

the next step

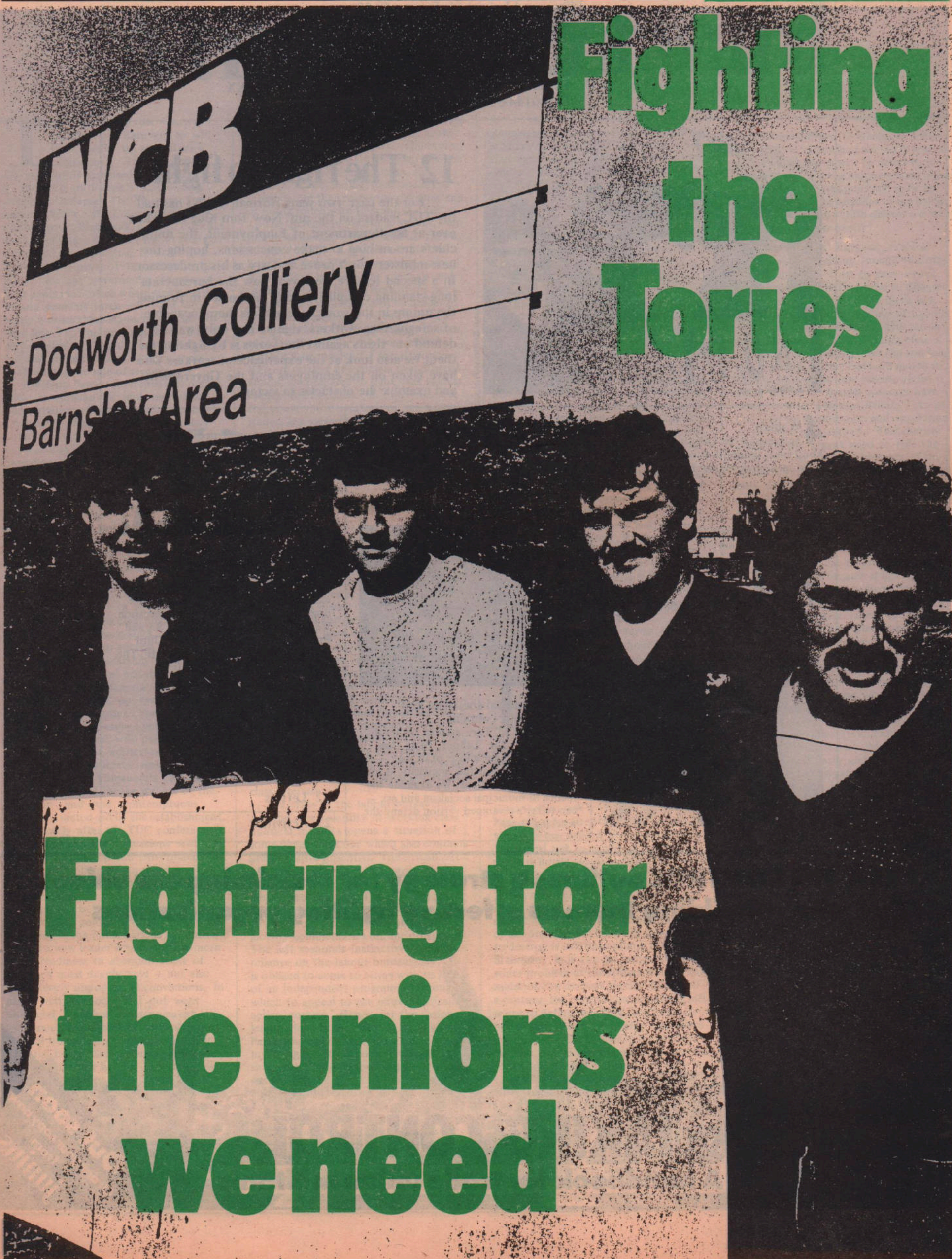
review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

No 41 November 1983

20p

Neil Kinnock
can't save jobs
in the NHS
p9.

Fighting the Tories



the next step

No 41 November 1983
monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

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John Smith (I.F.L.)

12 The right to fight

For the past two years Norman Tebbit has had the TUC leaders on the run. Now Tom King has taken over at the Department of Employment, the union chiefs are rushing to make concessions, hoping the new minister won't prove as nasty as his predecessor. In a special feature we reveal how the bureaucrats' long-standing complicity with the bosses in running the unions in the workplace renders them incapable of safeguarding workers' rights. The only way to defend our rights against the Tories is by fighting for them. We also look at the experience of workers who have taken on the employers and the Government and examine the obstacles to victory.

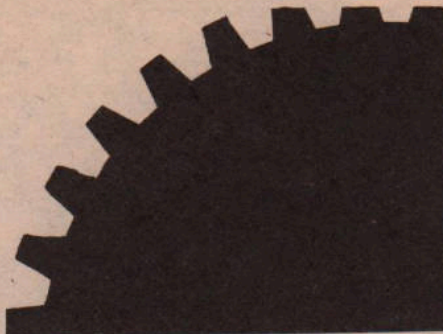
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the next step

A time to go forward

The Tories won the General Election but have yet to win their battle to save British capitalism. The Thatcher Government is confused and disoriented in the face of Britain's accelerating economic collapse. The *Financial Times*, commenting on the Conservative Party conference in Blackpool, pointed out that the Government seemed without strategic direction or ideological thrust. The *Economist* warned of 'the moment of danger for any government, the point four years into office where tiredness sets in and scandals catch up'. But what really worries these staunch advocates of hard-line Thatcherism is not the misdemeanours of Tory Cabinet Ministers, but the limited impact of Tory strategy in stemming the tide of recession.

The Tory Party conference was replete with inconsistencies and indecision. Some stalwarts found it hard to reconcile Chancellor Nigel Lawson's optimism about recovery with the prevailing gloom expressed in Treasury reports on public spending. His bland promises, to go on controlling inflation and public expenditure, and eventually to reduce taxation, cut little ice at Blackpool. The Tory faithful have so far been disappointed on both fronts by the Thatcher administration. The Cabinet is divided over how far and how fast to proceed with the privatisation of the public sector, and over where to impose cuts in expenditure. Only one thing unites the Tories — a determination to make the working class pay the price for the crisis of their system.

The Tories' major success has been in demoralising the leadership of the labour movement. 'Realism' was the keynote of this year's TUC conference, as the trade union leaders gave up even token resistance to the Tories. The Government's aggressive approach to the unions and its break with past traditions of negotiation and arbitration have left the labour bureaucracy isolated and vulnerable. The bureaucrats have been suitably humbled by the impact of the recession and the contemptuous treatment meted out by the establishment. Immediately after the TUC conference they crept off for discussions with Norman Tebbit on the Government's scheme for policing the unemployed and interfering further in the internal affairs of the unions.

'Compromise' was the theme of the Labour Party conference. Sobered by its thrashing at the polls, Labour has united behind a new leader whose singular merit is his readiness to abandon some of Labour's most deeply held — but also most deeply unpopular — convictions. In came Neil Kinnock, and out went unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from the EEC, opposition to council house sales — and the *Militant* editorial board. Self-preservation is the instinct that lies behind Labour's new yearning for unity. In both the unions and the Labour Party, the bureaucracy is adopting defensive postures to hold the movement together.

The labour bureaucracy's retreat before the Tory advance only accentuates the remoteness of the official labour movement from the working class. The General Election campaign exposed the gulf between the policies of the Labour

Party and the TUC and the preoccupations of workers. The problem is most acute for the trade union leaders. The more they concede to the Government and the employers, the less capable they become of defending their members' interests and the greater the risk they run of losing touch with the rank and file.

The increase in unofficial strikes, even in unions like the miners' and the railway workers' whose leaders claim to be left wing, indicates the growing scale of the conflict between the officials and their members. In this issue of *the next step* we take a close look at a number of workers' struggles to defend jobs and living standards. Workers in many sectors, even workers like the post office engineers or residential social workers who are relative newcomers to industrial action, are prepared to fight back against management attacks. In every dispute, the conservative strategy of the union leaders is a barrier to success. But as a result of their moderation, the bureaucrats can no longer be sure of keeping control of the action. Their very defensiveness undermines their capacity to contain rank and file militancy.

In the current climate, a gap has also opened up between the more militant workers and the rest of the working class. Mass unemployment and economic insecurity have strengthened conservative tendencies among some workers. The ineffectiveness of the unions and the Labour Party's lack of credibility have engendered a mood of passivity and cynicism. Some workers have proved more susceptible to the appeals of the Tories and the SDP-Liberal Alliance than to the calls of the labour bureaucracy. This combination of economic and political pressures has slowed the forward movement of the more politically conscious workers. They have been held back by the fragmentation and demoralisation that prevent the mass of workers from taking action to defend class interests.

The crisis of the labour bureaucracy and the new volatility of working class political loyalties opens a situation of some danger, but one which also contains great positive potential. The British left has been profoundly influenced by the more conservative moods within the labour movement. This has led to agonising reappraisals of the nature and structure of the working class, and gloomy commentaries on 'the downturn'. The left responds instinctively in its reliance on the labour bureaucracy. It is obliged to come to terms with its lack of an independent programme through which to appeal to the more politically active workers. Hence, for the various left factions in the orbit of the Labour Party, the only alternatives are to move to the right or to become irrelevant. In this sense Labour left-winger Peter Hain is right when he poses the options as choosing between unity behind Kinnock, or becoming 'massively marginalised' in the Socialist Workers' Party.

The remnants of the left around Kinnock have a role to play in reviving the Labour Party. The SWP has nothing to say to the working class but 'wait for an upturn to produce more strikes'. But there is another alternative. *Preparing*

for power, the programme of the Revolutionary Communist Party, outlines a perspective for building a party now that can organise effective defence of workers' interests in the recession and lead the struggle for a different form of society. But the radical left is incapable of seizing the time provided by the crisis of the existing Labour leadership to build a fighting alternative. Rather than try to overcome the despair that haunts the working class, the left effectively prolongs it by trying to breathe new life into the labour bureaucracy.

The left has taken much of the blame for Labour's defeat in the June General Election. It stood accused of lumbering the party with unpopular policies, and it has suffered a series of setbacks during the long drawn-out inquest. Eric Heffer and Michael Meacher — its candidates for the Labour leadership — were trounced; its position on the national executive committee was weakened, and most of its policies were discarded. In response, the left has further and further restricted its goals in accordance with what is acceptable within a party moving rapidly to the right. At times, the left's instability has reached almost comic proportions. For *Socialist Action* during the Labour Party conference, the key task was to 'rebuild the Bennite left'. By the following week, the strategic priority had been redefined to 'organising to commit Kinnock to the pledges he has made to conference'. In fact nobody apart from the editors of *Socialist Action* heard Kinnock make any pledges at Brighton. Whatever the terms, the left has agreed to serve the Labour Party.

In an ironic gesture, History has assigned the dying Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party an influential role in guiding the new Labour leadership through its present troubles. In September Bob Rowthorne outlined a strategy for the left:

'There are two separate but interrelated tasks: the first task is to revive the Labour Party and review its links with the people. This will not be easy and will take considerable time. The second task is to rally all the various people in Britain opposed to Mrs Thatcher and her policies.'

That a member of the Communist Party, itself on the verge of disintegration, should identify as his first task the revival of the organisation his party was founded to destroy is a fitting epitaph for British Stalinism. It is also an indication of a wider problem of the British left. In the midst of the deepest recession for half a century, the central concern of the left is not to defend working class interests — but to save the Labour Party. But there is a direct conflict between Rowthorne's 'second task' and workers' interests. His broad anti-Thatcher alliance can only be established by ruling out actions against the existing system which are vital for the working class, but which would be anathema to the middle class supporters of the Liberals and the SDP. Saving the Labour Party means sacrificing the working class.

Communist Party intellectual Professor Eric Hobsbawm shared a platform with Kinnock at Brighton. He delivered a

homily for the benefit of the new leader:

'Thatcherism aims to transform Britain irreversibly in its own way, not just to keep the system on an even keel. To defeat it, is therefore more than the routine demand of any opposition when it happens not to be in government. It is the condition of survival for a decent Britain, and of such chances as exist of advancing to a better society.'

By all accounts Kinnock nodded vigorously throughout, though this may have been in an effort to keep awake. But Kinnock could find little to disagree with here. For Hobsbawm there is a cause greater than the survival of Labour — the salvation of Britain. The retreat from the needs of the working class is complete. Hobsbawm, who not too long ago wrote about the 'Forward march of Labour halted', is now talking about it being reversed. British workers have never lived in 'a decent Britain', but in one built on exploitation and oppression — at home and abroad. Thatcherism confirms the urgent need to free the working class from the brutality of the capitalist system. But the bureaucrats can only dream of a return to their pre-Thatcher golden age when consensus politics gave them some status in the British establishment.

The official labour movement survives because it has so far avoided a systematic national challenge. It now rests on a shrinking social base, largely in the public sector unions. It has failed to broaden its influence among new sections of the working class: women, blacks, the unemployed. It now faces an uphill struggle to rebuild a credible reformist movement within the working class. Kinnock has set about providing a focus for this project by identifying with campaigns against cuts and closures in the National Health Service. Various groupings in the Labour Party and the unions are responding to this same preoccupation by getting involved in campaigns against deportations; some are even talking about the Irish War. This is the left's function for the bureaucracy — to provide a campaigning image to revitalise the decaying structures of the official labour movement.

The working class has no interest in restoring the rotten prop to a crumbling system. We have nothing to gain from saving British capitalism or its Labour caretakers. Nor do we have to wait in despondent resignation for 'something to turn up'. The paralysis of the official labour movement and the ideological disarray of the left offers a unique challenge. Now is not a time to retreat, but a time to take the opportunities opened up by the malaise of the bureaucracy to build a genuine working class alternative. The Revolutionary Communist Party has no stake in the existing system, and no links with the bureaucracy. To fulfil even the most modest needs of the working class today demands a struggle that goes beyond the limits imposed by the institutions of the labour movement. Our approach is to get involved in the struggles of the working class, and to build a party now that can lead the fight for power in the struggles ahead.

Labour women make their peace, not policy

THE CRUSHING OF the women's movement at last year's Labour Party conference was a tragedy. Its humiliation at this year's conference was a farce. Women delegates were ignored, insulted and jeered at by Labour's trade union old guard, led by the party chairman, salty Sam McCluskie from the seamen's union. Three composite motions put forward by women's organisations were defeated. The left has bewailed the week's events as an exposure of growing sexism among male delegates. 'The most macho conference for years' was *Socialist Organisation's* verdict. But McCluskie's behaviour was typical of the backwardness, sectionalism and bureaucracy on which the Labour Party was built and which remain its defining characteristics. The only thing 'exposed' at Brighton was the women's movement's accommodation to the Labour Party.

Ten years ago the women's movement campaigned for free abortion and contraception on demand, for nurseries and equal pay. As the crisis of the 'seventies threatened to wipe out women's rights, the feminist movement responded by retreating under the protective wing of the official labour movement. Over the past five years the dominant theme of feminism has been that the place to fight for women's rights is inside the Labour Party. Feminists have lowered their horizons to accommodate the prejudices of the labour bureaucracy. In today's conditions of falling women's employment and wages, the need for a political struggle against women's oppression is more pressing than ever. But to sustain their relationship with Labour, the left and the feminists have given up struggling. The women's movement has regressed from fighting for women's rights in society, to fighting for women's rights inside the Labour Party, to just being in the Labour Party.

Degenerated revolutionaries

The women's motions to this year's conference illustrated just how far feminism has slipped. All three motions concerned the status of and elections to the women's organisations in the Labour Party. None of them mentioned the oppressed status and rapid immiseration of millions of working class women in the real world outside the Labour Party. The left's fixation with constitutional manoeuvres has let the labour movement off the hook in the battle to defend women. Even veteran anti-feminist and right-wing deputy leadership candidate Gwyneth Dunwoody has been able to pose as a more principled protector of women than the women's movement. Challenged by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy's Women's Action Committee, Dunwoody dismissed the feminists as 'preoccupied with party squabbles and constitutional theorising while ignoring the need to defend women's rights in a wider social contest against Mrs Thatcher'.

In the event, the union block votes defeated the women's conference motions with ease. The bureaucrats' crushing of

the feminist reforms was not prompted by any threat to their hold over the party. Rather, it underlined the banality of the motions. The union barons were able to stomp on the motions because there was no pressure on them to make concessions. The feminists posed no political challenge to the leadership. Their motion calling for the convening of a rules conference was so harmless that it attracted the support of the TGWU and the NUM. The subservience of the women's movement to the Labour Party could not have been clearer. The future for the party's women's organisations was mapped out by AUEW-TASS deputy general secretary Barbara Switzer. She advised the feminists to become better bureaucrats and get educated in the ways of conference infighting because 'the motions lacked the necessary sophistication to gain conference support'.

Insults and illusions

The activities of the tamed women's movement have been reduced to building bridges between working women and men and the Labour Party's anti-working class programme. The Labour leadership has recognised that inoffensive young women can win friends and influence people where old bores like Roy Hattersley or even younger campaigners like Neil Kinnock fear to tread. The feminist campaigners of a decade ago have become the canvassers of the 'eighties. But the feminists' attempts to recruit more women to Labour have had little success. They claim that the lack of positive discrimination in the party's structures has put women off. But it is the Labour Party's inability to fight for women's rights which makes membership unattractive to those with more pressing concerns than who elects whom to what committee.

The spectacle of women queueing at the speaker's rostrum to be cat-called and degraded was an insult to all who take the struggle for women's rights seriously. The responsibility for their humiliation lies firmly with the left. It was the Labour left which drew the feminists into the party and reduced the fight for women's liberation to its present pathetic state. And it is the left in all its naivety which continues to sow illusions in its ability to change the Labour Party. For *Labour Herald*, Mandy Moore announced before the conference even started that 'whatever happens we will be back'. For *Socialist Action*, the lesson of the conference was that the labour bureaucracy should lead a fight against sexism in the movement. But, it observed, 'one begins to wonder whether the trade union leaders will ever learn'. One does indeed. While the left begins to wonder, more and more women are becoming convinced that the Labour Party is no place to fight for freedom. Women's liberation in the 'eighties demands a struggle against the Labour Party and its divisive politics.

Carol Taggart

The demands of the women's liberation movement

1970 (founding conference, Oxford):

1. Equal education and job opportunities
2. Equal pay
3. Free 24-hour nurseries
4. Free contraception and abortion on demand.

1983 (Labour Party conference):

1. Women's division of the NEC should be elected by National Conference of Labour Women
2. The NEC should convene a rules conference to draw up a constitution for the women's organisation
3. The National Conference of Labour Women should have the right to put five resolutions on the party conference agenda.



Labour's sexism: while women's issues were marginalised, Glenys Kinnock starred as housewife

Feminists retreat

'I DON'T GIVE a fuck about your trade union organisation', exclaimed an angry delegate at last month's National Abortion Campaign conference, 'what about me?'. This clash between a defender of the feminist alliance with the labour bureaucracy and the individualist preoccupations of the women's movement throws some light on the debate that has split the official campaign for abortion rights down the middle.

Abortion rights are under attack from several directions. Luton gynaecologist Anthony Hamilton has been hauled before the courts on a charge of attempted murder for carrying out a late abortion. Catholic bigot Victoria Gillick carries on her campaign to restrict the availability of contraceptive advice. Tory health minister Norman Fowler swings the axe on the hospitals - abortion facilities are often first to go. Meanwhile the National Abortion Campaign is locked in an internal squabble over the best way to keep the campaign going as its activists retreat from the fight for abortion rights.

The acceptable face of feminism

The National Abortion Campaign was founded in 1975 by feminists and socialists committed to women's right to abortion as one aspect of the struggle for women's liberation. It has organised opposition to a series of attempts to restrict the 1967 Abortion Act through new legislation. The campaign has adopted a narrow parliamentary approach, concentrating on lobbying MPs and winning the support of doctors and other respectable people. It has restricted its activities within the limits of what is acceptable to its powerful backers in the Labour Party and the trade unions. In response to the pressure of middle class feminists and politicians, NAC abandoned the original demand of the women's liberation movement for 'free abortion on demand' in favour of pleading for 'a woman's right to choose'.

Upholding the call for 'a woman's right to choose' turned a broad struggle against capitalist oppression into a narrow issue of individual choice. It made what was a cause for the whole working class into a private matter for every individual woman. The Federation of Conservative Students could agree with NAC that 'abortion should be a matter of personal choice for the women concerned'. And NAC could

lobby sufficient MPs to ensure that the White, Benyon and Corrie Bills to curb the 1967 Act were defeated in the House of Commons. But neither NAC nor its supporters could advance the struggle for abortion rights beyond the strict limits imposed by the 1967 Act. And NAC has proved ineffectual in defending abortion rights against the latest combined onslaught of Britain's 'moral majority' (SPUC, Life and the Responsible Society) and cuts in the NHS.

Reproductive rights and the left

The recent NAC conference split between an ultra-feminist faction which wants to turn the campaign away from its exclusive emphasis on abortion, and those who want to maintain links with the labour bureaucracy and continue in the old way. The ultra-feminists want to change NAC into a 'reproductive rights campaign' which would avoid the offensive against abortion rights by dissolving the issue among a plethora of others. On the other hand, the remaining radical left activists in NAC want to cling on to their allies in the unions and carry on defending the 1967 Act. The bureaucrats are happy to endorse a parliamentary pressure group, but less enthusiastic about sponsoring a diffuse feminist campaign.

Last month Tory minister Cecil Parkinson's woman friend Sara Keays commented, in response to press suggestions that she should have had her pregnancy terminated, that she 'was not aware that political expediency was sufficient grounds for an abortion under the 1967 Act'. Sara Keays is right. Neither are poverty, unemployment or squalid housing conditions grounds for termination of pregnancy under the 1967 Act, though that is of little concern to those who conceive in top Tory circles, in or out of wedlock. Yet thousands of working class women are denied the right to abortion through restrictive laws and public spending cuts. Neither faction in NAC has any answers to these problems; both sides in the split have retreated when faced with the advance of recession and reaction. The effective defence of women's rights now depends on mobilising working class resistance around a campaign for free abortion on demand.

Sheila Phillips

Striking: a blow for real freedom

ONE WEDNESDAY EVENING in June, John Newman Hindle decided to walk home from work. Hindle, boss of Hindle Gears in Bradford, left his car where it was parked and crept out of the back of his factory. His urge for exercise was prompted by the fact that the wives of his striking workers were doing their first spot of picket duty. For the next few weeks Hindle made a point of leaving early on Wednesdays. When the women turned up for their regular stint on the picket line they would find a police escort waiting for them. The women have now taken to varying the time and day they arrive to keep Hindle on the hop. The continuing strike at Hindle Gears is one of a number of disputes recently covered by *the next step* in which women have been centrally involved, either as strikers or in support of their men. They all provide examples of how women, when they do take action, are often more militant and willing to break with past traditions than men. At Britains Toys in East London it was the women strikers who upped the action by lying in front of scab lorries. And during the dispute at the Nigg Bay oil platform construction yard in Scotland, strikers' wives and children blocked the main road of the town of Alness to stop buses full of scabs entering the site.

Women's conventions

The militancy of the women at Nigg, Britains and Hindle's flies in the face of conventional wisdom about women's attitudes to strikes. Women are regularly shunted in and out of work. When confined to the home and housework, they are readily available for the bosses to bring them into the workforce when needed and kick them out again when demand drops off. Hazra, a striker from Britains Toys, told us what this meant for her: 'I began work at Britains in 1980. By mid-1981 I was sacked together with seven other women because they said they had no more work for us. At the end of 1981 they had a bad fire in the works and so they called some of us back'.

The fact that cooking, cleaning and childcare are seen as women's main job keeps them isolated from the political and social life of the working class. Women's first concern is reduced to how



On the picket line: Britains' women workers lead the way

they can afford to pay the rent and feed their children.

Whether it is women themselves or their husbands who get involved in an industrial dispute, the housekeeping budget suffers first. Women are faced with the prospect of spending their Christmas or holiday money on food or missing HP payments. The sooner the strike ends, the sooner they can get back to their everyday problems of survival. Women's worries about the effects of a long dispute can prompt either of two reactions. The media are sometimes able to whip up small, over-publicised 'back to work' movements among strikers' wives. Disputes at British Leyland's Cowley plant in the late 'seventies saw several such marches. On the other hand, women can get involved in fighting for victory in the strike. Women's decision to stand for or against a strike is

influenced by both the attitude of the union and the appeals from the bosses and their press. To involve women in disputes can only be to the advantage of the working class. Yet the official labour movement actively discourages working class women from getting stuck in. Women have often been left isolated, worrying about the rent or mortgage payments or the electricity bill, and open to anti-strike propaganda.

At Britains Toys, TGWU officials encouraged the more backward male workers to stop the women strikers lying in front of lorries and told women they were not needed on the picket line. The incident is typical of trade union attitudes to women. Each union exists to protect a particular group of workers in a certain sector of industry or services. Because capitalism doesn't recognise women as a regular part of the workforce, the unions have refused to recognise women as a regular part of the labour movement. At Hindle Gears, the AUEW has accommodated to the women by allowing them to use the union offices as a base. But the union's only interest in 'organising' the strikers' wives is to control them. A clear division of labour has been enforced. The women are a support and social group, raising money for family outings and occasional protests while the men run the strike. The official labour movement's indifference to women's participation in strikes means that women often get involved in a spontaneous attempt to overcome their isolation. Eileen Wilson, one of the women who joined the Nigg strikers' blockade, explained how it took off. 'It really snowballed. A few women suggested it, wanting to show support. What happened was spontaneous, nothing was organised'.

Workers divided

At Britains Toys, many of the women only joined the union when they came out on strike. They immediately took to effective picketing of the factory, to the consternation of union officials who wanted to back down in the face of the heavy police presence. Lying in front of lorries and ambushing employers are not normally considered to be part of trade union activity. Women's exclusion from the traditions of British trade

unionism means that their action is often militant and tactically innovative. Women workers who are 'uneducated' in the union leaders' preferred methods of conciliation and compromise will take whatever action they see as necessary to win the strike, rather than what is accepted as official picket-line practice. Such militancy is embarrassing for the bureaucrats. But the unconscious nature of the women's action also has its limitations. At Britains, where the sexual split among the strikers was compounded by differences in language and ethnic origin, women who had come out on strike in support of men from another department became disillusioned and began to drift back to work. The union bureaucrats' strategy did not challenge the divisions among the strikers. In the absence of a clear political perspective, the workers' militancy could not unite them against the officials' approach.

The recent strike at Dodsworth colliery in Yorkshire illustrates the problem of uniting men and women in a dispute. Five days before the end of the strike, miners' wives picketed the Barnsley headquarters of the South Yorkshire NUM. Carrying placards with the slogan 'Think of your future', they demanded that the union make the strike official and issue strike pay. But with the responsibility of keeping the home going weighing them down, the women were also calling on their husbands to get back to work if strike pay was not forthcoming. The women's ambivalence sums up the volatility of their position as both isolated houseworkers and members of the working class. It is this confusion which the media seize upon to depict women as sensible wives and mothers trying to curb their striking husbands' irresponsible antics. The ruling class makes women responsible for scrimping and saving to make ends meet. In a strike, it tries to manipulate their dilemma to put pressure on workers and stir up anti-union attitudes.

Beating the media

The failure of the labour movement to involve women in strikes has allowed the media to sustain the myth of docile wives who are 'naturally' conservative about industrial action. When male workers recognise their common interests with women, the press-hounds are hard pressed to find a 'we're on sex strike till the men go back' story. Eileen Wilson described how they went about it at Nigg: 'we're fed up of reading that wives are putting pressure on their husbands to go back... one particular reporter kept asking my husband about it. Other reporters went around looking for women against the strike'. The South Yorkshire miners on strike at Dodsworth gave an exemplary demonstration of how to handle the media in such situations. When the pressmen ignored the ferocity and militancy of a mass meeting of 500 striking miners and scurried around looking for women opposed to the action, the whole meeting turned on them. All the Fleet Street parasites were thrown out into the street. In beating up the media rather than berating their wives, the miners showed a positive approach to forging working class unity. The other job that remains to be done is for male trade unionists to direct their anger at the trade union leaders. Their divisive politics provide scope for ruling class propaganda to undermine working class propaganda. By fully involving women in all forms of working class struggle and taking up the broader issues of women's oppression, workers can ensure that the militancy unleashed at Britains, Hindle's and Nigg is channelled into a fight for real freedom for the whole of the working class.

Richard Tench

Real freedom

Are you fed up with trade unions that won't fight for women's rights? Are you unconvinced that a women's place is on her knees in the Labour Party? Do you want to fight the Tories' drive to push women back into the home? Kate Marshall shows how we can build a working class struggle for women's liberation.

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Back-door repatriation

'THIS government is not in the business of telling people who have made their homes here... "you are unwelcome", "here is some money", "clear off".'
(Minister for immigration David Waddington, 13 October 1983)

The Tory conference voted down MP Harvey Proctor's motion calling for repatriation. But in practice government policy amounts to the same thing. Thousands of black families are being confronted with an impossible choice; it works like this:

■ the Home Office tracks down a black couple who have 'overstayed' according to the immigration rules

■ frequently they will have lived here for many years and have British-born children whom the government is not entitled to deport

■ the couple are served with a deportation order and left to decide what to do with their children

The Hasbudak family know all about the government's repatriation techniques. The parents, Polat and Kebire, came to Britain from Turkey in 1975. Polat is a garment worker in Hackney; his wife does some home-working as a machinist. Their two children, aged seven and five, were born in Britain. The Home Office has been trying to deport the parents since 1981 for overstaying. Now they are scheduled for expulsion on 2 November. Immigration minister Waddington wrote to the Hasbudaks to express the now-familiar concern of the Tory Government to preserve the family unit. He wanted to make sure they were all kicked out together:

'If their two children accompany them, their fares can if necessary be met from public funds.'

Michel and Sheila Vythelingum have been offered similar inducements to take their three children — all British citizens — with them when they are deported to Mauritius on 8 November. Like the Hasbudaks, the parents are in breach of the 1971 Immigration Act for overstaying. Like them, they have suffered years of harassment from the immigration police, including short spells of imprisonment. Their nightmare began in 1975 when they put their faith in the Labour government's promise of an amnesty for overstayers and presented themselves to their local police station. The response was instantaneous — a deportation order.

The Vythelingums have lived here even longer than the Hasbudaks, since 1970. Michel works in the garment trade and they have lived in Tottenham for years. All this makes no difference to Waddington, who provided the Vythelingums too with a little homily on the Tories' Victorian values in a letter to their MP:

'I hope that the couple will feel able to take the children with them to Mauritius in the interests of family unity.'

But neither couple is willing to submit to the Home Office's moral blackmail. The alternative to the choice between abandoning their children in Britain or involuntarily taking them to countries to which they have never been is to fight their deportation orders. And that is what they are doing, with a lot of backing from WAR.

Both families have considerable support from teachers and parents at their children's local schools. WAR has set about translating that sympathy into action:

■ by mounting a campaign throughout the National Union of Teachers in London,



Family unity: the Home Office says the Vythelingums can stay together — if they all go to Mauritius

on, spearheaded by William Patten school in Hackney and the Downhills school in Tottenham, based on the principle that every attempt at behind-the-scenes repatriation of children must be fought

■ by organising demonstrations and pickets by teachers, other school staff, pupils and parents at the Home Office during school hours

■ by demanding financial, legal and other support from the Labour authorities in Hackney and Haringey, and from the Greater London Council (which controls the Inner London Education Authority)

We are also demanding support for these two families from the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. Along with the South East Region of the TUC, this union recently attempted a recruitment drive amongst Turkish and other immigrant workers in north and east London. Clearly such workers will only feel willing to get involved in trade union activities if they are confident that the union will back them up against the Home Office. WAR intends to drive this point home in the NUTGW.

No special cases!

The Hasbudaks and the Vythelingums are just two of the countless victims of the current clamp-down on black immigrants and migrants. They have had numerous representations made on their behalf, usually by Labour MPs, to the Home Office — all of which have been turned down.

Labour politicians are discovering that they can no longer combine support for some kind of immigration controls with successful appeals for individual constituents on 'compassionate' grounds. First,

because the Home Office feels less and less obliged to give way on individual cases, a climate of opinion has been created which makes deportations of 'illegals' appear wholly legitimate. Second, Waddington intends to make it impossible for anyone but the deportee's own MP to make a representation in future.

Waddington's infringement of MPs' traditional rights has created some consternation at Westminster. Fifty members have signed Labour left MP Stuart Holland's 'early day motion' to preserve the status quo. However, it will take more than parliamentary manoeuvres to block the government's racist ambitions. Decades of Labour Party operation and approval of immigration laws have made it widely acceptable to deport families like the Hasbudaks and Vythelingums on the grounds that they have, after all, 'overstayed' their welcome. Labour's recognition of the right of the British state to regulate the flow of immigrants has paved the way for Waddington's schemes for back-door repatriation.

WAR welcomes support from all quarters for its campaigns against deportations. But we will not restrict the scope of our activities to what is acceptable to the labour bureaucracy. We will fight again and again for our policy — an end to all immigration controls. We will oppose all attempts to fight deportations on the grounds that the victim is a 'special case', more deserving than others. We refuse to use arguments such as 'this person has done sterling service for the British economy', or has been 'a good law-abiding citizen' to win the ear of the Home Secretary. We do not beg for compassion on behalf of black deportation victims. We demand that the labour movement fights for their rights.

Sari Squad fights on

The campaign to prevent the deportation of twenty-year-old Bangladeshi widow AFIA BEGUM has gathered momentum over the past month:

■ fifty black women from the 'Sari Squad', led by the group who recently chained themselves to Home Secretary Leon Brittan's home, held a militant picket of the Tories' Blackpool conference.

■ a rally was held at the House of Commons to coincide with the re-opening of Parliament, hosted by some of the 50 Labour MPs who have backed the Afia Begum campaign.

Afia has been in hiding with her baby daughter Asma for over a year, since the Home Office decided that her husband's death in a Brick Lane fire was grounds

for her deportation. She defied her deportation order in July by refusing to turn up at Heathrow for a flight bound for Dacca. Ever since, the Home Office has been trying to hunt her down and has conducted raids on friends' and relatives' homes in the South East.

Home Secretary Leon Brittan recently said in a letter to Peter Shore MP that he would 'not be forced into reaching a decision...solely because of a well-orchestrated publicity campaign'. Now is the time to make him eat his words!

Send donations and messages of support to:

AFIA BEGUM DEFENCE CAMPAIGN
c/o BOX 22
136 KINGSLAND HIGH STREET E8



SONIA HASSAN 18-year-old Sari Squad member from Coventry: 'The Sari Squad is the best thing for black women to join if they want to fight for Afia Begum and against this country's racist immigration laws.'



No race checks on the dole!

Join WAR's campaign to wreck the government's new scheme to harass black claimants. Order the WAR video and invite a speaker for your trade union branch, youth club or college.

See WAR in action ■ fighting deportations and police harassment ■ organising against the checks and racist attacks ■ building solidarity with black workers on strike.

Full colour video ■ 33 mins ■ VHS ■ £5 to hire from
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WAR Video

Troops out when?

'The most important single issue for the United Kingdom'. This was how Labour's left greeted the discussion of Ireland at this year's conference. The Tory conference made the same point more subtly by not discussing Ireland at all. The Tories are unanimous in their support for the military occupation of the Six Counties. United in its loyalty to the British state, the Conservative conference had nothing to debate. As the war in Ireland enters its fifteenth year, even the wettest Tories accept that the Government's policy — using supergrasses, shooting unarmed nationalists in the street — is the only option for Britain. The Irish debates at this year's other party conferences saw the rest of the British political world trying to come to terms with the Tories' determination.

WHILE THE TORY conference was silent on the Irish War, the Liberal Assembly's debate turned into a shouting match. The contrast between the two underlined the Liberals' problem of coming to terms with Tory Irish policy. The Tories and the Liberals are both straight bourgeois parties. They get their votes from the same people and they owe allegiance to the same class — the British capitalists. But the ruling class only needs one political party to represent it. The Tory and Liberal parties have competed for that position since the nineteenth century. The Tories established themselves as the leading force in bourgeois politics during the 1920s. Ever since, the Liberals have searched for policies which could attract support away from the Tories. On any issue, coming up with a different policy to represent the same class as the Tories has been difficult for the Liberals. On the Irish War, it has proved impossible. No party which supports the British ruling class can oppose its war against the Irish. The Liberals have been unable to challenge the military terror which Britain needs and which the Tories pursue best.

The controversial motion before this year's Liberal Assembly called for the party to accept 'the principle of a united Ireland as a long-term objective', 'the creation of an All-Ireland Council' and 'the phased withdrawal of British troops to be replaced by UN or EEC troops if necessary'. The motion was backed by the Young Liberals, an unworldly group of under-thirties to whom the expense and bloodshed of the Irish War appear to be irrational. On their return from their summer trip to the Six Counties, Young Liberal delegates complained that British troops had been rude to them in the war-zone of Crossmaglen. To put a stop to this sort of thing, the Young Liberals have consistently lobbied governments of all persuasions to bring the British Army's boys home. Their motion to this summer's Assembly angered right-wing Liberals, who condemned it as a recipe for the 'Lebanonisation' of Ireland. The motion was passed narrowly in an amended form. The call for the withdrawal of British troops was replaced by a woolly appeal for the British and Irish governments to invite EEC armies to police the Six Counties and the border.

The press headline-writers proclaimed the Liberals' new commitment to eventual Irish unity to be a great breakthrough. Liberal leader David Steel disagreed: 'I can live with it' he observed. *The Times* editorial on the resolution saw his point:

'Mr Steel...remains sensibly calm about it. It expresses not a policy but an attitude...You cannot make a policy out of Irish unification, which is not available, and a Euro peace-keeping force, which belongs to the same order of reality as the contents of a medieval bestiary. But you can with such props strike an arresting attitude.'

David Steel and *The Times* both under-



Tony Benn: the Liberals' adoption of Labour's Irish policy exposes the left's illusions

stand that 'eventual Irish unity' is a meaningless notion for the Liberal Party. What matters as far as British strategy is concerned is the Liberals' support for military occupation now. Liberal Irish policy is now divided into three convenient parts: unity some day, negotiations with Dublin soon, troops on the streets of the Six Counties today. Far from being enraged with their new policy, Liberal leaders have noted its potential. The policy allows Liberal activists to 'strike arresting attitudes' against the Government, without endangering the party's relationship with the British state. It goes some way towards resolving the Liberals' problem of how to differentiate themselves from the Tories and still support British imperialism in Ireland. It will do nothing to assist the nationalist community of the Six Counties.

Lib-Lab Pact

All of this sounds vaguely familiar. Two years ago the Labour Party was faced with a similar problem of distancing its politics on Ireland from the Government's. Labour's response was to produce precisely the same policy fudge. The 1981 Labour conference took place after 10 Irish hunger-strikers had died in the H-Blocks. The Labour Party had attracted some scathing criticism for its unquestioning support of the Government while the Tories murdered the 10 republicans. The conference demanded a change in Labour's Irish policy. It voted for the three-stage plan which the Liberals have recently adopted: unification somewhere over the rainbow, talks with Irish parties in the medium term and military rule from London in the present.

The change in Labour's Irish policy has had no effect on its attitude to the war. The party's continued commitment to Direct Rule 'for now' has enabled

Labour leaders to avoid any embarrassing confrontations with the state. At the same time, the 'unity' clause formally broke the bipartisan front between the Tory and Labour parties which had lasted through 12 years of war. Labour could back British repression in the Six Counties while pointing out its substantial policy differences with the Tories.

The Labour Party had a far more pressing need than the Liberals to differentiate itself from the Government on Ireland. Unlike the Tories or Liberals, Labour is not seen as a straightforward representative of the ruling class. The Labour Party shares its opponents' loyalty to the British state. But it also has to respond to pressure from workers who identify Labour as the party of their class. Labour's historical role in Britain's oppression of Ireland has been to shift its stance when necessary to contain working class discontent and frustration. None of these policy changes has weakened Labour's resolution to pursue British interests in Ireland. The policy adopted at the 1981 conference is intended to distance Labour from bipartisanship to satisfy its labour movement critics, while allowing the state to pursue its war without working class interference.

Labour's Irish policy has a serious credibility problem. As the government which sent the troops into Ireland in 1969 and introduced the policy of 'criminalisation' in the mid 'seventies, Labour's ability to pose as a friend of Irish freedom is limited. In addition the three-stage policy is too transparent a cover to hide Labour's unchanged attitude to the reality of the Irish War. The Labour left has moved in to rescue the leadership. The left acclaimed the commitment to eventual Irish unity as a great step forward. Left-wing Labour Party activists have enthusiastically paraded Labour's Irish policy through the official labour movement.

The left admits that Labour Party policy may not yet be perfect. But it always pleads that 'a start has been made', 'movement has begun', 'attitudes are changing', 'a debate has been opened up'. It is solely due to the activities of the left over the past two years that the party has somewhat redeemed its sordid record among workers concerned about the Irish War.

The here and now

The events around this year's party conferences showed just how small a start the left has made. The reaction of Liberal Party leaders and the bourgeois press to the change in Liberal policy is instructive. The commitment to eventual reunification has been the keystone of the Labour left's enthusiasm for party policy over the past two years. Yet a reactionary politician like David Steel could dismiss it as irrelevant, while *The Times* editor made it clear that future Irish unity was 'not available'. As the Liberals, the party of Partition, moved to adopt Labour's radical policy, the left's much-vaunted breakthrough was revealed for what it had always been: a cover behind which Labour could continue to support the occupation of the Six Counties. The ruling class understands that plans for uniting Ireland at some future stage are not even worth arguing about. What matters for the state is the war being fought in Derry and Belfast today. So long as the Liberals and, more importantly, the Labour Party support the army in Ireland now, the ruling class is content. For the last two years Labour's new Irish policy has not prevented it from endorsing more British terror in the Six Counties. The Labour left has little to say about the victims of RUC/army shoot-to-kill squads or corrupted informers. Its gaze is fixed beyond the horizon, on the crock of gold that is 'eventual Irish reunification'.

The Irish discussion at this year's Labour conference closed the debate which the left claims to have opened up since 1981. Tony Benn made only one speech in Brighton. He proposed a motion which sought to make firmer Labour's vague references to ending Partition. The Labour and trade union bureaucracy would have none of it. From the bureaucrats' point of view, the lack of clarity in Labour's policy is its strength. It allows them to present it as all things to all men and to avoid any embarrassingly precise commitments to British withdrawal. The block votes defeated Benn's motion decisively. Benn's supporters on the left applauded his efforts. But former Northern Ireland minister and H-Block builder Don Concannon showed up the limits of the radicals' opposition. As Concannon pointed out, Benn had chaired the Home Policy Group which drafted the present Labour policy. Benn had not opposed it then, so why was he doing so now? The constituency delegates barracked Concannon, but they had no answer to his arguments. Benn's apparent change of heart summed up the approach of the left-wingers who follow him. They are capable of rhetorical flourishes from their present political isolation. But practical opposition to the Labour Party's support for Britain's war is beyond the scope of their limited objectives.

The Liberal and Labour leaders are at home with vague notions of eventual reunification. The left has accommodated to their timescale and refused to confront the British state. Workers' interests lie with defeating our own ruling class today, not wasting time in debating the possibility of a future negotiated settlement. The only coherent alternative to Tory policy is to fight for a working class alternative: the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland.

Mick Hume

The road to compromise

AFTER FIVE YEARS of negotiations, workers in children's and old people's homes have resorted to industrial action in a bid to win better pay and a reduction in their standard 60-hour week. They have faced major obstacles: the intransigence of their council employers, and their union leaders' steadfast refusal to give them full backing. But the biggest problem has been Labour councils which use left-wing rhetoric to undermine workers' militancy.

Residential social workers are employed by councils which negotiate national wage claims through the National Joint Council. About 75 per cent of residential workers are organised in the local government union NALGO. When the employers refused to concede the workers' demands for a 35-hour week and increased pay for working shifts, weekends and public holidays, NALGO gave official backing to a ban on overtime and new admissions to homes. When councils started suspending workers, industrial action spread and intensified.

Selective action

Caught in a dispute which they would have given anything to avoid, the NALGO bureaucrats have done their utmost to contain it. It was left to an officer from NALGO's Local Government Committee — aspiring bureaucrat Dennis Reed — to run the dispute. Reed drew up 'national guidelines' designed to restrict the workers to a minimal level of action.

At a 250-strong national delegate conference on 11 October the bureaucrats sidestepped calls for an immediate national escalation of the action and a ballot for an all-out strike. They favoured selective action organised at a local level. Militant supporters put the case for the bureaucracy in a leaflet arguing that 'an all-out strike of all residential workers would risk losing the support of much of the rest of the labour movement, because of the suffering it would cause, and such a move would give the Tories and their press the opportunity "on a plate", to pour out vile propaganda against the residential workers'.

Militant's argument is nothing more than an apology for the NALGO bureaucracy. It is true that the media will try to undermine a residential workers' strike by exposing individual cases of hardship and accusing the workers of endangering the lives of children and old people in their care. But the answer is not to give in to press hysteria and let the bureaucrats off the hook. Social service workers have to adopt imaginative tactics to win. NALGO workers in other departments of local government have the capacity to bring any borough to a standstill. They need to be persuaded to come out in solidarity. This was how 2500 council workers in Haringey prevented the victimisation of one of their colleagues — by all-out action.

The NALGO bureaucrats are desperate to keep control of the militants. They justify their reluctance to ballot the mem-

bership on the question of industrial action with the argument that the more backward workers would win a majority against strike action and thus isolate the militants. At least with selective action, they argue, it is possible to carry support from the more militant sectors. What terrifies them is that their members might go too far and bring Norman Tebbit's anti-union legislation down upon their heads. But selective strikes by the militant social services sections inevitably lead to isolated action and leave the strikers open to media scaremongering. It would be far better to involve the more passive union members in a debate over strike action in the course of a ballot, than to make no attempt to broaden the struggle and persist with ineffective and ultimately demoralising tactics.

Sham socialists

In fact, right-wing workers are not the major problem, as the bureaucrats argue. A much more serious problem is Labour's influence on militant workers. From the start of the residential workers' dispute Labour councils attempted to distance themselves from the Tories' hardline posturing. Left-wing Labour councillors used their influence with NALGO officials and activists in an attempt to win local agreements which would work to their advantage. In London, the newly formed Association of London Authorities, comprising 10 Labour boroughs, the GLC and ILEA, said it would make an offer which would embarrass the national employers into following suit. In reality it wanted to resolve the dispute in its own favour and hence presented local agreements in an anti-Tory guise.

At first, several militant NALGO branches were prepared to go along with the Labour left strategy and hammer out local agreements. This reflected the influence of radical left organisations which have some supporters among NALGO activists in key boroughs. For example, in London the Socialist Workers' Party is active in Lambeth and a combination of Militant and the SWP has some influence in Camden. These groups often have close links with the local Labour Party and tend to make concessions to left-wing Labour councillors and the NALGO bureaucrats. In Hackney, RCP supporters argued strongly against acceptance of a London or local deal as a divisive compromise. Other branches followed Hackney's lead and rejected Labour's offers.

Working together

The influence of the radical left on union militants, however, has been an important factor in the ability of left-wing councils to win acceptance of their policies from the workforce. Through an intricate local network of personal and political relationships, Labour councillors, NALGO bureaucrats and radical left rank and file activists have built up well-established patterns of collaboration.

Hackney Council, for example, recently appointed former Labour group chairman

Richard Shields to oversee the council's decentralisation plans. Shields helped set up the workplace Labour Party branch, became a NALGO steward and proceeded to argue that workers should support the council's schemes to transfer administration of housing and other services from the Town Hall to area offices. This means asking workers to accept plans to reorganise services, working conditions and pay in the name of efficiency and service to the community. When union branches have resisted these measures Labour has sought negotiated local agreements. It has found it much easier than Tory councils to win acceptance for such agreements because of the influence it exercises in the unions that organise the council workforce.

The role of left-wing groups has been to win acceptance for the arguments of the local bureaucracy amongst rank and file militants. For example, in the past, Socialist Workers' Party members and supporters in Hackney and Lambeth have been involved in negotiating local agreements on equal opportunities, new technology, disciplinary and grievance procedure and health and safety. While they now reject the consequences of these deals, they cannot escape responsibility for having helped to implement them in the first place.

Into battle

Following the revolt on local agreements led by Hackney NALGO in the residential workers' dispute, the Labour councils began to show their true colours. When workers closed down 14 homes in Lambeth, left-wing council leader Ted Knight challenged workers in other homes to walk out and leave homes unattended. The workers did walk out but they brought the children along to the council meeting in Lambeth Town Hall and left them with 'the council that cares'. In Hackney the radical new director of social services Gordon Peters threatened to discipline workers who left homes unattended. Following Kent, Islington is extending its fostering service and closing four children's homes. Hackney social services chairman Patrick Kodikara announced at the October council meeting that homes closed because of the dispute would be shut down for good. Lambeth, Brent, Islington and Haringey made similar threats. Permanent closures would fit in well with their 'reorganisation' and 'decentralisation' plans — cuts by longer names.

To win their dispute, residential workers need to fight hard for an all-out strike. They must reject the arguments of the bureaucrats which blame workers' backwardness for their own failings, and mobilise solidarity action in other sectors. Most importantly, they need to expose the hypocrisy of the left Labour councils. Victory requires a direct challenge to the Labour Party and its apologists at every level of the NALGO machine.

Joan Phillips

A knife in the back

THE TWO MONTH STRIKE by NALGO workers in Kent County Council's social services department is a stark example of what union solidarity means to our trade union leaders. The bitter struggle to win reinstatement for sacked shop steward John Kirkpatrick, in the face of a concerted attempt to smash union organisation, has received virtually no support from the NALGO leadership.

The cause of the dispute is the breakdown of local negotiations over pay and service conditions in July and the council's attempt to replace residential homes with Family Support Centres. The new centres are part of the council's drive to push through redundancies and change working conditions by reorganising its social services department. When NALGO decided to boycott admissions to the family centres to support the pay claim, the council threatened dismissals.

On 3 August, NALGO steward and leading negotiator in the dispute John Kirkpatrick was instructed to transport a child to a family centre. John refused and two hours later was sacked for breaking his contract. At a mass meeting of 500 the next day, NALGO members from the social services department voted overwhelmingly to take strike action.



Victimised: shop steward John Kirkpatrick

Despite a strong will to win, the strike has been undermined by the NALGO bureaucracy. The union executive gave its official blessing and then made no attempt to call out Kent NALGO or to link up the strike with other disputes involving NALGO members nationally — it has consistently rejected the call for a national strike.

When the strikers picketed the council's central supplies depot at West Malling the council tried unsuccessfully to get an injunction. The depot is the key to the strike's success; if the depot workers came out the work of the council would grind to a halt. NALGO proved how much importance it attached to this by balloting its members there — who cross the picket line every day — rather than instructing them to come out. TGWU officials have told their members to cross the NALGO picket line because it is a secondary picket! The strikers are not moving from the depot and are challenging the NEC to support defiance of any injunction. As leading militant Colin Harrison told us, 'there is a tremendous resistance by NALGO to take on Tebbit despite militant motions passed at annual conference'.

The union's inaction has led to half the original number of strikers returning to work. Management has taken advantage of the strike to reorganise jobs and impose stricter work discipline. Those returning to work have been forced to sign new contracts containing a 'normal working' clause, effectively banning industrial action.

To win, the Kent workers need to take complete control of the strike and get backing from workers in other sections. Whatever the outcome of the dispute, they have fought hard to win and as Colin Harrison put it, they are determined that the experience will not be wasted.



Lambeth social workers picket 'the council that cares': left Labour councils have proved NALGO's biggest obstacle

Campaigning against NHS cuts

Save jobs not Labour

NEIL KINNOCK DECLARED at the Labour Party conference in October that the call to defend 'our NHS' must become the rallying cry of the labour movement. Kinnock has chosen the Tory attack on the welfare state as the popular issue through which to win back the lost millions of Labour voters. The Labour Party-controlled campaign to prevent the closure of Thornton View hospital in Bradford shows this strategy in action.

Thornton View — known as Thornton Bastille to locals who have been around long enough to remember it as Clayton Workhouse in the 1920s — is an 82-bed geriatric hospital. To cut costs, Bradford District Health Authority has decided to close it down together with the 23-bed pre-convalescent Shipley hospital. In early August the workers at Thornton View occupied the hospital to prevent its closure and the loss of 100 jobs. Local RCP supporters have conducted a vigorous debate with Bradford Labour Party over the course of action required to win.

The 'patriotism of efficiency'

Labour has failed to fight in the past. In the present, its approach to defending the NHS is undermining the struggle at Thornton View. The Labour Party accepts that the NHS must be made more efficient and that the 'community' must shoulder some of the burden of caring for the sick.

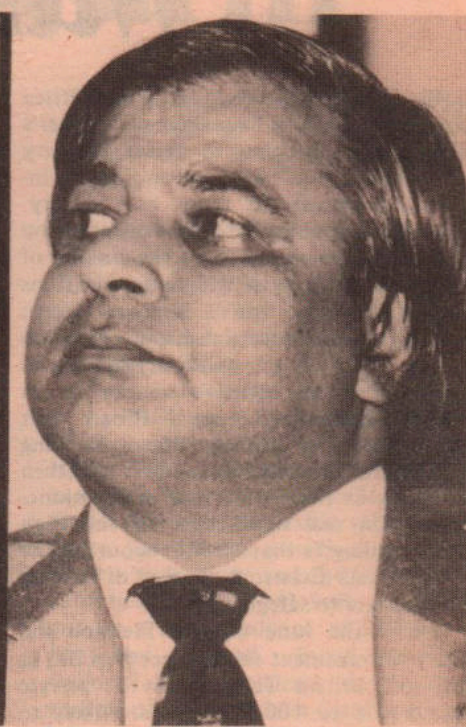
Labour leader Neil Kinnock's 'patriotism of efficiency' is not much different in practice from Tory minister Norman Fowler's brand of economic rigour. In Bradford, Labour councillors insisted that the District Health Authority produce a list of cost and efficiency savings as an alternative to closing Thornton View and Shipley hospitals. Labour-controlled Bradford Community Health Council argued that the DHA had been lazy and had made insufficient attempts to achieve efficiency savings.

Labour's advocacy of community care means that it is incapable of standing up to the Tories' cost-cutting measures. The Tories justify closures and manpower cuts by arguing that the elderly will be better looked after in their own homes. Bradford Labour Party's 'care in the community' campaign merely echoes the Tories. As Labour councillor Barry Thorne put it: 'I prefer that old people should be taken out of institutions and cared for at home by their loved ones and friends'. Having accepted that the burden of caring for the elderly would be better carried by the 'community' than by the state, Labour cannot argue effectively against the closures. As the DHA stated, the closure of Thornton View was 'not only entirely consistent with the "care in the community" initiative but an essential feature of it'.

Say no to Labour

To boost its electoral appeal, the Labour Party has limited its campaign to make it acceptable to middle class people. The campaign has received extensive backing from local doctors and health workers, patients and relatives. But Labour's notion of a broad-based campaign does not extend to workers in other hospitals and industries. The NHS union bureaucrats have been happy to keep their heads down and let the Labour Party run the show, because it exempts them from mobilising solidarity action from other workers and unions.

In reality, the labour bureaucrats' conception of a broad campaign imposes limits on the fight to stop the closure. The separation of the staff occupation committee from the supporters' occupation committee is the mechanism through which Labour keeps control. The staff committee deals with the more mundane matters of keeping the hospital running, while the supporters' committee organises the picketing and campaigning.



Building the party: Labour left MP Jeremy Corbyn and COHSE official Syed Boukhari appeal to NHS workers to support Labour

Three months into the occupation, the workers need to do three things to win. First, they must be clear what they are fighting for. The Labour Party says they are fighting for 'our NHS'. But the NHS has never been 'ours' — something which we have a responsibility to make more efficient. Working class people suffer at the hands of the NHS every day because the bosses have always run it on the cheap. The 'efficiency' of their NHS has nothing to do with the maintenance of our jobs or even with patients' interests. The working class has no interest in defending the principle of a health service which provides its employees with a meagre livelihood and its patients with a third-rate service. Health workers must fight for jobs and services in the NHS, not because it is 'ours', but because we need them.

Second, the workers need to step up the action. This requires joint meetings of workers and supporters and active participation by all workers. Local full-time RCN officer Dennis Sunderland instructed his members — qualified nurses — to have nothing to do with the occupation. Sixteen nurses are on temporary contracts which will end with the hospital's closure. This has been used by the union officials as an argument against the nurses' involvement. Workers at Thornton View must reject this conservative approach and fight to guarantee them full-time jobs. The workers need immediate solidarity strike action from other NHS workers and from other unions. The workers cannot rely on their union leaders — they must go out and argue for strike action themselves.

Finally, the workers must make practical plans for resisting eviction — using force if necessary. This is anathema to the Labour Party which has argued against the sort of militant tactics necessary to win the dispute. In its concern to preserve the respectable 'reputation' and 'image' of the occupation, the Labour Party has fostered a climate of conservatism among the workers at Thornton View. Its insistence on respect for the rule of law has defused the militancy of many and created an atmosphere of confusion and uncertainty.

By occupying the hospital the workers at Thornton View have already broken the law. It would be naive to imagine that they can resist eviction without using force. In 1978 the occupation at Bethnal Green Hospital in East London was defeated because workers put their faith in Labour before their own interests. We must make sure that the Thornton View occupation succeeds — by throwing out Labour's compromises.

Grant French

We want action!

According to Tory health minister Kenneth Clarke, to use the word 'cuts' to describe what is happening in the NHS would be 'a misuse of the English language'. Clarke prefers the more innocuous 'restriction in growth' to describe the Tories' assault on the NHS. But Clarke's exercise in semantics has not impressed workers at the Whittington Hospital in North London. The reality of the Tories' 'restrictions in growth' is the loss of 45 jobs if the planned closure of the hospital's Highgate wing goes through.

The campaign to stop the closure began at a public meeting on 11 October. Syed Boukhari, COHSE branch secretary at the Whittington, stressed the lack of 'consultation', complained that the 'timing of the closure was bad', and proposed a letter-writing campaign to the District Health Authority. Labour left MP Jeremy Corbyn called for a democratically-elected DHA. Michael Meacher demanded greater efficiency. None of them told the workers how they could fight back.

Sixty angry canteen workers turned up to the next meeting, two days later, and attacked Syed Boukhari for his inaction. When an RCP supporter suggested

occupying the DHA offices, Boukhari ignored her. He nearly had a seizure when 15 workers supported the idea. He quickly changed the subject. A meeting of domestic staff, porters and nurses on 18 October agreed to a four-point programme:

- No cuts, no redundancies, no decline in services
- A dining room work-in
- An action committee of workers and supporters
- A lobby of the December DHA meeting

Boukhari argued for efficiency talks with the management but this was opposed by RCP supporters and then by the majority of workers. We also won agreement for non-cooperation with management on changes in work practices. Our direct action strategy won a small victory — management decided against closing the Highgate wing dining room.

Health workers are rapidly discovering that they cannot rely on their officials to fight at the Whittington. With them we will continue to oppose all cuts and redundancies, and to defend jobs and services.

The Depression, the war and the working class

Slump socialism

Fight to save your NHS

nalgo

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— its calls for sacrifices
and efficiency —
undermines the fight
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Make Buzby walk the plank

THE LEADERS OF THE Post Office Engineering Union have claimed October's High Court decision to reject Mercury Communications' application for an injunction against the union as a victory. The High Court ruled that disruption by post office engineers over the linking of the private enterprise telecommunications company to the British Telecom system was a genuine industrial dispute over job losses, not an illegal, politically-motivated strike. But the POEU's victory is an empty one. The union's Broad Left leadership had already lifted blacking action and ordered its members to return to work at the first threat of an injunction. The real significance of the High Court ruling is that it will encourage the POEU in its disastrous strategy of looking to the state to safeguard jobs.

After the June General Election the Tory Government reintroduced its Bill to sell off British Telecom to the private sector. Up to 100 000 jobs are likely to be lost if privatisation goes through. The POEU — with 132 000 members, the biggest union in the six-union British Telecom Union Committee — has staged sporadic industrial action against the Government's privatisation moves. Some members have implemented a work-to-rule. Others have been blacking work involving the connection of the private Mercury system to the British Telecom network.

The POEU's campaign is defined by its narrow political approach to fighting privatisation. The emphasis is not on defending jobs but on defending British Telecom as a state-owned enterprise. The bureaucrats argue that one reason why the Tories are hell-bent on privatisation is because it is electorally popular. 'The image of the public service is not good', therefore 'one of the prime objectives of this coordinated campaign must be to restore belief in public service, not private profit!' (POEU Journal, October).

Appealing to the public

To further this objective, the British Telecom Union Committee has gone on the offensive. It is spending £500 000 on leaflets, a pamphlet, and a TUC-led campaign against privatisation 'to re-educate the public as to the benefits of our public services' (POEU Journal, August).

The POEU has reduced the fight for jobs to a public appeal to save British Telecom as a cheaper, more efficient state enterprise. The bureaucrats argue that current national pricing policy, based on equal provision of services at a standard price, will end with the sell-off to private owners. Competition will lead to price reductions in the more profitable sectors but price rises for domestic users. Like every bureaucrat in the public and private

sector, the POEU leaders put the defence of the service before the interests of their members.

The bureaucrats have put much more energy into their publicity campaign than into organising effective strike action. They have adopted British Telecom's 'Buzby' as their mascot, dressed it up in a Union Jack and dressed themselves up as pirates to win public sympathy against privatisation. But trying to persuade the state to adopt a different approach to exploiting the working class is no way to win a strike. The crew of POEU pirates which navigated its way to every single party conference to appeal for clemency would have been better employed confronting the bosses by wrecking their communications systems.

The bureaucrats' narrow political approach to fighting privatisation is reflected in its strategy of selective action. Only a small number of POEU members in the more militant London branches have been involved in strike action. This strategy is leading the POEU to certain defeat. Not only is it ineffective, it has also left the most militant sections isolated and vulnerable to attack. Of the 2000 or so members taking action, more than 1500 have been suspended. British Telecom has now issued dismissal notices to more than 20 workers from the London area who have twice refused to do work blacked by the union.

Conceding defeat

The bureaucrats use two arguments to justify their strategy of selective action. First, they argue that it achieves maximum impact by withdrawing key groups of workers without hitting the domestic customer. It also means that the majority who take no part in the dispute can finance those members on strike. Already, the strain of paying out the normal take-home pay of £250 000 a week to its 2000 members suspended or on strike has forced the union to reimpose a £1-a-week levy on its members.

The second argument the bureaucrats use is that a call for an all-out national strike would be defeated by the large conservative minority within the union. At least with selective action, they argue, the militants can sustain the dispute. At a conference at Wembley in September, 80 824 voted for industrial action, but 48 713 voted against. About 2000 members resigned after last year's day of action against privatisation. Another 3000 are still being disciplined for ignoring it. The bureaucrats use the backwardness of their members to excuse their own failure to fight. They impose a financial levy as an alternative to giving a political lead. The point is that workers who want to fight will lose through selec-



Overshadowed: the bosses' mascot in the bosses' flag hangs over the POEU

tive action anyway. They have every interest in convincing the conservative minority that a national stoppage is the only way to win.

Whatever the bureaucrats may say about the 'victory' of the High Court ruling, British Telecom knows that it has already got the POEU on the run. From the Broad Left to the far right, the bureaucrats have accepted that privatisation is unstoppable. As the *Financial Times* put it:

'The action is thus implicitly seen as a marker for the future. As one senior official said: "We are showing the shareholders and the management of a newly-privatised BT that we are not some tame house union".'

But while there may be a future for the bureaucrats in a new, rationalised telecommunications service, there certainly will not be for the thousands of workers whose jobs are threatened. Workers in British Telecom who want to defend their jobs need to do two things. They will have to argue for all-out strike action. But first they have to get rid of their bosses' mascot, and the politics it represents.

Joan Phillips

Electrify for disaster

SEVEN HUNDRED WORKERS at the General Electric Company's Traction plant in Sheffield learned in early October that GEC was planning to close the factory with the loss of 600 jobs. Instead of taking immediate action to fight the closure, the union bureaucrats and the Labour council have been seeking ways to keep the bosses in business.

Until last year, business was good at the GEC empire's Sheffield outpost. But increased turnover and high export sales hid a real weakness. The plant is dependent on a single order of 1072 motors for the Seoul metro in South Korea, due for completion in 1984. This dire state of affairs precipitated a number of liaisons between the unions and the Labour Party. The Sheffield GEC Traction shop stewards' committee approached Sheffield City Council's employment department to co-ordinate discussions between the NUR, ASLEF and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU). The council put the case for railway electrification in its pamphlet *Electrify for jobs*.

Electrify for jobs counterposes a strategy of investment in electrification to the Government's cutbacks and privatisation schemes. It argues that the next 10 years will see a 14 000 route-miles world expansion of electrification. Investment in British Rail, it argues, would increase Britain's prospects of grabbing a share of these markets.

But even if British capital did invest in electrification, it would be done not for the benefit of railway workers, but at their expense. Neither GEC chairman Arnold Weinstock nor the Tory Government need advice from the Labour bureaucrats. They know that to electrify the rail network and build a home industry capable of competing on the world market demands massive attacks on railway workers.

In what is virtually an afterword — 'Some outstanding issues' — *Electrify for jobs* acknowledges this. All the official reports supporting electrification presume that it will entail productivity increases via job losses and changing work patterns on the railways. The experience of workers on the section of the Sheffield-London main line between Bedford and St. Pancras confirms this. Electrification went ahead by introducing one man operated trains and cutting staffing levels. Whether electrification goes ahead or not, the Labour and union leaders' campaign can only undermine the fight for jobs.

Accepting the labour bureaucrats' alternative schemes spells disaster for workers at Sheffield GEC Traction. Although they voted overwhelmingly to oppose the closure at a mass meeting on 5 October, they have been led up a blind alley by the Labour council and their union officials. Eight days after the closure announcement, *Sheffield Weekly Gazette* revealed that South Yorkshire County Council is participating in a £500 000 GEC programme to develop a modern British trolleybus. Chairman of the county passenger transport committee Alex Waugh announced: 'If this experiment is successful, we might see GEC rise like Phoenix from the ashes'. The trolleybus scheme may mean salvation for the bureaucrats in the railway unions and the council, but it certainly won't redeem Sheffield workers from the threat of redundancy. It may be the case that GEC wants to keep its finger in the electrification pie at the same time as pushing through rationalisations and changes in work practices. GEC and the council may now try to present the trolleybus scheme as a progressive alternative to closure. The problem for GEC workers is that the trolleybus project is likely to employ only a third of the present workforce.

The alternative to redundancies is not the bureaucrats' rationalisation schemes vamped up as job-savers, but a concerted fight to stop the closure of the Traction plant and defend every job.

Stan Mason



Union protest against the 'piratisation' of BT: the POEU pirates would be more effective disrupting exchanges rather than parading at seaside conferences

The Broad Lefts

The bureaucracy's left arm

OVER THE SUMMER the newspapers of the British left celebrated the election victories of Broad Left caucuses in two major unions, the post office engineers and the railway workers. In a number of white-collar public service unions — NALGO, NUPE and COHSE — Broad Left factions claimed significant advances. However the left's factional triumphs, in winning a majority on the POEU executive or electing Jimmy Knapp leader of the NUR, reflect no general swing to the left in the unions. The Broad Left's successes result from the redefinition of the meaning of 'left' in the unions. The left's jubilation is simply a sign of its shift to the right.

The 'new' Broad Left is different from the Broad Left of old (see box). Two forces have converged to push the Broad Left to the fore in a number of public sector unions. Left-wingers in the Labour Party have attempted to strengthen their position at party conference by getting the backing of union block votes. At the same time, officials of trade unions in nationalised industries and public services have sought to defend themselves against cuts by advocating militant action to preserve the existing forms of state intervention in the economy.

Rotten BLOC

The rise of the new Broad Left dates from the left campaigns inside the Labour Party after the 1979 General Election defeat. Left caucuses had existed in some unions before, but the left's campaigns — for mandatory reselection, an electoral college, conference control of the manifesto and Benn for deputy — gave a new impetus to radical activity in the unions. Benn's defeat only added to the momentum. It brought home forcefully to the carriers of the left's conference pocket calculators that to get their way at Blackpool or Brighton they needed union block votes.

The formation of the Broad Left Organising Committee after the setbacks to the left at the 1982 Conference indicated a more concerted approach to lobbying in the unions. At a conference earlier this year, BLOC defended the block vote system and drew up a 13-point programme to make it more accountable to the Broad Left. The programme is a list of proposals to wrest control of the conference-determining coupons from the hands of the general secretaries — and transfer them to the activists. For the Broad Left, democracy means all power to the junior bureaucrats who dominate union conferences and delegations — arenas where the Broad Left is strongest.

The left's middle class activists had little access to the traditional heavy metal unions. They concentrated their efforts on the more easily influenced public service unions. Some unions in which the Labour left already had members, such as the CPSA and NALGO, were not affiliated to the Labour Party. The left, always prepared to take a long-term view, devoted its energies to winning backing for affiliation of these unions to Labour. It also tried to rally support for Labour in the unions using the party's softer issues, notably nuclear disarmament.

Labour's General Election defeat and the subsequent leadership struggle helped to consolidate the developing relationship between the Broad Lefts in the unions and the soft left around Neil Kinnock and the Labour Coordinating Committee. Every union with a Broad Left leadership ended up backing the bureaucrats' dream ticket — Kinnock and Hattersley. The hard left's candidate for leadership — Eric Heffer — was always an outsider, but Michael Meacher expected to do better in the unions. In the event, only a handful of smaller industrial unions, often with a



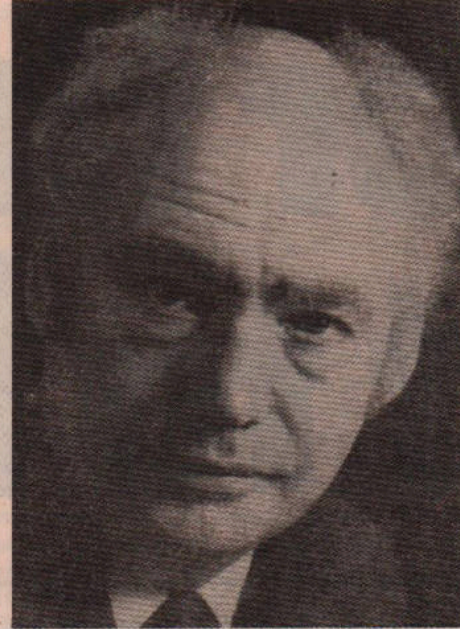
Scargill: militant spokesman for the British coal industry

substantial Stalinist faction, backed him. The capitulation of the new Broad Left to Kinnock's pragmatic leadership indicates a movement securely under the thumb of the bureaucracy.

Arthur Scargill makes a personal and a political link between the old and new Broad Lefts. Scargill was involved in the Broad Left movement that organised the successful strike action of the early 'seventies. But Scargill's rise to power in the NUM owes more to his fervent advocacy of the case for the British coal industry than to his prowess on the picket line. In the eyes of many miners, Scargill's most telling criticism of the Gormley years was that the old leadership had not pushed hard enough for subsidies and new investment in the declining British mining sector.

From Barnsley to Buzby

Scargill's commitment to a viable British coal industry has led to the NUM's close collaboration in rationalisations and pit closures. Even when Scargill launches industrial action it is always justified as a militant defence of the National Coal Board. This is how he announced the NUM's token action in protest against a diminutive wage offer in late October:



Knapp: more committed to British Rail than to NUR jobs

'The decision to impose a total overtime ban is only the first step in our campaign to save our industry, our jobs and get a standard of living at least equal to what we enjoyed in 1976.'

For the Broad Left in all unions the order is the same: 'our industry' first, our interests second.

The replacement of Sidney Weighell by Jimmy Knapp as leader of the NUR delighted the Labour left. The new executive promptly voted to support CND and Neil Kinnock — and to campaign for electrification and new investment in British Rail. Against Knapp's advice the new executive voted to boycott further talks on productivity with BR bosses. But it concurred with his appeal to give the leadership 'flexibility' by agreeing to the continuation of existing job-cutting negotiations. It also obliged BR management by accepting a wage rise of 4.5 per cent without a murmur. The NUR's Broad Left has done nothing to oppose massive job losses in BR's engineering workshops.

The rail employers are preparing another round of major job cuts. Between 1975 and 1983 they got rid of 55 000 jobs; they expect to chop another 25 900 in the next five years. Knapp is already on his knees in prayer:

The old Broad Left bows out

It is ironic that as the new Broad Left rises in the public sector, the surviving members of the Broad Left in the Manchester engineering industry are now being threatened with victimisation by the right-wing leadership of the AUEW.

The Broad Left organisations of the 'sixties were launched by the Communist Party in an attempt to broaden its influence within the trade union bureaucracy. They became influential among the engineering workers, the transport and general workers and the miners. In these unions the Communist Party's ambition to serve the bureaucracy corresponded with the national union leaderships' concern to keep in touch with an increasingly militant rank and file.

The Broad Lefts flourished in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies, leading resistance to incomes policies and anti-trade union legislation. They articu-

lated the traditional attachment of British manufacturing workers to collective bargaining methods' unrestricted by government interference. In key unions their electoral machines succeeded in pushing former representatives of the militant shop stewards into national office — Jack Jones in the TGWU and Hugh Scanlon in the AUEW.

After 1974, the combined impact of the recession and Labour's Social Contract destroyed the old Broad Left. Its adherence to free collective bargaining — the business unionism of the boom — provided no answers to the problems of mass unemployment and rampant inflation. Jones and Scanlon succumbed to Labour's appeals for sacrifices in the national interest, and the movement crumbled. Jones now leads the campaign for higher old age pensions, while Scanlon sits in the House of Lords.

'As a nationalised industry, railways have a moral responsibility, if nothing else, to pay reasonable rates of pay and provide decent conditions.'

No capitalist enterprise has any moral responsibility when it comes to making profits. Knapp's illusion, one common to all his Broad Left comrades, is that nationalisation suspends the harsh imperatives of the law of value.

The newly-elected Broad Left leaders in the POEU are following in the footsteps of their colleagues in the NUM and the NUR. The Broad Left won control of the executive because many members were dissatisfied with the feeble resistance put up by the old guard to the introduction of new technology and the threat of privatisation. The Broad Left promised to put up a better defence of BT than the right had achieved. Broad Left leader Colin Talbot explained that 'a large section of the members did not see it as left versus right' at the decisive June conference. Rather it was 'that the union had not been doing anything for a year on the major issues affecting us and now see something will be done'. As we report opposite, the Broad Left may have done more, but its political strategy is no more effective in mobilising the membership or fighting the Government.

White-collar lefts

Broad Lefts are proliferating in the public service unions. This summer's conference season has stimulated left caucuses in COHSE, NUPE and NALGO. In the past, Broad Lefts began among rank and file activists and were later incorporated by the bureaucracy. But these newer Broad Lefts are virtually extensions of the union machines from the start. The NALGO Broad Left is a good example.

Following a successful fringe meeting at the union's July conference, the NALGO left called a conference on privatisation in Leeds in September. The opening address came from the union's former president Peter Holt. Most of the 300 people present were senior stewards, branch secretaries or full-time officials. The key themes of the conference were the defence of state ownership against privatisation, and the preservation of the structures of union/management collaboration. Delegates upheld the principle of efficiency in local government as an appropriate concern of trade unionists. They condemned the Tories' three per cent pay offer on the grounds that it neglected 'the proper negotiating machinery'.

The experience of the Broad Left in the civil servants' union CPSA is a cautionary tale for other public service unions. Elected to power under the leadership of *Militant* supporter Kevin Roddy in May 1982, the left was ousted in a dramatic swing to the right only 12 months later. The Broad Left executive presided over stagnating pay, and sold out important struggles in Birmingham and Oxford. The left's betrayals led to increased demoralisation in the union and paved the way for the current right-wing leadership of Alistair Graham. Now the Broad Left is regrouping in several warring factions — mostly with the same old politics.

As long as left-wingers in public service unions subordinate their campaigns to the demands of the Labour Party and restrict their defence of workers' interests to the requirements of the public services, the setbacks will continue. And unfortunately it won't be just the Broad Left that gets a hammering. The way forward lies in challenging the politics of the Broad Left in every union where they have influence.

Helen Swift

Fighting for the right to fight

The appointment of Tom King as the front man of the Tory attack on the unions, following Norman Tebbit's promotion into the Cabinet seat of the disgraced Cecil Parkinson, brings no change in Government policy. The Tories are pressing ahead with the latest stage in their programme for altering the balance of power between the state and the official labour movement in favour of the capitalist class.

The capitalist offensive has demoralised and disoriented the trade union leaders. They have lost status, membership, and income. Incapable of fighting back against the state that has built up their prestige over past decades, appeasement has been the keynote of the bureaucrats' response to the Tory attack. They have made concession after concession to the Government in the hope that the onslaught on the unions would be mitigated. But their vacillation has only made the Tories bolder.

The fight to defend trade union rights today has become a fight to rebuild our unions — from the bottom up — into organisations that fight for workers' interests, instead of preserving the privileges of the bureaucracy. We look here at some problems raised by the offensive against the unions and some of the difficulties workers face in fighting back through strike action.

TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE of the fears created by mass unemployment, the Government has implemented a series of measures to curb trade union activity. At the same time the Tories have pressed on with plans to sell off state enterprises in which trade unions are well organised, and have encouraged firms to set up in areas like East Anglia and the South West, where trade unions are weakly established.

The success of the Tories' anti-trade union propaganda has put the TUC on the defensive. It has retreated from every Tory advance and is now preparing to change the arrangements for levying the political funds through which the unions support the Labour Party.

Only 39 per cent of trade unionists voted Labour in the June General Election. Even before any Tory-imposed ballot, a majority of members of five major unions — the print unions SOGAT and NGA, television union ACTT, and ASTMS and COHSE — contract out of paying the political levy to Labour. Even in some nominally left-wing, smaller unions — the white-collar engineers in TASS, the firemen, the furniture workers, the tobacco workers, the building workers and the cinema union NATTKE — large proportions contract out. While many members of these unions vote Tory or SDP, their leaders support CND and the left election tickets at Labour Party conferences. A recent MORI poll suggested that if ballots were held today, only the miners and NUPE would vote to retain links with the Labour Party. The labour bureaucracy has become aloof and out of touch with rank and file union members.

Strength in numbers?

The continuing high membership figures of the unions — still above 10 million despite a 10 per cent fall since 1979 — only underline their weakness. The labour bureaucrats and the left often take comfort from comparing

today's recession with the inter-war slump, when union membership fell to less than a quarter of the working class. But this contrast exposes the changing relationship between workers and their unions rather than any real advance in working class organisation.

In the 'twenties and 'thirties, workers joined unions because of a personal commitment to defending their class interests against the bosses. They paid their dues out of their own pockets to union representatives. Where possible they enforced the closed shop as a system of collective solidarity against the employer. The unions' growth over the past 20 years has been radically different. Union membership, especially in the public sector, has expanded largely through agreements between employers and union officials. Workers' dues have been checked off their wages by the employer and paid directly to the union. The closed shop has increasingly been imposed as a means of streamlining negotiations and disciplining conflict by formal agreement between bosses and bureaucrats.

The closed shop under attack

The unions of the Depression had a fairly small but relatively highly-committed membership, for whom trade unionism was a conscious choice. The unions of today's recession have a much bigger membership, but for many workers a trade union card simply comes with the job, as an empty formality. The much vaunted 'organisational strength' of the labour movement is in fact a measure of the integration of the union machine into the capitalist system over the post-war period. The inability of the bureaucrats to safeguard trade unions against a number of recent Tory attacks indicates that to defend our rights at work, we will have to break the bureaucrats' stranglehold and take control over our own organisations.

All the established practices and proce-

dures the union bureaucrats have built up in collaboration with management are now open to reappraisal. It has become commonplace for employers to overturn long-established agreements to impose harsher conditions on workers. Militant shop stewards have been victimised or neutralised; many have been replaced by workers' representatives who go along with the bosses' demands. Managements have pushed through large scale redundancies and new working practices to raise productivity and intensify exploitation, often after only token consultation with the unions. The recently published annual report of the Government's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) observes that many employers have decided that 'measures must be implemented regardless of the views of employees'. In recent months employers have begun to question the institutionalised closed shop and the check-off system which they had come to accept over the past decade.

Public sector employers, who led the way in introducing 'union membership agreements' — institutionalised closed shops — in the 'sixties and 'seventies, are now moving to abandon them. Employers in the water industry announced in September their repudiation of the closed shop agreement they had endorsed in the mid 'seventies. This followed a statement earlier in the year from British Rail personnel director Sidney Hoggart that the industry's trade union membership agreement had 'been overtaken by more recent events'. He was referring to the consequences of the NUR's ill-fated strike in summer 1982. At that time 12 000 union members — encouraged by BR chief Peter Parker's promise that no worker who crossed picket lines would lose his job if expelled from the union — scabbed on the strike. They were subsequently deprived of the rights to hold union office or claim benefits for five years, as a disciplinary measure short of expulsion from the union.



Picket lines at Vauxhall (top) and Monktonhall: w

A few hundred set up the breakaway Federation of Professional Railways Staff earlier this year. While BR has refused to recognise this scab union, management has withdrawn from its joint supervision of the closed shop with the NUR and made it clear that union membership is no longer a condition of continued employment on the railways.

Paying our dues

Union officials who never had to fight to establish closed shops in the first place are proving ineffective in defending them when agreements are unilaterally broken by the bosses. Of the three unions representing the water workers — GMBATU, NUPE and TGWU — only the last, which has the fewest members in the industry, has made any public protest. At a meeting of TGWU shop stewards, national official Jack Dromey announced that the union would not take any action to enforce the closed shop, but would simply wait for management to act. It was the same story at the NUR. Back in February a union spokesman assured members that BR would honour the closed shop agreement, which was 'of great help to them and the industry'. When a few months later the board effectively tore up the agreement the bureaucracy was dumbfounded.

In *Preparing for Power*, the programme of the RCP, we outlined our approach to the closed shop:



the trade unions were built by
workers to defend their
interests — but they have
become part of the system
instead of combat
organisations for
the working class



Workers' readiness to take strike action has been weakened by the bureaucrats' readiness to compromise

Rick Matthews (F.L.)

The institutionalised closed shop, which reached its zenith under the provisions for automatic dismissal contained in Labour's 1974 Trade Union and Labour Relations Act, can never be a reliable instrument of shop-floor power. A closed shop enforced by the bosses and their state will be used more to victimise militants than it will to deal with scabs. Insofar as it strengthens the unions, such an arrangement strengthens only the bureaucracy. The automatic closed shop turns entry into a union into a meaningless act: it is not surprising that as the practice has spread, many workers do not even know which union they are in. The closed shop as a deal between bureaucrats and bosses must be replaced with a system of 100 per cent union membership based on a dynamic relationship between the rank and file and its representatives.

Now that the bosses have shifted the balance of power in the workplace decisively to their advantage they no longer need the machinery they built up to contain workers' past militancy. They are moving in to dismantle the closed shop and other mediating institutions. The response of the bureaucracy to the bosses' opening salvos shows that they have become so subservient that they are incapable of fighting even to save their own machines. It is already apparent that the only way to secure 100 per cent union membership is by workers unilaterally breaking union/management agreements and enforcing their own closed shops, on their own terms.

The check-off system for the payment of union dues spread rapidly in the 'seventies to cover virtually the entire public sector and around half of private firms. While some large private white-collar employers have begun to review their check-off systems, the first major breach has come in local government. In September NALGO failed in a court action to press Birmingham City Council to restore the check-off system for its 9500 members on the council payroll. The Tory Council scrapped the 10-year-old agreement after NALGO disciplined 33 members who scabbed on a strike in the social services department in October 1982. The union's response was to insist that stewards would collect dues during working hours — and to warn the authorities that this would cost the council £90 000 a year in lost time. Council leader Nigel Bosworth replied by threatening disciplinary action against any steward who collected dues in work time: within days four stewards received warning letters. The union proceeded to hold a mass meeting of NALGO members on 5 October, which voted by a majority of two to one against taking any action to force management to withdraw its disciplinary action against the stewards. The union's 10-year cooperation in a system which put control over union funds in management hands and distanced stewards from rank and file workers meant that the stewards could not rely on grass-roots support when manag-

Jobs shuffle

The recession has dealt British capitalism a blow from which it will never recover. For the first time in history the workshop of the world has become a net importer of manufactured goods. Britain seems well on the way to becoming a nation of shopworkers. Between 1979 and 1982 steel output fell by half and car production by 54 per cent. There was a 63 per cent drop in the tonnage of merchant ships built, and textiles and clothing output slumped by 36 per cent.

Britain's industrial collapse has accelerated the transformation of the working class. In the first three years of Tory rule 1.4 million jobs disappeared — making a total of more than two million in the decade from 1972. British Steel has cut its workforce from 210 000 to 75 000 in six years; the British motor industry has shed almost a quarter of a million jobs since 1979, and more than 310 000 textiles and clothing jobs have gone for ever.

Over the past few years Britain's long, slow retreat in the face of overseas competition has turned into a disorderly rout. By the end of last year manufacturing output was 12 per cent below the slump level of 1975. Ironically, North Sea oil, greeted as the saviour of British capitalism, has only accelerated its demise. While Britain has become a net exporter of oil, the positive effect of oil revenues on the balance of trade boosted the exchange rate of the pound by some 20 to 25 per cent. If it were not for North Sea oil British manufactured goods would be cheaper on the world market and foreign imports would be more expensive. Thus North Sea oil has made British industry even less competitive and intensified the recession.

The Tories and their backers are pinning their hopes of recovery on the 'new technology' sector. But they have few grounds for optimism. Since 1979 the government has implemented 70 different measures to assist small businesses. Computer entrepreneur Clive Sinclair is Thatcher's golden boy. But small firms are going bankrupt almost as fast as they are being set up. The few jobs they create cannot compensate for the collapse of traditional manufacturing. Britain's largest computer company, ICL, has made 10 000 workers redundant over the past three years. The only future for the dynamic small industrialist lies in enforcing intensive rates of exploitation on non-unionised workers.

The service sector continued to grow through the 'seventies: it now accounts for 70 per cent of GNP and employs 12.5 million people, nearly two thirds of all those at work. Services are relatively insulated from market pressures. But even services such as international transport and finance which do face competition have managed to expand in the recession. Oil tax revenues have helped to finance public expenditure and public employment. Increased consumer spending encouraged by sterling's high exchange rate also helped to boost trade and jobs in the retail and distribution sectors.

The public sector has played some part in cushioning the impact of the industrial decay of the past decade. But public spending cuts now threaten more and more jobs in the nationalised industries, the NHS, the civil service and local government. The National Coal Board and the civil service have both shed 10 per cent of their workforces in the last five years — and they are both scheduled for more drastic cuts to come. Hospital workers and town hall clerks are next in line.

ement turned against them.

While NALGO pleaded to no avail that the check-off would save the council money, the *Daily Telegraph* was canvassing the bosses' opinions of Birmingham's radical departure from 'seventies industrial relations practices. The Institute of Directors was the most forthcoming. It advised caution in sweeping away check-off as 'it would force shop stewards to go around collecting dues and thus give them an opportunity to campaign on behalf of the union and propagate political views'. This is exactly why we are in favour of workers getting rid of the check-off system. *Preparing for Power* puts it like this:

'The check-off system makes sense for the bureaucracy, but the automatic deduction of dues from wages by the employer removes a crucial link between union and workers and gives management and bureaucrats direct control over union funds. Union membership becomes a passport to passivity and the rank and file can no longer take sanctions against their leaders. The traditional collection of dues at union meetings should be re-established. Union representatives must be forced to convince their members of the need for active involvement in union affairs.'

While we are resolutely opposed to any further state interference in trade union affairs along the lines the Tories propose, we are in favour of workers deciding to stop paying the political levy to the Labour Party.

The automatic deduction from wages of political levies to the Labour Party must also be stopped. Instead, a proportion of each worker's union dues should be put into a fund for political activity useful to the working class as a whole.'

Workers' control over the funding of their own organisations and activities is vital for the defence of workers' rights.

Accountability in the workplace

To become effective the unions have to be made accountable to their members. Over the past 20 years the union bureaucracy has expanded through the incorporation of full-time convenors and shop stewards. Many have been provided by employers with offices and 'facility time' to carry out trade union functions. Such representatives have

been increasingly drawn into collaboration with the bosses and have become more and more remote from their members.

The urgent need for a break with these practices is clear to many active workers. Yet when a prominent industrial militant in the Socialist Workers' Party recently suggested in the party's monthly review that stewards should reject facility time and organise independently of the employers, he raised a storm of controversy. The SWP's leading trade union activists condemned this as 'ultra-left nonsense'. The central committee itself joined the discussion, arguing that 100 per cent facility time was undesirable, 'rather it should be spread as widely as possible among the stewards'.

The entire debate in the SWP missed the central issue — that of control. Workers should force their employers to concede time for workplace representatives to keep in touch with their members. But this should be allocated by the workers themselves and kept under their control. The issue is not the percentage of working hours spent in facility time but whether the steward is accountable to management or to the rank and file. As we argue in *Preparing for Power* 'only through the direct accountability of representatives to workplace assemblies can the interests of the majority be expressed'.

Fighting to win

Strikes in 1983 have reached their lowest level for 20 years. There has been a steady decline in trade union militancy since the recession worsened sharply in 1979. The main burden of responsibility for the failure of the labour movement to mount an effective defence of jobs and living standards lies with the trade union leaders. To win any dispute today workers need to raise the stakes and broaden and intensify industrial action. But this is anathema to the bureaucrats. They fear that militancy will only further provoke the employers and the government. Their strategy is to keep their heads down and pray for a revival in the British economy to restore the good old days of the 'sixties and 'seventies.

While the leadership of the labour movement indulges in wishful thinking about an

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upturn, the working class has suffered a series of setbacks. The failure of the bureaucracy to give any lead in struggle has paved the way for defeats. It has helped to create despondency about the efficacy of trade unions and strike action in fighting redundancies and deteriorating conditions. As a result, workers are more reluctant to strike and when they do take action they often aim for limited objectives.

At the same time many workers have shown a willingness to fight back against the Tories. Sections of the working class with little or no experience of strike action have come out in recent months — civil servants, water workers, local government officers and post office engineers. And some workers who have a long tradition of militancy have shown that they are still prepared to have a go — in the car factories, on the docks and in the mines and shipyards. It is possible to distinguish three broad types of strikes over the past few months.

Public sector set pieces

The biggest strikes of the Thatcher years have been the confrontations over pay in the public sector — in the civil service in 1981, the health service last year, and the water industry earlier this year. The Government's determination to enforce even lower wage rises and impose further cuts, either through privatisation or through direct rationalisation programmes, makes further disputes similar to current conflicts in British Telecom and the NHS inevitable. So far all the major strikes have ended in more or less unfavourable compromises. These strikes have thrown up a number of common problems.

The public service unions always prefer a diffuse protest campaign to hard-hitting strike action. Their object is to put pressure on the Government by winning public sympathy. The bureaucrats go for selective, limited, local action rather than an all-out national stoppage. They make a show of leading strike action to retain the allegiance of the rank and file, not to defeat the employers. Their model is the notorious September 'day of action' in last year's NHS dispute — a maximum of public performance with a minimum of punch. The officials of the public service unions have been too closely tied to the state machine for too long to be able to break away and lead effective action against it.

Behind the pathetic gestures of the GMBATU and COHSE lies the total dependence of the labour bureaucracy on the state. This is expressed in the bureaucrats' constant attempts to justify industrial action in terms of their commitment to the public service itself. Hence the GMBATU called the water workers out because it had the best interests of the water supply industry at heart, and COHSE organised nurses on picket lines to save 'our' NHS. The public service union leaders never claim that they are organising strike action simply to defend working class living standards. The bureaucrats put their faith in the state's arbitration and conciliation procedures, and if they fail, they hope a state-appointed inquiry will get them off the hook. They dare not trust in the power of the working class, because if that force was unleashed it would challenge the official labour movement's cosy compliance with the capitalist state.

In each sector of the public services effective action is undermined by sectional conflict among a number of different unions — CPSA versus SCPS, NUPE versus COHSE, GMBATU versus NUPE. The need for a single union in each service sector is apparent to any worker who has seen the consequences of the existing divisions and rivalries. A single sector union could coordinate united action at a national level and provide maximum scope for rank and file initiative at local level.

'Enough is enough'

The second group of strikes happen more often in manufacturing industry, generally in response to changes in working conditions or the announcement of compulsory redundancies. The slogan

'enough is enough' sums up the response of the workers at BL's Cowley plant who went on strike in April over the withdrawal of washing-up time, after they had suffered a long series of setbacks in pay and conditions. It expresses too the outlook of workers at Highlands Fabrication's Nigg yard, Michelin's Stoke plant, and at Greening's engineering works in Warrington, all of whom have taken strike action in recent months to defend jobs and conditions against aggressive and provocative managements. The same attitude led workers at the Vauxhall car factories at Ellesmere Port and Luton to embark on industrial action to win a decent wage rise after a long period of stagnation when the company's competitive position seemed to be improving. These strikes are virtually always unsuccessful — even though the bureaucrats sometimes claim short-term 'victories'.

The most significant feature of 'enough is enough' strikes is their very limited objectives. While there was clearly much more involved in their industrial action, the formal demand of workers at Cowley was to retain a few minutes respite at the end of the working day. At Vauxhall the claim was for a marginally improved pay offer. Deepening recession has tended to reduce workers' horizons further still. The recent strike at Britains in East London aimed to take one hour off a standard 50-hour week! The limited scope of workers' demands allows considerable scope for compromise and for the bureaucrats to claim victories when very little has been achieved. For example, in the strike at Hindle Gears in Bradford, the officials greeted the referral of the dispute to an industrial tribunal as a great breakthrough.

The central problem with 'enough is enough' strikes is indicated by the slogan itself. It implies that workers have been prepared to make sacrifices in pay and conditions or even in jobs, but now want to draw the line at the latest or most extreme humiliation proposed by management. At BL, workers' representatives claimed that they had made a series of

concessions to the bosses on manning levels, labour flexibility and workplace organisation. The attempt to cut washing-up time was the last straw. At Greening's, convenor Arthur Conheeny declared that the union had accepted a 15 per cent cut in the workforce last year and was ready to find volunteers for redundancy this year. But the bosses' insistence on compulsory redundancies, cuts in bonuses and the emasculation of the shop steward system was going too far. At Vauxhall, shop stewards at all the major plants protested that they had cooperated in raising productivity and keeping down wages over recent years.

The left does a disservice to the working class by celebrating as victories the limited compromise settlements sometimes achieved in 'enough is enough' strikes. At Greenings, the bosses were forced to withdraw 24 compulsory redundancies after a six month long strike, but the AUEW accepted a high degree of work-sharing, flexibility and redeployment. At Nigg, the workers went back as the union agreed to enter negotiations over a 21-point plan to cut labour costs. The Michelin managers were forced to withdraw proposed shift changes but anticipated introducing some changes in 'the medium term'. In all these instances the only real victors were the bureaucrats, whose rights to consultation were strengthened by rank and file action. It is certain that anybody returning to these plants in six months time will find fewer workers working in worse conditions. The left celebrates compromises that save the face of the bureaucracy to boost its own despondent mood. But the working class needs an accurate assessment of the results of industrial action, not radical cheerleaders.

When the left is not cheering on the bureaucrats, it joins them in blaming the backwardness of the working class for their own reluctance to give a lead in struggle. Thus in the Britains' strike the SWP echoed the TGWU official's view that little could be achieved through militant action. It limited its intervention

to criticising RCP supporters, who did give some direction to the strike, and bemoaning the conservatism of the workers. This approach makes defeat more likely. It defies the elementary principle that it is always better to fight and force the bosses to make concessions than give in and make concessions to them without a struggle. When workers return to work after they have forced something out of the bosses, they retain the capacity to fight again. When they return after having setbacks inflicted upon them, they are vulnerable to the sort of victimisation and harassment encountered by the Britains' workers after their defeat.

Gesture strikes

The third category of strikes are the token gestures of militancy, sponsored by the bureaucracy in response to closures of workplaces that involve substantial job losses. The posturing of the steelworkers' union over the major shutdown at Corby, the miners' leaders' token protests over pit closures in South Wales and Scotland, and Labour-sponsored occupations against hospital closures (see Thornton View, page 9) are recent examples.

The bureaucrats have cooperated fully in the rationalisation and productivity drives that have decimated jobs in steel and coal. And they have participated in hundreds of hospital closures — especially under the last Labour government. But when it comes to major plant closures and an even more drastic round of NHS cuts, the union leaders feel obliged to make some sort of protest. They fear losing all credibility in the eyes of their members if they refuse to endorse action against mass job losses. However, the bureaucrats' gesture strikes have a uniformly disastrous outcome for the workers involved.

The unions try to campaign against major closures on the grounds that they are not in the interests of British capitalism. The shutdown of excess steel capacity is presented as a shortsighted policy which will leave British industry behind when the upturn comes. According to Arthur Scargill pit closures are the result of a misconceived national energy policy which prefers to import cheap coal rather than mine expensive coal from clapped-out pits. The bureaucrats protest against mass sackings on the grounds that redundancy and dole payments will be a bigger burden on the exchequer than maintaining unprofitable industries or unproductive services. For the unions and the Labour Party, closures are always a threat to industry, the government, local shopkeepers, anybody — before they are a menace to the working class. The bureaucrats extend their tradition of class collaboration into campaigns against closures. The effect is to demoralise working class resistance to major attacks. The bureaucrats want middle class lobbying tactics against closure, not working class action. Hence the union leaders always try to restrict the scope of militancy. If workers occupy a threatened plant, the officials try to keep it legal and decent. They vigorously oppose attempts to escalate or spread the action. If workers go on strike the union leaders try to keep it local. When they are sure the situation is under control they make the strike official. The manoeuvring of the Scottish NUM over the threatened closure of the Monktonhall pit is the latest example of the cynical strategy that has paved the way for closures at Kinneil and Cardowan.

When miners despair of the union and refuse to give their support to further phoney strikes, the bureaucrats accuse the workers of being bought off by redundancy pay-outs. In reality they have been sold out by the NUM before and see no alternative but to make the best of their expulsion from the ranks of the employed.

Our approach to the gesture strike must be to give full support to workers' struggles against closures whilst exposing the role of the bureaucracy. These strikes more than any others reveal the urgent need for workers to take control of the unions out of the hands of the leaders who have usurped them, and turn them into effective fighting organisations.

Pay patterns

Who are the 'upwardly-mobile workers' towards whom the new model Kinnock Labour Party intends to direct its marketing resources? There have been very few workers whose living standards have improved significantly since Harold Wilson — Kinnock's last predecessor to win a general election — took office as Prime Minister in 1974. There has been intense media anxiety recently as the rate of wage rises edged above the level of inflation this summer, for the first time since the Thatcher government began to get on top of the unions shortly after taking office. Yet pay rises are currently running at their lowest level for 16 years. By the end of the year workers are expected to be winning earnings increases averaging around seven per cent, while inflation reaches six per cent.

Perhaps Kinnock and his aides have been scrutinising the league table of the highest earning male manual workers? They will find here miners, dockers, printers and other skilled industrial workers. These workers may be able to buy their own cars and houses and they may have succeeded in maintaining wage levels since the onset of the recession. But the fact that between a quarter and a half of their earnings comes from overtime, productivity and shift work bonuses indicates that they often have little time or energy to catch up with Labour Party political broadcasts on their home videos. Another problem for Labour is that virtually all of these occupations are in steep decline.

Maybe the new Labour leadership is looking towards the booming oil and new technology sectors? Workers for Esso and Mobil earn among the highest craft rates in the country. Other highly-paid skilled workers are employed by Westland Helicopters, British Aerospace and Amersham International. Workers in the few growth areas of British capitalism are now separated from those on the bottom rung of the wages ladder by basic pay differentials of up to £100 a week. But workers in the labour-intensive new technology sector remain a small minority of the working class.

Are white-collar workers the target of Labour's more dynamic image? Computer programmers have now made it into the top 20 male occupations. In this league they rub shoulders with doctors, university academics and police inspectors — not social groups generally considered a strong constituency for the Labour Party. But the vast majority of white-collar workers are concentrated in clerical grades in banking and insurance or in the public services. More than 80 per cent of clerical workers on the lowest rates earn less than £100 a week. As most of these workers can expect their wages to be 'downwardly-mobile' in coming years, presumably they will not be a central concern of the new Labour Party.

With substantial variations, those in work have just about managed to hold their own. The four million unemployed, the seven million on Supplementary Benefit and the nine million pensioners have been pushed remorselessly below the poverty line. Those at work have often maintained wages at the cost of conceding to punitive productivity deals, flexible working arrangements, no-strike agreements, and long-term, inflation-vulnerable pay offers. The South has sustained its relative prosperity, while the North-West and the Midlands have plunged into poverty. Women have dropped back again far behind men after a slight advance in the 'seventies. Labour's futile quest for support among some section of the working class as a means of restoring its electoral fortunes only underlines the irrelevance of the Labour Party to the real problems thrown up by the recession for the working class as a whole.



& Labour councils

The long march back to the parish pump

David Blunkett was the hero of this year's Labour Party conference. The radical leader of the Sheffield City Council won a seat on the national executive at his first attempt and won plaudits from right, left and centre. After Labour's General Election catastrophe in June, Blunkett's brand of municipal socialism seems a promising way to revive the party.

Last month the Tories announced plans to abolish Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council and the six Labour-controlled metropolitan counties. The Tories also plan to cut the rate support grant to local government (again) and to 'cap' the rates of high-spending councils. The Government's assault on Labour's municipal bastions is a direct attack on workers' jobs and services. But can municipal socialism defend them? Fran Eden and Helen Simons unravel the strands of Labour's lifeline.

IN A RECENT PIECE in *Labour Herald*, the house journal of Labour's municipal socialists, Tony Benn pointed to the local councils as the roots to which Labour should return:

'The rediscovery of municipal socialism, with all its potential in terms of services, education, health, transport and campaigning for peace is of critical importance...for it was the struggles of the nineteenth century to develop local government which provided the great growth points to train our people and create the foundations on which the later welfare state was built.'

Benn is right to see the development of local government as a formative experience for the Labour Party. Labour's 'people' were 'trained' in the mechanics of capitalist administration in the local state bodies created during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Fabian reformers

Municipal government has never been anything more than capitalist administration at a local level. From the early nineteenth century, parish and borough councils took over responsibility for basic services, such as gas supplies and road works. Party politics rarely impinged on council affairs. Councils were often made up of sturdy local businessmen trying to create some order from the chaos of Victorian Britain. The burghers were in favour of expanding local state services because they recognised that a modern capitalist economy could not run along unlit, dirt roads.

The mundane affairs of local government were first invested with the title of municipal socialism in the 1870s, when Liberal imperialist Joseph Chamberlain pioneered the systematic expansion of services in Birmingham. Chamberlain was a vociferous supporter of the British state, both in its empire-building exploits abroad, and in its organisation of municipal facilities at home. He expanded Birmingham's local government under the slogan 'high rates mean a healthy city'. Chamberlain's council was 'socialist' because it saw the

need to accommodate the swelling ranks of the working class. His Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act of 1875 was the first municipal housing measure.

Bourgeois local government reformers tried to impose order on the sprawling towns and cities thrown up by industrialisation. The attempt to come to terms with urban chaos and social instability was also the impetus behind the middle class reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — the Fabians. Led by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, the Fabians had a profound impact on the development of the early Labour Party. The Fabian view was that all society's problems could be solved by a rational administration made up of intellectuals and 'experts'. Enlightened individuals (such as members of the Fabian Society) could use the expanded machinery of local government to benefit 'the community' as a whole. The Fabians' 'municipalisation' sought not to challenge capitalism but to make it more efficient. Their aim was 'not the subdivision of property, whether capital or land, but the control and administration of it by the representatives of the community' (*Socialism: true and false*, Fabian Tract 51).

The Fabians used the emergent labour bureaucracy as a vehicle for advancing their policies. The Fabians welcomed the 'new unionism' of the late 1880s. They saw the 'respectable' labour movement as a buffer against the feared and hated 'residuum' of unemployed and casual labourers. The Webbs manipulated the power of the labour movement to carry Fabian plans for local government to fruition. Fabian tracts on every aspect of municipal government were circulated widely, and Beatrice Webb in particular cultivated the union leaders.

The Fabians argued that socialism could be built 'on the instalment plan by local councils'. Their intervention coincided with the appearance of working class leaders in local government, after the 1888 Local Government Act established popularly-elected councils. Working class councillors in the Liberal Party, the Inde-



Sheffield Council leader Blunkett: can Labour rally in the town halls?

pendent Labour Party, and later (after 1900) in the Labour Party, were attracted to the Fabian ideas of state intervention. The infant labour bureaucracy was as keen as the intellectuals to reorganise society and to suppress the 'residuum', seen as a danger to organised workers. Councils such as West Ham, which was controlled by an alliance of progressives from 1898, pursued the management of services on behalf of the local 'community'. Many early working class councillors wanted to use local government to improve workers' living conditions. But the function of local government remained unchanged. Whoever sat on them, municipal councils assisted capitalist expansion and provided a minimal level of shoddy services for working class communities.

The Social Democratic Federation was the largest radical organisation outside the Labour Party. The SDF proclaimed its support for revolution and characterised 'municipal politics' as 'a phase in the class struggle against the exploiters and not in any sense a petty affair of local government reform' (Quoted in J Hinton, *Labour and Socialism*). But in practice, SDF councillors supported Fabian politics around housing, 'fair wages', and even 'labour colonies' — concentration camps for 'industrial malingers'. The SDF failed to provide a political alternative to municipal socialism. Its inability to establish any coherent opposition to Labourism condemned the working class to be used in the Fabians' reactionary plans.

From Poplar to Parliament

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Labour Party councillors learnt the rudiments of council administration. After the First World War, the party sought to put its experience to use at national level. The Labour leaders drew up a new constitution and launched the party as a national force in British politics. But local government remained Labour's most important sphere of influence. While Labour's parliamentary representation fluctuated dramatically in the 'twenties and 'thirties, the party made steady advances in local government.

Labour Party councillors were changing. The old municipal socialists had come up from the roots of the labour movement and were forced to strike radical postures to contain working class pressure. The

new Labour councillors were increasingly removed from any working class base. Their concern was to present Labour as a respectable party. The conflict between the two wings came to a head in response to Poplar Council's fight against public spending cuts in the 1920s. Poplar mayor and Fabian fellow traveller George Lansbury led a militant campaign against the cuts, to keep it under Labour Party control. Hackney mayor and London party secretary Herbert Morrison joined union bureaucrats and Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald in condemning Lansbury's actions and Poplar's prodigal spending of ratepayers' money on benefits to the starving unemployed. Morrison's concern was to establish Labour's reputation for sound financing and sensible administration. After the defeat of Poplar, the Morrison wing and the labour bureaucracy established control. But left-wing figures like Lansbury still had an important part to play in delivering the working class up for the sacrifices the system required. His role in the Labour Government of 1929, and as party leader in the 'thirties, was to give the reactionary politics of the bureaucracy a socialist stamp.

Far-sighted members of the new Labour Party bureaucracy recognised the usefulness of the old municipal socialists. As mayor of neighbouring Stepney, the young Clement Attlee supported the Poplar campaign. Attlee was typical of the new breed of local Labour leaders. A moderate barrister, Attlee was co-opted as mayor. During his stay in office Attlee was busy on the mushrooming local state bodies — hospital committees, boards of school governors, Whitley councils — through which the Labour bureaucracy was consolidating its influence. After his election as MP for Limehouse in 1922, Attlee served as the chair of Stepney borough's electricity committee. During the General Strike of 1926, Attlee negotiated a compromise with local union leaders which ensured that the electricity workers stayed at work 'to keep the hospitals running'. Local businessmen took advantage of this cynical move to keep their factories running throughout the strike.

During the 1930s Labour councils in cities such as Sheffield, Glasgow and London helped British capitalism through the Depression. Through a combination

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of coercion and conciliation the councils held back the struggles of the unemployed. In 1935, unemployed workers staged huge and violent demonstrations against cuts in welfare payments, which were then administered by local government. In Sheffield, for example, about 40 000 unemployed iron and steel workers were joined by Yorkshire miners in a march to the city hall to demand that the Labour council restore the cuts. The council refused to meet the workers' delegation. Instead it unleashed a wave of police baton charges to force the workers off the streets. When it became obvious the police could not win, the Labour councillors rushed to London and obtained the National Government's permission to restore benefits to their previous miserable level. This action ensured that the protests did not go beyond Labour's political control.

The year 1935 marked a turning point in Labour Party fortunes. Labour won London County Council for the first time and Attlee became leader of the party. Ten years later, Attlee was prime minister and Morrison was a leading figure in his cabinet. Both put their experience of managing capitalism at municipal level to good use, enforcing wage controls, rationalising industry and extending state ownership. Labour, already established as the natural party of local government, was fast becoming the natural party of national government. During the years of the post-war boom, municipal socialism became a forgotten term. Labour administrations became divorced from the working class. Labour councillors confined their activities to committee rooms and developed cosy relations with local businessmen. In the 'sixties, Labour councils became notorious for the mass



Planning to make Labour popular: the GLC's alternatives to fighting to save jobs

construction of soul-destroying tower blocks and damp and draughty pre-fabricated housing estates. Scandals like the T Dan Smith-Poulson affair exposed the web of bribery and fraud linking Labour councillors and building contractors, especially in Labour's rotten boroughs in the North.

Labour's national leadership turned a blind eye to municipal corruption. Local councils became little more than a conveyor belt to national office. Between 1945 and 1979, 45 per cent of Labour MPs began their rise to parliamentary

glory as humble Labour councillors.

The recession has brought a renewed enthusiasm for municipal socialism inside the Labour Party. Labour's electoral collapse has forced the party to unite in defence of the areas of local government which are still under its control. Staving off Tory plans to abolish the metropolitan councils, and retaining the rate-setting powers of other municipal bodies, is a cause dear to the hearts of all who want to salvage the Labour Party. The young Labour Party came of age in the municipal authorities. Now senile, Labour is having a second childhood trying to get back to the local councils that served its purposes in the past.

The rates and our jobs

The Tories' proposals do represent a real attack on the working class. But the Labour councils' resistance to the Government's plans is not rooted in any concern with working class interests. The incorporation of Labour administrators into the local state has made them more concerned to balance accounts than defend workers' living standards. Councils such as the GLC or the 'red' London boroughs of Islington and Lambeth have responded to cuts in central government funding by raising the rates at the same time as running down services. This strategy has left the councils open to the current round of attacks. High rates and shoddy services which leave the streets strewn with rubbish and council houses in a chronic state of disrepair have made local government unpopular with the working class. The Government has been able to manipulate workers' dissatisfaction with the councils to win popular approval for its attacks on jobs and services.

The Labour councils have replied to the 'rate-capping' and abolition proposals by resurrecting the tired ideas of municipal socialism. After half a century the Labour left has rediscovered the notion that there is something progressive about local government. But Labour councillors are aware of the lack of public sympathy for the red tape and rotten services of local government. They are now trying to mobilise support by refusing the claims of inefficiency, by appealing to middle class sentiments about local democracy and by arguing for more 'community involvement' as a way around the shortcomings of municipal government.

In the best traditions of Fabianism, the Labour councils today declare their commitment to efficient capitalist management. The Tories' London regional transport plan, for example, which proposes shifting the responsibility for bus and tube services in the capital to a government-appointed board, has been attacked by GLC councillors as unnecessary. GLC Transport Committee chair Dave Wetzel pointed out the stringent efficiency measures which his council is already helping to introduce in London Transport: 'Good-housekeeping exercises have been carried out in LT and we're delighted that they have been so successful in reducing unnecessary costs since we took over'. Just what these 'good-house-

keeping exercises' mean for the working class was illustrated last month. London Transport announced plans to axe more than 1000 jobs at its Aldenham, Essex works. Another 1900 jobs are under threat at LT's Chiswick bus works. These measures for reducing 'unnecessary costs' were prompted by the discovery that contracting the work out could save LT £8m. The GLC's 'efficient' local government means attacking public sector workers and the services on which working class communities depend.

Instead of taking a stand to defend jobs and services, the Labour councils are trying to save their institutions. The councils have appealed for a campaign to protect local democracy. Aware of the disquiet many Tories and Liberals feel about the Government's latest proposals, left-wing Labour councils have set out to unite everybody who 'cares' about local government. The Labour councils that have combined to form the Association of London Authorities are spending £100 000 on their 'London Charter', a petition designed to court middle class opinion. GLC leader Ken Livingstone has gone even further. The GLC has spent £800 000 promoting its appeal to defend local government as 'a vital check on the centralising power of government and a defence for the individual'. The GLC has peddled its stall around the country during the conference season, lobbying anybody who will listen from the CBI, the Tories or the Liberals. The Labour councils are willing to accommodate to any anti-working class politicians or employers if it will save their own skins. Their aim is not to defend workers, but to protect their place in the structure of local government. Left-wing council leaders like Lambeth's Ted Knight recently admitted that it would be almost impossible for them to fight the 'rate-capping' proposals. But they dismissed the idea that they should give up their positions and make local Tories carry out the 'inevitable' cuts. Labour's plea is that it can administer the same cuts in a more caring and compassionate manner.

The early municipal socialists came up from the working class and tried to use local government to benefit their communities. They failed because they accepted bourgeois rationality in Fabian packaging. Today's Labour councils are attempting to use a multitude of municipal quangos to win back working class support for Labour. David Blunkett's recent pamphlet 'Building from the bottom: the Sheffield experience' (produced, appropriately enough, by the Fabian Society) readily admits the problem: 'No one will easily defend a socialist principle (like for example direct labour) if it is encapsulated in a service (like council house repairs) which is paternalistic, authoritarian or plain inefficient'. Blunkett's solution is to 'provide services sensitively and efficiently' and extend the 'accountability' of local government by involving the community. But the municipal socialists cannot defend workers by involving more trade union officials, liberals, professionals and local entrepreneurs in a morass of quangos.

Democracy and dictatorship

The ruling class is not sentimental about local government. Throughout the twentieth century, state power has shifted away from Hackney and Hampshire towards Whitehall and Westminster. A recent feature in *The Times* by leading Thatcherite ideologue Roger Scruton suggested that the sensible thing would be to dispense with elected local authorities altogether. The municipal socialists are trying to persuade the working class to stake its future on the defence of an anachronistic layer of the bourgeois state. The history of Labour in local government shows that workers have nothing to gain from municipal politics. What the working class needs is not rhetoric about 'local democracy' but a national movement that fights for jobs and services at all levels of society. The British working class broke out of its parochial past 150 years ago. Instead of retreating to the parish pump of local bourgeois democracy, the task of the proletariat remains to fight for the establishment of its dictatorship at the level of state power.

Going local

The Tories call it 'reorganisation'. The Labour left calls it 'decentralisation'. The Tories do it in the name of efficiency. The Labour left does it in the name of service to the community. But whoever's doing it and whatever its justification, it means only one thing to local government workers — redundancies, changes in work practices, loss of pay, 'deskilling', increased discipline and victimisations.

Tory-controlled councils such as Westminster and Kent have taken on their workforces directly, reorganising whole departments or services, demanding wage-cuts, redundancies and altered work practices. The threat of privatisation has often been enough to bring union officials rushing to the negotiating table to offer up jobs in the cause of efficiency.

Some Labour-controlled councils have used the same tactics to make savings. Avon County Council has laid off dozens of school meals staff, insisted on temporary contracts for new teaching appointments, and is now closing down residential care homes. Labour councils in inner London and other metropolitan areas have used a different approach. They have tried to rally local support against Tory attacks on local government spending. The left alternative to Tory cuts is decentralisation of local government services. Left Labour councils such as Hackney are sensitive to criticisms of 'inefficiency' and reluctant to impose still more rate increases. Hackney is making cuts by reorganising services into local neighbourhood offices:

'Local people will be able to get things done quickly and efficiently...while more complicated issues should be handled more efficiently with fewer officials in the town hall.' (Hackney goes local)

The council's new methods of cutting costs have not halted rent and rate rises.

The left-wing councils have promoted broad alliances of councillors and 'the community' against the Tory measures. Labour councils use radical anti-Tory rhetoric and eulogise about

local control and accountability to win support for their cost-cutting exercises. In addition, left-wing councillors use their influence with local government union officials and activists to negotiate punitive local agreements. Hackney Council has produced a draft agreement for the unions which includes open-ended job descriptions and contracts and surrenders the right to take industrial action. The consequences are a blurring of job definitions, erosion of pay and conditions, increased discipline and fewer jobs.

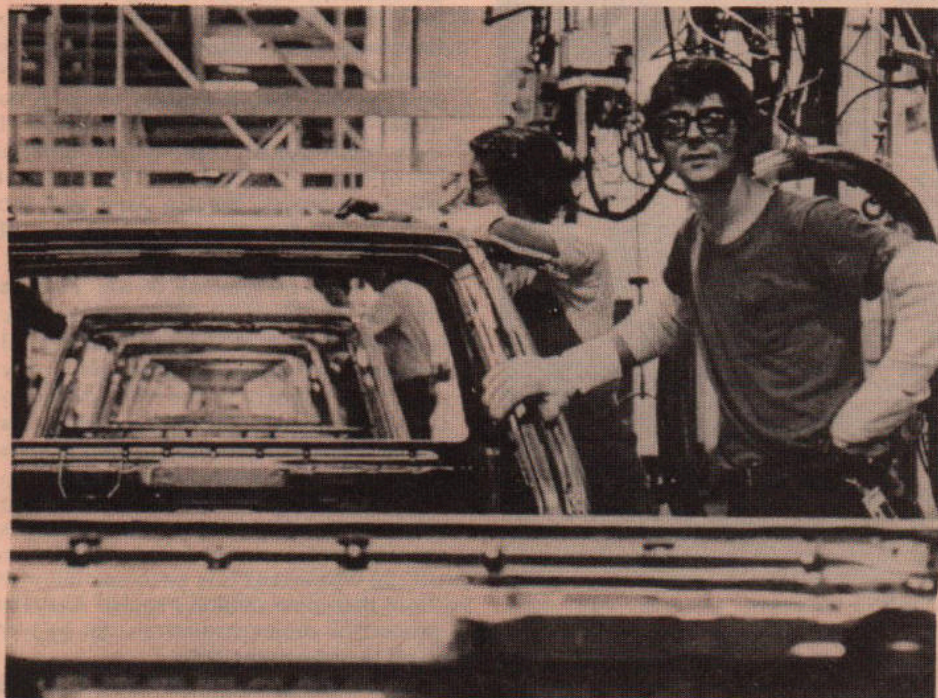
'No to privatisation' is the favourite anti-Tory slogan of the Labour left. But left Labour councils are increasingly using private contractors and consultants in local authority building programmes. Next door to Hackney Town Hall, Wates builders are improving a block of council-owned flats. Camden and Hackney councils are now contracting out council house building — the traditional preserve of direct labour organisations — to housing associations. Tower Hamlets Council is also using private developers.

Decentralisation has meant a burgeoning of voluntary and community agencies to carry out traditional local government functions on the cheap. Community groups in Hackney have submitted more than 230 projects to the council for funding under next year's Inner City Partnership programme. Labour councils have also taken advantage of the Manpower Services Commission's Youth Training Scheme to introduce temporary jobs for youth and reduce their payrolls. Hackney Council has frozen all low-grade clerical posts so they can be filled by temporary workers.

As the Tory attack on local government sharpens, Labour's appeal — to 'save the GLC' or to save this or that service — will become more desperate. The experience of council workers in Hackney, Lambeth and Camden shows that they have no interest in supporting left-wing Labour alternatives. We must fight to get what we need, not to defend Labour's niche in local government.

The recession in Britain and the USA

No upturn in the downturn



Detroit in the doldrums: no real revival in US industry

'This means war' is the response of everybody who has seen the forecasts from the Cambridge Economic Policy Group's new computer model of the world economy. Ten years ago the Cambridge school, whose political sympathies embrace the spectrum from Tory wets to Eurocommunists, anticipated the collapse of British industry. Today the Cambridge economists predict deepening world recession and intensifying global conflict. Yet their grim forebodings come at a time when many Western politicians are tentatively greeting a capitalist revival. A look at the world's biggest capitalist economy — that of the USA — shows little grounds for bourgeois optimism. And even a glimpse at the British economy justifies the deepest apprehensions of the Cambridge computer.

ON THE SURFACE the American upturn looks impressive. The US economy grew at an annual rate of more than nine per cent between April and June of this year. In comparison with a 1½ per cent fall in 1982 this seems to be a substantial recovery. The real question, however, is whether the recovery will be sustained by new investment. Up to now the main stimulus to the economy has been provided by consumer and state spending bolstered by record budget deficits.

Rearmament has given a boost to US industry. It has provided new orders to manufacturers and indirectly encouraged consumer spending. Both house building and car sales have picked up this year. Yet despite cuts in welfare payments, the Government's massive rearmament programme is likely to keep the budget deficit at the \$200 billion level for years to come. And the underlying structural weakness of US industry remains unsolved.

American goods are still uncompetitive on the world market. In 1983 US exporters have lost out further and further

to the more dynamic economies of the EEC and Japan: the result is a \$30 billion deficit on the US balance of payments current account. Japan, with its \$20 billion surplus, is likely to be the main beneficiary of the limited US recovery as it continues to undercut US prices on both world and US markets.

Only new investment can begin to solve America's economic problems. But here the American bourgeoisie faces the same constraint as capitalists throughout the Western world: there is no point in investing capital until levels of profitability are restored. The American ruling class has not balked at taking ruthless measures to improve economic performance. Thousands of less competitive firms have been driven to ruin. There were more than 20 000 bankruptcies last year. Employers have launched a remorseless campaign of wage-cutting and union-busting. At Continental Airlines, for example, bosses have scrapped their labour agreements, sacked union members, and then rehired a select few on half their previous wages. Despite all this, profit levels still remain too low to justify new investment.

Structural decline

Falling profit rates and low investment have dogged the Western world for the past 20 years. The Bank of International Settlements recently observed that investment has been tailing off in all the major capitalist countries since the late 'sixties. The decline began well before the 1973 oil price explosion on which Western economists always blame the onset of the recession. Over the past three years total fixed investment has fallen not only in the USA, but also in Japan, West Germany, Britain and France. The latest OECD *Economic Outlook* expresses the view of a bourgeoisie which is deeply troubled, and just as profoundly mystified, by the continuing grip of the crisis of profitability:

'Even more striking has been the sharp drop in realised rates of return, measured as the ratio of gross operating surplus to gross capital stock. For example, taking six of the largest OECD countries as a group, realised rates of return in manufacturing fell from 20 per cent to 13 per cent from 1973 to 1981...For reasons which

remain unclear, the productivity of capital has shown a marked decline over the last two decades.'

As a result of stagnating profit levels, industrial investment in the USA is more likely to fall than to increase by the end of 1983. The decline in US net foreign direct investment provides further evidence of the intractability of its economic crisis. The USA sustained its position of global economic supremacy during the post-war period through the large scale export of capital to other countries. After 1981, however, the recession produced a dramatic reversal in the flow of capital: the net outflow of capital became a net inflow of more than \$10 billion. Rather than reinvest their profits abroad, American companies repatriated dividends to stave off the collapse of the parent companies at home. At the same time, US companies were squeezed out of domestic money markets by high levels of government borrowing and high interest rates. They went to Europe to borrow the funds to keep themselves going. When American capitalists cannot generate enough surplus to keep their domestic industry running but have to go abroad to borrow money — Third World style — the writing is on the wall for US imperialism.

The enormous size of US industry and its home market will help to keep the economy going for a few years ahead. Although the USA has been losing out to Japan and West Germany in terms of productivity levels, shares in key foreign markets, and spheres of investment, it still accounts for 20 per cent of world output. This economic weight, backed up by its world-beating military strength, enables the USA to withstand pressure from its imperialist competitors. Businessmen in Tokyo and Bonn may complain about the damaging effects of high US budget deficits and interest rates on their domestic economies. But the USA is still strong enough to resist bowing to their demands.

The US economy is likely to sustain its current growth rate into 1984. There is still some scope for the re-supplying of companies that ran down their stock of finished goods in the early years of the recession. As a result of increased consumer spending, stock levels are now lower than at any time since the 'sixties.

The British disease

While America stagnates, Britain's decay accelerates. In 1960 Britain could still jostle with West Germany for the position of the second largest imperialist economy. Today it ranks fifth after the USA, Japan, West Germany and France, and it is still falling in the charts. The two to three per cent growth rate forecast for Britain this year is simply a pale reflection of the modest improvement in the world economy. While the rest of the top five expect to continue growing into 1984, the British economy is already beginning to turn down again. Fortunately for Chancellor Nigel Lawson, the Cecil Parkinson affair overshadowed his optimistic projections at the Tory Party Conference. His protestations that the long-awaited British economic recovery was not already petering out escaped much critical scrutiny.

In Britain, as in the USA, the initial stimulus to growth came from a pick-up in consumer spending in late 1982. The



abolition of hire-purchase controls last summer helped to encourage domestic consumption. However, credit-encouraged spending has made much less impact on economic growth in Britain than it has for her competitors. The British recovery has been so slow that two years after the low point of late 1981, when the upswing is supposed to have begun, industrial output is still almost five per cent below its previous peak in 1979. Such a slow rate of growth is unprecedented in the post-war period. The British economic recovery has been little more than a slowdown in the pace of collapse.

The malaise of manufacturing output has been unaffected by the superficial upturn: this year it is 15 per cent below 1979 levels. Low productivity levels and poor competitiveness caused Britain earlier this year to register its first trade deficit in manufactures since the industrial revolution. In the midst of the current upturn, manufacturing investment continues to decline — to the lowest levels for 20 years. The trends towards the de-industrialisation of Britain now seem unstoppable.

Low investment is both a symptom of the British decline and a factor in accelerating it. Net investment levels have followed the downward curve of profit rates throughout the post-war period. From an average four per cent increase in net capital stock in the 'fifties and 'sixties, the two per cent in the late 'seventies fell to an average of one per cent in the 'eighties. In the context of falling profits and investment, the productivity improvements celebrated by Thatcher and friends can give little real encouragement to British capitalists. Indeed the 12 per cent improvement in manufacturing productivity between 1980 and 1981 was a manifestation of deepening recession, not a sign of impending recovery. Far from being the consequence of new, efficient investment productivity levels only rose because of the drastic shedding of plant and labour in the less competitive sectors of the economy. Industry became leaner, but that which remained could still not compete on the world market. On average, productivity in British industry remains 60 per cent lower than in the USA.

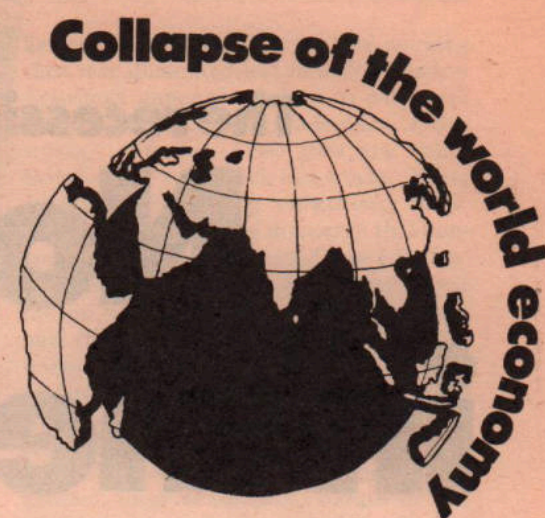
Recession without end

The collapse of manufacturing leaves the British economy vulnerable to the rigours of the world recession. The service sector — particularly shipping, tourism and financial services — has always been a useful asset for British imperialism. But it is simply too small to fill the gap left by the demise of manufacturing.

Some government ministers may still be able to fool the Tory Party conference with talk of new technology industries, small business success stories, and promises of recovery to come. But the painful deliberations of the same ministers the following week over implementing major reductions in public expenditure expose the real preoccupations of ruling class crisis management. Cuts and closures in the NHS, civil service and local government, and the continuing shakeout of nationalised industries, show the real dead-end British capitalism has reached. The Cambridge computer has no confidence that the USA can lead the Western world out of recession. It can see only gloom at the end of the tunnel for the capitalist system.

Phil Murphy

Workers of the Third World Grave-diggers of imperialism



Much media attention has been focused on the tremendous debt problems of Brazil, Chile, Argentina, South Korea and other Newly Industrialising Countries. But there is a graver threat to imperialist interests in the NICs than the problem of repaying loans.

THE BILLIONS OF dollars owed by Newly Industrialising Countries to imperialist banks expose the fragility of the world banking system and other international capitalist institutions. But external debt is only one side of the problem. All the NICs are wracked by internal political and economic crises. Western interests are becoming increasingly sensitive to the threat of domestic convulsions in the NICs. Earlier this year *The Economist* surveyed the strife in Brazil, Chile and Argentina and asked whether it was wise to push too hard for debt repayments:

'Most of the loans are irrecoverably lost. The question now is: does it make much sense for the bankers to try to stretch the Latin American economies on the rack to recover their losses?'

The message is clear: it is unreasonable to expect to recover the loans, and too much foreign pressure on the NICs risks exacerbating internal instability. To appreciate the scope for unrest in the NICs it is necessary to examine the background to their previous economic development over the past two decades.

Born in blood

Today's NICs are the product of the needs of imperialism at the height of the post-war boom. To sustain the momentum of the upswing of the 'sixties and 'seventies Western powers were forced to expand their activities in the Third World. The subsequent high growth rates in the NICs were a by-product of the economic expansion of the major capitalist economies.

However, before the Western powers could boost their activities in the Third World they had a number of local problems to solve. Most of the countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia were no longer European colonies. Many of the Third World regimes were at least formally committed to the policy of independent national development; their leaders frequently declared their determination to control foreign capital. More importantly, in many areas of the Third World the ruling class was on the defensive against mass working class and popular movements. The growth of popular mass movements was both a challenge to the indigenous ruling classes, and a threat to imperialist interests.

Before the Western powers could step up their intervention in the Third World they had to make sure that their investments would be protected by reliable local allies. Their model was 'strong and stable' Iran under the Shah. George Wilson, former president of Trans World Agriculture, a leading US agribusiness company expressed the importance of the confidence created by a sympathetic dictator:

'You could sit down in other countries and figure out more profit with a pencil and paper, but they don't have the stability that Iran does.'

During the 'sixties and the early 'seventies a succession of military take-overs backed by the West formed the political structures that now characterise the



Confrontation with the military: Chile today, any of the NICs tomorrow

NICs. The most important of these were the coup d'état in Brazil in 1964, the military seizure of power in Indonesia in 1965, and the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile in 1973.

The objective of military takeovers was to destroy working class organisations, crush popular resistance, and thus create economic stability for foreign capital. Indonesia was the most successful example of the transformation of a political climate to the advantage of imperialism. The coup which overthrew President Sukarno unleashed a massacre of historic proportions. The membership of the Indonesian Communist Party was virtually wiped out. Altogether more than half a million people were liquidated. The bloody achievements of President Suharto were highly respected by the West. President Nixon congratulated Suharto on his 'Adventure in Progress'. The Queen later awarded Suharto the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath. The Indonesian holocaust was followed by a massive inflow of Western capital. Repression created the conditions for foreign investment. As one US World Bank official remarked after the coup: 'Indonesia is the best thing that has happened to Uncle Sam since the war'.

The economic miracles

More than half a million lives was a small price to pay for new investment opportunities. In the early 'seventies, Indonesia emerged as the model for 'developing countries'. In 1972 one imperialist periodical — the *Far East Economic Review* — held up Indonesia as an example of how to tackle 'development problems': 'Politics in Indonesia are no longer in command. Indonesia is a classic illustration that developing systems must resolve political contradictions and conflicts into some form of *modus vivendi* before development problems can be meaningfully tackled'. Development problems were 'meaningfully tackled' in other parts of the Third World as well. The coup in Brazil unleashed a wave of terror against the working class. And in Chile General Pinochet emulated President Suharto on a somewhat smaller scale after the overthrow of Allende.

The policy of brutal class domination pursued by the governments of the NICs has a clear purpose. Capitalist social

relations in backward capitalist economies can be maintained only through coercion. Class violence is essential to maximise the rate of exploitation of the proletariat. For foreign investors 'cheap labour' is one of the most attractive features of the NICs — and the military regimes make sure that labour stays 'cheap'. Hong Kong, one of the most successful of the NICs, provides a vivid illustration of the position of wage labourers. In 1968 at the height of Hong Kong's prosperity, 58 per cent of workers had a seven-day working week, and 52 per cent worked 10 hours or more a day.

A high rate of exploitation provided the foundation of the 'economic miracle' of Brazil, now the most powerful of the NICs. The first priority of the Brazilian military junta in 1964 was to destroy the power of the organised working class. Between 1964 and 1966 the cost of living more than doubled while real wages fell by more than 30 per cent. During the years from 1964 to 1972 the real minimum wage fell by 35 per cent. Industrial expansion was made possible by the high rate of surplus value that the bosses were able to extract from the proletariat. The *Financial Times* was impressed by Brazil's 'tight wage policy'.

There is an intimate connection between the exploitation of the working class and the economic miracles of the NICs. There is nothing miraculous about achieving high profits through mass impoverishment and class coercion.

To crisis

For a while the NIC model seemed to work. However, even the systematic exploitation of the working class on an unprecedented scale could not guarantee sustained growth. As the world recession began to bite, it became clear that economic growth could only continue by increasing the NICs' already intolerable burden of debt. But economic stagnation is not the only problem facing military regimes. These pro-imperialist regimes are increasingly being confronted by the revival of organised working class and popular discontent.

The regimes that run the NICs lack a popular base. Their survival depends almost entirely on the armed forces and security services. Even a highly militarised society like South Korea faces social unrest and protest. Until now repression has been effective. Thus in 1980 President

Chan succeeded in crushing a rebellion in the southern town of Hwang-Ju. He dispatched a special force of paratroopers to the town which restored order by indiscriminately shooting down several hundred people. But repression alone is no longer sufficient to check the growth of mass movements. In recent months violent demonstrations on the streets of Manila, Santiago, Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo reveal the growing polarisation of these societies.

The mass movements of the 'eighties are not the same as those crushed by today's dictators in the past: their social character has changed dramatically. The growth of industry in the NICs has led to the emergence of substantial working class forces. This transformation of the class structure is exemplified by South Korea. In recent years more than half a million new workers have entered the factories every year. Seoul, which had a population of 750 000 in 1977, is now bursting with more than nine million people. A similar process of proletarianisation can be seen in all the important NICs.

The emergence of labour as a leading social force limits the options of the military juntas. The new industrial working class, concentrated in strategic areas, has considerably more social weight than the heterogeneous opposition movements of the 'fifties and 'sixties. The military regimes are sensitive to this danger. One reason why the Brazilian Government is reluctant to introduce the IMF-sponsored austerity measures is its fear of provoking working class resistance. The same fear has led the Government to allow more space for trade union activity.

The growth of the working class is also a direct threat to Western imperialism. The advanced capitalist countries need their local allies more than ever before. The survival of capitalism depends on strengthening imperialist domination over the Third World. But the military regimes cannot offer the guarantees they were able to give ten years ago. The changing balance of class forces has pushed imperialist strategists to rethink their policy.

The Western powers are not sentimental. They are prepared to sacrifice their loyal allies if it gives them a breathing space. Thus unpopular dictators like President Marcos, General Pinochet or President Figueiredo may soon be deserted by their friends in Washington and London, Paris and Bonn. But whatever happens a confrontation between the proletariat of the Third World and imperialism cannot be postponed indefinitely. Western imperialism desperately needs spheres of influence and investment. The working class must pay the price.

Workers in the NICs are in the front line of the imperialist offensive. History has cast them as the grave-diggers of imperialism. They have the power not only to defeat their own ruling class but also to inflict a severe blow against the imperialists. They must not fight alone. The proletariat of the West has every interest in supporting their struggles and fighting all forms of imperialist intervention. The official labour movement in Britain looks upon the proletariat of the Third World as 'cheap labourers' who are responsible for British unemployment. But the workers of South East Asia and Latin America are not competitors for our jobs. They are our class allies in the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system.

Frank Richards

The IMF in conference The pack breaks up

'Slumps and depressions', Keynes once wrote, 'are the mere consequence of upsetting the delicate balance of spontaneous optimism'. The directors of the International Monetary Fund, an institution designed by Keynes as the cornerstone of the post-war financial order, no doubt recalled his words as they ended their annual conference last month in an atmosphere of despondency. Their role in the months and years ahead will be to preside over the break-up of imperialist cooperation in exploiting the backward capitalist countries.

THE MASSIVE EXPANSION of credit over the past two decades is at an end. Last year saw the collapse of Penn Square Bank in the USA and God's own Banco Ambrosiano in Italy. Now a Hong Kong bank has gone the same way, the Israeli banks are in crisis, and the head of the Argentine central bank has been clapped in jail. Since Mexico's revelation last year that it could no longer continue to service its \$80 billion debt, 19 more Latin American and Caribbean countries have been involved in negotiations to reschedule their debts.

When the IMF was set up in 1946, it was never intended that it should act as central banker to the world's commercial banks. Under the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement the value of the dollar was tied to gold. All the imperialist countries undertook to maintain their currency exchange rates in a fixed relation to the dollar. The role of the IMF was to provide funds to enable member countries to adjust their trade balances without resort to protectionism and devaluation. Each country could draw on the Fund up to the quota originally subscribed. At its inception the IMF's resources were equivalent to 16 per cent of annual world trade. More than a fifth of the cash was supplied by the USA.

Changing roles

The system began to break down in 1967. The imperialist pecking order had changed dramatically over 20 years. Productivity had increased much more rapidly in some countries (notably Germany and Japan) than in others (USA, Britain). This change had been disguised by the fixed exchange rate system, but could no longer be con-

cealed. In 1971 the USA finally broke from the Gold Standard, and with a 10 per cent devaluation of the dollar in 1973, the system collapsed.

In the chaotic early years of the recession, the IMF was forced to take on a new role for which it had never been designed. Ten years ago commercial banks were involved mostly in financing domestic industry, and lent only a small proportion of their funds to foreign governments. The investment crisis and industrial bankruptcies of 1974 led to large losses for many banks. A number of major banks — among them Franklin National and I D Herstatt — collapsed, and many banks withdrew altogether from international lending. The volume of private international lending dropped 20 per cent in two years.

The crisis in the imperialist countries opened a certain space into which the more dynamic of the backward capitalist economies — the Newly Industrialising Countries — could expand. The NICs' accelerating domestic capital accumulation was funded at first by windfall gains from the large increases in prices of raw material exports in the early 'seventies; then the banks took over. The commodity whose price increased most spectacularly was oil, but the economies of most of the oil-producing countries were too backward to absorb more than a small share of the increased oil revenues. Consequently a large part of the OPEC surplus was channelled through the imperialist banks to other backward capitalist countries. Petrodollars flowed in large quantities into Latin America and Asia. By 1980, the nominal dollar volume of lending through the international capital markets had reached five times the 1973 level.

The Western bankers' new business in the Third World proved very lucrative. It enabled them to avoid the financial crash which threatened in the mid 'seventies. Hundreds of banks scrambled over one another competing for customers in the Third World, often with little regard for how and when the money would be repaid.

This rapid and chaotic expansion of international credit required central co-ordination and backing. Forced to step in as international 'lender of last resort', the IMF adopted on the world stage the role played by central banks in national expansion. In 1974 and again in 1975 it introduced programmes to recycle funds from the OPEC and imperialist countries. The IMF established a pattern in which it gave its stamp of approval to certain countries by making a loan — which then

encouraged all the other banks to rush in for a piece of the action.

The lending spree lasted only six years before problems began to set in. The alarm bells started to ring as early as 1978 when Peru was forced to reschedule its debt repayments. Jamaica and Turkey followed in 1979, Nicaragua and Zaire in 1980, and Sudan, Bolivia and Poland in 1981. The annual increase in net bank lending began to fall — from 25 per cent between 1974 and 1980, to 21 per cent in 1981, 7 per cent last year, and around 3 per cent this year. So long as debts are honoured, the banks can continue to make a fat living out of the exploitation of workers all over the world. What they dread is default by their creditors, and the consequent loss of their assets.

The system came close to disaster last autumn when Mexico announced that it could no longer service its debt. Over the last few years the bankers have built up a vast and highly mobile pool of funds on the 'interbank market'. These monies circulate among banks to enable business to expand as fast as possible. Some Mexican banks had borrowed short-term funds from these sources, and then made medium-term loans to domestic businesses. When it appeared that Mexico might default, confidence flagged and banks started asking for their money back. Only an emergency \$1.85 billion loan put together by the US Federal Reserve and the Bank for International Settlements saved the day.

Mounting debts

The current financial crisis is the result of the continued subordination of the backward capitalist countries within the international division of labour. Reduced demand for their exports has led to a drastic decline in prices. World trade declined by two and a half per cent last year. Today most agricultural goods and raw materials and about a quarter of manufactures are subject to protectionist controls.

Under pressure from the banks, Third World governments have introduced ruthless austerity measures. In 1982 the current account deficit of these countries was cut by \$21 billion. This was achieved by slashing imports. In one year, the real value of imports by Latin American countries fell by 22 per cent. Widespread looting and riots in the cities are the consequence.

The total outstanding debt of the non-oil-producing backward capitalist countries is now more than \$660 billion, and



62 per cent of long term debt is to private banks. All the imperialist powers fear the consequences of banking defaults and are working hard to dissuade banks from cutting back their loans. This explains why Reagan was instantly converted into a champion of the IMF when the Mexican crisis broke last year, and why in February of this year he agreed a 50 per cent increase in IMF quotas. More active IMF involvement in Mexico has worked — for the time being. But how much longer can the IMF sustain a debt mountain which the backward capitalist countries have no prospect of repaying?

After Mexico, Brazil. Earlier this year Brazil negotiated with the IMF to reschedule payments on its \$90 billion debt, but failed to meet the conditions the IMF imposed. A new \$11 billion rescue package, which requires the Brazilian Congress to legislate a 20 per cent wage cut across the board, is now being put together. Without this condition the banks will not pay up. But if they don't pay up default will be inevitable.

Lone wolves

The IMF conference provoked a conflict within the US camp. The US Congress, threatened not to ratify Reagan's agreement to increase the IMF quotas. American business is concerned that the Government is encouraging banks to throw good money after bad. The US banks' foreign assets are greater than the combined foreign assets of France, Britain and West Germany. They also have a much greater proportion of their assets in non-oil-exporting Third World countries — 22 per cent compared with 16 per cent for the three main European nations. They have also responded much faster to the danger of default: the US banks' share of total Euromarket loans to the Third World has declined from 53 per cent in 1975 to around 35 per cent today.

Right-wing congressmen backed up by business interests to the tune of \$1 million have launched a 'Free the Eagle' campaign to cut back US subsidies to the IMF. They claim that Reagan is recklessly doling out money to the 'loan lusers' of the Third World. Worse still, they accuse the IMF of helping to fund the USA's communist enemies — Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and China. All this masks their real concern, that the USA is losing out to its imperialist rivals in the backward capitalist countries. At the moment the administration is holding out against the 'isolationists', but the trends are all towards weakening international imperialist institutions.

The IMF won't collapse this side of Christmas, and no doubt Reagan will get his bill through Congress in November — with Democratic support. But imperialist debt negotiations with Third World governments will increasingly become bilateral, with the object of crowding out the opposition. This is already clear in the Brazilian negotiations in which Britain and Japan are taking no part, even though Japan is now challenging US domination of the Brazilian economy. 'Isolationism' doesn't mean that the USA and other imperialist powers are retreating back into their domestic markets. It means that more and more they hunt alone rather than in packs. And if they fail to get what they want through negotiation, they have their rapid deployment forces standing ready.

Gareth Evans



Standing loose at Williamsburg: how much longer can they stand the strain of Third World debt?



Hackney estate: do-gooders' eye view

Slumming it

Paul Harrison, *Inside the inner city: life under the cutting edge*, Penguin Books 1983, pp444, pbk £3.95

LIKE AN INTREPID Victorian explorer, Paul Harrison left the safety of his Hampstead home and made the four-mile journey to Hackney. Armed only with his tape recorder, he conducted more than 500 interviews with the inhabitants of the 'strange world' he found there. This book is the result. Its main strength is the way in which Harrison uses individual experience to breathe life into the official statistics of deprivation. Unemployment, poverty, bad housing, disease, domestic and social violence and despair are graphically conveyed in the accounts of those who suffer them day in and day out.

The most awful place in Britain

According to the government's own criteria, Hackney is a leading contender for the title 'most awful place in Britain'. From the mid 'seventies to 1981 Hackney lost more than 40 per cent of its jobs in manufacturing. From 1979 to 1981 the council, one of the borough's largest employers, shed 300 jobs in its Direct Labour Organisation and cut overtime payments to its manual workers by £20 a week. In 1981, the average male wage in Hackney was £7 a week lower than the national average, and more than £30 lower than the London average. From 1979 to 1981 the cost of living in Hackney soared. Rents have doubled. Rates have risen by almost 250 per cent and heating bills by 159 per cent. The consequences can as easily be read in the number of people who had their electricity disconnected – 38 000 in 1980 – or in the desperate faces of local housewives scrambling to get into the numerous local jumble sales.

Housing is another indicator of the nightmare of urban poverty. In 1981 there were 15 000 people on the council house waiting list. The council owned 2500 empty houses and it started building a further 55. More than 10 per cent of council houses in Hackney are officially classified as unfit for human habitation. Tenants have even set fire to their homes in the hope of being offered a bigger or slightly better flat.

Victorian values

Harrison himself draws the parallel between his work and that of Victorian social explorers such as Charles Booth whose massive survey of poverty *Life and Labour of the People of London* shocked its middle class readers when it was published in 1903. The comparison is a good one. First, the language of both writers conveys their contempt for working class people. Harrison describes Hackney as a 'sump' into which human detritus sinks. Booth described the London poor as the 'residuum', literally human waste matter.

Like Booth, Harrison sees the devastation as symptomatic of a sickness throughout society. Indeed metaphors of disease are scattered throughout his book. The poor are 'like the bubo that indicates a body riddled with plague, or the sudden fever that reveals recurrent malaria'. The 'inner-city phenomenon', we are told, 'spread like a cancer' during the 'seventies. Its inhabitants are 'at each other's throats like rats in an overcrowded cage'.

Like Booth, Harrison's project is to shake his readers into a realisation that things cannot

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continue as they are. He is concerned, not with the effects of the crisis on the working class, but with the consequences of the degradation of the working class for the rest of society. Victorian England was gripped by the fear that the mass of starving and homeless people in the capital would upset the whole social order. During the 1880s, riots shook the centre of London. Angry protests by the East End 'mob' raised panic among the middle classes. The protests stimulated social exploration which peaked in Booth's survey. Tales of the African missions were set aside and the middle class read books about the conditions of the working class at home.

In response to Booth's shocking revelations a generation of upper class parasites descended on the East End. Through philanthropic foundations like Toynbee Hall and other 'settlements', they tried to expiate their guilty bourgeois consciences by bringing the values of thrift and industry, virtue and temperance to the savage sub-proletariat. By campaigning against the worst excesses of the immiseration of the poor, these social reformers helped to contain the threat to the British establishment. A century later East London provides an eloquent testimony to the value of philanthropy and inner-city do-gooders – for the capitalist system. As Harrison documents, 'eighty odd years of the twentieth century, two world wars, massive efforts in public housing, a decade and a half of government programmes to help the inner city – all these have made essentially no difference to Hackney'. The slums and the sweatshops seem to go on for ever – and so do the do-gooders.

The recession of the 'eighties is recreating in a new form the inner-city lumpen proletariat of Victorian times. A new generation of middle class parasites now afflicts Hackney and areas like it. Harrison is their spokesman. Now they are organised by the borough council, especially by its social services department, its associated quangos, and the Labour Party. Harrison welcomes the influx of middle class professionals into gentrified Stoke Newington, credits them as the only progressive force in the borough and acknowledges their individual contributions to his book. Together they feed off the suffering of the oppressed people of Hackney, vicariously enjoying their subcultures while helping to stabilise the system that condemns them to a life of misery and a future of despair.

For Harrison, all the problems of Hackney are remote external forces – the doctrine of monetarism, the evil force of Thatcherism, the malice of the multinationals. The Labour council, which has presided over the impoverishment of the local people for most of the last half century, is a blameless victim of circumstances beyond its control. Harrison echoes the combination of fatalism and pragmatism that has led his friends on the left-wing Labour council to give in to government pressures and pass off cuts in jobs and services under the guise of 'progressive' initiatives like 'decentralisation' and community self-help groups. The police who patrol Hackney like an occupying army, especially terrorising the area's substantial black community, are – according to Harrison – only doing a hard job with the best of intentions. After a few days touring in a squad car, Harrison emerges as a fervent apologist for police brutality. He blames young blacks' liking for loud music and illicit drugs, and their hostility to the police, for racial tensions in Hackney; the victims of racial oppression are turned into its culprits. In a borough where several young blacks have died in police custody, Harrison concentrates on the problem of violence against the police inside local police stations.

During the 'seventies Harrison was a writer and commentator on the Third World. The riots showed him that 'you didn't have to travel half way across the globe to find poverty' – or grasp its destabilising impact on social order. Labour MP Gerald Kaufman, reviewing the book in *The Guardian*, points out the threat to social stability inherent in the conditions exposed by Harrison. He sees the spectre of no-go areas on the Irish model becoming a common feature of the landscape of the British mainland. Harrison remarks that the inner city is 'a very good place to learn about the destructive forces inherent in (this) society'.

While Harrison's diagnosis of Hackney's problems mirrors that of the Labour left, his prescriptions are more in line with those of the SDP. He appeals for 'a new consensus of values' and for a more caring government. He earnestly wants an end to the 'unspoken class warfare' that exists in British society. Harrison warns the British establishment that if something is not done about Hackney and similar areas they will explode on a scale much greater

than the riots of 1981. In case the Labour left council in Hackney fails to contain this threat, Harrison endorses Metropolitan Police commander Kenneth Newman's methods of intensive repression to deal with the problem. A century after Booth, it's high time the labour movement repudiated the petit-bourgeois voyeurs from Fleet Street to Mare Street who prey on the miseries of the working class.

Tony Powell



The Resistance: flying the flag

Reconstructing capitalism

Richard F Kuisel, *Capitalism and the state in modern France*, Cambridge Paperback Library 1983, pp 344, £8.50

THIS IS A USEFUL BOOK, particularly for those who still harbour illusions in the 'socialist' character of state intervention in the capitalist economy. Richard Kuisel's study traces the development of state intervention in twentieth century France. It shows that the relative decline of French capitalism compelled the bourgeoisie to seek new methods of state management and control. The parallels with Britain are striking. In 1945, while the British Attlee Government set about nationalising transport and energy industries and creating the NHS, French Socialist Prime Minister Felix Gouin presided over the nationalisation of the credit system, the electricity, gas and coal industries and insurance services. In both countries the upheaval of the world depression in the 'thirties and the Second World War exposed the fragility of capitalist relations. To compensate for low productivity and industrial stagnation the state had to step in on a large scale.

French capital was in particularly dire straits. Militarily defeated by Nazi Germany in June 1940, the French state had lost its national sovereignty. The French economy was subordinated to the German war effort. After the liberation of France by the Allied forces in 1944 the bourgeoisie faced a major task. It had to rebuild its economy and restore the credibility of the French nation state.

The moves towards nationalisation, increased social services and involvement of the trade unions in discussions of state economic policy were not motivated simply by a desire for greater economic efficiency. By promoting social and economic reforms which appeared to curb the power of private capital, the French bourgeoisie – like its British counterpart – succeeded in winning popular support for its objectives.

Nazis and Stalinists

Kuisel's study confirms this point. The chapters on the economic strategy of the wartime Vichy Government under Marshal Petain on the one hand, and the policy perspectives of the Resistance under de Gaulle on the other, are of particular interest. In the bourgeois and reformist interpretation of the 1940s, Petain occupies a similar place to that of Chamberlain in British history: he is the arch-reactionary traitor, the man who sold out to the Nazi occupiers. The anti-fascist Resistance leaders are

regarded within the official French labour movement as the true representatives of the working class. Kuisel shows that in their broad perspectives for the future of French society the Vichy Nazi collaborators and the anti-Vichy Resistance leadership were remarkably similar. Both were concerned to rebuild French capitalism and both realised that this required major changes in the organisation of French society. Indeed it was Petain who coined the phrase 'National Revolution' to describe his strategy of state controls, social reform and national economic planning designed to restore France to its former grandeur. Much of Petain's rhetoric as well as his administration's practical policies were taken over by the Resistance after liberation. Kuisel points out that:

'Vichy and the Resistance articulated reforms that, despite obvious differences, had much in common. Both sought a nationalist revival, social reconciliation, moral rehabilitation, a planned and more just economy, and a dynamic state...the men of Vichy and the Resistance combined to uproot old habits and attitudes and design a new economic order.'

Anti-fascism provided the Resistance leaders with the radical appeal they needed to win working class cooperation in rebuilding French capitalism. The Stalinist PCF which was the main force within the Resistance, and which by 1942 controlled the main trade union federation, the Confederation Generale de Travail (CGT), played the central role in promoting class collaboration. Immediately after the liberation the PCF called for a 'battle for production' and demanded that workers do voluntary overtime to rebuild the French nation. While de Gaulle was still waiting in the wings and the state was still in disarray the PCF cleared the path for capitalist reconstruction.

The PCF has not changed much since. It has lost much of its former base in the working class and today has to content itself with a subordinate role in Mitterand's austerity Government. However, its radical nationalism still has a resonance among many French workers and helps undermine resistance to the reactionary Mitterand administration. Kuisel's book is essential reading for those who want to know more about the background to the class struggle in France today.

Sabena Norton

The nature of man

Norman Geras, *Marx and human nature: refutation of a legend*, Verso 1983, pp126, pbk £2.95

IT IS UNFORTUNATE that Norman Geras does not make clear why he wrote this book. His justification for writing a refutation of the bourgeois prejudice that Marx was hostile to human nature seems rather arbitrary: 'it was my attendance at a certain seminar one evening in early 1979 that led me to want to confront it'. For readers who were not privileged to attend this seminar it is necessary to reconstruct the motives behind Geras' work and the consequences of his arguments.

'It's human nature, isn't it?'

The question of human nature has long preoccupied philosophers and social investigators. Virtually all religions and ideologies claim to respond to the needs of man's 'essence', his 'nature' or his 'soul'. In contrast, Marxism rejects the concept of a fixed human nature. Marx argued that everything that is human is the result of social forces, and not a product of nature. Marx summed up his approach in the sixth of his famous *Theses on Feuerbach*:

'Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.'

In other words, it is useless to look for general definitions – the attitudes, values and goals of men are determined by the 'ensemble of the social relations'. Geras develops an extensive critique of this thesis.

Geras' aim is to convince the reader that Marx was in fact firmly committed to the concept of human nature and that the sixth thesis did not contradict this commitment. He begins by unearthing a considerable number of quotations in which Marx uses the term 'human nature'. This approach shows the author's familiarity with Marx's texts but by itself scarcely amounts to an argument. Then Geras proceeds to fall back on the methods of formal logic. Thus he notes correctly that Marx writes of the transformation of human needs. From this proposition he concludes 'that to declare of anything that it changes does not commit one to the view that everything about it changes or that it has no enduring factors'. In other words,

changes in man do not necessarily imply that nothing is permanent.

Geras' argument is coherent and consistent. As long as he sticks to textual criticisms and formal logic he manages to sustain his thesis that the concept of human nature is compatible with Marx. But once we move from textual interpretations and look at Marx's method Geras' argument breaks down.

Marx did not reject the concept of a fixed human nature out of a desire to be anti-humanist. Marx rejected the concept of a fixed essence not only in man but also in nature. Nature provides the basis for the emergence of human culture. It is the precondition for human development and social interaction. But man is not simply a product of nature — man is also a social force which transforms nature. Man's nature is shaped by his interaction with nature and with other men. In a book recently published in English, the Soviet philosopher E. V. Ilyenkov cogently summarises the Marxist view of the relationship between man and nature:

'Nature as such creates absolutely nothing "human". Man with all his specifically human features is from beginning to end the result and product of his own labour. Even walking straight, which appears at first sight man's natural anatomically innate trait, is in actual fact a result of educating the child within an established society.' (E.V. Ilyenkov, *The dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in Marx's Capital*)

What we recognise as 'human' is the product of labour. Thus as one form of social labour evolves into another, so human nature itself is transformed. Marx began, not with a universal definition of man's essence, but from human practice through which the nature of man is revealed. Geras' argument that human change does not mean that everything must change misses the point. The evolution of the relationship between man and nature leads not to 'changes' but to *transformations* — in both man and nature. The major land masses, the oceans, mountain ranges, tropical forests and deserts endure — but they become less and less relevant to understanding society. In the past, the elementary need to eat led to mass migrations and social upheavals. In the imperialist world today, man's basic physical need is more likely to generate a demand for low-fat foods and aerobics.

The new moralism

Geras' argument does not rest entirely on his reinterpretation of Marx. He concludes by projecting a new morality based on 'human needs':

'Where it concerns basic human needs, whether for adequate nourishment and other physical provision, for love, respect and friendship, or for freedom and breadth of intellectual and physical self-expression...this is surely a central part of any socialist politics worth the name: the fight against what is inimical to human happiness. And could not one — I do not say the only — motivation for doing so be a conception, an elementary conception, of the vital needs of any healthy human being, in virtue of human nature?'

Geras' ethical posturing indicates that he has the makings of a great humanist. But his worthy moral principles are of little use in defining human nature.

Geras is firmly in the camp of academic Marxism. Cut off from the social experience of the working class, this school remains essentially contemplative. Hence Geras can discover in his strongly-held principles all that there is to know about human nature. No doubt in that 'certain seminar one evening in early 1979' it was possible to acknowledge the 'breadth of intellectual and physical self-expression'. Unfortunately for most individuals, human happiness depends on more mundane matters. In the abstract Geras' ethical principles are all very fine. In reality they are meaningless phrases that can justify oppression and exploitation just as easily as they can inspire rebellion.

Geras' attempt to refute the view that Marx denied human nature leads to a general non-class, moralistic outlook. It is significant that he situates his concept of human nature in 'conformity with the usage of much socialist, anarchist, communitarian and other radical thought'. In common with radical thought, Geras' rejection of capitalism is moralistic. Moralism is but one of the ideological underpinnings of reformism. It is the outlook of a Labour left that despite its horror of the arms race, poverty and degradation recoils at the thought of class violence. There are good reasons for this. Revolutions tend to demonstrate a lack of concern for the physical safety and survival of the exploiters and to be callous in disregarding their happiness and self-expression. Anybody with the slightest acquaintance with the history of the class struggle knows that class interests come before every principle of humanism.

Geras' essay on human nature is a one-sided elaboration of the nature of Oxfam-man. Even his lofty principles are the product of society, not the highest expression of the essence of man.

Frank Richards

Banking on Europe in Latin America

The European challenge: Europe's new role in Latin America. Latin American Bureau 1982, pp 243, pbk £3.95

Chile: the Pinochet decade. Latin American Bureau 1983, pp 118, pbk £2.95

The poverty brokers: the IMF and Latin America. Latin American Bureau 1983, pp 138, pbk £3.25

THESE ARE HARD TIMES for liberals. The Latin American Bureau wishes the world was a different place but cannot suggest any way of changing it. These books have in common the fact that they are all well-researched and clearly presented. All three can be recommended for this alone. But the clarity with which factual information is presented is matched by an inability to explain the forces at work in Latin America.

The European challenge is a collection of essays on the involvement of the European powers in the region. The LAB recognises that the role of Europe in Latin America is no different from that of the United States, France, West Germany and Britain are as concerned as the US that the region remains a secure source of minerals and agricultural produce, a safe place for profitable investment, and a ready market for their manufactured goods. Yet most of the contributions detect a progressive content in the growing interest in Latin America on the part of the European powers and in their conflict with the United States.

In his contribution on the arms trade, Simon Barrow shows how the increase in European supplies of weapons to countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Chile offsets the decline in more conventional trade. Arms deals make sure that copper, coffee and beef continue to flow into Europe from Latin America. They also establish the political influence of the selling countries. Arms deals are one way in which the imperialist powers can divide the region into spheres of influence. Barrow laments the 'wastefulness' of the arms trade. He imagines that the militarisation of their relations with the Third World is a shortsighted policy option for the imperialist powers. He appeals to the European powers to be more judicious in their trade with Latin America and to try to avoid the mistakes of the US. The militarisation of competition between the imperialist powers in the region has not yet developed into a coherent system of military blocs. But as the struggle for survival becomes more bitter such a division will be essential to the survival of each imperialist power.

All the articles are more or less united in their view that the European powers have a progressive role to play in Latin America. In their overview, Jacqueline Roddick and Philip O'Brien welcome the growing conflict within the Western alliance. They welcome the anti-American stamp of the European peace movements and only wish it could be translated into government policy. They note with approval 'the willingness of the European media to publicise the unsavoury side of American policy in El Salvador and Guatemala', and French recognition of the Salvadorean liberation movement. They realise that these tensions have nothing to do with European concern for the welfare of the people of the region but they see them as better than nothing. The book's horizons are limited by its authors' inability to point the way to an anti-imperialist strategy in Latin America and Europe. It ends up choosing between equally reactionary options.

More of the same

For the people of Chile, and by implication the rest of the continent, all the LAB has to offer is a repeat of the past. The compromises of the Allende Government, its concessions to the military, and its savage repression of the working class which prepared the ground for Pinochet's accession to power are passed over almost in embarrassment. The authors are fixated with the 'broadness' of Allende's Government and of the present opposition movement. The 'attachment of the Chilean masses to pluralist democracy' is expected to end the nightmare of Pinochet's 'interregnum' in much the same way as it was supposed to sustain the Allende Government.

They propose that the broad masses should give their support to the narrow interest of the Chilean bourgeoisie. To maximise support they look for the common denominators which unite all classes in Chile. But in a crisis there are no common denominators. The emergence of the Christian Democrat opposition — which they find encouraging — merely expresses the realisation by Chile's middle classes that Pinochet's policies have failed and that working

class hostility to Pinochet is now an obstacle to the pursuit of their interests. The popular front strategy offered by the Chilean Communist Party, the far left, and by the LAB seeks to unite the working class with those who backed the 1973 coup.

The new opposition is far to the right of the Allende Government. Its rejection of Communist Party involvement in the coalition and its selective support for actions against the military shows the renewed confidence of bourgeois opposition forces. They do not need formal support from the left because they know it will be given anyway. Privately, they welcome anti-government riots organised by Chilean workers because they strengthen their hand against Pinochet. In public they condemn the use of violence because they want to see the working class crushed just as much as Pinochet does. The endorsement of the new opposition by the left in Britain and in Chile proposes a solution which has already failed with disastrous consequences for the working class.

The debt trap

By far the best of these books is *The poverty brokers*. It provides a clear account of the international financial system. Its glossary and statistical tables are excellent. The book shows the relationship between the various institutions of the international financial system and how the whole system now hinges on the role of the International Monetary Fund. Most Third World debt is contracted through private banks or groups of banks. This is complicated by the system of interbank loans which transfer money between different banks and banking groups. The threat posed by the current crisis is that any default by one borrowing country will affect not one bank or group of banks but will spread rapidly throughout the entire system. This domino effect would destabilise the banking system of the capitalist world. The world's banks rely on the IMF to do what they cannot do themselves: police the financial system.

The book's case study of Peru which rejected the IMF in the 'seventies' shows what the imperialist powers fear most. Instead of going to the IMF the Peruvian government contracted loans directly from the Western banks. In the mid 'seventies' when its loans fell due it was unable to pay. For almost two years the battle to subordinate the country to the world banking system was fought in the streets. The working class resisted the austerity measures proposed by the individual banks. By the end of the 'seventies' Peru had returned to the fold. But the banking community had experienced a nasty shock. Fear of a repetition dominates their thinking now as the battles are fought in other Latin American countries. Riots in Brazil and Mexico, two of the largest debtors, put governments under impossible pressure. They are caught between the opposition of the masses and the demands of their creditors. The recent arrest of Argentina's Central Bank chief ordered by a nationalist judge reveals the strain on the system. *The poverty brokers* maps out the features of that strain but does not point to any way of resolving it.

John Johnson

Art and revolution

Royal Academy, Art of the avant-garde in Russia: selections from the George Costakis collection

IN 1930 THE RUSSIAN POET and propagandist Vladimir Mayakovsky committed suicide by shooting himself. His death symbolised the end of an unrivalled period of revolutionary artistic creation. The George Costakis collection of revolutionary art — on exhibition at the Royal Academy in London until 13 November — gives us a glimpse of the creative energy that was crushed by Stalinism.

From 1900 Russia was a centre for the various art movements — especially Cubism and Futurism — that were sweeping Europe. Braque, who with Picasso pioneered Cubist representation, explained that he had abandoned traditional perspectives because they were 'too mechanical to allow one to take full possession of things'. The First World War shattered the avant-garde movement in Western Europe. In Russia it intensified it.

Constructivism

Although Constructivism only emerged after the Bolshevik revolution, its principles were laid out in the pre-revolutionary period. The Constructivists were concerned with the engineering and mathematical principles underlying the construction of a natural form, and in the structural forces causing it to take the particular shape it does. Their work expressed hostility to nature as an oppressive force. For the Constructivists machines were a means of liberation, helping man to seize the 'world from the hands of nature to build a new one belonging to himself' (K Malevich, *The new system of art*).



Gustav Klucis' anti-imperialist poster, 1931

The Constructivists welcomed the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 because it gave a direction to their activities. They rejected those Western Constructivists who defended art as aesthetic activity, and fought to build a communist culture. The revolution gave them the opportunity to abandon 'idle picture painting' and create 'a living factory of the human spirit in the streets, in the tramways, in the factories, workshops and workers' homes'.

In the period immediately after October 1917 the Constructivists concentrated on propaganda work. Their agitprop trains travelled the country bringing news and images of the revolution. They organised plays to explain the revolution, pageants and festivals to celebrate it. Their posters were invaluable in the propaganda war.

The Constructivists turned from propaganda work to producing objects of use. They used their artistic and engineering skills to design everything from clothes to heat-efficient stoves, from furniture to swimming pools. They planned cities and built new monuments. Many of their projects — such as Tatlin's famous monument to the Third International — were never realised. Many of them were utopian and impractical. In part, this reflected their belief that technology itself was a force for liberation. But they provided a vision of a possible future. Those few years after 1917 showed how art could become useful in building a new world.

As the Stalinist bureaucracy became entrenched from the mid 'twenties, it began to sap the lifeblood of the Constructivists. To a regime that needed to proscribe workers' aspirations if it was to survive, the innovation and energy of the Constructivists were a threat. The bureaucracy adopted the most conservative formulae. In the pictorial field it took the 'Wonderers' — a group of Russian artists from the 1860s — as its model. In architecture it advocated a return to the classical style. In 1932 'Socialist Realism' became the official artistic dogma of the Soviet Union.

The avant-garde movement had fragmented long before. Some artists, like Lissitzky, emigrated to the West. Others, like Rodchenko, simply gave up art. A few, including Drevin and Klucis, died in Stalin's concentration camps. Their works were ignored and forgotten.

In 1946, a minor official at the Greek Embassy in Moscow, George Costakis, began collecting revolutionary art. He soon amassed a huge collection. The Royal Academy exhibition comprises 300 works from his collection.

It would be difficult to find a less apt place than Burlington House, with its stultifying atmosphere, crystal chandeliers and gold friezes, to display the work of the Constructivists. Mayakovsky once wrote, 'We do not need a dead mausoleum of art where dead works are worshipped'. Yet even within this dead mausoleum, the vitality and vision of the Constructivists is staggering. Most of the major artists are represented — Lissitzky, Kandinsky, Malevich, Rodchenko, Klucis, Ender, Rozanova and Popova. Their versatility is astonishing. None expresses this better than the work of Popova. Her drawings, textile designs, theatre sets and propaganda speak a different language to bourgeois art.

But it is here — in communicating the effect of the revolution on creativity — that the exhibition fails dismally. You could walk through the exhibition without realising that there had been a revolution in 1917. The impact of the revolution on art was immense. It was the revolution which unleashed the Constructivists' creative energies and turned them from purveyors of hope into creators of reality. Of this there is not the slightest hint at the Royal Academy.

Nevertheless, the exhibition is well worth a visit. It gives a hint of the vitality and hope of the first few years of the revolution. It provides a vision of what might have been.

Kennon Malik



NALGO inaction in Somerset

Somerset County branch of NALGO, which boasts of its tradition of *non-militancy*, has 178 residential workers in its membership. They are spread through 41 homes on a county-wide basis. The immediate problem to be overcome, if effective industrial action is to be taken, is the isolation of these members.

A meeting of residential workers, called in the summer before the national action ballot was held, attracted only eight people. This was at least partly because the meeting was held in Taunton while the majority of residential workers live and work in other towns. Workers employed in other council services were not invited to the meeting and an opportunity to involve them was missed.

The ballot approved national-level industrial action (although it is rumoured that Somerset branch voted against). The branch set up an Industrial Action Committee. This was not elected by the residential workers but appointed by the branch executive. It consists of branch officers and as many representatives of the social services department as they can muster. There is only one residential worker on the action committee. The residential worker is the only member of the committee prepared to visit the various homes to talk to members. This job is left to the full time official from the district office, who a month after the action started, announced that he had done

nothing because of pressure of work!

A few union reps contacted some of the homes to find out what the level of support was. Of the 34 homes they 'phoned, 12 expressed complete support and 13 refused to support any action. A further nine reported that they were banning overtime but not admissions. Since there is almost no overtime in Somerset it was an empty gesture. Their refusal to ban admissions does not indicate that they are willingly scabbing on the strike. Admissions are the responsibility of the heads of homes. NALGO has refused to instruct its members to take any action against heads who allow admissions. No wonder the workforce is put off taking reprisals.

If the residential workers are to win their claim it will be in spite of the lead given by the national and local leadership of NALGO. However there are some useful lessons to be drawn from the experience of branches like Somerset. One is the inadequacy of the system of departmental representatives, where a rep may be responsible for several hundred members miles away from his own workplace. We need a workplace-based steward system. So far the executive have opposed this. We also need to bring our union under the control of the rank and file and take it out of the hands of a few officials.

Celia Parker
Somerset

A narrow escape

I must thank you for your kind support in my recent troubles. Without the help of WAR I would not have known where to turn.

My home was badly damaged when someone pushed a towel soaked in petrol through my letterbox and set it on fire. The front door was burned down and our curtains and carpet ruined. If the noise had not woken us up, me and my husband and our baby daughter would probably have burned to death.

To make matters worse the council just ignored me. For

three weeks I asked them at least to fix our front door. But they never came. Tower Hamlets councillors were keen for black people to vote for the Labour Party but when we go to them for help they just turn away.

When WAR took me to a meeting with Paul Boateng and Ken Livingstone where they wanted again to convince black people they were doing right by them, they had to listen to my story. They had to put me and my family in a new house. Again, thank you WAR.

Amie Jeng
East London

Race checks in Hackney

Hackney Labour Party politicians have been denouncing the French for turning away black British day-trippers at Calais. Councillor Sam Springer even made the journey himself to see whether he would get turned back. What we would like to know is what those same politicians are doing to fight racism in their own backyard. French policies of racial discrimination are disgraceful, but what about the race checks the Department of Employment has admitted it will be introducing in the dole offices?

Race checks (or 'ethnic monitoring' as they are politely called) in Hackney are, in fact, not new at all. The new British Nationality Act has ensured that the black population are carefully monitored and snooped upon wherever they go. Checks now operate in hospitals, in housing allocation and in

schools. Soon even the unemployed will be under official government surveillance.

Local Labour councils, like Hackney, have gone along with this. Housing chief John Bloom assures black people 'while I'm chair of the Housing Services Committee, the police won't be allowed access to any ethnic minority records'. The fact is, and Bloom must know this very well, that gathering statistics on race is an important element in Sir Kenneth Newman's new multi-agency policing scheme for London. Sooner or later, Bloom's records are bound to get into the hands of the police.

Sam Springer, John Bloom and their cronies should follow up their opposition to French racism with a crusade nearer to home.

Zaro Costello
East London

Nurses fight for jobs

I'm sick of reading about how Norman Fowler's latest cuts in NHS manpower can be achieved without affecting patient care — its already deteriorating rapidly, and it's really only down to luck that more patients haven't died. The reason is that, even before the latest redundancies were conceived, nurses were being badly affected by the long-standing policy of running down staffing levels on the wards.

At my hospital, the majority of the nursing staff consists of student nurses, with most wards having only two qualified staff on each shift. In the Intensive Care Unit, we usually have five qualified nurses, but one of these is needed to look after each patient on a ventilator. Often there aren't enough qualified nurses to go round, and sometimes inexperienced students have to be left in charge of these very sick patients. Sometimes on night shift there can be only two nurses on duty at a time — often they are too busy to take

the breaks they are entitled to and this can lead to mistakes being made.

Now that the intake of student nurses is being reduced, we will be under even more pressure — and Fowler says that patient care won't be affected!

The fact is that too many jobs have already been allowed to go, through 'natural wastage', to allow for any further cuts. The only way to maintain patient care is to fight for every job — and to demand more jobs, so that we can provide the kind of service to patients we all know is needed.

That means all the unions and all the hospital workers joining together to oppose all redundancies — even 'voluntary' ones. We intend to revive the Action Group formed during last year's pay dispute to do just that.

Estella Downer
RCN Steward
St George's Hospital
Tooting, London

...so must teachers!

Bradford's Tory council has just announced cuts of £2¼ million in this year's education budget and £9 million in next year's. This will mean an immediate cut in jobs for supply teachers, followed by the loss of 500 other jobs over the coming year. Bradford's teachers have had to deal with cuts for each of the past eight years, under both Labour and Tory administrations. These cuts are the worst yet and have provoked a swift response. On 17 October, 800 teachers attended a mass meeting and voted to take the first steps to oppose the cuts by balloting the membership for action.

The problems facing this struggle are great. The NUT National Executive member who spoke at the meeting made it very clear that they would remain in full control of any action taken. But perhaps the

biggest problem is that the campaign has already been directed towards combatting compulsory redundancies — not fighting for all jobs. Over the past eight years the NUT leadership has won the argument that limiting job losses to voluntary redundancies, early retirement and natural wastage is a victory. This has paved the way for a steady erosion in jobs and conditions of service.

To win, the workers must win two arguments. Firstly that the fight is to save all jobs, including those of the supply teachers immediately threatened. Secondly for direct local control over the campaign by local representatives, drawn not just from the NUT but all the teaching and non-teaching unions involved.

Rob Knight
Bradford RCP

Police violence in Bristol

On 31 January 1982, police forced their way into the home of the Royal family in Argyle Road, St Paul's, Bristol. They beat up Mrs Royal and her children, and dragged her son David off for questioning. They held him for two days. They were investigating the incident where PC Ian Bennett had a slab of concrete dropped on him by 50 black youths. They were trying to pin a charge of attempted murder on David Royal if he didn't finger his mates.

As a result of the raid Mrs Royal was charged with actual bodily harm. She was later acquitted on appeal and is now suing the police.

The Royals are no strangers to police violence. In 1980 David Royal was acquitted of charges arising out of the 1980 St Paul's riot. In January this year, police smashed down the front door of the Royals' home on the pretext that they were looking for Mr Royal for a traffic offence. They punched and kicked Mr Royal to the ground. The incident ended with 60 police trying to control an angry crowd of local residents who had gathered to defend the family. Mr Royal, three children

and a neighbour were led off to Trinity Road police station to be charged.

This is the sort of thing likely to happen to you if you are black and live in St Paul's. But the people of St Paul's have shown that they can fight back: the 1980 riots, the attack on PC Bennett, and the defence of the Royals all prove this. Recently the police have refused to attend evictions ordered by the council in the area, for fear of provoking a 'disturbance'.

At the moment the police are playing cautious and trying to stay out of trouble in the area. In the June riot this year, the police adopted a 'defensive' rather than an 'aggressive' tactic in the hope of calming the situation. But this was mainly for public consumption. Out of the headlines, systematic police harassment of the black community goes on unabated. They know that the only way of keeping St Paul's under control in the future will be to come down hard. As the experience of the Royal family shows, 'community policing' is already a dead duck in Bristol.

Ewan Cameron
St Paul's, Bristol

Militant: opportunists

As a one-time reader of *Militant*, I was interested to read your article (*the next step* 40) on their approach to the general election. I have several friends who are *Militant* supporters. They scurried around canvassing support for the Labour Party — and they wanted me to join them!

As your article points out, they say one thing in private and another in public. When I argue with them about the past and present role of the Labour Party, they agree that it has consistently betrayed the working class. They accept that it has attempted to manage the bosses' system at the expense of the working class if necessary — and it usually has been necessary.

Militant accepts that the Labour Party's programme is just another promise to keep the system afloat. Yet when they go around getting people out to vote, my *Militant* friends paint this as the most radical departure in English politics since the Roundheads lopped off Charles I's head. They anticipate the party falling into their hands if

they continue to burrow away in the youth sections. In the meantime they are prepared to bow to the party leadership. They even offered up their leaders for expulsion so that they could get on with the job of 'infiltrating' the future leadership of the Labour Party.

If the record of their 'Marxist' MPs is anything to go by, even a future *Militant*-dominated Labour Party would not be much different to the one we're used to. *Militant* are now so used to the political environment inside the Labour Party that they are indistinguishable from it. The only way you can tell a *Militant* apart from any other Labour Party member is that he will be slightly younger, and maybe a bit more fiery if he's talking to the right audience (though even Roy Hattersley knows the difference between talking to a crowd of young blacks and a group of right-wing journalists). You won't be able to distinguish him by his politics.

Jonathan Davis

Liverpool

...or grey liberation?

Your article on *Militant* in the last issue of *the next step* missed out a couple of important points. *Militant* has never really emerged from the 1950s. Coined inside the Labour Party it has not had to come to terms with new conditions within the working class, nor with the radical departures that have occurred in Marxist thought. *Militant* are caught in a time lock. *Militant* supporters do a disservice to the working class not only by their uncritical support for the Labour Party, but also by their reduction of Marxism and working class politics to a set of dusty formulae. It doesn't help that their catechisms are recited by a set of equally grey individuals.

The rigidity with which they cling to their received notions of what Marxism is about astounds me. Their paper is an appalling collection of turgid articles, each one committed to pumping the 'correct'

line into the membership. There is little room in the lives of *Militant* supporters for personal development or for coming to a creative understanding of Marxism. The 'Marxism' they are committed to is learned by rote and regurgitated by each member to order.

Their sectarian organisation, with its emphasis on authoritarian command structures, would remind most workers of the army or some weird religious group like the Moonies. Their organisation does little to reflect the experience of workers themselves. Their gloomy outlook on life and politics can only put workers off revolutionary politics. As your article points out, *Militant* supporters have been up to their necks in the hierarchical structures of the Labour Party for so long, they have ended up operating in more or less the same way.

Lenny Pearmain
Oxford

the next step replies:

Lenny Pearmain's critique of *Militant* reveals that he shares the narrow outlook of the British radical left. What he singles out as *Militant*'s weaknesses are, in fact, its only strengths.

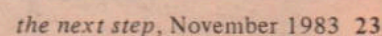
First, he objects to the idea of a 'correct' party line, and the notion that it should be transmitted to the membership and readers of the paper. For most of its history the British left has shied away from the necessity for theoretical development. It resents any struggle for political clarity and prefers to stumble along in its inimitable 'British' manner. The British left fears the personal consequences of having to develop and pursue a coherent political strategy. In its critique of *Militant* it attacks the form of presentation of *Militant*'s politics, rather than assessing whether its politics are adequate for the defence of working class interests.

Pearmain's second objection — to the 'authoritarian command structures' of *Militant* — reflects the radical left's hostility to anything which impinges on

sacred individuality. It would rather not confront the harsh reality that we are engaged in a struggle with a ruthless and disciplined enemy. The ruling class will fight tooth and nail to hold on to its power. We need to be equally ruthless and disciplined. The British left attacks this positive feature of *Militant* rather than pointing out that *Militant*'s discipline is not directed at winning working class power, but is designed merely to reconcile workers to the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

The left is unable to go beyond narrow organisational criticisms of *Militant*. To varying degrees, *Militant*'s opportunism is shared by all British left groups both inside and outside the Labour Party. The left has adapted itself to the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy every bit as much as *Militant*. It selects *Militant*'s manner of presenting its politics for its sharpest criticism, because that is all that distinguishes *Militant* from the rest of the left.

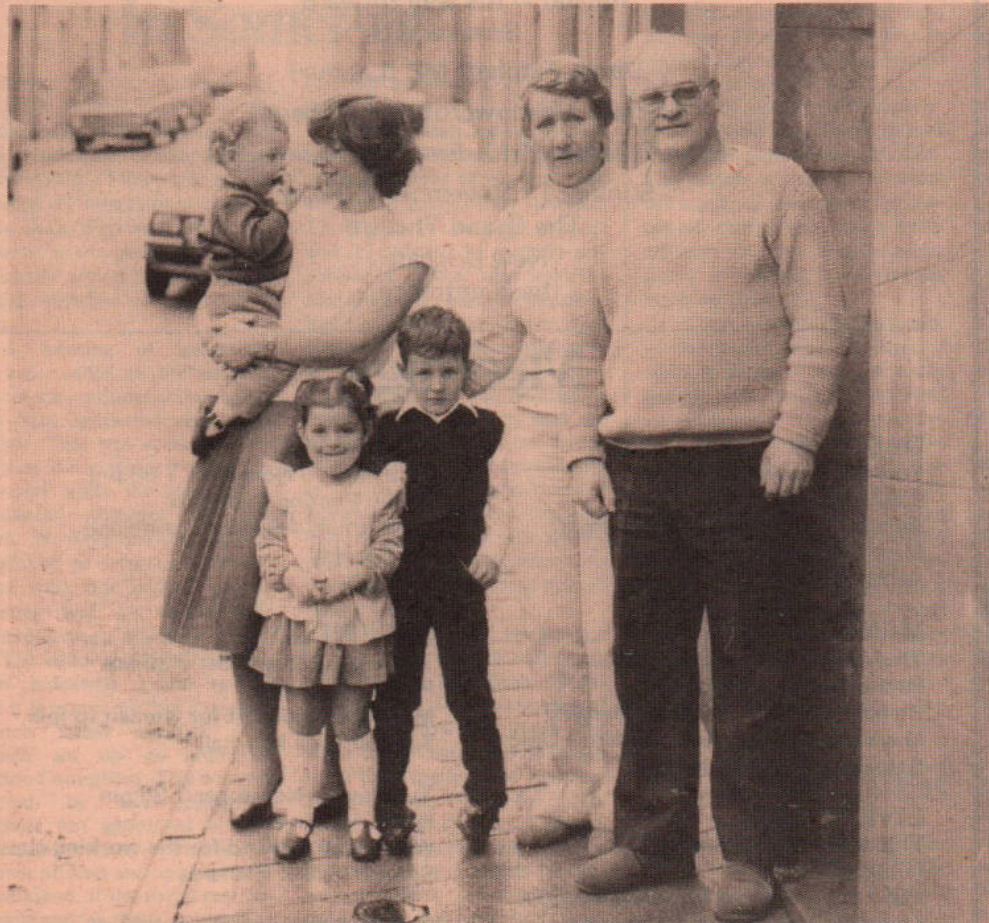
Meetings



Irish Freedom Movement Liverpool conference

Stop the showtrials!

Smash the PTA!



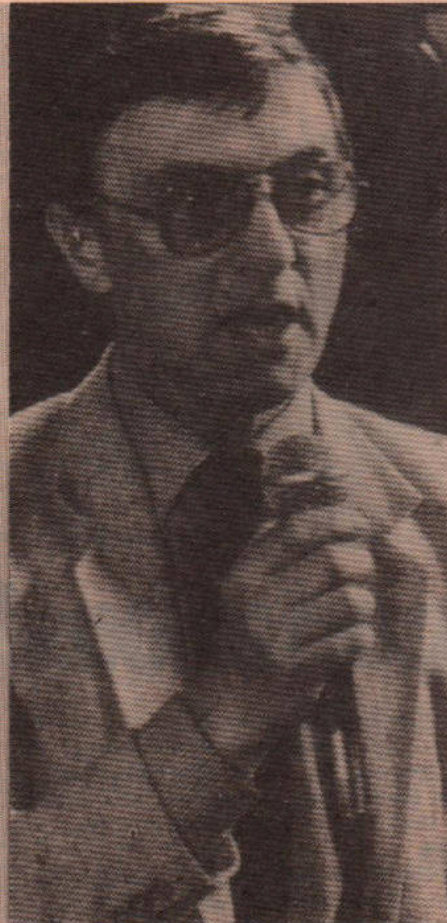
The Moores outside their Bogside home: a family divided on the word of a supergrass.

PATSY AND THERESA MOORE, their daughter-in-law Gabrielle and her three children are a family at war in the Six Counties. On 24 March last year, machine gun-toting RUC men arrested Gabrielle's husband Patrick Pearse Moore at their home in Derry. Police dragged Pearse off to the Castlereagh interrogation centre — on the day Gabrielle was due to go into hospital for the birth of their third child. Baby Michael is now 19 months old and has yet to meet his father, still in British custody awaiting trial. The only evidence the RUC have against Pearse is the testimony of supergrass John Grimley. Pearse's trial was adjourned after Grimley was found to have a history of psychopathic tendencies. While in custody, Pearse has been offered bribes to turn supergrass. His mother, Theresa, has been arrested. The RUC told her they knew Pearse was innocent, but if she would admit to membership of a proscribed organisation her son could go free. She refused.

Pearse Moore is only one of more than 250 nationalists who have been held by

the RUC on supergrass evidence. Sixty convictions have already been handed down in no-jury Diplock courts. The nationalist community of the Six Counties is fighting to stop the show trials. Michael English, whose son was killed by a British Army landrover during the hunger-strike protests two years ago, is prominent in the Campaign Against the Show Trials. At a march and rally through Derry's Bogside last month, Michael English described the supergrass strategy as only the latest suffering Britain has inflicted on the nationalist community since the movement for civil rights began in the late 'sixties: 'On 5 October 1968 we stood on this same spot to highlight the denial of rights. Today, 15 years on, we're seeking the same basic rights in our fight against the show trials system'.

The British state has suffered some embarrassing setbacks of late in its attempts to break nationalist resistance through the use of supergrasses. First came the escape of 38 republican prisoners from the Maze prison in September. Then



Michael English: speaking out against the supergrass system

last month, Britain lost its star supergrass when Robert Lean, described by the media as a 'senior IRA commander', escaped from Belfast's Palace Barracks via a bathroom window and a borrowed police car. Lean retracted his evidence before being rearrested. The RUC was forced to start releasing some of the 28 men held on evidence the police had forced out of Lean.

The nationalist community's resistance to British legal terror remains undaunted. The Irish Freedom Movement's Liverpool conference will be discussing how to build support for their struggle in Britain. Gabrielle Moore summed up the nationalists' determination and called for support:

'The showtrials are another barbaric attempt to crush resistance to British occupation. Its a tactic which has hit not just at those being held on remand but has caused enormous harassment to the families as well. But we're not going to be intimidated and we appeal for your help in Britain to put an end to this injustice.'

On Tuesday 4 October the humdrum routine of lunchtime Liverpool was broken by 40 supporters of Liverpool Irish Freedom Movement. Waving banners and shouting slogans, the IFM lobbied Merseyside County Council as the latest stage of its campaign to make Merseyside a Prevention of Terrorism Act-free zone. Local IFM organiser Denise Taylor handed a petition of more than 800 signatures to council leader Keva Coombes. Coombes is one of the 14 county councillors supporting the IFM campaign for a PTA-free Merseyside. Local MPs Bob Parry (Riverside), Eddie Loyden (Garston), Terry Fields (Broadgreen) and Bob Wavering (West Derby) have also given their backing. Up to now veteran Liverpool left-winger Eric Heffer has refused to support the campaign, fearing that taking a firm stand against the PTA might jeopardise his prospects of becoming Labour's leader. However, the IFM will be seeking his support again shortly.

The ruling Labour group on Merseyside County Council have baulked at the proposal to oppose publicly any use of the Act on Merseyside and to cut off funds to the Special Branch. The Labour group has shunted the PTA-free zone debate into the sidings of its Police Working Group. The working group in turn has commissioned one of its members to dig up the history of the PTA's use in Liverpool. After nine years in which Merseyside has accounted for a quarter of all PTA detentions, the Labour county councillors claim they lack adequate information to decide policy. The IFM will be submitting its evidence of dawn arrests and exclusions under the PTA to the inquiry. But IFM supporters will continue to concentrate on practical campaigning against the harassment of Liverpool's Irish community.

Merseyside Labour councillors' equivocation over the PTA is typical of the record of the Act's opponents in the Labour Party. Labour critics of the PTA have wavered because they object only to its violation of civil liberties. Labour has always accepted the need for the PTA in Britain's Irish War. As we go to press the Prevention of Terrorism Bill is being debated in Parliament. The Bill seeks to make permanent the 'temporary provisions' of the present Act. Labour MPs' performance in the debate will doubtless provide more good reason why those who want to smash the PTA/B should back the IFM and come to the Liverpool conference.

Conference agenda 26 November

- Speakers from Ireland will introduce the discussions.
- 10am Morning session
- Supergrasses and the lie of 'British justice': victims' relatives speak out
- 2pm Afternoon workshops
- How to stop the Prevention of Terrorism Act
- British trade unionists report on their visit to Ireland
- Law and disorder in Ireland — Diplock to H-Block
- 4.30pm Final session
- Where do we go from here?

Saturday 26 November 10am - 5.30pm
Liverpool Polytechnic Students' Union
The Haigh Building
Maryland Street
Liverpool 1

Sunday 27 November Assemble 1pm
Manchester Martyrs Commemoration
March to Moston Cemetery
Called by Sinn Fein

Transport from Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Glasgow, Bradford, Birmingham, Coventry, Cardiff, Bristol, Sunderland, London. Accommodation available for those staying for the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration March.

£1.50 registration fee (£1.00 unemployed). Make cheques payable to Irish Freedom Movement. Phone 01-274 3951 for details

Yorkshire Irish Freedom Movement

If you want to see the reality of war in the Six Counties and meet people who are forced to fight unemployment, dire housing conditions and British military oppression, join the Yorkshire IFM delegation.

The delegation leaves on the evening of Friday 18 November and returns early on Tuesday 22 November. Transport is available from Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford. The fee for each delegate is £40 (including transport costs) which can be raised from sponsoring organisations or personal contributions.

Trade union delegation to Ireland

I want to join the Yorkshire Trade Union Delegation to Ireland.

I/We wish to sponsor the delegation and enclose £_____

We wish to receive a report-back from a delegate to Ireland _____

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Trade union branch/trades council _____

Send to Irish Freedom Movement, BM IFM, London WC1N 3XX
or phone Phil Murphy on 01-274 3951 for further details.