of the Employment Bill.

Workers can read the papers as well as Len Murray. They have shown in a series of strikes and occupations over recent months – at Plesseys, BL Bathgate, Massey Ferguson and others – that they are well aware of the legal threat they face, and that they are quite prepared to defy

the law and fight their employers to defend jobs and living standards. The problem, and it is graphically illustrated by two strikes we examine in detail on pages 8 and 9 – Rulecan and Laurence Scott – is that workers are constantly hampered in their struggle against the bosses, the courts and the Government by their own trade union organisations.

The discovery that the trade unions have become an obstacle in the fight for jobs and conditions is a new and disturbing one for most British workers, who in the past have generally found unions a fairly effective defence. This experience is a new one for men but it is nothing new for women. As Kate Marshall argues on this page, women had to fight their union leaders as well as their employers to get what they wanted even when the British economy was expanding. Now it is in recession that fight is fiercer on both fronts.

Making the unions fit for women to join

BRITISH UNIONS have never accepted women as part of the labour movement. There are a number of reasons for this. First, women have generally been unskilled workers. They lacked the bargaining power of men in the craft unions and they could easily be replaced. Second, women's movements out to work and back into the home according to the pressure of family commitments made it difficult to develop any sustained commitment to the union. Third, since the 'sixties more and more women have taken up jobs as part-time workers, for whom the unions have had little relevance. Finally, and this factor has assumed central importance in the recession, women act as a reserve of labour: dependence on their husbands could always take the place of waged employment when the capitalists had a surfeit of labour and a dearth of work. On the other hand, women at home are always available for work when capital requires them.

These factors have all contributed to women's marginal role in society and their neglect by the unions. The trade unions have allowed a state of affairs to prevail where women bear the brunt of unemployment, low wages and bad conditions, while trying to ensure that the 'real workers' are protected.

Women take issue

Thousands of women have refused to accept that they should pay for the ups and downs of the capitalist system. They have rejected their role as gap-fillers, temporary workers and low-paid beasts of burden. Strikes by women workers have become increasingly common since the 'seventies. The most famous was the sewing machinists' strike at Ford, Dagenham in June 1968, when women came out over their grading and for equal pay. They won sympathy action from Ford workers at Halewood, Liverpool. But to get what they wanted they had to take on their own union. They descended on their annual conference at Felixstowe, banners flying, to lobby delegates. They had to invade the conference hall and disrupt the proceedings before they got official backing for their strike. From then until well after the implementation of the Equal Pay Act in 1975 there was a plethora of equal pay strikes up to the famous 1976 strike at Trico in West London.

The demand for equal pay – a principle of the TUC since 1881 – got little active backing from the bureaucracy, which preferred in public to declare its reliance on government inquiries and tribunals. In private, union officials colluded with employers over the regrading of jobs and

the maintenance of differentials, leaving women to fight for equal pay alone. The bureaucrats encouraged divisions between men and women, exploiting male fears that equal pay would inevitably mean less for them.

John Colliers

During the course of a strike for higher pay in 1970 at John Colliers clothing factory in Leeds, workers put in a claim for an equal pay rise for both men and women. Negotiators from the tailor and garment workers' union (NUTGW), unfamiliar with this sort of demand, bargained it away in the course of their discussions with management. When they presented their 'victory', an unequal pay rise, the workforce not only refused to return to work, but retaliated by extending their strike to include 45 other factories and some 30 000 women in the Leeds area. The solidarity of the women and men who fought with them for both a general improvement and equality, was remarkable. A massive demonstration of workers marched through Leeds city centre demanding equal pay.

What was the union's response? The bureaucrats wrote to John Colliers' management urging them to stand firm against the unofficial militancy. The union promised to give its full backing to the company if it had the courage to oppose the demand for equality. However, the bosses were less concerned about preventing inequality than they were in getting their factories going again. So they coughed up the equal pay rise, to the exasperation of the union.

In recent years equal pay strikes have become increasingly rare, undermined by wage cuts, mass unemployment, union inaction and the Equal Pay Act. Now women's strikes are over issues which affect all workers – but women most of all. Since the late 'seventies we have seen women on strike against closures (Lee Jeans), public sector cuts (Coventry council workers) and for trade union rights (Grunwick, Royal Pride, Rulecan). The bureaucrats – a big enough problem in the past – have become an even greater menace to women workers since the recession really began to bite. Now that unions are putting past gains on the counter and bargaining them away to the bosses, women workers find themselves at the front of the special offers. Part-timers are sacrificed, women are 'naturally wasted', lower paid civil servants (female) are given nil pay increases and new technology is swopped for women's jobs.

Lee Jeans

Women clothing workers employed at

Lee Jeans in Scotland went on strike last year against the threatened closure of their factory. They went into occupation and held out for five months. They won their strike with the aid of effective blacking by dockers. Yet the very actions that won the dispute had to be undertaken in the face of trade union opposition. The leaders of the NUTGW opposed blacking and consumer boycotts because, they argued, such tactics would damage the firm's market position. The union was more concerned about Lee Jeans' profits than about bringing the strike to a speedy victory. The women at Lee Jeans won *despite* their union: many other women were not so determined, so well supported, or so fortunate in the final outcome.

Many women's strikes during the recession have involved the right to join a trade union. The strike of black women at Grunwick's photo-processing firm in North London won widespread sympathy throughout the labour movement. But the leadership of APEX, the union the women joined, and the other unions involved, moved to curb the sort of supportive action from postal and electrical workers that could have won the dispute. They feared legal action against the unions. But they also feared the spontaneous solidarity workers offered, uniting various sections of the working class – black, white, male, female, skilled and unskilled – against a reactionary employer. With unity like that who needs the union bureaucracy? So they allowed the women to go down to a bitter defeat.

Although the unions want to recruit women, and win the right to negotiate on their behalf, the hostility of employers to union organisation has meant that recognition disputes have been extremely difficult to win. Mary Hobbs, leader of the London night cleaners, was told to go to another union when she approached the TGWU to request that Britain's biggest union begin to organise some of the country's most exploited workers. And in Coventry it is impossible to find a full-timer in the garment workers' union who is prepared to unionise the Asian women in the sweat shops. Often the unions have retreated rather than tackle long legal battles and hard-nosed bosses. This is the story of Chix, Garners, and scores of others.

Shake-out the unions!

These examples illustrate that the trade union movement has not only done very little for its female members but it has actively moved in against successful action organised by women on strike. Now that official, legal attacks are being made on the union movement, the bosses

feel even more confident to step up their unofficial attack on the unions.

Many on the left and in the women's movement have noted these betrayals. Feminists often advise women to ignore the unions altogether and organise as women alone. The left, which has a soft spot for the bureaucrats, proposes instead to change the unions. But because they identify the problem too narrowly as the preponderance of men in the bureaucracy, their solutions miss the mark. They call for 'positive action' in the labour movement, to get women into posts and positions in the unions. The Communist Party and factions inside the Labour Party call for more reserved seats, women's names on short lists, more training schemes for women stewards, etc, to bring women into the unions and get women to take on positions of responsibility. The TUC, however, has been there before them. It now has a Charter for Women in the unions – a few courses at Ruskin College and five (instead of two) seats for women on the General Council. But this is no solution for women like those at Rulecan who are fighting for their jobs now.

The problem we really face is that the labour movement is dominated by reformists, rather than the fact that these reformists are usually men. Reserved seats, special conferences (with no policy-making power) and fine words are nothing new. We know from experience that Marie Patterson and her female colleagues are as bad as Len Murray and his mates. People whose first concern is for their own position in the bureaucracy will not stick out their necks on behalf of women workers. People who want to keep on the right side of the law will sell our jobs to save their skins. People who think nothing can be done until Labour is returned to power will be incapable of fighting for us now.

Women will join unions and become more active in them as they are transformed from being bureaucratic fetters into organisations that fight for women's interests. Badges proclaiming 'a women's place is in her union' are an insult to working women. If unions were democratic campaigning organisations that fought against cuts and redundancies, for abortion rights and nurseries, for decent pay and conditions for *all* workers, then women would flock to join and take up office. Instead of urging women to get involved in institutions that are at best useless and at worst downright obstructive, socialists should turn their energies to transforming the unions into organisations fit for women to join.

Rulecan, the courts and Women for Communism

THE RULECAN DISPUTE shows how, even before Tebbit's Bill reaches the statute book, the law is increasingly being used to interfere to curtail basic trade union rights. One of the central aims of Tory anti-union legislation is to deprive trade unions of certain immunities they have acquired over the years from prosecution for damages in civil law. James Prior's 1980 Act withdrew protection from workers involved in 'secondary' action - picketing or blacking at places other than their own place of work. Thus the Rulecan workers and their union and other unions involved could be sued for any damages caused by their blacking of goods at, for example, Kay's and Gratton's Catalogues.

However, any organisation which is not a trade union - this applies for example to women's groups or political organisations - enjoys no immunity of any sort. Thus Women for Communism can be hauled before the courts for organising the sort of elementary solidarity action for workers on strike that countless individuals, women's groups and political organisations have been undertaking for years.

The injunction against Women for Communism's picketing activities, and the claim for damages against it, is a major attack on the rights of women and workers. It has nothing directly to do with either Prior or Tebbit: it simply indicates the employers' growing preparedness to use the courts to strengthen its attack on the working class. The following outline of the Rulecan dispute reveals the employers' use of the law, the vacillation of the union and the determination of the women to win.

★ **December** Rulecan takes over the factory from Courtaulds, declares a 12 month wage freeze and makes 30 workers redundant.

★ **January** A consultant work study engineer is brought in. He re-times

Sixty women at Rulecan Ltd, a clothing manufacturer in Runcorn, Cheshire have been out on strike for four months for trade union rights and a guaranteed minimum wage (see the next step, No 24, May 1982). Despite the pressures of record levels of unemployment in the textiles and garment trades - which have made it easy for Rulecan to recruit scab labour - the women have fought a determined battle against the employers. But their union - the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers has proved more of a hindrance than a help.

The Rulecan women, supported by one local official, soon persuaded workers in USDAW and the TGWU at Kay's and Gratton's Catalogues, two firms supplied by Rulecan, to refuse to handle its products. But when the company threatened legal action under the 1980 Employment Act the union head office immediately called off the blacking. When Women for Communism organised consumer boycotts and pickets of Rulecan's major customers such as C&A and Mothercare, Rulecan and its parent company Kingsland Models Ltd responded with a flurry of injunctions and claims for damages. Even though - by the bureaucrats' own acknowledgement - the pickets forced the bosses to return with new concessions to the negotiating table, the NUTGW still refused to organise effective backing for the women on strike or to support their sympathisers against victimisation by the employers.

piece-work and reduces the rates of pay.

★ **Early February** Workers call in local NUTGW official Derek Cattell who is told by the employers that the wage rates are low because the women are not working fast enough. Cattell advises a walk-out and organises a picket: only 15 workers enter the factory, and when a delegation goes in to negotiate, Cattell is physically thrown out by management. When the women refuse to accept the bosses' terms - no Cattell, no direct negotiations with union representatives - they are promptly sacked and the strike is made official.

★ **Mid February** The bosses bring in scab labour and increase the wages. Official union picketing and blacking begin.

★ **Late February** Rulecan boss Raymond Rattle offers to reinstate 30 strikers (alongside 25 scabs) if the blacking is called off. The women refuse. Rattle then threatens legal action under the 1980 Employment Act and NUTGW General Secretary Alec Smith lifted the

blacking without any consultation.

★ **March** The picketing at Runcorn continues as rank and file anger against the executive's climb down grows in the NUTGW throughout the North West.

★ **April** Women for Communism begins its pickets of C&A and Mothercare in London, Manchester, Coventry, Sheffield, and elsewhere.

★ **29 April** High Court injunctions are granted against Women for Communism and others, restraining them from picketing or making 'defamatory' statements against Rulecan or Kingsland Models.

On the same day Rattle comes up with new proposals. He offers informally to re-employ all the strikers - but in a new factory two miles away. He insists however that Cattell must go 'and is prepared to guarantee a minimum wage for six weeks only. The women are suspicious and far from satisfied. But the NUTGW is delighted and even promises to re-impose blacking if Rattle backs down. *Socialist Worker* reports that the workers 'may be close to

a famous victory' (8 May).

★ **30 April** A joint Women for Communism and Workers Against Racism meeting takes place in extraordinary circumstances in London. Injunctions have been issued against all the advertised speakers, including Grunwick strike leader Jayaben Desai. The bookings desk in the public library where the meeting has been advertised has been besieged all week by solicitors' clerks and court bailiffs trying to find out who organised the meeting so they can serve writs on them. The meeting is attended by a functionary of the Rulecan-Kingsland legal machine, his pockets bulging with injunctions and affidavits, but alas he is unable to find anybody to serve them on. More than 100 people hear speakers other than those advertised and are treated to a full reading of the injunction and a full account of the Rulecan struggle.

★ **5 May** Paul Foot addresses 400 people at an SWP meeting in Manchester. He, and one of the Rulecan shop stewards, both appeal for a big turnout for the pickets at Runcorn and C&A in Manchester.

★ **6 May** One SWP member joins Women for Communism supporters from Manchester on the picket line. Women for Communism mobilises support for the strikers around the country. *Socialist Worker* reports that 'twice weekly pickets at the factory gate and pickets at C&A shops which sell Rulecan garments have forced management to the negotiating table' (8 May).

★ **12 May** An Industrial Tribunal in Liverpool hears the claims of the Rulecan women for re-instatement and against unfair dismissal. Judgement is deferred for a fortnight.

As we go to press, the Rulecan women are still on strike and Women for Communism is still supporting them. Send donations to the strike fund to Joyce Clare, 6 Portland Street, Runcorn, Cheshire.



RULECAN WOMEN SPEAK OUT!

'Our General Secretary said he'd fight for our jobs but he didn't seem to be doing much to help us. The C&A pickets Women for Communism organised really put the pressure back on the Company. We weren't that surprised when we heard that they were going to take Women for Communism to court for it. They've been very quick off the mark to use the law against us over the blacking and on the picket line. We're supporting Women for Communism all the way. We don't think it's right to let the bosses walk all over us and tell us that no one is allowed to support workers on strike. We all need that kind of support if we're going to win.'

This court doth order that:

(1) The above-named Defendants and each of them be restrained until after Friday 30th April 1982 or until further Order in the meantime from doing (whether by themselves or by their servants or agents or any of them or otherwise howsoever) the following acts or any of them that is to say:

(a) picketing at or near the shops or other business premises or any of them of C&A Modes or Grattons PLC or Kay's of Worcester PLC or any other customer of the Plaintiff Kingsland Models Limited for the purpose of intimidating the Plaintiffs or either of them or such customers or any of them or for the purpose of unlawfully interfering with the trade or business of the Plaintiffs or either of them or of the said customers or any of them.

(b) publishing statements defamatory of the Plaintiffs or either of them or publishing malicious falsehoods of and concerning the Plaintiffs or either of them or their trades or businesses and in particular allegations that

(i) the factory of Rulecan Limited in Runcorn, Cheshire is a sweat-shop

(ii) Rulecan Limited pay only, or offer only, £30 per week for a full week's work

(iii) the Plaintiffs and each of them are fly-by-night companies

(c) unlawfully intimidating or attempting to intimidate the Plaintiffs or either of them or their customers or any of them.

The labour movement and the law

The lessons of Laurence Scott

THERE ARE two myths prevalent on the left about Laurence Scott. Ironically they contradict one another. One, put about by the International Marxist Group, is that the Manchester factory has long been a hot-bed of militancy and the recent struggle was simply a continuation of this fine tradition. The other, favoured by the Socialist Workers Party, is that the Laurence Scott workers were notably backward from a trade union point of view until the recent dispute galvanised them into a display of unaccustomed militancy. Paul Foot put this view at a recent public meeting when he claimed — slanderously, and to the intense annoyance of some LSE workers present — that before their occupation, Laurence Scott workers had been in favour of Tory anti-trade union legislation.

Myths and realities

In reality the outlook of most Laurence Scott workers corresponded to neither of these stereotypes. Their political views, like those of most British workers, were diverse. Some voted Tory, some voted Labour — but most did tend to identify their own livelihoods with the success of the company. Because Laurence Scott operated closed shops in all departments, all workers were union members; most did see the unions as defenders of their position in negotiation with management. However all the workers had one thing in common — they were angry at being thrown out of work in a city with little prospects of alternative employment. The vast majority was ready to take action to save jobs.

The Laurence Scott workers had one big advantage. The factory had no tradition of Labour left or Communist Party organisation at the shop floor level. And so, as the boss blundered from one provocative posture to another, stiffening the resolve of the workers against him, he could not turn to the traditional dampeners of militancy to ease the way towards closure. The workers at Laurence Scott were neither more nor less class conscious than workers anywhere else, but the dead hand of Labourism was not much in evidence at the start of the dispute, and they were open to political argument.

After more than a year of fighting to save 650 jobs at the Manchester engineering factory of Laurence Scott and Electromotors, the workers have finally given up their struggle. The Laurence Scott workers have faced an unprecedented legal and political onslaught. High Court judges granted injunctions against their occupation and to prevent them picketing their boss's major plant, Mining Supplies in Doncaster. Bailiffs smashed their way into the factory to evict the occupiers — and then the courts presented the shop stewards with the bill for the £6800 damage they caused (the claim still stands). The employer used first scabs and then helicopters to get vital components out of the factory. The strike was finally crushed when 400 members of Manchester Police's paramilitary Tactical Aid Group staged a commando-style dawn raid on the factory and assisted scabs in a week-long plant-stripping operation.

However it took more than Mining Supplies boss Arthur Snipe, the courts and the police to break the Laurence Scott strikers. The workers had to fight all the way against the politics of the engineering workers' union, nationally and locally, right and left. And it was not just the instinctive militancy of workers fighting for their living standards that sustained the Laurence Scott struggle through 12 long months. The politics of the Revolutionary Communist Party, presented through our supporters in the factory and on the picket lines, in factory bulletins and articles in the next step, provided a constant challenge to the bureaucracy and a realistic alternative in the fight for jobs.

However once the dispute got under way the local Broad Left full-time officials became more and more involved. And the longer the dispute dragged on the more important became the influence of the Broad Left — among other engineering workers in Manchester and beyond, among the miners who were in a key position to put pressure on Mining Supplies in Doncaster, and at every level in the AUEW.

At Laurence Scott itself the strategy of the strike was resolved at an early stage. There were two positions encapsulated in two slogans. The one put forward by the Broad Left union officials — 'substantial redundancies, yes, closure, no' — was decisively rejected. The strategy that was adopted after long argument was the one put forward by supporters of the RCP — 'no redundancies, no closure'.

The right priorities

The politics of the Broad Left officials reflected the outlook of the more backward workers. For them the possibility of saving jobs depended on the viability of the company; their first priority was

keeping Arthur Snipe in business, even at the cost of most, and ultimately *all* the Manchester workers' jobs. This system of priorities dictated their tactics: they always sought to restrict militancy, to contain picketing, to acquiesce to the courts, to urge the acceptance of humiliating compromises.

By contrast the strategy of 'no redundancies, no closures' always encouraged the most effective action. It was supporters of *the next step* who called for occupation, for extending the picketing, for involving all the workers, for defying the courts and for rejecting the officials' sell-outs. Support for these tactics had to be won through the political argument of the more class conscious workers with the rest. But in the course of the struggle these arguments were won and the approach of putting workers' interests first and forgetting about the company was accepted by more and more workers as the only realistic way to defend their jobs.

In the end the LSE workers suffered a bitter defeat. At the present stage of the class struggle we were unable to prevail

against the combined forces of the state and the union bureaucracy. But the very fact that the Laurence Scott struggle began to be fought from a broader working class perspective meant that the experience of defeat could become a conscious one. Far from coming out of their defeat downcast and with feelings of inadequacy, the LSE workers knew full well why they lost. They knew it was no fault of their own but that of traitors in their own ranks — the right-wing leaders of the AUEW who tried to wreck the strike from above and left-wing officials who undermined it from below. Thus the first outcome of the Laurence Scott dispute was a national campaign to oust the entire Executive Committee of the AUEW.

Cleansing our ranks

Now that the Laurence Scott struggle is over and the Tebbit Bill looms ahead, Broad Left leaders like Bob Wright and Ken Brett are to be found campaigning against Tory anti-trade union legislation. They are often joined on public platforms by prominent SWP trade unionists who join them in bemoaning the poor turnout and the lack of working class response to the vicious Tory proposals. The Laurence Scott dispute showed that workers are not lacking in either the anger or the confidence to fight their employers or the government. Their problem is that the Broad Left keeps getting in their way. As one LSE worker said, 'as soon as we beat the boss to his knees one of these bastards raised him to his feet again'.

Laurence Scott showed those pessimists of the left who are awed by the 'backwardness' of the working class, that workers are not backward because they reject revolutionary ideas, but because they have never had them put before them as a serious option. Revolutionaries can take heart from Laurence Scott even though we lost. Our battle showed the excellence and audacity of the British working class; an excellence that can draw around it all those downtrodden by those who rule society, an audacity that can clear aside the compromisers, wrest power from capital and remake the world.

Dave Hallsworth

Dear Editor,

In your paper dated April 7, 1982, you went to great lengths to describe the cartoon in the Laurence Scott's March Bulletin. The main point was the indignation of certain Communist Party members.

I notice you did not reproduce the cartoon in your paper to explain your case. We have no criticism of any individual Communist Party member who supported us. In fact we appreciate it sincerely and would not wish to offend any genuine trade unionists, but it is a fact that the Communist Party and the Broad Left as a whole, who we considered to be the vanguard of the Trade Union Movement did not do their duty.

The feelings of the shop stewards and the strikers is that we were badly let down and felt it was our duty to express our feelings. We did not criticise the Communist Party or the Broad Left in the Bulletins, but illustrated our feelings in the cartoon, which the Joint Shop Stewards Committee considered very mild. It is a pity you did not show the

An open letter to the Morning Star

same indignation when we were smashed on the picket line. It would be a disgrace if other trade unionists fell into the same trap and were eventually abandoned.

One of our main criticisms of the Broad Left and the Manchester Confed including yourselves, is that genuine socialists are deluding themselves. Laurence Scott's were promised Grunwick type support but when the crunch came they were unable or unwilling to come up with the goods.

Accepting that the Broad Left are genuine pro-working class it must be pointed out that they are sitting in Ivory Towers promising the earth. During the boom years they were talking of fighting when it was unnecessary, but in the recession when the rank and file were looking for leadership they have not got the ability to produce it. They are kidding themselves and the factory members. Yet at a time when workers are being

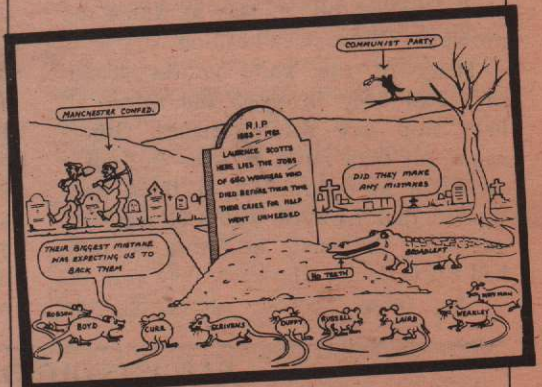
crushed all over Britain, you can find the time and place in your paper to express your over-sensitive criticisms of a cartoon.

Well brother, the truth hurts, doesn't it? Let's hope the pain stirs you into some sense of perspective. It is one thing to stand and fight in times of full employment, but when the chips are down and with over 3 million on the dole the time is here to stand up and be counted.

In our Rule 14 Campaign within the AUEW the Communist Party are refusing to support us. The excuse they offer is that they do not feel that sufficient support could be mustered from the rank and file to remove the executive. You have been saying it is better not to fight, the time is not right. What a load of rubbish. If you are awaiting the green light let me say that the revolution was not official and with your attitude and our present union leadership the Thatchers

and Tebbits of this world will find no problems in crushing workers, because their position is now, in cricketing terms, a 'Batter's Paradise'.

Dennis Barry (Laurence Scott convenor)



The cartoon that upset the Stalinists

WORKERS MARCH

LONDON-TUC IN BRIGH

ELWAR-on the offensive

The NF came nowhere in the May council elections. And the British Movement has recently split down the middle. But don't let anyone tell you that means the fascists aren't a problem. Racist thugs have been on the rampage recently and the need for direct action against them is greater than ever before. Keith Tompson describes how ELWAR has been tackling the problem.

WALTHAMSTOW — where the Khan family was massacred in a racist arson attack last year — is once again the scene of violent assaults on black families. This is what happened to Asian residents on Priory Court Estate in early May.

Tariq Mahmood had a crow-bar smashed through his front door. His wife and children have been regularly stoned by gangs of racist thugs going to and from school.

The Bashir family were afraid to leave their house because every time they did the children — all under eight — were assaulted. Petrol and burning rags were shoved through one family's letterbox.

The estate is smothered in KKK graffiti. A favourite pastime is scrawling 'WOGS OUT' outside Asian flats. But the local home-beat officer (one PC Burke) denies there is any problem. This is not surprising since his colleagues join in the fun all the time. One West Indian teenager was brutally assaulted by a van-load of police recently. When his mother protested she was also beaten up and racially abused. They poked her in the chest and said 'The nigger woman has tits'. Now she and her son are being charged with assaulting the police.

According to PC Burke the black tenants beat themselves up. The Malik family, he claims, are just trouble-makers who break their own windows in order to get rehoused... and the local Labour Party chairman agrees. She and PC Burke thought they had everything under control — until ELWAR moved onto the scene.

Two fronts

The first thing we did was canvass the entire estate. Over 100 tenants responded to an appeal from the Asian families, calling on their neighbours to help patrol the estate to prevent further attacks. More and more evidence emerged about when and where the attacks were happening; many tenants were able to pinpoint who was behind the trouble.

But, as always, ELWAR has been working on two fronts. We confronted the white youths who hang out on the estate and demanded to know who had been involved in the attacks. We called an open-air meeting between them and the black families on 16 May at which the problems were tackled head-on.

Many of the white youths denied they had been involved and agreed to help stop any future attacks. Others came out with racist remarks and got a mouthful in return. All of them were warned that ELWAR would be regularly patrolling the estate in future, so they had better decide whose side they were on.

One thing everyone agreed on: the

police weren't welcome on Priory Court Estate; and local politicians had done nothing for the tenants — black or white. By identifying the real enemies and confronting the racists, ELWAR has begun to replace the climate of fear with one of working class solidarity.

STEPNEY has seen a spate of violent racist attacks in recent weeks. In the first week of May a 12-year old Asian boy, Sadik Hussein, was viciously clubbed by six white thugs in Fieldgate Street. He was hospitalised as a result. A week later, Atiqul Haque was beaten up by ten racists near his home in Bigland Street. They assaulted him with an iron bar.

'They just came from behind. I was going into the lift and I turned, then suddenly I felt a big blow on my head. I turned more and I was hit again. I just fell. When I awoke they were gone.'

Atiqul spent two days in hospital. He's still badly concussed, can't walk properly and his vision and hearing are impaired.

Several days later Rofique Miah and Pir Ali experienced a horrific attack, at four o'clock in the afternoon, outside Grove dwellings in Adelina Grove. They were chatting in the courtyard when, without warning, two thugs set upon them with a knife. Rofique received a six-inch stab wound in his stomach. Pir was beaten up but managed to escape without being stabbed.

ELWAR, along with local Bengali organisations, has immediately moved into action. While the police have displayed the usual contempt and indifference, ELWAR and local residents have organised nightly patrols of the streets. We have been around door-to-door and mobilised the local community, uncovering still more details of recent racist assaults. In Grove Dwellings alone, ten families are under siege. One family produced a massive bin piled high with bricks, stones and bottles — the missiles that had been hurled through their windows and doors. The family next door has an even bigger stockpile, reminders of past bombardments.

The families in the area are not only in severe physical danger from fascists. They have been living for years in the most squalid housing conditions, with no bathrooms or toilets, thanks to the benign neglect of Tower Hamlets Labour council. The same council is quite prepared to turn a blind eye to the growing numbers of fascists congregating in the area — most conspicuously in Brick Lane on Sundays.

More volunteers are needed for the nightly street patrols. Contact Keith Tompson on 01-274 3951 (24 hours) if you want to get involved. Come to the public meeting.

**FASCISTS OUT OF BRICK LANE
STOP THE RACIST TERROR
EMERGENCY PUBLIC MEETING**

Friday 4 June 8pm, Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street, E1 (near Aldgate East tube)

Speakers from ELWAR, local trade unions and Asian organisations.

UNITED W BRICK LANE - BRID

With three months still to go, the WORKERS MARCH AGAINST RACISM is already building up overwhelming support

- * from trade unionists who can see how racism is being used to wreck their movement
- * from Labour Party members who are sick at their leaders' disgusting chauvinism
- * from black workers who want to see solidarity in action, not just words
- * from white youth who don't want to become cannon-fodder for the NF or the army.
- * We have already signed up over 200 marchers. Sponsorship is pouring in from all round the country. And WAR groups are springing up everywhere.
- * On these two pages we look at the kind of work that has convinced more and more people to join our campaign. Whether it's fighting racist thugs on the street, police frame-ups in the courts, or racism in the workplace, WAR has proved that united working class action works.

For full details write to WAR, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street,

FOUR DAYS OF NON-STOP



GBH/ABH

PINO KHAN is a Pakistani worker from Sparkhill, Birmingham. He has been working at Birmingham Batteries for 10 years, where he is a member of the AUEW Selly Oak Branch 8.

On 6 April, Pino was charged with 'grievous' and 'actual bodily harm' offences. This is what happened. A few days before he had been playing cards with some relatives. It was 11pm. Suddenly there was a loud bang at the window. When Pino went to the door to investigate he was confronted by two

white youths (Gareth and Harry Morgan) who hurled insults and then bottles at him. Pino picked up a length of timber and used it to defend himself from the youths — and their father, who suddenly arrived on the scene.

Later the police arrived. First, they went to see the racists. Then to Pino's house, where they interrogated him and his relatives. The Morgans stood outside shouting abuse ('We'll burn your house down, we'll burn your children, we'll kick you out the country!'). The

AGAINST RACISM

TON 4-8 SEPTEMBER

WE STAND XTON - BRIGHTON

DAY ONE

- * Make London a no-go zone for racists!
- * Feeder marches from North, South and West London
- * Rally and benefit in Brixton

DAY TWO AND THREE

- * March to Brighton
- * Films, meetings, entertainment on the way

DAY FOUR

- * Mass demonstration at the TUC
- * End of march benefit

SPONSORS INCLUDE

Jayaben Desai * Anwar Ditta * Cynthia Gordon * Nasira Begum
Reggie Yates * Nayat Chafee * Tony Benn * Paul Boateng
Ted Knight * Ken Livingstone

London E8 or phone 01-274 3951. (Plus see cut-off box on back page)

ACTION AGAINST RACISM



FRAME-UP

police took no notice. They were too busy hauling Pino, his brother and cousin off to the police station where they were held overnight. During that time they were assaulted and a 'confession' was forced out of Pino.

He is coming up in court on 10 June. Birmingham WAR has organised a picket and legal back-up, jointly with the Pakistani Workers Association, to defend this brother. We've approached the workers at Birmingham Batteries and addressed his AUEW branch to appeal

for support.

Pino has got to be defended, and the West Midlands police exposed. They are widely regarded as model 'community policemen' and held in high esteem by local Labour politicians. Their idea of community policing is to protect well-known thugs like the Morgans - who are in the habit of letting their dog loose on Asian children for a laugh - meanwhile framing up black workers when they defend themselves.

Alex Farrell

GOTCHA!

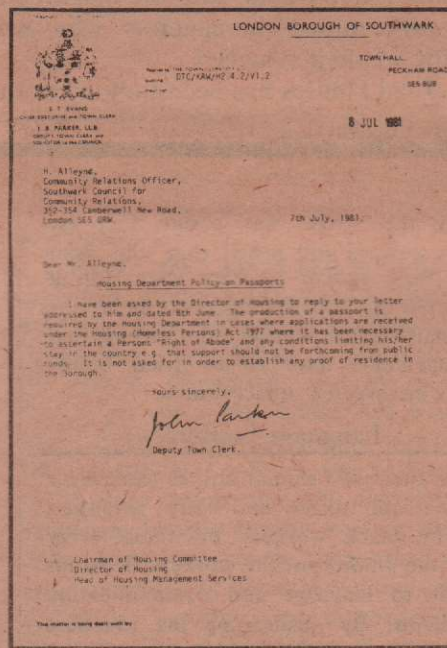
How we wrecked the race checks

WAR has been digging up more and more evidence of racist procedures - in dole offices, hospitals and housing departments - designed to deprive black workers of their rights. In one London borough we recently exposed what has been going on in the housing offices. There have been a lot of red faces ever since.

SOUTHWARK'S HOUSING DIRECTOR, John O'Brien, claims no prior knowledge of the widespread passport checks in his department. 'As soon as I became aware of the practice', he said, 'I issued an instruction that it should be stopped' (*South London Press*, 7 May).

What us - racist?

This is strange, because less than a year earlier the Housing Director instructed Southwark's Deputy Town Clerk to reply to an enquiry on the matter as follows:



Stranger still, until recently the Housing Department was circulating a draft document to selected employees, outlining special interviewing arrangements for persons suspected of having 'no right of abode' in the borough. This document - which was made public by WAR - contained an explicit instruction to 'request to see the passport of the person to determine what conditions, if any, have been entered therein to control that person's stay after entry'. It included a collection of sample passport stamps to assist the interviewer in deciding who had 'no right of abode'.

It works

If WAR had not conducted a vigorous local campaign that document would by now be official policy. Thanks to our efforts it has been hastily withdrawn, and O'Brien and his colleagues have been forced to disclaim publicly such practices. How did we force this climb down?

We made a direct appeal to the housing workers themselves, and their union - NALGO. They confirmed that in many

housing offices the workers were automatically expected to request a passport from every black or 'foreign-sounding' person on the waiting list, and that they had been threatened with disciplinary action for refusing. They also revealed that the more zealous administrators were in the habit of inviting immigration police to sit in on interviews - in at least one case leading to the instant deportation of a black prospective tenant.

We uncovered a hornets' nest of such racist practices, and found considerable resentment amongst the housing workers at the role they were expected to play. In April, the local NALGO executive decided to put its foot down. It passed a resolution condemning the race checks and guaranteeing full backing for members threatened with victimisation if they refused to implement the checks. They also backed WAR's lobby of Southwark Council on 25 April at which Housing Committee Chairman George Young was forced to announce an inquiry into the whole affair.

Only the beginning

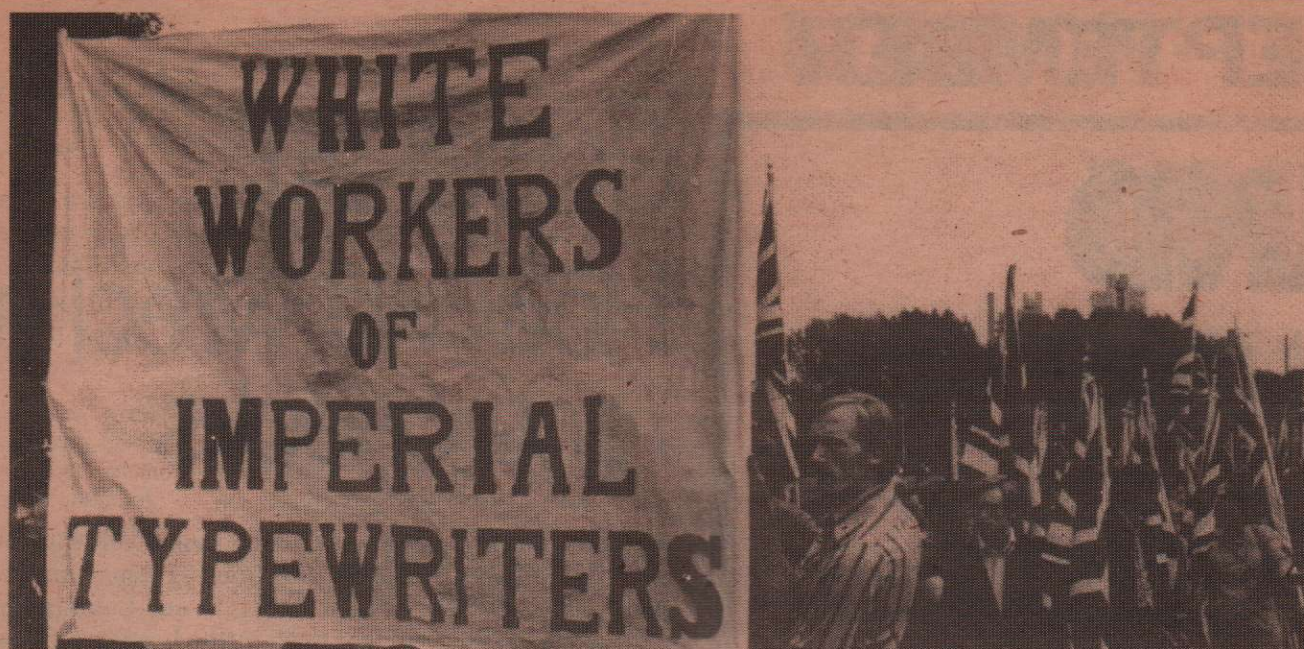
We've won an important victory in Southwark. But there is a lot more work to be done. Our supporters in NALGO will be monitoring what goes on in the housing offices, to make sure the policy of no passport checks sticks. They're also beginning to monitor the extent of racist harassment on local housing estates, and the borough's discriminatory allocation policy which ghettoises blacks on all the worst estates.

WAR has been canvassing many of those estates, and found widespread evidence of police harassment. A 200-strong petition from tenants on Dog Kennel Hill Estate was recently presented to the council complaining about persistent raids by the East Dulwich police. Last but not least we're campaigning against the heavy NF presence at East Street market - a direct provocation to black families on the estate opposite.

Southwark isn't a special case. Throughout London, and up and down the country, WAR is mobilising trade unionists and tenants to fight their local authorities' apartheid housing policies. At NALGO Conference (Brighton 14-18 June) we will be urging delegates to copy Southwark's stand, and make non-cooperation with race checks national policy. The next area on our hit-list is Newham, where the Housing Director recently claimed there is nothing wrong with checking passports. Watch this space. We'll make him eat his words!

Marcelle Reynolds

Racism and the unions



DIVIDED WE FALL

RED SCAR MILLS in Preston closed down 18 months ago. The unions didn't put up a fight. Nobody was too surprised though; shop floor organisation was destroyed years ago, after the crushing of a black workers' strike there in 1965.

Their dispute began in the summer of 1964. It was over a new productivity deal — negotiated between the Courtaulds management and the TGWU — which would have forced black workers in the spinning department to operate one and a half instead of one machine for a mere 3d extra per hour.

A cautionary tale

The black workers hadn't even been consulted about the deal. They were already working under appalling conditions, far worse than the white workers. They sat down in protest, and eventually came out on strike. Management was outraged — but so too was the TGWU. The union declared the strike unofficial and kept the spinning department working at 85 per cent capacity, using scab workers who did long hours of overtime at break-neck speed. As far as the white TGWU stewards were concerned this wasn't a 'normal' trade union dispute. 'The issues involved in the Courtaulds strike appear to be entirely racial', was what one steward told the local press (*Lancashire Evening Post*, 25 May 1965).

The strike — the first in Red Scar's history — was over in three weeks, defeated by hostility from fellow-workers and sabotaged by the union. After they returned to work the tensions continued. At a mass meeting white workers demanded that management victimise the black troublemakers, and a short strike took place in the viscose department to further this end.

But the white workers paid a high price for their collaboration with management. Speed-up in the spinning section meant speed-up throughout the factory, as this department fed the others. Management continued to get away with imposing unhealthy working conditions, low wages, redundancies — and eventual closure — thanks to the fatal divisions that had been created between the workers.

Even today, many local union representatives in Preston refuse to recognise

According to official TUC wisdom black workers are to blame for their own problems. Not enough of them join unions, when they do they're inactive and, of course, there's the language problem. . . . That's what we're told by our union leaders.

They're talking nonsense. There are proportionally more black workers in unions than white. They have fought long and hard for basic trade union rights. And the biggest communication problem they've got is with union bureaucrats who won't listen to their grievances or support their struggles.

Joan Phillips has been looking at the unions' track-record.

what the strike was about. One ex-shop steward still insists that 'the Asian and West Indian workers were not as oriented to the industrial scene as the ordinary British worker, who accepts that arrangements have to be tried before being discarded as unacceptable'.

Language barriers?

More than 100 similar strikes took place in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies, led by black workers. In almost every case the unions put the workers' demands down to language and communication problems. By challenging the practices that ghettoised them into the worst paid, dirtiest jobs — usually on the night shifts — black workers were upsetting the cosy gentlemen's agreements between union and management. At root the union officials saw black workers as a threat to their white members' interests. At best this meant that, even when the union was opposed to the more extreme manifestations of racism on the shop floor, their words and deeds showed whose side they were on.

This was the case at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester, the scene of a notorious strike in 1974. Once again, the union involved was the TGWU, but this time there was the added ingredient of National Front involvement ('from the boardroom downwards', according to local NF organiser Reed-Herbert).

The Asian workers — 1100 out of a workforce of 1650 — struck when they found management had been cheating on their bonus payments. They were also demanding the right to elect their own shop stewards, something precluded by the union's own bureaucratic procedures.

The NF organised violent strike-breaking activities, and generally whipped up the white workers into a racist frenzy.

Alarmed at this state of affairs, senior TGWU officials intervened to try to cool things down. But it was too little, too late. The strike was broken and soon afterwards the factory was shut down. Whilst deploring the intervention of the NF, the union officials played into their hands continuously. This is what George Bromley, the local full-time official, had to say about the Asian strikers:

'They've got to learn to fit in with our ways, you know. We haven't got to fit in with theirs. . . in a civilised society, the majority view will prevail. Some people must learn how things are done.' (Interview with Radio Leicester, 1974)

Bill Batstone, vice-chairman of the Leicester district committee of the TGWU was blunter still: 'Sooner or later somebody had to stand up and be counted. The Asians cannot come here and make their own rules' (*Race Today*, September 1974).

According to Bromley it was 'a language problem; they can't understand very well or express themselves very well' (*Race Today*, October 1974). The barely disguised racism of the union only served to fuel the flames on the shop floor and ultimately led to the smashing of the strike.

A white man's union

The Asian workers at Imperial Typewriters, and elsewhere, could have been forgiven for turning their backs on trade unionism after this debacle. In fact, they didn't. The Asian workers' strike committee at Imperial's resolved to fight all the harder, to transform the unions:

'Right now the trade union movement in Britain is functioning as a white man's union and this must be challenged. In challenging this we believe in the unity of the working

class.' (Statement by strike committee, 1974)

This is the kind of fighting talk the TUC finds difficult to stomach. They are too used to looking at black workers as a constituency that needs to be educated in the habits of our British labour movement. They don't like being told to change their ways by 'outsiders'. In fact, as one delegate told the 1965 Trades Union Congress, black workers have a lot to be thankful for — not least the tolerance of their white brothers:

'Most of all, I want to congratulate the British working man on his tolerance and good humour and willingness to work alongside the coloured immigrant workers.' (*TUC Report*, 1965, p542)

Such chauvinist arrogance is less commonplace these days. The TUC has learnt to be more subtle. But really nothing much has changed. At a recent TUC Race Relations conference — the first for two years — the same old platitudes were still being trotted out. 'There's no racism where I work; we're all black down the mines', said one NUM delegate. 'It takes two to tango' said AUEW leader Ken Cure cryptically, meaning the unions can only do so much — black workers have got to want to help themselves. A few breast-beating liberals called for more and different 'structures', more language classes and positive discrimination to encourage black participation in the unions. Everyone agreed there was still a lot of ground to cover.

But nobody wanted to be reminded, at this predominantly white, male, middle-aged gathering, of the TUC's own sordid record. Nobody mentioned Red Scar Mills, Imperial Typewriters, Mansfield Hosiery, Standard Telephone and Cable, Birmid Qualcast, Intex, Woolfs Rubber factory, Perivale Gutterman, Harwood Cash Mill or countless other disputes where black workers led the way and got nothing for their pains.

They didn't want to be told that racism on the shop floor, and the growing influence of the NF in many union branches, won't go away until union representatives set an example to all workers. If anyone needs educating, it is certainly not black workers. It's our trade union leaders. And Lesson No 1 — something they forgot a long time ago — is UNITY IS STRENGTH.

HOMES FIT

FOR DYNAMITERS

The 'controlled' explosion of five tower blocks in Kirkby, Liverpool last month went badly wrong, wrecking 20 occupied homes in the vicinity, causing damage worth £100 000 and leaving 100 people homeless. But the Kirkby fiasco has drawn attention to a much wider problem. The multi-storey blocks at Tower Hill — 12 in all are due for demolition — were built, at a cost of £6 million, only 12 years ago. Badly designed, shoddily constructed, damp and lice-infested, they are typical of much modern council housing. Yet council rents have just risen by another £2 a week and 62 000 people are officially without any homes at all. Nick Jenkins reports.

A RECENT *Sunday Times* survey revealed a grim picture:

- 50 000 concrete slab-and-panel homes, owned by 50 local authorities, all built since 1965, are fit only for the attentions of Ogdens of Otley, the world famous demolition contractors (whose reputation has been somewhat tarnished by the Kirkby incident). In Manchester and the London Borough of Hillingdon 2200 units have already hit the dust. They were built by the 'Bison Wall Frame' system, a method only equalled by the 'Camus' technique used in Liverpool, for producing leaky, mouldy, unhealthy flats
- many system-built blocks are structurally unsafe. Moreover, condensation on walls and rainwater penetration through ceilings and windows leads to coughs and colds, allergies and depression
- the total value of inadequate system-built housing in Britain could come to as much as £3bn — a figure which indicates that hundreds of estates are likely, not to be replaced, but to be left to rot with their occupiers inside them.

So much for the condition of British council housing. But how much are working class families paying for it, and what are their chances of getting a decent place to live? Here things are equally bleak.

High rents, low starts

Rents are up — in some places by almost £5 a week. The average unrebated rent today is £14 a week, compared to less than £7 when the Tories came to power in May 1979. A greater fraction of workers' wages goes on rent and rates payments now than at any time in the past 50 years. Both the numbers of council tenants in rent arrears and the amount of money they owe have risen dramatically: half the tenants in Glasgow,

Liverpool and Manchester are in debt and in the past 12 months most London housing authorities have seen their bills outstanding increase by an average of 50 per cent.

Behind the current rents crisis lies environment minister Michael Heseltine's August 1980 Housing Act. This introduced a new system of subsidies which enabled central government to force local authorities to raise rents in order to make ends meet. Families seeking re-housing today face grim prospects. Cuts in *investment in housing stock* have proceeded even faster than those in housing *subsidies*.

Since Heseltine declared a moratorium on new council house starts late in 1980 they have dropped to minuscule levels: only 21 000 have been made in 1981/82, the lowest figure since 1921. Completions are down too. Instead of building new houses, the Government is selling old ones off, so cutting vacancies and lengthening waiting lists. Nearly 120 000 council houses were sold last year.

The Tories say they are encouraging local authorities to improve their existing properties. But this is just a charade. First, the Housing Act has placed the onus on tenants, not landlords, to get decoration, repairs and maintenance done. Second, the Tories' November 1980 Local Government & Land (No 2) Act has emasculated local authority Direct Labour Organisations, the very work-forces that do up council property. By compelling DLOs to give details of their tenders, publish full accounts of their different activities and compete with private contractors on the open market, the Government has ensured that they are undercut on specific projects, that they lose their more profitable enterprises to private interests, and that — in a few cases — they are wound up altogether. Result: no improvements and

housing goes from bad to worse. The figures say it all:

	1980	1981
Unfit for human habitation	53 000	63 000
No bath, inside toilet etc	149 000	173 000
In need of major repairs (England only)	1.72m	1.75m
Hard to let	260 000	285 000

Derelict Labour

For the Labour Party the problem is simple. A handful of unscrupulous property speculators are responsible for buying up Britain's land and erecting huge, lucrative office blocks against the wishes of the community, which would prefer council houses. Labour blames Tory laws and Tory cuts for cutting back on 'housing for public need' and encouraging cowboy contractors.

Labour's solutions are equally simple. Land and the construction industry should both be nationalised, as should the banks, which have the whip hand over local authority housing departments through debt charges.

People should be put before profits. Instead of jerry-builders, councils should employ DLOs, which guarantee good workmanship. Labour has always been committed to council housing — its record shows this — and the next Labour Government will undo the Tories' misdeeds by pouring billions into public sector construction. So vote Labour.

Let's take these points one by one. First, the property speculators. Labour's focus on 'the unacceptable face of capitalism' disguises its approval for mainstream 'acceptable' capitalism. It distracts from the exploitation Labour councils subject their DLOs to, it distracts from Labour's own miserly housing policies, and it distracts from the fact, for instance, that *local authority* developers (like the Yorkshire Development Group) put up bad flats just as much as private developers.

Second, the jerry-builders. Under capitalism, production is geared to profit, not to need, so the 'cutting of corners' in design and construction is built into the system. Of course, only as many corners get cut as the market will bear: Harry Hyams made sure there weren't any puddles in London's Centre Point office block before the CBI moved in. But goods destined for the working class were faulty long before Marx attacked the adulteration of bread in Volume One of *Capital*. Housing is no exception to this rule. The jerry-building of council houses will continue so long as the working class is not in a position to check up on quality itself; so long, in fact, as capitalism survives. As for fault-free DLO construction, this is just a myth. DLOs have budgets to stay within and deadlines to meet just like Laing or Bovis. They were caught within the constraints of profitability well before the latest Housing Act made such constraints enforceable by law.

Third, the principle of housing for public need. Accommodation, like clothing and food, enters into the value of labour-power. If it can be produced at a profit, private capital will take it on; if not, the state may do. Why? Because while the *individual capitalist* has no interest in seeing the mass of the working class properly housed, the state, acting on behalf of *capital in general*, does have such an interest. It will build council houses insofar as the money is available for them, insofar as capital needs workers with roofs over their heads, and insofar as it needs to keep the homeless off the streets and squatters out of mischief.

Britain has never enjoyed 'housing for public need'. The Attlee Government's Housing Act of 1946, which laid the basis

for post-war council housing, catered for capitalist reconstruction, not the requirements of the working class. The state had to step in: since there was to be full employment, and since less than 10 000 new homes had been completed between 1941 and 1945, 300 000 dwellings were needed every year for a decade. Private capital could never build this many profitably; but, in the event, Attlee himself never finished more than 200 000 a year.

Today things are different. Capital wants fewer workers, not more: it could not care less if the unemployed are badly housed. And the general collapse in profitability makes the financing of Labour's crash housing programmes through taxation on private industry almost impossible. That's why the state has shown itself prepared to put the homeless in expensive bed-and-breakfast establishments and to allow squatters to slum it in peace. More permanent arrangements are just too costly.

Last, the difference between Labour and Tory housing policy. This is a difference in degree, not in principle. It was the 1964-70 Labour Government that, in a dash for half a million new homes a year, was responsible for most of today's shoddy council flats. It was the last Labour Government which got new starts down to a post-war record low; which sanctioned council house sales 'except in stress areas'; and which proposed subsidies for new owner-occupiers and less emphasis on council repairs and maintenance. Today's left Labour councils are no better. The most they have done is try to blunt the effect of the cuts on council tenants by raising rates instead of rents. But council tenants pay rates like anybody else...

Take it to the town halls!

The victims of bad housing in Britain are the old, the young, the disabled, the unemployed, women and blacks. Though the importance of tenants' struggles should not be underestimated, the atomisation and squalor of most estates tends to make such struggles hard to mount and even harder to win. It is up to the organised labour movement to defend tenants and to fight for decent new housing.

A start must be made by NALGO members in local authority housing departments. They must oppose council house sales: not because council housing is 'housing for public need' (it isn't), nor because administering sales means heavier workloads (that isn't the point), but because every sale means one less home for DLO workers to repair and one less for working class families to seek. In other words, they must make sales into a class issue, not simply one for Labour or the NALGO executive to score points on. Owner-occupation is not just a means of turning council tenants into Tory voters. It is designed to get sections of the working class to abandon the demand for adequate rented accommodation altogether. It must be resisted all the way.

The same goes for rent and rate rises. NALGO members must refuse to process these increases, just like distraint proceeding (recently reintroduced in Southwark) or notices to quit. On the other hand, every demand for maintenance, repairs or rehousing should go to the top of the pile. At the same time, council workers should be wary of plans for 'decentralisation' of building work and management services onto the estates. In the name of efficiency, such schemes will inevitably mean greater pressure on tenants and a more direct role for housing workers in enforcing rent and rate increases. And finally workers should learn from Ogdens of Otley and make sure that all the explosions they cause are controlled ones.

Maggie's miracle

How the Tories stay on top



After more than three years in office the Conservative Party is doing remarkably well. Frank Richards assesses the strategy of the Tories and argues that, despite the unpopularity of the Government's economic strategy, the Conservatives retain the initiative in British political life.

THE TORIES did very well in the May council elections. Their success is all the more remarkable given the mess they were in only a few months ago. During the summer of 1981 the Tories were in a state of gloom and virtual despair. The economic crisis was wreaking havoc in British industry, creating widespread closures and unemployment. Margaret Thatcher plumbed new depths of national unpopularity and even many industrialists were beginning to have second thoughts about the wisdom of her economic strategy. When unrest turned into street fighting many Tories became resigned to another spell in opposition after the next general election. In the background loomed the Social Democratic Party picking up members and voters in thousands in traditional Tory areas.

Maggie's comeback

By August many leading Conservatives could no longer restrict their doubts to private conversation. One Tory editor moaned that 'nowadays a week-end does not pass without a message of more or less outspoken dissent from one senior member of the Cabinet or another' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 1981). Senior ministers Thorneycroft and Pym publicly repudiated Sir Geoffrey Howe's optimistic assessment of the state of the recession. *The Guardian's* political editor, Ian Aitken remarked: 'The morale of the Conservative Parliamentary Party has

reached a condition bordering on panic' (5 August 1981).

The Tory Government was in disarray and a growing number of Cabinet ministers lost heart in Thatcher's economic strategy. A prominent journalist summed up the chaotic situation: 'The past two weeks have been a nightmare for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Geoffrey Howe. His call for new spending cuts was rejected by almost the whole Cabinet' (*The Times*, 6 August 1981). For the first time since the election the Tory 'wets' were on the offensive. The editor of *The Times* observed that the 'Cabinet is in a degree of turmoil unprecedented for a Conservative administration in modern times' (8 August 1981).

The purge of the wets in the September Cabinet reshuffle did not solve Thatcher's problems. During the first week of October former leader Edward Heath launched a bitter attack on the Government's economic policy and an influential opinion survey showed Thatcher to be the most unpopular Prime Minister since polls began. The October Tory Party conference created a semblance of unity, but within a month consensus was shattered by wrangling over economic policy. In December, Tory backbenchers fought a rearguard action to prevent the implementation of certain electorally unpopular measures. Employment minister Michael Heseltine was forced to withdraw proposals for curbing local authority powers through the recourse to compul-

sory rates referendums. A proposal to index unemployment benefit at a level two per cent below inflation was also withdrawn under pressure. *The Economist* commented on the conflicts inside the Government:

'The Tory whips, under the command of Mr Michael Jopling, are feeling desperate.

'Since the public spending round commenced in earnest in September, the Treasury has lost every major battle it has fought.' (19 December 1981)

But in the new year, Tory fortunes changed. At first imperceptibly, but by the budget quite visibly, Thatcher was back on top. The wets receded into the background and inner-party conflict declined. Even the resignation of Lord Carrington and two other senior ministers forced by the Falklands crisis did little to damage the Tory revival. By the third week of the Falklands crisis the Conservatives had made significant gains in all the opinion polls. How did the Tories manage to do it? What lies behind their success? To answer these questions we have to examine the main features of Thatcher's strategy and their relationship to the crisis of British capitalism.

Golden age

Thatcher's resolute pursuit of the interests of British capitalism has been portrayed as 'extreme' by the liberal media and the left. After last year's Cabinet reshuffle *The Guardian* warned:

'A Conservative Party chaired by Mr Parkinson which in its Cabinet has no room for Norman St John-Stevens or Ian Gilmour is, by definition, a party and government which has taken one more stride away from its tolerant place in history.' (15 September 1981)

Many Tory wets would agree with this assessment. *Changing Gear*, a pamphlet produced last October by a number of young wet MPs, attempted to restate the case for a more moderate Tory option. Haunted by class polarisation, social unrest and economic instability, the wets yearn for the consensus politics of Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan.

During the 'fifties the Conservative Party attempted to overcome long-standing class divisions by becoming the party of the 'middle ground'. This search for moderation and consensus was typified by Walter Monckton, appointed Minister of Labour by Churchill in 1951. Monckton built up a close working relationship with the unions and went out of his way to publicise his role as 'umpire' in industrial conflict. The Macmillan Government continued this approach and did its best to avoid social conflict of any sort. By the end of the decade the Tories had shaken off much of their traditional upper class image and there was little to separate them from the Labour Party.

The Monckton golden age was brief. During a period of relative prosperity, when Britain 'never had it so good' it was easy to establish harmonious class relations. But as the British economy began to experience the first symptoms of the crisis, class conflict surfaced. When in June 1961 Macmillan introduced a wage freeze the new Tory philosophy received its first major setback. Tory consensus politics proved irrelevant to the needs of capitalism and the Conservatives were branded as old-fashioned and obsolete, like most of British industry, by Wilson-style Labour technocrats.

Between 1964 and 1970 successive Labour ministers attempted in their own way to emulate the Tories' consensus approach. In effect the Labour Party too became a party of the middle ground. And its attempt to please all classes also foundered on the rocks of conflicting class interests. While Wilson searched for the phantom of the middle ground the Tories went back to their roots.

Between the two main classes — the capitalists and the proletariat — stands an

unstable, heterogeneous middle class. More than a century ago Marx noted that these middle strata had no independent existence and that they tended to follow whichever of the two major classes was the most decisive in the pursuit of its interests. The Tories may not have read Marx but they got the message. In January 1970, at a meeting of Tory leaders at the Selsdon Park Hotel in Croydon a new party programme emerged. Gone were the days of flabby consensus — the Selsdon programme promised to roll back 'the frontiers of government' and smash the working class. The new Selsdon man was committed to deflation, free enterprise and strict regulation of union power.

Selsdon man, Iron Lady

The Heath administration from 1970 to 1974 failed to win the day for Selsdon. The inability of this government to implement the Tories' anti-working class programme had nothing to do with Heath's vacillation and mediocrity. The working class was well organised, confident in its case and well able to give as good as it got. But by the time the Iron Lady arrived in Downing Street in 1979, much had changed. During the Labour regime from 1974 to 1979 the working class was thrown into confusion. The Social Contract pushed the labour movement into the clutches of the bosses and 'educated' workers to accept the 'realities' of the capitalist system. The deepening crisis and the threat of unemployment undermined union power and working class militancy. The Thatcher regime did the rest.

The Thatcher Government is not against social consensus. But it wants a consensus that is firmly on the side of the capitalist class. To win support Thatcher has popularised the necessity for tough legal restrictions on trade union activity. Even at the height of Thatcher's unpopularity last October there was little organised opposition to the Government's handling of the unions, the inner city revolt or Heseltine's attack on local government.

Thatcherism has nothing to do with the peculiar psychological features of the present Prime Minister. It simply represents the coherent formulation of capitalist interests in relation to the present crisis. One objective underlines the Government's policy: to establish a new class equilibrium where bourgeois interests prevail and the proletariat exists as a subservient demoralised class. The Government has been entirely pragmatic in its pursuit of the objective. It has avoided any major test of strength with the unions and even postponed a confrontation with the miners when it wasn't 100 per cent certain of victory.

Thatcher's strength is the recognition that the interests of her class cannot be defended by half-measures. She has been prepared to accept great unpopularity because her policies are necessary for the survival of British capitalism and also because wet policies would have even worse consequences for the electoral prospects of her party. The strength of the Tory Government lies in its unyielding attacks on the unions, the state bureaucracy, immigrants and liberalism.

The Government's Cold War rhetoric comes cheaply but it pulls a deeply divided nation together against a foreign threat. The tough stance against the H-Block hunger strikers and the law and order campaign evoked widespread support at a time of economic insecurity and social uncertainty. The Government has taken up issues around which a popular consensus has been kept alive by debates on union power, crime statistics, hanging and family discipline. The Government's inflexibility and its confrontation policy have worked because it has been able to establish a consensus

against the objects of its attacks. Millions hate Thatcher's economic policy but they hate union bureaucrats and 'black muggers' even more. Thus the Government knows that it can count on popular support for its stand on the issues it chooses to make political priorities.

The price of Thatcherism

The Tory regime still faces many dangers. It might have defined the issues and won the arguments but people want jobs and the security of a decent living standard. Confrontation, by its very nature, stimulates class polarisation and limits the scope for social consensus. The Tory wets express a sensitivity to this danger. Moreover they are acutely aware of the danger of isolating the party from the middle class. What is necessary for capital is often unpalatable to the professionals and small businessmen.

The recession has forced much of the petit bourgeoisie to recognise its vulnerability and political impotence. The rise of the SDP reflects the mood and aspiration of these social strata. The SDP — like the Tory wets — wants a return to old-fashioned consensus policies. The growth of the SDP has exacerbated divisions inside the Tories and put their electoral support in jeopardy.

The SDP-Liberal alliance has staked a claim to the centre of British political life. The electoral success of this alliance is symptomatic of the fragile hold of the Tories over the middle strata. However the SDP-Liberal alliance poses little real threat to Thatcher. In today's crisis, where alternatives are sharply posed, the middle ground is too unstable to serve as a foundation for national political leadership. At the first sign of a crisis the middle ground disappears, dooming centre politicians to irrelevance. Thatcher may have lost considerable middle class support, but as the May local government elections showed, this loss is not irreversible. A little war in the South Atlantic sufficed to shatter the electoral dreams of the alliance.

The success of the Tory Government is far from assured. The measures taken in the interest of capital degrade millions into a life of poverty and alienate a growing section of society. Thatcher knows that the stakes are high and she has prepared for all contingencies. The police and the army are ready to deal with those who do not share the Government's ideological consensus.

The secret of her success

The fact that Thatcher retains the initiative is no more inevitable than the fact that unions are unpopular. Thatcher has won the arguments because she has faced no real opposition. The Government has maintained its fragile hold on the middle strata because the petit bourgeoisie has nobody else to turn to. The logical alternative, the Labour Party, has faded out of the picture. Indeed the Labour bureaucracy has not even managed to cohere a populist anti-Tory movement.

The crisis of the Labour Party is a result of its political diffuseness. Unlike the Conservatives, it has been reluctant to abandon the consensus policies of the 'sixties. There are good reasons for this hesitation. To fight for the interests of the working class with the sort of vigour and determination which characterises the Conservatives' pursuit of their class interests would mean Labour launching a major attack on British capitalism. This, the Labour Party is incapable of doing. The Labour Party is too integrated into the capitalist system to give up its policy of class collaboration. The Labour bureaucracy sees any serious blow to capitalism as an attack on itself and therefore restricts its horizons to limited reforms.

Stuck in the middle, vainly trying to reconcile the aspirations of the masses with the capitalist system, the Labour

Party has no coherent alternatives to Thatcher. The best the labour bureaucracy can do is to articulate the hatred of millions for the Thatcher regime. But the disaffection of millions of workers and the petit bourgeoisie has not been matched by a corresponding enthusiasm for the Labour Party. It is very easy to see why. The Labour Party alternative lacks plausibility. On every issue the Labour Party contradicts itself. It promises more jobs and economic stability with policies that in the past have led to unemployment and stagnation. As the crisis deepens the labour bureaucrats promise less and less — their only distinctive suggestion is a discredited incomes policy. The Labour Party promises peace — yet when the Falklands were reclaimed by their rightful owners, Labour called for war. A week later, when the implications of military conflict became clear, the Labour Party sought refuge in the United Nations — an institution that is probably even more discredited than incomes policy.

While Thatcher launches a resolute war drive on all fronts the Labour Party dithers. Michael Foot personifies the Labour Party in every respect — vacillating, incoherent and above all unconvincing.

The secret of Thatcher's success is the Labour Party. The middle class has been repelled by the Labour Party faster than it has become disenchanted with the Tories. The widespread hatred for the Government in the labour movement has had little practical consequences because the Labour leadership has not been prepared to lead the fight. The Government has taken the initiative and forced the labour bureaucracy to account for itself. Instead of fighting unemployment, the labour bureaucracy is busy explaining how damaging Tebbit's anti-union legislation will be for employers and pleading how unfair it is to workers. Typically, the Government acts while the labour bureaucracy responds. For a Government that has presided over the destruction of significant sections of industry and the greatest decline in living standards in the post-war period, retaining this initiative is no small achievement.

It's up to us

Middle class disenchantment and working class demoralisation provide a perfect foundation for Thatcher's reactionary popular consensus. The Tories' electoral fortunes have been restored thanks to a Labour Party that makes Thatcher look good. For the time being the Tory wets have disappeared; their worst fears have not been realised due to Labour's inertia.

Thatcher's formula has worked and will be used again to re-elect another Tory Government. The Conservatives will go on the offensive declaring their determination to uphold the British way of life against foreigners, criminals, reds and union bosses. If it has its way the next election will be fought on the issue of law and order. And the Labour Party? The Labour Party will continue to respond and respond. If Thatcher attacks Labour extremists the party leaders will launch another inquiry into Militant. If the Tories publish new shocking crime statistics, Roy Hattersley will be ready to correct the figures. If Britain invades another nation an inveterate peace-monger will crawl out to wave the Union Jack.

Will the capitalists succeed? Can they indefinitely postpone class conflict with more sheets of crime statistics? The answer has already been given. As long as the Labour Party maintains its hold over the working class the momentum of the capitalist offensive will be maintained. It is up to us. It is up to workers who have had enough to fight for a new alternative. Let us leave the Labour Party to flounder on the ever-receding middle ground and mobilise our forces on the solid foundation of proletarian interests.



Ever wish you were better informed?

I would like to subscribe to the next step (£4.00 per year).

Start from issue No. — — — Send to BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX.

Name — — — — —

Address — — — — —

Trade union — — — — — Cheques payable to Junius Publications.

take....the next step

THE CENTRAL OBJECTIVE of Prior's proposals is that the Government should be 'seen to be doing something' at home and abroad to deal with its Irish problem. Direct Rule means direct British responsibility for what happens in the Six Counties — the killings of Catholic civilians by soldiers, the shooting of children with plastic bullets, the torture and starvation of political prisoners, and all the other barbarities of the military occupation. Northern Ireland is a considerable embarrassment to Britain, which it would like to distance itself from. Direct Rule also deprives local politicians of any real function — except to squabble among themselves and stir up more trouble for Britain.

Prior's Devolution Bill aims to include elected representatives of the nationalist and Loyalist communities in a local assembly, which in the long term might assume governmental powers at present exercised from Westminster. In the interim the proposed assembly would be a talking shop with some rights to inquire about, discuss and comment on government measures.

The British government has been promoting initiatives along broadly similar lines more or less continuously since Direct Rule superseded Stormont in 1972. Because they have all failed does not mean that they have served no useful purpose. On the contrary they have been very successful. They have preserved Britain's image as benign mediator, constantly searching for a fair political resolution of the troubles. And at the same time they have provided the democratic cover for the relentless repression of the nationalist people that has proceeded with even greater continuity than the quest for the ideal form of top-level Six Counties debating society. Prior's scheme follows this tradition of colonial administration: as *The Times* commented, 'the preliminary processes of establishing an assembly afford time for the security forces to tighten their squeeze on the Provisional IRA' (23 March). However, for Prior the processes of trying to establish an assembly in the midst of a war are proving difficult indeed.

Rolling back to Stormont?

By widespread agreement Prior's singular achievement has been to produce a consensus among Northern Ireland's warring political factions — in opposition to his Devolution Bill. He has even produced a degree of unity among the Unionist ranks. Those Unionists, like Official Unionist Party leader James Molyneux and his mentor Enoch Powell, who favour the full integration of the Six Counties within the UK, have opposed Prior right from the start. Confident after their recent by-election success against the Paisleyites in South Belfast, they are prepared for a test of strength in any election — but they will go no further towards devolution.

Other Unionists, both in the Official Party faction led by Harold McCusker, and in Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, who have long called for the return of some power to the local level, were more equivocal at first. They hoped they could turn the assembly away from the concept of 'power-sharing' with Catholic nationalists, which has dominated previous initiatives, towards something more like the old Stormont — a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people. However, as it has become clear that Prior cannot restore old-style Loyalist supremacy without losing what little Catholic support he has, Unionist opposition has hardened. Prior's carefully calculated figure of 70 per cent, as the proportion of votes required to effect any change in the status or powers of the assembly, has been interpreted by the Orangemen as a Catholic veto. And they are concerned that the pro-



TORY DEVOLUTION PROPOSALS Rolling into trouble, rolling out of time

'There is something almost insulting about the inadequacy and mutual incompatibility of the arguments used to defend the measure; it is necessary because the Province is polarised and also because the Province is swelling with sentiments of moderation; it is worth trying because at worst it can only fail, and it must succeed because failure would be an irretrievable disaster; it will help the revival of the Northern Irish economy — pray how?' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 10 May)

'Real failure in Ulster', commented the editor of *The Daily Telegraph* on 6 April, 'would be a greater catastrophe for Britain even than defeat over the Falklands'. Many Tories and their supporters are beginning to wonder whether James Prior's Devolution Bill may provoke more conflict rather than help to subdue the troublesome Six Counties. 'The danger is', continued the editorial, 'that if anarchy were to break out there, the Government would be obliged to use far greater force in restoring order than it has ever imagined'. And the British ruling class is well aware of the potentially disruptive consequences throughout the United Kingdom. Mick Kennedy examines the crisis of Tory Irish policy.

posed assembly would have no powers over matters of 'security' — the repression of Catholics — which is the Loyalists' central preoccupation.

Any Loyalist politician who is prepared to participate in any 'cross-community' assembly runs the risk of being identified as too conciliatory towards Catholics and being outflanked by more intransigent Loyalists. Hard-line Unionists Clifford Smyth and Ronnie Crawford have called for a boycott of the assembly elections. William Craig, the man who played a leading part in wrecking an earlier British initiative in 1974 has threatened to revive his Vanguard movement to fight Prior's plans. 'The one position no Unionist can afford to find himself in', said McCusker, surveying these developments, 'is to be seen as an ally of Hume and Haughey' (*Irish Times*, 8 April). In fact there is little danger for the Unionists here because Prior's proposals are even less acceptable to the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party and his political ally, the Taoiseach of the Twenty-six Counties.

Hume rule

The SDLP is a middle class, moderate, Catholic, nationalist party. It operates with difficulty in the Six Counties where

most Catholics are not middle class and, as a result of long and bitter experience of British rule, little inclined towards moderation. Any intensification of the war tends to polarise society further and render the SDLP more marginal. This was its fate during last year's hunger strikes when the nationalist people turned away from the SDLP to support — electorally and in other ways — organisations identified with the struggle for Irish independence.

As the War has dragged on over the years since 1970 when it was formed, the SDLP has been obliged to shift from the narrow trade union and pro-British politics of some of its founders, Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin, to respond more directly to the nationalist aspirations of its supporters. Fitt, by his own boast, 'the only Northern Ireland MP who supports Prior's Bill', and Devlin are now long gone. Their place has been taken by politicians like Seamus Mallon — recently nominated by Haughey for a place in the Irish Senate — whose outlook corresponds with the traditional nationalism of Fianna Fail. Now under the leadership of John Hume, the SDLP claims to represent the nationalist people — but the pressure of this constituency gives him very little room to manoeuvre with Prior and his assembly plans.

For Hume, the problem with Prior's scheme is that by participating in it, the SDLP risks being drawn into playing an impotent and subordinate role in a Loyalist-dominated forum. It is suspicious that the 70 per cent quota may still allow a permanent Unionist majority — particularly as constituency boundary changes favour the Loyalists. And the SDLP is resentful that the Tories have back-tracked on the 'Irish dimension' — last year's much vaunted Anglo-Irish Council that has been keeping a low profile in face of Unionist hostility. In the circumstances of the War Prior cannot offer more without provoking total Unionist rejection of his Bill; Hume cannot accept less without losing all his already shaky credibility in the nationalist community. Hence Hume's final condemnation of the Bill as 'unworkable, dangerous, insulting and a recipe for political and administrative mayhem'.

Tory tantrums

The Six Counties consensus against Prior reflects the polarisation that has resulted from 13 years of war. It has given rise to increasing concern in Britain that, far from 'solving' the Irish problem, Prior's solutions might lead to further instability in the Six Counties. *The Daily Telegraph* wondered whether the price of "doing something" in Ulster might be that the failure of Prior's initiative would 'be accompanied by such an intensification of bitterness in Ulster as to make the Province more nearly ungovernable than it ever has been' (29 April). This fear has led to a growing revolt on the Tory backbenches against the Devolution Bill, now supported by the resignation of three junior ministers.

In fact there is no great danger to the realm from James Prior. Right-wing Tories take the statements of their leaders, especially on Irish matters, too much at face value. Prior has no serious intentions of devolving real power to Belfast. He confided to one reporter that if the assembly committees on agriculture and commerce were operating by 1984, he would consider the experiment a success (*Financial Times*, 14 April).

And there is always Direct Rule to fall back on. *The Times* objected to Prior's dismissal of this system 'as an enduring form of government for the province'. 'It is a stabilising instrument, few people's first but almost everybody's second choice' (6 April). As the forces against Prior gather strength — in the Cabinet, where he has lost allies Carrington and Atkins, on the backbenches, where 23 Tories defied a three-line whip and voted against his Bill after heckling his speech, and, more importantly, in Ireland itself — it looks like the old second choice will prevail. And as the Falklands crisis looms over Parliamentary schedules, John Hume's jibe that Prior's initiative had more to do with his own political future than with the future of the people of Northern Ireland, may prove an ill omen for the leading Tory wet.

Leave it to Labour

And what of the Labour Party? Chief spokesman Don Concannon has given the Party's full support for the concept of devolution in Prior's Bill, while making a few minor criticisms. He urged abstention on the Second Reading as a formal gesture of Opposition disapproval on points of detail, while deploring moves to wreck the Bill from the Unionist ranks. There was a revolt on the Labour benches too. But did this come from the left, from the MPs who are often given pride of place on Irish solidarity platforms, who wanted to make a stand against Labour complicity in yet another cynical scheme to whitewash British barbarism in Ireland? From the left there was not a whisper. Around 25 Labour MPs broke ranks to vote for the Government.

IRISH FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Remembering the past, fighting for the future

The main activity of the Irish Freedom Movement in the week leading up to the first anniversary of the death of Bobby Sands was a national speaking tour by members of the Silent too long group.

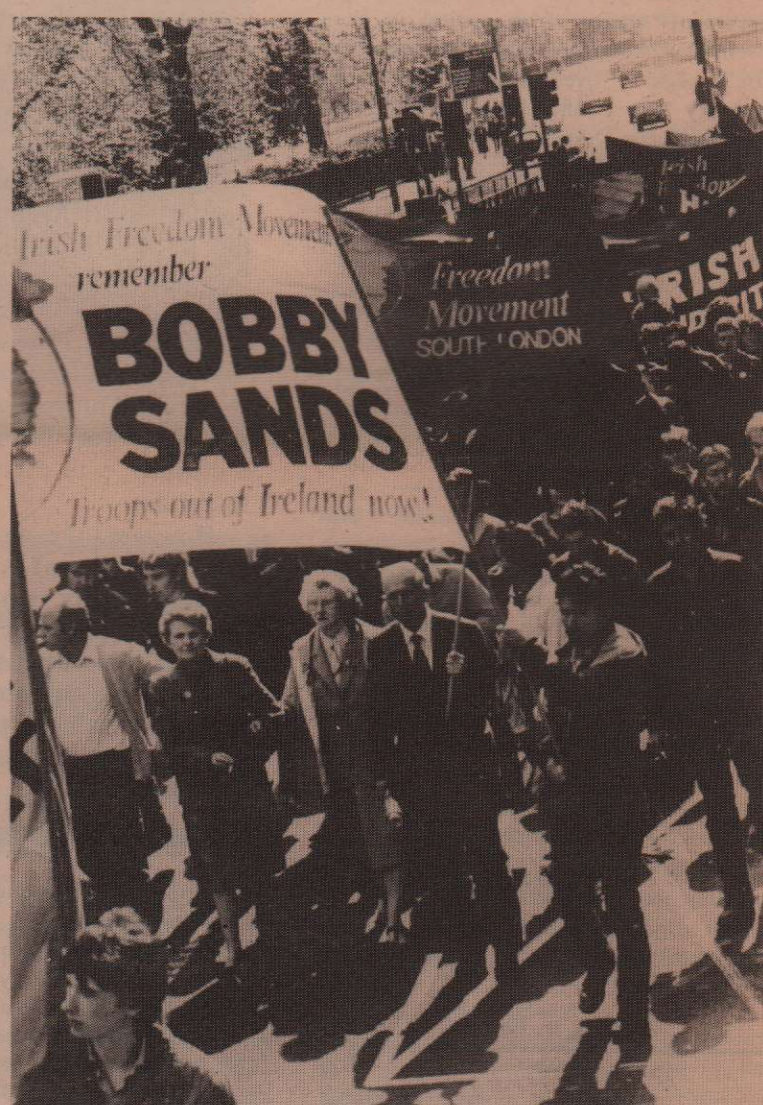
Michael English and Michael Sweeney, both from Derry, told audiences in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield that Silent too long was a very exclusive club. To be a member you have to have had a member of your family killed by the British Army or their Loyalist paramilitary allies. Michael English's son, Gary, aged 19, was killed when an army landrover ploughed into a peaceful hunger strike protest last year; Michael Sweeney's nephew, 11-year old Stephen McConomy, was the latest victim of the notorious plastic bullets. He was shot in the head at point-blank range only a few weeks ago. We print below extracts from Michael English's speech to 150 people in London on the eve of the national Bobby Sands commemoration demonstration.

Although the demonstration in honour of the dead hunger strikers was swelled by many Irish people, the turnout of the British labour movement was pathetic. The Irish Freedom Movement mobilised the largest single contingent — but most left-wing organisations had only token representatives. The march organisers allowed the final rally to be dominated by Labour Party politicians of the sort who can be relied

upon to spout fine phrases about Irish unity — and to betray the Irish struggle whenever its protagonists come too close or hit too hard at the British state.

Over the past few weeks, the Falklands war fever has provided new opportunities for raising the Irish issue in Britain. A reporter from The Daily Telegraph was horrified to discover a contingent behind an IFM banner on an anti-war demonstration, calling for a British defeat. The British ruling class cynically proclaims the hallowed principle of self-determination on behalf of a few hundred sheep herders, but it is outraged that people in Britain should support the right of the Irish people to national freedom. Many British workers are uneasy about the drive towards war in the South Atlantic; our point has been that if they took a stand against the war going on now in Ireland, they would be in a stronger position to prevent any further military adventures by the British state.

This month the IFM takes anti-imperialist politics to the NALGO conference in Brighton. We will be talking to delegates, holding a fringe meeting with speakers from Ireland and generally challenging the pro-British outlook of the trade union bureaucracy on every issue from Buenos Aires to Belfast.



SILENT TOO LONG SPEAKING TOUR

Michael English:

'The violence of sudden death in your own family is terrible. But our aim is not to grieve in public over our dead. Nothing can bring them back. What is even worse than violent death is the violence of injustice — to have your people deliberately murdered and the murderers are protected by the Army and the courts. Silent too long was formed because we cannot remain silent in the face of this injustice.

'We have no protection from the law. Loyalist paramilitaries have murdered over 600 innocent Catholics. Only a handful have ever been convicted. The soldiers who killed my own son were acquitted — most soldiers are never

taken to court in the first place. In my case the judges ruled that forensic evidence which proved that Gary's body had been reversed over by the landrover was "irrelevant" as he was "in all likelihood already dead".

'We expected no justice from the court, but at least a recognition of an element of guilt — a fine for reckless driving perhaps. But even this we were denied.

'The UDA have murdered over 600 innocent Catholics. They are still a legal organisation, with close and well-known ties to Loyalist politicians, the Army, the RUC and the UDR. The IRA and INLA have killed about 400. But they are proscribed organisations whose members are hounded as terrorists.

'When the IRA kill a UDR man that death is reported as a terrorist sectarian attack upon an innocent Protestant person. If the victim's membership of the UDR is mentioned at all, it will be in the last sentence. The UDR is an organisation of mercenaries — people who improve their weekly pay by hiring themselves out for part-time killing. If, however, an innocent Catholic civilian, like my son, is killed, this is reported either as an accident or as an act of self-defence against rioting youth.

'Silent too long was formed to expose the murder and injustice forced upon innocent Catholic people. The truth is, though, that in this society there is no such thing as an innocent Catholic

person. In the Creggan and the Bogside and all the other nationalist areas every Catholic is classed as an enemy. Every Catholic is a target for deliberate murder, abuse and harassment. We have no rights — not even to live in peace in the four walls of our own homes, which is where many of the relatives of our members were set upon and killed.

'Britain has to rule Northern Ireland by the bullet because this whole society is based on the denial of basic rights to our community. I believe that peace and safety for the Irish people will come when the British Army and all other British institutions are removed from this country. The Irish people must be free to administer their own justice.'

THE *SOCIALIST ORGANISER* thesis, developed in a series of articles by John O'Mahony, can be summed up as follows. The central political problem in Ireland is not British imperialism but native Irish capitalism. Ireland cannot be characterised as a backward capitalist country oppressed by Britain; indeed there now exists in the Twenty-six Counties 'a modern Ireland whose powerful bourgeoisie are now an integral segment of the European capitalist class and in as much control of their state as any EEC ruling class is' (*Socialist Organiser*, 4 March). In short, 'in the South an advanced capitalist society exists'. The problems in the Six Counties are reduced to those of recession and repression caused by a residual British imperialism.

The republican movement is therefore wrong, argues O'Mahony, to attribute Ireland's ills to British domination. This view he condemns as 'just plain reactionary bourgeois politics', which render the movement 'irrelevant' north and south:

'Focusing on "the national question" as "first things first" nationalists, they are irrelevant and bankrupt in the South, and thus bankrupt also as nationalists in the Northern struggle.' (4 March)

For O'Mahony, the solution to 'the stalemate' in Northern Ireland lies in the development of 'a revolutionary workers movement' against Irish capital in the Twenty-six Counties. Such a movement 'could begin — over time, and it would probably take a long time: there are no miracles likely — to create the conditions for a united working class solution' in the Six Counties.

Socialist Organiser urges republicans to downplay the military defence of nationalist communities against British terror and to cultivate links with the Loyalist allies of British imperialism:

'Abandon the Catholic pro-nationalist politics which lead you to talk and act as if one million Irish Protestants do not exist (and the political method that seeks to "define them away" with political labels like unionist, pro-imperialist, etc). Stop extrapolating your political programme from the exigencies and limits of commitment to an immediate physical-force solution. Stop making the physical-force struggle the all shaping core of your politics.' (22 April)

This series of imperatives sums up the advice of a faction inside the party of Roy Mason and Don Concannon for a movement that has lost several hundred volunteers in the struggle against British imperialism. O'Mahony's articles are distinguished by their opportunism, their incoherence and their sub-literacy, not their originality. This particular adaptation to imperialism is as old as imperialism itself.

Back to basics

When capitalism developed, around a century ago, into a system of global domination, it divided the countries of the world into two camps — a handful of advanced nations and a large majority of backward countries. The relations between these camps have been characterised by economic domination and political oppression. These basic relations have been modified but not fundamentally altered either by different patterns of economic development — notably the industrialisation of a number of backward countries — or by changing forms of political control, such as the transition made by many Third World countries from a colonial to a formally independent status.

As far as the relations between Britain and Ireland are concerned, our view is that Britain is an imperialist country and that Ireland as a whole is dominated by it. We do not base this judgement on superficial criteria such as the wealth of the Irish bourgeoisie, the sophistication of its factories or the state of its working



Socialist Organiser heads for a sticky end

The worms that turn and turn

It seems that the more servile the British left becomes towards the British state, the more it turns to attack, in appropriately discreet 'socialist' phrases, the Irish national liberation movement. In recent weeks Chris Myant of the *Morning Star* commemorated the anniversary of Bobby Sands' death with a turgid analysis of 'how the Provisionals have lost ground won during the H-Block hunger strike campaign last year'.

The Socialist Workers Party could not even turn out a paper seller on the Easter Rising march, although it managed a solitary banner for the Bobby Sands demonstration. But it could devote three pages of *Socialist Worker* to a study of the pro-imperialist prejudices of Loyalist workers, and conclude by grotesquely blaming their persistence on the failure of the Provisionals to leaflet Loyalist areas. The latest issue of the party's theoretical journal carries a detailed critique of the Irish republican movement in the north; the next issue promises the same treatment for the movement south of the border. We eagerly await a critique — or even an account — of the SWP's Irish solidarity work in Britain.

However, the most systematic attack on the Irish struggle comes from the paper of one of Labour's entryist factions, *Socialist Organiser*. Moving rapidly rightwards under the malign influence of its host, this particular parasite (the fusion product of Sean Matgamna's International Communist League and Alan Thornett's Workers Socialist League) has adopted a perspective on Ireland close to that of the two most rabidly pro-imperialist groups around, Ireland's (Sinn Féin the) Workers Party and Britain's own Militant Tendency. Keith Tompson reports.

class movement. The question is — what is the relationship of Ireland to the world economy? And the answer is that Irish commerce, industry and agriculture operate almost entirely under the control of foreign, especially European, American and British capital. The government agencies in Belfast and Dublin coordinate foreign finance and investment alongside feeble indigenous capital.

But Ireland is not only economically dominated by imperialism, it is also politically oppressed — by Britain. The form that this oppression takes is the partition of the country, the division of the working class and the maintenance of a pro-British regime in the Twenty-six Counties and a vast military garrison in the Six Counties. The most striking manifestations of British domination over the whole of Ireland in recent months have been the transformation of the Garda Síochána (police) into an anti-republican militia admired by the RUC, and the integration of the judicial systems on either side of the border to such an extent that a Six County Loyalist judge now sits in a Dublin court for the trial of an alleged IRA volunteer.

Irish readers may be shocked, and perhaps embarrassed, that it is necessary to restate such elementary points for the

benefit of people who call themselves socialists in Britain. But it is necessary. O'Mahony's discovery that the Twenty-six Counties is an independent advanced capitalist power allows him to get down on his knees before the imperialist power which the party he has newly adopted has done so much to keep in business.

Grovel, grovel

This is the real significance of *Socialist Organiser's* low-life polemic against the republican movement. By analysing British imperialism out of existence, denying the crucial importance of partition, and dismissing the struggle against it in Ireland, O'Mahony clears the way for making his peace with the British state in Britain. As Lenin wrote nearly 70 years ago, 'to brush aside the mass national movements once they have started, and to refuse to support what is progressive in them, means, in effect, pandering to nationalistic prejudices', nationalistic prejudices, that is, in the labour movement of the imperialist country, in this case, Britain.

The consequences of *Socialist Organiser's* position emerge clearly if we look at its attitude to what is most progressive in the Irish national liberation movement,

its preparedness to take up arms against the British state. It is clearly this that guarantees the republican movement mass support in the nationalist ghettos of the Six Counties. But, equally clearly, it is the military campaign against British rule that is the greatest threat to imperialist control in Ireland. The British ruling class has gone to great lengths to prevent the emergence of support for the armed struggle in Ireland in the British labour movement. What is *Socialist Organiser's* response? It accommodates to the pressures of British chauvinism and advises the IRA and the INLA to put down their guns:

'Armed struggle, as James Connolly understood over 80 years ago, is a possible tool of revolutionaries, but is not in itself social revolution. In terms of social programme and class concerns, the Provos are far from being adequate revolutionaries.' (4 March)

A spade is good for digging trenches, but it is not in itself a trench — workers of the world, throw away your spades! In terms of their preparedness to fight British imperialism, the central obstacle to all social progress in Ireland, the Provos are more 'adequate revolutionaries' than our *Socialist Organiser* theoreticians will ever be.

The 'Protestant workers' cop out

It is the hallmark of opportunists in the British labour movement on the question of Ireland that the more they adapt to the British state, the more loudly they shout about the need to build unity between Protestant and Catholic workers. The lead comes from the trade union bureaucrats and the Communist Party and it has been dutifully followed by the SWP, the Militant — and now by *Socialist Organiser*:

'Probably the only road by which the Southern working class can arrive at James Connolly's republicanism now lies through redeveloping socialist conviction and building a socialist movement which accepts its responsibilities to the oppressed of the Six Counties and can also propose class unity to the Protestant workers, to fight for a working class socialist-republican solution in Ireland.' (11 March)

What O'Mahony is trying to say is that workers in the Twenty-six Counties should abandon their aspirations towards an independent united Ireland so that they can appeal to Loyalists in the Six Counties.

This is reactionary rubbish. Protestant workers are loyal to Britain because, even at a time of recession, they derive definite advantages from the Union (see 'The Loyalist working class', *Revolutionary Communist Papers*, No 7, July 1981). The only way to unite the working class in Ireland is through the destruction of the force that presently divides it — British imperialism. This is why the struggle against Britain provides the only way forward towards class unity. The republican movement is right to appreciate that there is no basis for winning the mass of Protestant workers to the anti-imperialist cause as long as imperialism can still confer privileges.

The British ruling class uses the Loyalist community as a propaganda tool to justify its continued occupation of Ireland. *Socialist Organiser* has swallowed this argument, and emphasising its concern for 'Protestant workers' gives its sell-out to imperialism a proletarian flavour.

Bound for treachery

Last year's Labour Party conference upheld Direct Rule and condemned the Irish liberation struggle. *Socialist Organiser's* 'advice' to the republican movement reveals one entryist faction well on the way to new alliances and perhaps even high office in a party with a consistent record of backing British barbarism in Ireland.

Before the storm

A Derry correspondent continues his recollection of events in the 'sixties before the War.

THE SUMMER OF 15 years ago was warm, in more ways than one. 1967 witnessed the Stormont screw being tightened as political repression became more apparent. The republican movement was in a period of growth and re-organisation. Its social and economic programme, adopted after the abortive Border Campaign of 1956-62, was clearly manifested in a higher degree of public activity on issues such as Special Powers, votes, employment and housing. The ban on the Republican Clubs resulted in a stubborn refusal to go underground; resistance to the ban took the form of increasing political activity within the unemployed and trade union organisations. Street-corner meetings, mass leafleting, pickets and rallies to defy the ban were common-place. In Derry the Young Republican Association was created to get around the ban on 'the clubs'.

The YRA from its inception campaigned on many social and economic issues. Unemployment and inadequate housing were the two themes that occupied most of the YRA membership on a daily basis. House-building and votes were closely identified as areas of controversy for all politically-minded people. The Mayor had the sole say in home-allocation — and only householders could vote in local and Stormont elections. The Unionist-controlled local councils throughout the North were determined to build as few houses as possible and were ever mindful that any housing development might upset their electoral domination.

No evictions!

One of the big campaigns of 1966 and 1967 was against the slum landlords of the Catholic ghettos. In Derry overcrowding was rife — often as many as nine families lived in one house. When tenants fell behind with their rents they were bullied out by the landlords' hired thugs, often without even so much as a court order. Many working class families were reluctant to seek the aid of solicitors and the courts, because of the costs involved. But they responded positively to a YRA campaign against evictions.

On a few occasions where families were threatened with violence by the landlords' heavies, the YRA requested the local command of the IRA to make its services available for the purposes of protection. The very mention of the IRA was usually enough to discourage the hired thugs, but those who ignored warnings later paid the price.

Many working class families became more militant in the knowledge that the local republicans would assist them in resisting unjust evictions. In November 1966 Ellen McDonnell, a widow with two children, living at 17 Harvey Street received an eviction order. When local clergy, councillors and others showed her total indifference, she appealed for assistance from the YRA. The threat was discussed by all branches of the movement, and it was decided that the family, who had lived there for more than 20 years, would be defended by every means possible. A 24-hour picket was placed on the house, and placard-carrying youths paraded the street to highlight the family's plight. Neighbours provided tea, fish and chips and sandwiches to the picketers, and hundreds of leaflets were distributed. Towards Christmas, due to mounting public pressure, a stay of execution was obtained from the courts.

After a six-month lull, battle was joined again on 11 July 1967, as the Loyalist Belfast Telegraph reported:

'Crowds gathered at Harvey Street, Derry this afternoon as Young Republicans moved barricades into the house of widow Mrs Ellen McDonnell who with her family faces an eviction threat. Inside Young Republicans played republican and socialist songs on a record player and prepared for "three months siege if necessary".'

Legalised treachery

On 1 August the YRA withdrew from the house, as a hearing was to take place in a Belfast court the following morning. Their legal advisors informed them that there was high hopes of success as the local council was duty bound to provide alternative accommodation under Statute law. The local council, police chiefs and bailiffs had other ideas. Only

the family was at home when, first thing in the morning, a Special Branch man — posing as an inspector from the Electricity Department — was admitted to the house, supposedly to read the meter. Once he established that no republicans were present, the street was invaded by police cars, and bailiffs began to break down the front door while the family were still in bed. On hearing the rattle of axes and crowbars, the family began to reinforce the barricades and tried to block off the stairs. But the agents of the state, some 40 in all (with dogs), gradually gained entry.

A crowd of 200 people gathered and cheered as Mrs McDonnell threw cups, plates and cutlery at police and bailiffs. A sufferer from heart disease, Mrs McDonnell had to be taken by ambulance to hospital. Her 13 year old son, Billy, was taken forcibly from the house by police after a violent scuffle on the top floor. Bailiffs carried out furniture and piled it up in the street. As Billy McDonnell was frogmarched down the street, one of the YRA leaders defied the police cordon to address the crowd from a window sill. He condemned the police, the landlords and the bigoted authorities and called for a protest outside Victoria Barracks where Billy was held. He too was later detained, together with another man and his dog who entered the barracks to lodge a formal complaint.

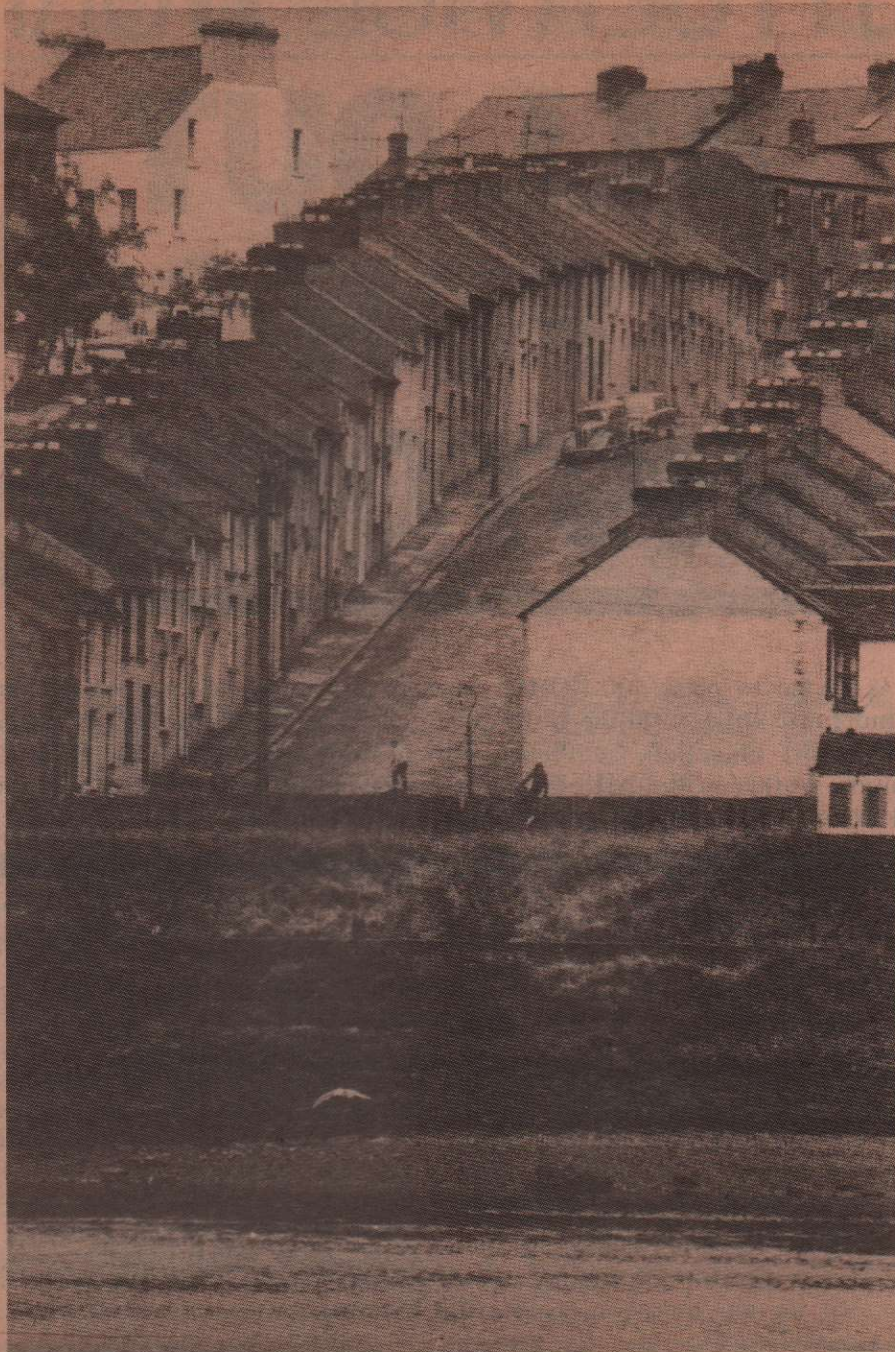
Within days of the Harvey Street eviction, homeless families began to organise. Immediately on arrival at hospital Mrs McDonnell was told by doctors that they would not release her until the family was allocated suitable accommodation. Within a matter of days the family was re-united, and with the help of local republicans and socialists set up home again in Aran Court in the Creggan Estate.

Finn O'Foyle

REVIEWS

Owing to lack of space the reviews section has been held over until the next issue.

LETTERS



time and probably oppose the cuts as fiercely as many of the rest of us.

I hope Nesta Lloyd Moody gets his job back, but please don't assume it's always a good thing to smack supervisory staff in the gob. Many of the best old time shop stewards who built the movement in the 'fifties and 'sixties would refuse on principle to defend a member who had used violence on the site, never mind the alleged provocation.

Maybe they were legalistic fetishists, but maybe you need a few legalistic fetishists around to fight for civilised working conditions.

GL Eames
Horsham

Dear Socialist Worker,

You recently published a letter ('More than one way to fight racism', SW, 24 April 1982) from someone called 'GL Eames of Horsham' without comment and without even bothering to ask me the facts of my case.

Those facts are well-known. I was dismissed from my job as an electrician by Lambeth Council after I hit my supervisor, Jim Pope. After two years of racist abuse, what GL Eames of Horsham calls 'jokes' wear thin. For his information I did go through the union (EETPU) time and again, and got nowhere. Jim Pope is in NALGO, but Lambeth NALGO was no more prepared to do anything than the EETPU (I think Pope should be kicked out of the union).

At first I thought Eames must be a racist. But he's probably one of those so-called left-wingers who always keeps his head down at work and even shares a racist joke or two. For him to lecture me on how to fight for 'civilised working conditions', when he's not even prepared to stop black workers being treated like animals, is just insulting.

Since you can find room for publishing Eames's rubbish you should print this reply as well. I'm also sending a copy to Workers Against Racism who've given me support during my campaign to get reinstated and who are prepared to stand up against racists like Jim Pope.

Yours fraternally
Nesta Moody

(Editorial note: Jim Pope has just been promoted!)

I'll do it my way

Following our report (tms 24, March 1982) on the struggle of Nesta Moody, a black employee of Lambeth Council, for reinstatement after he had been victimised for physically resisting racist abuse from his supervisor, we reprint below a letter published in *Socialist Worker* (24 April) without editorial comment. Nesta's reply follows.

I would like to comment on the case of Nesta Lloyd Moody, the black Lambeth Council electrician, reported in SW, who was sacked for allegedly punching a racist supervisor who spat and swore at him.

Of course racist abuse in the workplace must be stamped upon, also we whites must understand why black colleagues get upset about jokes and banter that, however well meaning, have some racial content. But surely the course of action for the victims of such abuse is to take a complaint through the union, getting the backing of your mates, rather than fisticuffs.

Was the foreman concerned a consistent racist, maybe an NF member, spreading his poison with the clear intention of dividing the workers he supervised? Or just a harassed nonentity to whom racist language came spontaneously?

Fiercely

As Viv Richards, the Somerset cricketer, said in a recent interview, 'black bastard' is the first thing that comes into a man's mouth when the stress gets to him. I am sure local government works foremen, caught between the cuts and the manual workers' unions have a hell of a

Giving a lead *

We are nurses, porters and other ancillary workers involved in action against the Government's insulting four per cent pay offer. However, we want to draw the attention of your readers to another, more insidious Government attack upon us.

As of 1 October 1982 the DHSS will operate its new scheme to stop 'NHS abuse'. It will try to force us to question 'suspected foreign' (ie black) patients with a view to charging 'NHS abusers'. Admission clerks will have to ask questions about black people's immigration status and could have to demand a passport before treatment is allowed.

This certainly exposes all the Government propaganda about patients' interests coming first for what it is. The scheme means some black people will pay over £100 a day for the privilege of being sick. It is also a part of their strategy of cutting down services in order to sell off the NHS to the private sector.

If the DHSS thinks we're going to carry out its racist harassment for it, it had better think again. At our hospital we are badly understaffed. Nurses who have left have not been replaced. We're supposed to have five nurses on each ward but sometimes there are only two. 'Just wait till we get over our cash problems', say management, 'then we'll fix this'.

The only thing they want to fix is us. They want to break us by overwork and pay cuts and turn us into policemen for their racist regulations. We will not deny our brothers and sisters their right to free health care, no matter how long they've lived in this country. We hope that other hospital workers will also boycott this racist scheme.

Signed 23 COHSE and NUPE members
Newton Green Wing
Chapelallerton Hospital, Leeds 7.

* This letter has been shortened.

HEALTH SERVICE WORKERS

THE TREMENDOUS RESPONSE to the health service unions' call for a 24-hour strike on 19 May shows that many health workers are ready to take on the Government. The militant demonstrations and picket lines up and down the country and the inventive tactics used, to disrupt normal hospital working without harming patients and to win wider support for the health workers' cause, show their determination to win.

The legacy of discontent

The legacy of the past however still dogs the campaign. Many health workers have bitter memories of the 'winter of discontent'. The failure of union leadership in the disputes of Winter 1979 led to serious setbacks, acrimonious divisions among the unions at local level and a further decline in pay and conditions. Many workers look at the way the union leaders are approaching the current conflict — COHSE's proposed two-hour walkouts, NUPE's suggestion for a three-day campaign — and fear a repetition of the fiasco of 1979.

Yet the scale of the present attack on health workers gives no alternative but to fight. The four per cent offer means a drastic cut in real wages for workers who are already among the lowest paid in the country. And it comes at a time when public spending cuts and the Government promoted expansion of private clinics and private contractors in every sphere of the NHS threatens thousands of jobs in the hospital sector.

The seriousness of the Government onslaught has even forced a degree of unity on the union bureaucrats. Threatened by declining membership and status, the 14 NHS unions have been forced to

ALL OUT FOR VICTORY!

As we go to press 500 COHSE workers in Edinburgh have declared an indefinite strike until the Government concedes their national pay claim. This sort of action, combined with a strategy that puts the need of every worker in the NHS for a living wage before any concern about the state of the national economy, points the way towards victory.

club together in the TUC's health services committee to try to salvage their position through coordinated opposition to the Government. However, as the action increases, it becomes increasingly clear that the bureaucrats' militancy is dictated more by their need to stay in control of their members, than by their determination to lead the campaign to a victorious showdown with the Government.

Leading from behind

The unions may have got together at the top, but on the ground, they are still

leading from behind. From the start the bureaucrats advised local branches to decide on action individually. The uneven action of 19 May was the result of the lack of a clear national lead. Many domestics, porters, drivers and ancillaries in COHSE and NUPE came out. Groups of nurses joined in, in some areas blocking roads and using loud hailer to get their message across to local people. But many nurses still felt unable to support strike action. Many NALGO branches declined to take action — while in some areas secretarial and administrative workers came

out or disrupted their departments. The response from ASTMS was patchy too — some branches worked normally, others went on strike for the day, others worked to rule.

The lack of a coherent common strategy at local level has produced a fragmented campaign that could still result in the dissipation of widespread hostility towards the Government and lead to defeat and demoralisation. It is difficult to bring workers out in one hospital when the hospital up the road has decided to stay at work. It is difficult to get one union to take strike action when another union at the same hospital has voted to take no action or to work to rule.

Action to win

What is required to win is all-out action. This can only be organised through local district and joint shop stewards committees of all the unions involved. Meetings of workers in *all* the unions in the hospitals are vital to discuss the issues and mobilise the widest possible support. And the aim of this action must be *to win* — not to produce the shabby compromise through arbitration that Spanswick and Fisher and the rest are desperate to reach.

● Don't blame workers in other unions for not supporting action before or in the present campaign — blame the union chiefs for not giving a decisive national lead.

● Keep union control of emergency cover — don't let management and the press use patients against workers.

● No co-operation with agency staff, voluntary or scab workers.

● No sell-outs through arbitration or negotiation — 12 per cent is the minimum needed to keep pace with inflation.

PREPARING FOR POWER

the next step's third international labour movement conference
11-14 September 1982
Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19.

Over 40 workshops, including:

- The war in the South Atlantic
- The showdown in Central America
- Debate with CND
- The Soviet Union — aggressor or victim?
- Women and the crisis
- The criminalisation of black youth
- Gays under attack
- Irish freedom — solidarity work in Britain

Be sure of your place — register now!

I/We would like to attend the Preparing for Power conference

Name

Address

Tel No

TU/Organisation

Creche needed?

Registration: £8.50 (£5 UB40)

Make cheques payable to RCP Association. Send this form or write for more details to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX (phone 01-274 3951).

Workers March Against Racism

Every year the Trades Union Congress discusses 'race relations'. They might as well not bother. The more the bosses use racism to divide the labour movement, the less the TUC does about it.

This year it is going to be different. Five hundred marchers will be descending on Brighton to demand

- direct action against fascists at work and on the streets
- trade union solidarity with black youth against the police
- industrial action against deportations, fishing raids and passport checks
- an end to racist hiring, firing and promotion practices — no more colour bars!

REMEMBER — UNITED WE STAND — DIVIDED WE FALL

Get your trade union/organisation to support the march.
Send us money (it costs £30 to get each marcher on the road).
JOIN THE MARCH!

I/We want to march on/sponsor/make a donation to the
WORKERS MARCH AGAINST RACISM, London — Brighton, 4-8 September.

Name

Address

Tel No

TU/Organisation

No of marchers

£ enclosed

Make cheques/postal orders payable to 'WAR' and send to Workers Against Racism, c/o Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8.